



## Distance, proximity, and freedom: Identifying conflicting priorities regarding urban backyard livestock slaughter



Jennifer Blecha <sup>a,\*</sup>, Adam Davis <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Geography & Environment, San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94132, United States

<sup>b</sup> Department of Geography, 1832 Ellison Hall, UC Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-4060, United States

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### ABSTRACT

In many U.S. cities, a new generation of urban residents is taking up gardening, canning, and keeping small livestock. Within this urban homesteading movement, the backyard slaughter of chickens and rabbits for household food production has become increasingly popular in some cities, including Oakland, California, where the practice has incited strong feelings and public debate. Based on a survey of 345 San Francisco Bay Area residents, this quantitative and qualitative research identifies three perspectives among respondents. Some subjects want backyard slaughter prohibited, either to maintain emotional distance from slaughter or because they believe it is inappropriate for urban space. Others express strong support for backyard slaughter, which they see as a humane, healthful alternative to meat from intensive animal production systems. A third group of subjects support urban residents' right to slaughter animals, placing a high value on individual (human) liberties whether or not they personally approve of backyard slaughter. Each of these perspectives was further associated with a cluster of demographic factors, food shopping and production practices, and personal experiences with slaughter. We suggest that different underlying orientations toward the food system – that is, valuing distance, proximity, or freedom – can be seen in the discourses in which subjects discuss slaughter, how their city should regulate the practice, and in their own food procurement practices. The paper concludes by considering both contributions to related literature and the implications of findings for alternative food systems and for the municipal regulation of urban agriculture.

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*“You have just dined, and however scrupulously the slaughter-house is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity.”*

[~ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Fate”, *The Conduct of Life*, 1860]

### Introduction

In Michael Moore's (1989) documentary, *Roger and Me*, which exposes the post-General Motors decline of Flint, Michigan, one of the most riveting scenes features a woman who has turned to breeding rabbits for sale as “pets or meat”. She holds a large buff-colored rabbit in her arms, stroking its ears while she answers Moore's questions. Moments later, the camera shows her hitting the rabbit several times on the head with a heavy metal pipe and stringing the rabbit up in a tree. As she quickly skins and guts it, she says, “I was brought up to learn to survive”. Of all the lessons about urban and economic geography that this film offers, our

introductory human geography students invariably remember most vividly this scene with the rabbit.

Why? Is it the idea of animals being killed for food? Students with a commitment to animal rights may find the thought horrific, but for most students who eat meat regularly, the thought cannot be utterly foreign. Is the shock because the slaughtered animal is a rabbit? Even if many American college students have never tasted rabbit, they probably know that some people consider rabbits to be food. It might be the violence of her method, but we suspect viewers would have a similar reaction even if she used a more “humane” method of slaughter.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The term “slaughter” requires explanation. The words used to describe this practice convey a great deal about a writer's politics. Many people, including some subjects in this study, use discourse from a strong animal rights position, in which non-human animals are recognized as subjects, their proper pronoun is “who”, and their death can be called nothing but “murder” for human animals to eat their “flesh” or “corpse”. In stark contrast, the discourse of the animal agriculture industry refers to animals as “production units” “that” are “processed” into “meat”. Here, we use terms such as “slaughter” and “kill”, seeking neither to convey judgment nor to hide the reality of ending the lives of other beings for the purpose of eating their bodies. We also refer to non-human animals as “who”, recognizing them as individuals with lives, minds, and emotions.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [jblecha@sfsu.edu](mailto:jblecha@sfsu.edu) (J. Blecha), [awdavis@umail.ucsb.edu](mailto:awdavis@umail.ucsb.edu) (A. Davis).

We suggest that perhaps students are startled because the woman both pets the rabbit and slaughters it. We have become used to “compartmentalizing” animals (Fox, 1999), making separations between animals we caress and those we kill, and it feels transgressive to do both with one rabbit.<sup>2</sup> Further, the location of the slaughter may seem out of place – in the city, in her own backyard. This is not the slaughter we have become used to: psychologically and physically distant, out of sight in a rural slaughterhouse, done *en masse* on a disassembly line by workers unknown to the consumers. This is home butchery: animals turned to meat by hand in an urban backyard, where many of us imagine we are far removed from subsistence activities like killing animals for food.

Within a wider urban homesteading<sup>3</sup> movement, backyard slaughter has experienced a recent resurgence in the United States along with practices such as gardening, canning, fermenting, cheese-making, and keeping small livestock (bees for honey, poultry for eggs, dwarf dairy goats for milk). Skills of slaughter, once possessed by many households but lost for much of the 20th Century, are now being regained and spread through chicken- and rabbit-slaughtering classes, YouTube videos, and online “how-to” guides for aspiring do-it-yourself (DIY) butchers. The practice has sometimes been linked in the media with the social identity of “hipsters”, as it is practiced most visibly (though not exclusively) by twenty- and thirty-something adults in liberal urban enclaves such as Portland, Oregon; Olympia and Seattle, Washington; Saint Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota; Oakland, California; Austin, Texas; and Brooklyn, New York.

These practices must be seen within the context of a growing national and international food movement that includes a diverse array of actors pursuing fundamental changes to the industrial agri-food system: family farmers, peasant organizations, political leaders, chefs, food distributors, consumers, and workers. Growing numbers of people following various banners (e.g., food justice, food sovereignty, fair trade, local food, and Slow Food®) are rethinking their relationship with the mainstream agri-food industry. Specifically regarding meat, this trend can be seen in the growing sales of niche meats, with attributes such as “local”, “grass-fed”, “hormone-free”, “antibiotic-free”, or “humanely-raised” (Hoffelt, 2011; Curtis et al., 2011).

Backyard slaughter has become increasingly popular and commands serious attention in a growing number of U.S. cities, in direct contrast to the previous century or more, during which livestock and slaughter became increasingly excluded and distant from the lives of urban residents. This growing material and discursive distance provided some comfort to consumers of animal bodies. In this paper we define distance and proximity both physically and emotionally.

Bringing slaughter back to the city and to residential neighborhoods has met with mixed reactions. One hotspot for public debate over this practice is Oakland, California, home to several of the country’s most prominent advocates of urban livestock production. In Oakland and nearby Berkeley, residents can take classes in the raising and slaughtering of rabbits and poultry through the Institute for Urban Homesteading and other local urban farming organizations. Opponents of this trend such as members of Neighbors Opposed to Backyard Slaughter (NOBS) have been

present at Oakland city council meetings, in the news, on Op-Ed pages, and in the blogosphere, arguing for a prohibition of slaughter. While Oakland may be home to the most visible conflict on this issue to date, it is not unique: similar debates are taking place in neighborhoods and council chambers across the country. This research explores why some urban residents see the growth of backyard slaughter as a positive change and others want the practice banned or restricted.

Although geographers have published considerable work on alternative food systems and urban agriculture in the past decade, the topic of backyard slaughter has scarcely been mentioned. The goals of this exploratory study were: (1) to identify the variety of perspectives that urban residents have toward backyard slaughter, (2) to discern possible patterns or themes among them, and (3) to discover what personal characteristics might be correlated with subjects’ positions on the practice. (In other words, what views do people hold about backyard slaughter, who are the people who hold these different views, and why?)

To answer these questions, we conducted an online survey in summer 2012, examining respondents’ thoughts and feelings about (the prospect of) backyard slaughter in their neighborhoods. Drawing on the responses of 345 residents of urban zip codes within the San Francisco Bay Area in California, we identified three different discourses or logics through which subjects explain where they believe slaughter belongs and why, and how it should be regulated. By linking respondents’ views on slaughter with demographic characteristics, food shopping habits, and experiences with animal slaughter, we found that subjects’ views on slaughter reflect a broader orientation toward the food system. Some individuals value proximity to their food sources while others value distance; a third group primarily values individuals’ freedom to choose.

We proceed by situating this inquiry at the intersection of several bodies of relevant literature, both geographic and interdisciplinary. Our methodology follows, including study design, methods of analysis, and a brief discussion of the limitations of this research. We then present our findings, beginning with a description of the qualitative content analysis of subjects’ written responses to open-ended survey questions. Next we present our quantitative analysis of subjects’ demographic, behavioral, and experiential characteristics in relation to their opinions on backyard slaughter. We conclude by discussing the contributions of this research to the literature, its policy implications, and directions for further research.

## Distance, proximity, and the geographies of slaughter

This research on animal slaughter in cities brings together several relevant lines of inquiry: previous work on cultural animal geographies, on concepts of distance and proximity, and on the place(s) of livestock and slaughter all help to frame the following discussion.

### *Cultural animal geographies*

Wolch et al. (2003) have identified three geographical approaches to the study of animals. The first, zoogeography, arose in the early 20th century primarily as a physical science that analyzed the distribution of wild animals as natural objects. Zoogeography paid limited attention to human–animal interactions, which were understood largely as competitive or conflictual. A second, less prominent approach was developed simultaneously by cultural and regional geographers, including Carl Sauer, who sought to understand the role of domesticated animals (primarily livestock) in shaping cultural landscapes (p. 186). Despite recognizing

<sup>2</sup> This division is not universal. Podbersek (2009) explores the South Korean concept that dogs can be both “good to pet and eat”, depending on the type of dog and the relationship that people have with it. Similarly, Herzog (1988) has shown how individual mice can be socially constructed as pet, pest, medical device, or food, and hold several of these roles simultaneously.

<sup>3</sup> The term “urban homesteading” is widely used by grassroots practitioners of self-provisioning. In 2010, the Dervaes family, who have taught these practices for decades, trademarked the term and have since brought lawsuits against violators (Friesma, 2011). Their privatization of the term has been broadly condemned within the movement.

a significant interaction between humans and other animals, this approach still “stress[ed] human powers and agency”, and “treated domestic animals simply as cultural artifacts” (p. 187). This project had a limited following, and by the 1970s was effectively abandoned.

The 1990s saw a surge of interdisciplinary interest in society and animals, and geographers played a prominent role, connecting critical questions from social theory with the geographical study of human–animal relations.<sup>4</sup> While this “third wave” of animal geography clearly builds on earlier work (Urbanik, 2012, 36), it is new in several ways. First, the scope of inquiry has expanded to include a wider range of animals including wildlife (Yeo and Neo, 2010; Hinchliffe et al., 2005; Thomson, 2007), house pets (Nast, 2006; Power, 2012), and invasive, feral, and pest animals (Biehler, 2009; Seymour, 2012; Griffiths et al., 2000). Similarly, recent work in animal geography examines human–animal relations in a wider array of locations, such as media, medical research, pet cemeteries, aquatic parks, and cities. Even the traditional topic of rural livestock has been transformed by work that examines the emotional importance of livestock animals to their human owners (Riley, 2011; Convery et al., 2005) and the experiences and agency of animals themselves (Holloway, 2007; Haggerty et al., 2009). These studies illustrate the third and perhaps most novel aspect of the new animal geography: a recognition of the selfhood and subjectivity of non-human animals, and an appreciation of the complex, mutually-constructed relationships between animals and humans.

Philo and Wilbert (2000, 4) summarize the project of animal geography today as analyzing “the conjoint conceptual and material placements of animals, as decided upon by humans in a variety of situations, and also to probe the disruptions of these placements as achieved on occasion by the animals themselves” (in Urbanik, 2012, 36). The present article contributes to this work, as it engages simultaneously the material and symbolic location of animal slaughter – a contentious issue – and probes subjects’ responses to a disruption in the placements they are used to – that is, the relocation of slaughter from rural and hidden sites to urban and (potentially) visible ones. Geographers have delved into the social forces that pushed livestock slaughter out of the cities of the Global North in the 19th and 20th centuries (see Section 2.3); however, the impact of its recent return has been described materially much more than conceptually (see Section 2.5). This article seeks to discover some of the ways that city residents today think and feel about livestock slaughter and where they believe it belongs.

We value the attention to animal subjectivities paid by much third wave literature; however, this article concentrates on the perspectives of human rather than non-human animals. With respect to the animal beings referred to in this study, we simply acknowledge that in the practice of slaughter, livestock animals “...do not seem to desire their given place, but can do little about it” (Arluke and Sanders, 1996, 170).

### *Geographies of distance and proximity*

If livestock animals are only reluctantly compliant with their agricultural role, part of what allows us to be comfortable forcing compliance upon them is distance. Distancing is a key technique for managing the moral difficulties associated with using and killing animals. Critics from various fields including sociology (Arluke, 1988), psychology (Plous, 1993), feminist theory and theology (Adams, 1995, 2000 (1990)), geography (Philo, 1998; Elder et al.,

1998a,b) and others have studied the methods and effects of distancing of livestock animals.

One of the most prominent scholars on human–animal relationships is animal ethicist James Serpell. In his book, *In the Company of Animals* (1986), Serpell reviews key “distancing devices” of the animal industry. The first of these techniques is detachment. Serpell argues that, just as in war, people have to detach psychologically in order to kill with indifference.

*Unless he takes steps to prevent it happening, the farmer or stockman will get to know individual animals and may become personally attached to them. Once this has happened, the slaughter or the deliberate affliction of suffering on the animal inevitably generates feelings of guilt and remorse because, in human terms, it constitutes a gross betrayal of trust.*

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The large scale, rapid pace, and mechanization of industrial animal agriculture helps with detachment: direct, physical employee contact with animals is minimized and each worker is responsible for a large number of animals. “At this level of detachment, the animal easily becomes a cipher, a unit of production, abstracted out of existence in the pursuit of higher yields.” (192)

A second distancing device is concealment, both material and discursive – a device geared more toward the sensibilities of consumers than of livestock workers. *Material* concealment is achieved through the physical distancing of animals from most people who eventually eat them.

*...concealment is the natural partner of detachment. ...In modern, intensive systems it is relatively easy and widespread. Factory-farmed pigs and poultry are kept in anonymous-looking, windowless buildings that more closely resemble warehouses than animal enclosures. Once inside, the animals are out of sight and, effectively, out of mind as far as the majority of people are concerned.*

[Serpell, 1986, 158]

The *discursive* aspects of concealment pervade our everyday language and media. Songs and images of happy animals on small family farms infuse our childhood, effectively concealing the industrial, confined, and highly mechanized settings in which most farm animals live (Plous, 1993). Basic linguistic tricks, such as calling animal bodies “meat”, and more specifically “beef”, “pork”, or “veal” instead of “cow flesh”, “pig muscles” or “baby cow stomach”, have been widely critiqued (Adams, 1995). These tricks of imagery and grammar largely conceal animals’ lives from their consumers—and allow a comfortable psychological distance for many people between an animal’s death and a human’s dinner.

*It isn’t so much that we avoid killing the animals with which we are friendly. It is more the other way around. Unconsciously or deliberately we ...avoid befriending the animals we intend to harm.*

[Serpell, 1986, 170]

Concealment is employed to keep meat eaters’ consciences at bay. If people are kept from knowing how their eating habits affect animals, they need not be concerned; as Lawson (2007, 5) writes, “ignorance is literally care-less”. Indeed, industrial livestock agriculture arguably depends on distancing to maintain a lack of care on the part of both the slaughterers and consumers of animals. These distancing devices of detachment and concealment work to ease the psychological burdens of livestock workers and meat-eaters, but they also raise ethical questions about the implications of making killing and consuming easier. The critical literature on distancing offers helpful tools for examining our society’s spatial relationship with livestock animals. Much of this work, however, remains conceptual and placeless.

<sup>4</sup> The “new” animal geographies can be traced to two foundational volumes: a special journal issue, *Bringing the Animals Back In*, (Wolch and Emel, 1995) and a book, *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places* (Philo and Wilbert, 2000).

### *Migration of commercial slaughter*

Recent geographical research on the historical location and movement of stockyards and slaughterhouses provides case studies that ground these theoretical discussions of distancing and proximity in place. Cities such as Paris (Watts, 2008), Mexico City (Pilcher, 2008), New Orleans (Johnson, 2008), and San Francisco (Robichaud and Steiner, 2010) have long sought to mitigate the filth and stench of slaughter by regulating the location of commercial slaughterhouses. In the 19th century, social forces including health reformers (McNeur, 2011), business leaders (Hartog, 1985; Pilcher, 2008), and Victorian moralists (Philo, 1998) combined to move these spaces of confinement and death from center to fringe in many British and North American cities (Atkins, 2012).

Technological innovations, too, began to influence the geography of the slaughter industry. The modern factory arguably was invented when “disassembly” lines appeared in Cincinnati’s pork packinghouses in the 1830s, and were refined in Chicago” (Stull and Broadway, 2013, 40). The invention of the refrigerated rail car in 1879 allowed the development of national meat distribution networks, and “Chicago’s meatpacking giants began building slaughterhouses in cities throughout the Midwest and the Plains” (Stull and Broadway, 2013, 39), undercutting local butchers (Fields, 2004). For the next 80 years, industrial slaughter facilities could be found on the fringes of many U.S. cities. Since 1960 the livestock and slaughter industries have undergone tremendous consolidation and spatial reorganization (Broadway and Ward, 1990; Drabenstott et al., 1999; Kandel and Parrado, 2005). “Packers [said] good-bye to the city”, closing older, smaller plants in cities across the country (Stull and Broadway, 2013, 19). Meanwhile, fewer but larger meatpacking plants were built in small rural towns where labor is cheap and concentrations of corn-fed cattle, hogs, or chickens could be established nearby.

While the urban-to-edge-to-rural migration of commercial slaughter facilities may have been largely driven by economics, another effect of locating them far from population centers is that they are hidden from view. Nineteenth-century reformers would have considered this progress. However, along with the increasing urbanization of the U.S. population, this out-migration of slaughter to the countryside means that fewer and fewer Americans have any direct contact with livestock, farming, or food production. Michael Watts asks pointedly, “who has visited a chicken farm or pig slaughterhouse?” (2004, 60).

### *Household-scale animal slaughter*

Animal slaughter for home consumption is practiced on a dramatically smaller scale and is subject to different logics of value, regimes of regulation, and cultural expectations. Perhaps the most robust research on this subject is the applied development literature analyzing the use of urban livestock animals in household strategies for nutrition and income in poor countries (Guendel and Richards, 2002; Ishani, 2009; Thys, 2006). The recent popular literature on backyard livestock-keeping in the UK and North America has tended to emphasize the husbandry of live animals but it increasingly outlines techniques for “humane slaughter” (Johnson, 2011; Hubbard, 2010; Cottrell, 2011).

A few academic geographers have critically addressed the cultural aspects of household-scale animal slaughter, primarily in the context of a clash of cultures and negative racialization. Elder et al. (1998a,b) describe the charges of cruelty brought against two California men in 1989 for killing and eating a puppy at their apartment complex. Filipina-Americans report facing racial discrimination based on the animal practices of some Filipinos of dog-eating (Griffith et al., 2002). Ballard (2010) describes a similar crisis between whites and blacks in post-apartheid South Africa.

Between 1993 and 2009, the process of de-segregation in the city of Durban brought black residents into formerly white residential neighborhoods, where they continued their practices of cattle slaughter for celebrations and rituals. This practice incited a “moral panic” (p. 1070): white residents’ tolerance for integration reached its limit when their cultural norms around animal slaughter were violated.

The present paper differs from this line of research in that the conflicting perspectives on animal slaughter and where it belongs split not along racial or ethnic lines. Rather, our findings indicate that generational differences explain the greatest divisions. That said, the prospect of urban backyard slaughter elicited from some participants a panicked, vituperative language parallel to cases of racialization above.<sup>5</sup> To the authors’ knowledge, this article is the first to examine differences over urban livestock practices in the U.S. from the perspective of philosophical divisions rather than ethnic or racial ones.

### *Urban livestock agriculture*

Although controversy over backyard slaughter has arisen locally in recent years, the practice of slaughtering animals in cities is not new. Since the earliest civilizations, “farm” animals have been integral to the urban metabolism, providing transportation and waste management as well as food for humans. Tens of thousands of horses, cows, pigs, and poultry lived and died in cities including New York, London, and Perth well into the mid-19th and 20th centuries (McNeur, 2011; Davies, 2004; Atkins, 1977; Gaynor, 2007). Productive animals<sup>6</sup> such as poultry, goats, cows, rabbits, honeybees, and guinea pigs still produce food and income for human residents in many world cities (Schiere et al., 2006; Thys, 2006; Smit et al., 1996; Hovorka, 2012).

The recent return of livestock to Western cities after nearly a century of exclusion has received scholarly attention in geography (Blecha, 2007; Blecha and Leitner, 2013; LaBadie, 2008; Butler, 2012) and legal studies (Salkin, 2011a,b; Orbach and Sjoberg, 2011). To date, the research on this “new” urban livestock-keeping focuses largely on municipal regulation as well as the hazards and benefits of keeping live animals in cities, with only cursory attention to slaughter. McClintock et al. (2014) is an exception, as they include slaughter practices in their discussion of the experiences of urban livestock keepers. The present article is the first to focus primarily on slaughter, and to consider public perceptions of the practice.

### *Purpose of the research*

An insight from cultural anthropology holds that the best opportunity to learn the norms of a society is when those norms are violated. When this occurs, values normally implicit are spoken; cultural rules are examined and either re-inscribed or revised. The re-emergence of urban slaughter openly challenges the hegemonic relations with farm animals in the contemporary United States.

In this study, urban residents consider the possibility and practice of deliberately bringing livestock animals back into proximity and their deaths back into view. At its current scale, the practice of

<sup>5</sup> Further analysis of the vilification in our survey of “hipsters” and “slaughter hobbyists” as a social caste is rich fodder for a future article.

<sup>6</sup> We use the term “productive” cautiously, aware of its anthropocentrism. Certainly, all animals are productive – and reproductive – toward their own ends: building nests, raising young, hunting for food, etc. The term, however, differentiates between those animals used by humans for food, fiber, or power; those who have been constructed as pets/consumers (of toys, beds, daycare), and “wild” or “pest” animals who serve their own productive purposes but are not enrolled in productivity for human benefit.

backyard slaughter has little material impact on the commercial meat industry, but more and more households are experiencing the lives—and deaths—of chickens, rabbits, and other small livestock in their neighborhoods. This opens conversations about the geography of slaughter: where do urban residents feel killing animals is appropriate and why? Why do perspectives differ widely on the issue? What factors influence individuals' feelings and opinions?

## Methodology

### Study design

We conducted an online survey during the summer of 2012 to assess the range of perspectives on backyard slaughter among people interested broadly in food issues, local foods, gardening, and urban livestock-keeping. The survey focused initially on two urban centers—the San Francisco Bay Area in California and the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) in Minnesota—where conflicts over backyard slaughter have arisen. The survey's purpose was to gain insights into the range of public perspectives—and what factors influence them—on the practice of small-scale urban slaughter.

The survey was initially sent to three listservs (Twin Cities Chickens, San Francisco Urban Agriculture Alliance, and East Bay Urban Agriculture Alliance) and to one community newspaper (Oakland Local). The researchers gave permission for subjects to share and re-post the survey link. The survey was "live" for one month, receiving 584 completed responses, many from beyond the originally targeted localities. Forty-nine came from the Twin Cities and 345 from the urban Bay Area; 190 came from locations outside of California and Minnesota, including 37 states and four foreign countries. This paper focuses exclusively on the 345 Bay Area respondents.

The survey contained 48 closed-response questions, including 13 demographic questions. Fourteen of the questions addressed subjects' practices, such as their dietary and grocery-shopping habits, animal-related hobbies, and relationships with animals. If subjects indicated that they kept livestock animals, they were asked up to five additional questions about their experiences. The remaining 21 closed-response questions asked subjects' level of agreement with various statements about the human use of animals, the nature of animals, how cities should regulate animal practices, and the ethics and healthfulness of meat produced under different farming conditions. Ten open-ended questions allowed subjects to describe their perspectives in their own words.

### Methods of analysis

Our quantitative analysis examined the relationships between 108 independent and 21 dependent variables to identify the characteristics of subjects who were particularly supportive of or opposed to backyard slaughter. Chi-squared tests were performed between each pair of variables for which there was an  $n$  of 5 or greater. For all variable pairs with a chi-squared value above a 0.05  $p$ -value, coefficients of correlation were also calculated.<sup>7</sup>

The 108 independent variables can be divided into three thematic groups:

- *Demographics* (e.g., age, household income, education, race and ethnicity, diet, immigration history, home ownership).

- *Food procurement and animal practices* (e.g., where they shop for groceries, if they grow or preserve any food,<sup>8</sup> what pets they keep, if they donate money to or volunteer with any animal-related charities).
- *Slaughter experiences* (e.g., what types of animals or meats they have eaten; whether they keep poultry or livestock; whether they have hunted or fished; whether they have killed household pests such as flies, mosquitoes, or mice; whether they have witnessed or taken part in animal slaughter).

Each of these 108 characteristics variables was paired with each of 21 dependent variables regarding regulations, rights, and feelings that gauge subjects' level of support for backyard slaughter. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with various statements on regulations and rights. For example, the core regulations statement was "My city should allow residents to slaughter poultry or livestock animals for their own use". This was followed by variations suggesting that the city should allow slaughter but require training or permits, establish limits on the number or type of animals slaughtered, or establish designated slaughter sites within the city. "Rights" statements included both pro-slaughter statements such as "People should have a right to raise their own food, including slaughtering animals" and anti-slaughter perspectives: "City residents should not have to see or hear animals being slaughtered nearby". "Feelings" variables centered on the questions, "How would you feel if you heard that your neighbor was planning to slaughter a chicken for food?" and the same question about "a rabbit". These questions were followed by choices from "Very Positive" to "Very Negative" on a five-point Likert scale, and by an open-ended follow-up question, "Why would you feel this way?"

In addition to quantitative analysis, we also examined subjects' written answers to open-ended questions, totaling more than 50,000 words. Using a qualitative process of open coding, we observed frequent use of words and phrases referring to *distance from*, *proximity to*, or *location of* livestock animals, slaughter, or meat production. We searched for terms such as "home", "neighborhood", "city", "farm", "urban", "rural", "near", "close", "far", "distant", "intimate", and "crowded". Through inductive content analysis, we categorized these comments into three clusters of opinions or sensibilities about the proper place of slaughter, and different feelings about the prospect of backyard meat production next door.

### Limitations and sources of bias

We began the online survey by distributing it to three urban agriculture listservs in the Bay Area and the Twin Cities, choosing these networks out of a concern that a posting to the general public might not garner sufficient participation. We hoped that individuals already interested in urban agriculture might take the time to complete our survey. We did not expect the survey to be forwarded to so many additional lists, and we were surprised to attract nearly 600 participants in just a few weeks. Several sources of bias arose through this recruitment method.

First, we were surprised by the strength of feeling subjects conveyed. Even though the survey was lengthy and responding to the open-ended questions was optional, a majority of participants provided answers to all ten, often at length. The vigor of participation indicates that some portion of the public feels strongly, even passionately, about this issue, and these individuals self-selected to

<sup>7</sup> Chi-squared results were first screened for significance at the 0.05  $p$ -value level (chi-squared = 3.841 for a  $2 \times 2$  test) and others were rechecked against higher-levels (0.01  $p \rightarrow$  chi2 = 6.635). Apparent independent variables were screened against each other to avoid autocorrelation.

<sup>8</sup> Subjects were allowed to choose as many of the following as they wished: growing vegetables; growing fruits; preserving foods (canning, pickling, freezing, drying); beekeeping; keeping poultry for eggs; keeping livestock for milk; keeping livestock for meat; fishing/hunting; or other.

participate in the survey. Thus, the answers we received are likely more disparate than we would have received from a representative population sample. This “outspoken” outcome suited our research goal well, however, as we were seeking to identify the *range* of perspectives rather than reliably determine their relative prominence.

A second bias in the results of this survey is a striking over-representation of white, US-born, non-Hispanic participants. Employing an online survey automatically creates bias in favor of people with easy Internet access: although many people of color, particularly immigrants, actively participate in urban agriculture, they may not seek information in the online communities where we solicited responses. Additionally, many “alternative food spaces”, including online spaces such as blogs and listservs, have unintentionally been constructed as “white spaces” (Alkon, 2012; Alkon and Mares, 2012; Slocum, 2007). Further, this survey was provided only in English and Spanish. Follow-up studies should provide materials in other languages common in the study area(s).

Another source of bias stemmed from the survey being forwarded to other lists and social media. As the number of respondents increased, we noticed a disproportionately high rate of participation by vegans and vegetarians. One participant wrote to alert us of this, explaining that “the survey is being circulated among animal rescue groups with a note encouraging people to take the survey and spend ‘15 minutes’ to ‘save lives’. I feel this may be skewing the results” (Subject 1). The influence of this potential bias is limited, as we do not purport to have a representative sample. However, the large number of vegan and vegetarian participants did pose challenges. Indeed, it became clear that a subject’s diet was by far the most significant predictor of feelings about backyard slaughter. Vegans were almost unanimously (103 out of 104) opposed to all 21 variables supporting backyard slaughter. (Vegetarians were less uniform in their opinions, with ten percent indicating mild support.) In contrast, subjects who eat meat (called “omnivores” here) were widely split on the issue of backyard slaughter, reporting a wide range of opinions. In this paper we chose to focus primarily on omnivores, to control for the strong “diet” variable. We examined how demographics, food procurement practices, and slaughter experiences influenced omnivores’ differing perspectives on this practice.

Finally, we must emphasize that this study was, by design, exploratory. The results cannot be construed as a reliable representation of the Bay Area population or be generalized to other cities or regions. Nevertheless, we hope that by identifying and illuminating some of these diverse perspectives, communities experiencing (or anticipating) conflict over urban slaughter may gain insight into (and empathy for) the conflicting worldviews that subjects bring to the issue.

### Qualitative findings

The subjects’ written comments provided a wealth of textual data that conveyed subjects’ opinions about whether slaughter should be allowed and also drew upon certain words, images, and values to emphasize their views. We sorted these comments into three clusters, each sharing sentiments about where slaughter belongs and why, and how the practice should be regulated. The following discussion features quotations from 19 individual omnivore participants (Table 1) that exemplify the three perspectives.

#### Valuing distance

For some respondents, maintaining psychological and emotional distance from slaughter is crucially important. Even though they eat meat, they do not want to think about the death

**Table 1**  
Correlation of omnivore characteristics and agreement with slaughter policy.

	n	Allow <sup>a</sup>	Prohibit <sup>b</sup>
<b>Demographic variables</b>			
Under 45 years old	95	0.38	−0.29
Has a college degree	123	0.21	−0.24
<b>Food procurement variables</b>			
<i>Subject participates in</i>			
Preserving foods (e.g., canning, drying)	86	0.60	−0.56
Growing vegetables	112	0.54	−0.53
Growing fruits	96	0.47	−0.46
Keeping bees for honey	22	0.31	−0.25
<i>Subjects’ main sources for food/groceries include</i>			
Homegrown or home-raised	66	0.45	−0.45
Natural grocery store (small, non-chain)	83	0.25	−0.29
Direct from farm (incl. CSA, not farmers mkt)	25	0.21	
Warehouse club (e.g., Sam’s Club, Costco)	25	−0.23	0.18
Large chain grocery store	72	−0.28	0.28
<b>Slaughter experience variables</b>			
<i>Slaughter or animal-killing experience</i>			
Has killed an animal for meat or sport	74	0.54	−0.46
Experienced backyard slaughter	34	0.40	−0.30
Has killed a fish for food	105	0.34	−0.33
Has killed/exterminated a mammal pest	90	0.22	−0.25
<i>Livestock-keeping experience</i>			
Keeping poultry for eggs	58	0.50	−0.38
Keeps livestock for meat	29	0.36	−0.30
<i>Variety meat-eating experience</i>			
Has ever eaten wild game	82	0.50	−0.41
Has ever eaten lamb or goat	119	0.40	−0.40

Note: Coefficients were significant at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>a</sup> Agree or Strongly Agree: “My city should allow residents to slaughter poultry or livestock animals for their own use.”

<sup>b</sup> Agree or Strongly Agree: “My city should prohibit all slaughter of poultry or livestock animals within city limits.”

of animals. In fact, a few respondents explicitly noted that this psychological distance is *necessary* in order for them to continue eating meat. One admitted: “Just don’t want to know. I love animals and also eat them. I’m a bit of a hypocrite [sic].” (Subject 1) A Connecticut respondent<sup>9</sup> elaborated,

*Even though I eat meat I can’t kill animals. If I had to kill my own animals to eat meat I would stop eating meat. Having it already processed on a shelf in the supermarket provides a ‘disconnect’ from how the animal actually got there. It’s the disconnect that allows me to purchase and consume it. I hate the process that allows it to get there*

[Subject 2]

Others did not explicitly acknowledge this “disconnect”. These meat-eaters simply expressed a dislike or emotional distress at being aware of animals being killed nearby.

*Even though I know animals are slaughtered for meat, I don’t like to be exposed to that aspect of raising animals.*

[Subject 3]

*I don’t like knowing an animal was killed so near my home.*

[Subject 4]

One subject, who keeps chickens for eggs, projects her desire for distance onto other urban residents, and is amazed that anyone might feel differently. “I don’t [sic] how anyone could slaughter there [sic] own animals for food[,] it is unhealthy for all” (Subject

<sup>9</sup> Although our analysis is based primarily on survey respondents from the Bay Area, two quotes from out-of-area subjects were included since they offer the most succinct expression of a particular idea that Bay Area residents also mentioned.

6). This writer implies that slaughtering unknown animals is preferable. She literally cannot see how anyone could kill their “own animals for food”. It is not the killing that bothers this person but the proximity; the proper place for slaughter is simply far away from oneself and one’s home.

While the subjects above desired an emotional or psychological distance from slaughter, others desired distance out of material concerns about odors, vermin, or unpleasant sounds.

*I listened to a goat cry out in agony for 7 h in the middle of the night..until it died. . . Also the goats smell like a barnyard..they’re goats! they should be in a field away from the home. They are too close to my home. Many flies..increase in rodents (Subject 5).  
[punctuation original]*

Another perspective that values distance from slaughter emphasizes particular types of spaces as appropriate or inappropriate for slaughter. This imperative to (re)locate slaughter is based on beliefs about what cities are for and what activities are appropriate in a residential neighborhood. Without offering particular reasons, subjects simply stated an absolute incompatibility between slaughter and urban life.

*I do not think the slaughter of any animal is appropriate in a residential neighborhood.*

[Subject 7]

Bearing in mind that these statements come from meat-eaters, one might ask where they believe animals *should* be slaughtered. Some suggest a pastoral ideal: “in farms where the animals are raised and slaughtered humanely, but never in cities or suburban areas” (Subject 10). Others stress the need to distance urban dwellers from animal suffering:

*Butchery has no place in the city. Children and families do not need to hear animals screaming, see their blood or be exposed to the suffering on an animal. While I do not support slaughterhouses, awful as it is, I do not have to see it.*

[Subject 6]

This sense of “the city” as a place where animal slaughter – at least in intimate household or neighborhood settings – absolutely does not belong reflects a particular industrial or post-industrial middle-class sensibility. Some respondents expressed a more nuanced view of cities, acknowledging that slaughter has played a role in cities historically and is still common in many cities of the world. These participants nevertheless felt it was inappropriate today in their own city.

*In this modern day, there is no need for such raising and slaughtering to be happening within the neighborhood. . . Just like we’re all not emptying our own chamber pots into the sewers of the streets, there’s no need for that type of gore and violence.*

[Subject 8]

This writer contrasts historical reality with “this modern day”, and what he feels is necessary and appropriate in a modern city. Another writer objects to backyard slaughter by distancing American cities from other world cities where urban livestock and urban slaughter are still common sights: “We Are [sic] not a third world country” (Subject 9). These subjects relied upon a kind of historical and geographical exceptionalism to say that their cities “here and now” are not the place for slaughter, whereas slaughter might well belong in other cities or in other times.

One writer explained this non-absolutist stance by arguing that not all urban slaughter is wrong, but her own community had arrived at wise standards that should be upheld.

*we live in a community with agreed upon standards/codes ...slaughter is not permissible by code. Codes are in place to protect*

*our HEALTH AND SAFETY...need I say more? (Subject 5)*

[emphasis in original]

From this perspective, it is acceptable for animals to be slaughtered and eaten by humans, but *where* that slaughter takes place matters: it should be distant from urban settlements. These subjects want distance from slaughter – psychologically, emotionally, and materially.

#### *Valuing proximity*

In direct opposition to subjects who want slaughter removed from urban spaces and located at a distance from themselves, other respondents expressed positive associations with proximity to slaughter, using terms such as “intimate”, “close”, “local”, and “home”. These “locavores” (who eat locally grown food whenever possible) explicitly valued physical and emotional proximity to the sources of their food, including the animals they eat. Emotional connection with animals seems fully intertwined with locavores’ economic and environmental goals. Subjects repeatedly refer to ways of raising animals that are “humane”, “hand-raised”, and “humble”, while producing more healthful meat, building social connections in the community, and reducing fossil fuel use:

*. . .they have an intimate relationship with that animal, have raised it humanely and will now be eating it- a full cycle!*

[Subject 10]

Subjects who valued proximity to their food sources and strong connections between urban residents and the animals they slaughter also found greater mindfulness of the animal in eating meat slaughtered at home. Some locavores criticized other meat-eaters’ objections to backyard slaughter, pointing out the moral compromise such people make with the industrial food system.

*we eat meat every day and are so disconnected from the process of where that meat came from and how the chicken gave its life. It comes all wrapped up and cleaned up that at times we don’t even think about it. Being able to raise and harvest your own meat brings you closer to understanding the process. . . Anyone who buys chicken in my mind has hired someone else as their hit man, and can pretend that they had nothing to do with the fact that a chicken gave its life.*

[Subject 11]

Within the locavore discourse, keeping slaughter at a distance from urban spaces and residential neighborhoods constitutes a psychological shield from an unpleasant reality.

#### *Valuing individual freedom*

The third and final view expressed in subjects’ comments focused not on distance from or proximity to slaughter, but on the freedom of (human) individuals to do what they wished without interference from neighbors or the government. Respondents with this perspective—perhaps best described as “libertarian”—place a high value on individual freedom and private property rights. “If it is a private matter and private property I say, mind your own business”, (Subject 12), and “It is not my business. I expect the same consideration from them”, (Subject 13), were sentiments common to many. Some subjects specified that “their business” ended at their property line, and by “property” they generally referred to real estate: “We should have every right to raise and eat animals on our own property” (Subject 14). In some cases, however, the notion of “property” included the animal being killed: “It’s their chicken” and “It’s their rabbit” (Subject 15). It is notable that these respondents supported liberty, choice, and

individual freedom in these statements only for human beings; non-human animals are considered property.

In contrast to the honor accorded property rights, this libertarian perspective sharply constrains the rights of neighbors to complain or protest, even if they do not personally approve of or wish to participate in backyard slaughter: “I just don’t like it, but I think they have a right to do so” (Subject 16). Not only do these subjects hold back from constraining their neighbors’ activities, they also view government regulation as counter-productive and actively problematic.

*I believe people have the right to make their own decisions regarding the type of food they eat, and how they obtain it. ... I believe there is too much government oversight in the food production business.*

[Subject 17]

*The Oakland City Government is a shameful embarrassment, full of ignorance, greed and corruption. They have no business trying to stop people from actively pursuing solutions to the growing crises of infrastructure collapse.*

[Subject 18]

Here we have offered one way to sort and interpret the variety of shared perspectives on backyard slaughter in the urban Bay Area. We do not suggest that these three orientations are exhaustive; nevertheless the identification of these three clusters provides a thematic landscape for further exploration. In the following section, we draw on the quantitative analysis of survey data to identify individual characteristics associated with these values and viewpoints.

## Quantitative findings

Quantitative analysis helped us discover which characteristics (demographic, behavioral, experiential) were linked with subjects’ opinions and feelings about backyard slaughter. Having screened 2052 original data pairs, we calculated coefficients of association for all significant relationships (chi-squared above 0.05 *p*-value), and set about analyzing patterns within the data. For this paper, we have reduced the data to a simplified set of correlations that demonstrate the overall patterns and invite preliminary interpretation (Table 2).

### Demographics

We anticipated that age, race, gender, income, home ownership, or other demographic factors might be linked with differences of opinion about backyard slaughter.<sup>10</sup> Contrary to our expectations, most demographic factors showed no significant relationship with feeling and opinion variables.<sup>11</sup> Of all the demographic factors tested, only age had a significant relationship to more than one opinion variable. Being over or under age 45 was reliably and strongly linked to feelings about backyard slaughter, having a very strong relationship ( $p \leq 0.001$ , chi-squared  $\geq 10.83$ ) with nearly every opinion question asked. Respondents under 45 were much more likely to: (1) consider raising and slaughtering animals a right, (2) support legalizing backyard slaughter, (3) and feel that backyard

slaughter belongs in cities. They were also much less likely to indicate that training and facilities were necessary for backyard slaughter practitioners. Subjects under 45 felt equally positive about the prospects of slaughter in their neighborhood—whether or not they kept livestock animals themselves.

One potential explanation of this age-related difference may be related to decreased public trust in industrial modes of food production. According to Renting et al. (2003), mid-20th century American and British publics were broadly content to trust institutional “experts” in both government and industry to produce their food safely. However,

*Since the late 1970s the public image of agriculture has become dominated by an ongoing stream of ‘food scandals’ ranging from salmonella and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) to dioxine [sic] residues in milk. ... Consumer distrust in modern food production has become firmly rooted.*

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Reports of industrial agriculture’s negative environmental impacts and inhumane animal husbandry practices have further eroded public trust and goodwill, spurring what Renting describes as a broad down-scaling or re-localizing of food trust over the past 35 years. One response has been a widespread turn away from both long food supply chains and manufactured foods. Instead consumers have sought face-to-face, producer-to-consumer food sales through farmers markets and community supported agriculture (Renting et al., 2003). Self-provisioning through home gardens, community gardens, beekeeping, and backyard henhouses brings food production into even closer proximity.

People under 45 have grown up with misgivings about the corporate agri-food system, while those over 45 came of age during a time when supermarkets, big-name brands, and USDA inspection seals signified quality. This generational difference seems to be reflected in the results of our survey, in that younger subjects tended to value proximity to the sources of their food (including via backyard slaughter) while older respondents tended to value distance and the “professionalism” of the commercial meat industry.

### Food procurement practices

Respondents’ food procurement practices represented the strongest association with views on slaughter. Characteristics such as whether people engaged in food production or processing and where they shopped for groceries were closely tied to their feelings about urban slaughter. These practices can be grouped into three clusters that closely parallel the viewpoints discussed above.

The first could be called “mainstream shoppers” who acquired the bulk of their groceries at national chain retail stores, including warehouse clubs, mainstream supermarkets, and “natural food” stores such as Whole Foods. Regardless of income, mainstream shoppers favored restricting or prohibiting backyard slaughter. These subjects were much less likely than others to engage in food production activities such as vegetable gardening or canning. They seem comfortable maintaining a certain *distance* from the sources of their food, allowing others to grow, harvest, process, and package it for them.

Respondents who listed “home-grown” as a major food source held very different views: the practices of canning, gardening, or growing fruit were linked more strongly than any other characteristics with support for backyard slaughter. Participants, who grew a significant portion of their own food—a particularly active “do-it-yourself (DIY)” population—were broadly opposed to restricting or regulating the practice, seeing it as a fundamental right. Yet support for backyard slaughter was not restricted to the most

<sup>10</sup> Of the 345 Bay Area subjects, 78% were female and 22% male. Roughly one quarter were under 35 years old and one quarter over 55, with 50% between these ages. Median reported income was \$75,000, although many people left this question blank.

<sup>11</sup> The analysis of race, ethnicity, and immigrant status was hampered by the overrepresentation of white, U.S.-born participants. For many questions, the number of non-white subjects was too low to calculate chi-square values. Survey participants were less racially diverse than the Bay Area population as a whole. Eighty-four percent of participants identified as White, with 11% Asian American, 3% Black, 2% Native American, and 4% Other. In addition, 10% identified as Hispanic or Latino.

**Table 2**  
Survey participants quoted.

ID #	Age	Sex	Education	Home type	City	Household income	Race (1 or more)	Grocery sources <sup>a</sup>	Food production <sup>b</sup>
1	25–34	F	BA/BS	Rent – Apt	San Jose, CA	\$20–29k	Wht	5, 2	C, F
2	45–54	F	Some Coll	Own – House	S. Windsor, CT	\$150–249k	Wht	5, 6	C
3	45–54	F	Doctorate	Family's House	Palo Alto, CA	\$60–74k	Wht	5, 6, 1	
4	55–64	F	HS	Own – House	San Francisco, CA	\$500–999k	Wht	7, 2, 4	C, B, F
5	55–64	F	BA/BS	Own – House	Oakland, CA	\$75–99k	Wht	2, 6, 7	B, C
6	25–34	F	HS	Rent – Apt	Saratoga Springs, NY	\$75–99k	Wht	5, 7, 8	
7	45–54	F	BA/BS	Own – House	Oakland, CA	\$100–149k	Wht	4, 5, 6, 9	B, C, F
8	45–54	M	BA/BS	Rent – Apt	Richmond, CA	\$50–59k	N/A	8	
9	35–44	F	Some Coll	Rent – House	Daly City, CA	\$75–99k	Lat/Hisp	9, 2	C, B
10	35–44	F	Some Grad	Rent – Apt	Oakland, CA	<\$20k	Wht	2, 4, 6, 7	B, C, F
11	35–44	F	BA/BS	Own – House	Oakland, CA	N/A	Other	2, 4, 6, 7	B, C, D, E, F
12	25–34	F	BA/BS	Rent – House	Richmond, CA	\$40–49k	N/A	8, 2, 4, 10	C, B, F, E, D
13	55–64	F	BA/BS	Own – House	Oakland, CA	\$250–499k	Blk, As/Pi, Wht	5, 9, 2, 4	C, B, F, G
14	35–44	F	Some Coll	Rent – House	American Canyon, CA	\$60–75k	AmInd, Wht	5, 9	A
15	35–44	F	BA/BS	Own – House	Vallejo, CA	\$75–99k	Wht	7, 2, 1, 4	C, B, F, E, D
16	65–74	F	MA/MS	Rent – Apt	Berkeley, CA	\$40–49k	Wht	8, 7, 6, 2	C
17	25–34	M	Some Grad	Rent – Apt	Marina, CA	N/A	N/A	8, 7, 6, 2	
18	55–64	F	BA/BS	Own – House	Oakland, CA	\$100–149k	Wht	5, 9, 2, 4	C, B, F

<sup>a</sup> *Grocery sources*: 1. CSA or other direct-from-farm, 2. Farmers' markets, 3. Food assistance, 4. Home-grown, 5. Large chain grocery stores, 6. Natural grocery store – chain, 7. Natural grocery store – small, 8. Small grocery stores, 9. Warehouse clubs 10. Other (crop swap).

<sup>b</sup> *Food production activities*: A. Fishing/hunting, B. Growing fruits, C. Growing vegetables, D. Keeping livestock for meat, E. Keeping poultry for eggs, F. Preserving food, G. Other (beekeeping).

committed and productive homesteaders. Subjects who raised or processed *even a small amount* of their own food were broadly supportive of backyard slaughter, though they were less opposed to regulations such as requiring permits or limiting the number or species of animals. All food DIYers were much less likely to shop at large chain groceries and much more likely to shop at independent natural foods stores. In contrast to mainstream shoppers, these DIYers value proximity to the sources of their food. They trust their own soil and their own labor, and seek to take power back from agri-food corporations.

A third distinct group of meat-eaters supported legalizing the practice of backyard slaughter whether or not they participated in any food production activities. These “libertarian” subjects expressed less positive feeling about the prospect of their neighbors slaughtering animals than the DIYers, but nevertheless felt that raising animals for food is a right that should not be infringed by government regulation. The value they place on individual freedom and property rights differentiates them from others whose chief concern was either distance from or proximity to slaughter.

#### *Slaughter experiences*

We have loosely grouped together a third set of variables that might be understood as a proxy for proximity to slaughter. “Slaughter experiences” includes a variety of encounters that brought participants into closer physical or conceptual contact with the death of animals at human hands.

One set of experiences includes hunting, fishing, and backyard slaughter itself. As expected, people who had participated in these activities were much more likely to support backyard slaughter. Those who had only watched neighbors or relatives slaughter animals supported the practice just as strongly. Having killed “mammal pests” (though they are not livestock) is also linked with support for backyard slaughter.

One might easily predict that those who have killed animals previously would support the killing of more animals: indeed, it seems that these individuals are comfortable with the idea that procuring and eating meat involves the death of an animal. However, this need not be the case. If those killings had gone badly – had been botched, perhaps – they might have had the opposite

effect. Another type of proximity might be seen in the raising or keeping of poultry or livestock animals. Subjects who keep chickens for eggs, even with no intent to slaughter them, tend to support the practice. (The reasons for this are not apparent from this survey, but beg inquiry.) Notably, the opposite is true for respondents who keep rabbits.

A third experience type related to slaughter pertains to the kinds of meat (or species of animals) that participants have eaten. Approximately one quarter of all participants had eaten only the “big three” meats of the standard American diet: pork, beef, or poultry (pigs, cows, and chickens or turkeys). Respondents who had eaten wild game, lamb, or goat – even once – were significantly more supportive of backyard slaughter. One possible explanation relates to “conceptual proximity” to slaughter. Over the past few decades the meat industry has increasingly presented common cuts of meat to appear less like the animals they came from and more like a source-less piece of “protein” on a plastic tray. Since the origins of wild game, goat, and (to some degree) lamb have been less erased by the meat packing industry, we suggest that eating these meats implies a certain willingness to imagine the animal who “embodied” the meal.

Several other “slaughter experiences” had insufficient numbers (*n*) to show statistical significance, but hint at other types of relevant experiences:

- People who knew of friends, neighbors, or relatives who had killed chickens felt more positively than those who just imagined it.
- Individuals who learned to slaughter from a farmer or family member were much more likely to have a positive experience than those who learned from a book or video.
- Many people who had participated in only one backyard slaughter felt it had gone poorly. Nevertheless, they saw this as a learning experience, expected future slaughters to go more smoothly, and still supported the practice.

This preliminary evidence suggests that a wide variety of personal experiences correlate with more positive feelings about animal slaughter. The causal factors in this relationship remain to be determined: does proximity to slaughter lead to comfort with the practice, or is it the other way around?

## Discussion and implications

After more than a century of intentional, if gradual, displacement and distancing from U.S. cities, slaughter is returning. Urban residents practicing small-scale backyard slaughter are bringing into question the “proper place” of meat production. Most research on the geographies of slaughter has focused on political and economic analyses of the large-scale, rural, meatpacking industry. This study brings the conversation back to the level of urban households, residential neighborhoods, and city policies, locating it at the intersection of animal geographies literature and urban agriculture literature, which have only just begun to address urban livestock at all.

This study identified a basic disagreement over whether backyard slaughter is a problem. While a local community may agree fairly easily that they want a waste incinerator kept out of their neighborhood or that a farmers market nearby would be an amenity, there is no consensus on whether having chickens and rabbits being slaughtered next door is a good or a bad thing. Using a mixed-method study, we found that subjects’ views on where slaughter belongs reflect more fundamental orientations toward the food system. Two of these orientations are spatial: distance and proximity. For some subjects, keeping slaughter outside of the city maintains a desirable emotional and material distance from the unpleasant aspects of animal slaughter. Others subjects want to be near their food sources, believing that producing meat as locally as possible ensures both the quality of life and death for the animal and the healthfulness of the meat. The third (non-spatial) orientation toward freedom is not correlated with particular food procurement practices or age.

Another factor that differentiated the subjects’ viewpoints on slaughter was which rights they prioritized. Those who oppose backyard slaughter felt that city-dwellers have a right not to be exposed to the sights and sounds of slaughter. Supporters of backyard slaughter, in contrast, emphasized two different types of rights. Many DIYers felt it was a human right to raise and provide food for one’s family. In contrast, libertarians emphasized the right of their neighbors to do (nearly) whatever they want *with* and *on* their private property, short of nuisance or cruelty. While many omnivores discussed their concerns about animal welfare, few mentioned animal rights – a fourth type of rights that was cited by many of the vegan and vegetarian respondents and that deserves discussion in another article.

Finally, subjects’ desire for distance or proximity is also strongly related to their age and food procurement practices. What does it mean for our cities now and in the future that people under forty show significantly greater support for household scale food production in general and backyard slaughter in particular? During the 19th and 20th centuries, the handling of animal bodies became industrialized, professionalized, and commodified. Slaughterhouses distanced animal death and meat production from urban households. We note an intriguing similarity with the distancing of human death in the spaces of hospitals and the professionalized handling of human bodies in mortuaries. Recently some dying persons and their families have worked to return these commodified processes to the space of the home and to the hands of loved ones (Slocum and Carlson, 2011; Kaleem, 2013) Could the parallel growth of backyard slaughter and DIY funerals reflect changing opinions on what is appropriate proximity to death? Perhaps the widespread distrust of large institutions described by Renting et al. (2003) underlies a significant generational shift in whom we trust to do the emotionally intense, yet physically real work of our own animal lives – home birth, home death, home production of food. Will human inhabitants of the 21st century city

accept a closer relationship not only with animal life but with animal death in their midst?

This research has implications for municipal policy-making and for efforts to build alternative food systems. While this study’s data are specific to the San Francisco Bay Area, distrust of the conventional food system and interest in alternatives are growing across the North America and beyond. As backyard slaughter become more widespread, public debate will intensify and more cities will find themselves grappling with the question of how to regulate the practice. For public officials or citizens who wish to better understand differing perspectives, our research begins to offer insights why the issue is so fraught.

Further research is warranted along a number of lines. For example, how does killing one’s own animals impact meat consumption? Does the gravity or difficulty of the process actually lead to practitioners eating less meat, as some have suggested? How are municipalities in the U.S. or elsewhere currently regulating animal slaughter and are there trends toward greater tolerance or stricter prohibition? What arguments do the publically visible ‘leaders’ on each side of this debate employ, and are their concerns echoed by the general public? In all these questions, moreover, fine-tuned attention must be paid to cultural differences. Even within groups that support backyard slaughter, widely varying perspectives are sure to be found among immigrant and non-immigrant communities (Lassiter and Wolch, 2006), young adult hipsters and baby-boom hippies, dumpster-divers and culture-driving CEOs (Hickman, 2011). If cities seek to become both “green” and humane, and seek to guard both their residents’ liberties and their sensibilities, they will need to understand the discourses and underlying values at play in contestations over backyard slaughter.

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