

It's Not What You Eat but *How* and *That* You Eat: Social Media, Counter-Discourses and Disciplined Ingestion among Amateur Competitive Eaters¹

Emma-Jayne Abbots and Luci Attala

Abstract

This article interrogates how social media can provide a platform for contesting dominant discourses. It does so through the lens of competitive eating, demonstrating that amateur competitive eaters use social media sites to challenge and subvert mass media representations of their sport while concomitantly upholding normative notions of healthy eating and bodies. Competitors consider themselves to be skilful athletes that discipline and train their bodies to eat. They regard their eating practices, which are often depicted in the mass media as uncontrolled and gluttonous, as *controlled* ingestion, and present an alternative perspective of their 'sport' – a perspective that stresses health, physical expertise and a fit, trained body over voracity and insatiability. Social media acts as a 'precipitating agency' for the creation of these alternative definitions of disciplined eating, as well as the construction of new digital eating identities. Instead of focusing on the food being ingested and the 'Carnavalesque' practice of competitive eating, we draw attention to the performers' voices and the ways they attend to the mechanics of gurgitation, including methods of chewing, swallowing and stomach

¹ First and foremost we would like to thank our research participants who so generously gave their time and shared their thoughts on their sport with us. Our thanks also to Mike Goodman, Josée Johnston and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful and constructive comments: all errors and omissions remain our own.

stretching, and their ability to manage, regulate and operate ingestivity. As hegemonic discourses align the notion of 'good eating' to discipline, order and restraint, competitive eating is thus revealed to be a practice that mirrors and appropriates, yet also ultimately reproduces, conventional narratives. Social media is, in turn, shown to be a political tool for counter-discursive practices that are produced in dialogue with, and concomitantly uphold and contest, normative discourses of mass media.

Key Words: competitive eating; social media; counter-discourses; healthy eating; obesity/fatness; dis/ordered bodies; discipline

Introduction

This is disgusting... This is...a freaky world in which people chow down 2.89 pounds of pigs' feet in 10 minutes, or 31.5 quesadillas in five minutes (Sandomir 2007).

According to the International Federation of Competitive Eating (IFoCE), as many as 80 eating contests are held each year in association with Major League Eating (MLE) (www.ifoce.com). These heavily sponsored and publicised competitions, together with an assortment of television programmes such as *Man Vs Food* have rapidly and colourfully brought this type of eating performance to a wider, global audience, inspiring a number to emulate the practice and format (Congalton 2009: 176-7). As a result, there is an emerging, somewhat fluid, taxonomy of 'gurgitators' perfecting their abilities to ingest at speed or in quantity. Eaters' status in the gurgitating community's hierarchy (as professionals, celebrities or amateurs) is determined by their ingestive proficiencies. This can be predicated on either speed or the amount of substance ingested: Performers can excel through ingestive 'nerve', that is by ingesting what are known as 'extreme eats' (for

example, 1000 year old eggs or Ghost chillies), but also the ordinary, the cheap and ‘unhealthy’ (with hot dogs established as a firm favourite). The aim within both broad categories is to challenge an individual’s ingestive abilities and their corporeal rejection of items consumed either via return or satiety/repletion. Competitive eating is thus defined as ‘engaging in a contest of skill, in this case voluminously and/or rapidly for remuneration, which may or may not be monetary, and includes, but is not limited to money, material objects, visibility and fame’ (Rubin 2008: 250).

In this article we extend the ‘skill’ aspect of competitive eating to elucidate the ways in which competitive eaters’ training and disciplining of their bodies subverts and appropriates established notions of ‘civilised’ eating. In particular, we are concerned with the ways competitive eaters deploy social media to create spaces of autonomy in which to practice their sport. This focus lets us examine how social media facilitates the (re)production of counter-discourses as we interrogate the extent that competitive eaters concomitantly challenge, uphold and reproduce hegemonic discourses of proper, good and right eating that are commonly promulgated through the mass media. We draw inspiration from Guthman’s (2011) political ecology approach that, in the context of obesity, challenges the conventions found in media representations and demonstrates how these are socially produced, take hold and close the possibilities of discussion. Likewise, our approach implicates recent work within Fat Studies (Aphramor et al 2013), Critical Geography of Obesity/Fatness (Colls 2012; Colls and Evans 2009, 2013) and the associated discussions on ordered and disordered eating and bodies (see Longhurst 2012), as we demonstrate how normative assumptions about what constitutes

healthy eating and bodies are experienced, countered and reinforced by our research participants. Taking our lead from Guthman, our interest is also in ‘opening up the conversation to other ideas’ (ibid: 188) and counter-intuitively working against the assumptions on which mass media representations of both normative and deviant eating practices are premised.

We do not, however, focus on the realm of professional eaters and their place in the globalised media, which has already been subject to some academic and popular discussion (Congalton 2009, Fagone 2006, Nerz 2007). Nor do we take the paths of focusing on the foodstuffs consumed (e.g. Phillipov 2013) or the relationship between eater and audience (e.g. Rubin 2008). Instead we focus on the perspectives of semi-professional and amateur aspiring eaters who rely on USG (user generated content) social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to generate interest in their skills, and promote their practices. This not only helps ensure that our discussion is shaped by competitive eaters’ perspectives – rather than our own preconceptions – but also enables us to illuminate how social media provides the space to engage with dominant discourses (of eating) in ways which both challenge and uphold normative narratives. Thus, we argue, that the competitive eaters with whom we worked contest – through their eating and its social media representation – mass media representations of competitive eating as grotesque and disgusting, while also showing how this contestation simultaneously reproduces normative discourses on food, health and the body that propound discipline and equate thinness with healthiness. We look to demonstrate, then, how social media can provide a platform from which to formulate counter-discourses, albeit in a limited manner.

Models of consumers passively receiving information from a homogenous media have long been countered by active audience theorists (cf Hall 1980), with Bruns' (2008) idea of 'producers' highlighting the active ways consumers interpret – or produce – media. Conflating production and consumption, 'prosumption' has also recently emerged as a frame through which to understand users' engagement with social media in that it better reflects how they simultaneously consume and produce knowledge (Ritzer et al. 2010, Ritzer 2014, Rousseau in press). Through this lens, wikis, blogs and social networking sites are the 'ultimate social factories' (Ritzer et al. 2012: 383) that, on one hand, extract value from unpaid labour and on the other, empower users to produce their own experiences free from external control and interference. This latter theme of empowerment and autonomy has been a pervasive discourse of social media, and expressions of agency, choice and freedom are abundant across blogs and networking sites (Chia 2012). As we show below, our research participants' perspectives reflect this rhetoric as they use social media to convey their freedom to eat and practice their sport as they choose. However, we also look to go beyond discussions of cyber-libertarianism, democratisation and their limitation (O'Neill and Boykoff 2010, Sunstein 2007), by demonstrating how the seemingly counter-discourses enabled by social media are embedded within, and ultimately reproduce, dominant paradigms. As such, we draw on and extend Chia's conclusion that the Internet is 'the scene of contestation and complicity, where subjects' consumptive energies on discreet social media platforms are milled through a digital ecosystem' (2012: 424) by elucidating how our

participants' views are mediated by normative narratives and their autonomy, curtailed.

The media in all its forms has been subject to some, if limited, discussion in the context of food and eating (Adema 2000, Collins 2009, Eli and Ulijaszek 2014, Slocum et al. 2011). Rousseau (2012a) addresses the politics of the food entertainment industry and the ways media personalities emerge as food activists that, in her words, 'interfere' with people's food preferences. She thus traces the rise of food media and the shift towards eating practices becoming a public concern, arguing that public health issues work to consolidate the authority of food media celebrities. Yet she also points to the ways that consumers are complicit in this production (see also Abbots in press), a process compounded by the dialogic nature of social media (Rousseau 2012b). Similarly, Barnes (2014 in press) illustrates how consumers 'talk back' to celebrity chefs through social media and demonstrates how this production of collaborative knowledge both upholds and contests chefs' authority. Social media provides a space, then, for the construction and communication of counter-discourses although, as Rousseau cautions, it can only 'contribute a precipitating agency to the already fraught arena of discourses around what is 'good' and 'proper' when it comes to how and what to eat' (in press).

It is this notion of social media as precipitating agency that informs our account of how competitive eaters dialogically mobilise Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to construct and express their eating practices in their own terms. We further draw on scholarship that shows how 'subcultural communities of practice' (Ritzer et al 2010: 394) reflexively use social media as a tool to

construct a digital identity (cf. Woermann 2012), and look to extend this by exploring how this process of self-reflection occurs in dialogue with, and in contestation to, mass media representations. We thus present competitive eaters as prosumers of food knowledges and social media as a political instrument that is deployed to ‘talk back’ to critics through the construction of counter-food identities.

Methodological Approach

Recent ethnographies (Boellstorff 2008, Miller 2013) and broader discussions of digital anthropology (Boellstorff et al. 2012, Horst and Miller 2012) have established the Internet as an object of critical enquiry and a location – or fieldsite – of study. In the networked world of amateur competitive eating, social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook emerge as the key sites in which this self-defined ‘community of practice’ are located. We consequently treat social media spaces as both fieldsite and research object. Due, in part, to mass media caricatures of competitive eating we adopted a qualitative approach that would be less obscured by preconceptions and pay heed to the perspectives and voices of competitive eaters. In keeping with this methodology we initially formed a basic but loose research direction with the understanding that it would act as a springboard for any unforeseen outcomes or alternative directions. In other words, our participants would lead the research, and we would be guided by their responses, life stories, experiences, and comments. Our study thus grew organically and holistically and was shaped by the lived experiences of our participants.

We identified potential participants through online competitive eating sources, and sent invitations to participate in research through the integrated message services of these sites, asking them to contact us directly if they wished to do so.² This method meant that contact and possible inclusion in the study emerged directly from eaters' self-promotion sites and we used their own public 'gateways' as an entry point. Responses to our invitation initiated our ongoing research relationships that are mediated informally using the various online message services our participants prefer. Our approach favoured informal, even ordinary, quotidian engagements, which we supported with a brief series of broad open questions and the collection of biographies. Over the research period,³ our online conversations became more spontaneous, with some taking places in real time as text via Facebook; others spanned broader lengths of time, possibly enabling individuals to formulate their responses with more consideration. Each conversation developed in accordance with the style of the individual/s concerned and each respondent was free to message with new information or ideas at any point – which many did. This further created a sense of informality that enabled our participants to lead the direction of the research and afforded them a level of control. Following the collation of all these responses, our analysis drew out latent patterns between participants' ideas and noted emergent and recurring

² Competitive eating draws a wide range of participants from a variety of backgrounds, although all our participants are men and are geographically situated in what could loosely be called 'the West'. This gender and geographical bias has not gone unnoticed and gender, in particular, has emerged as a direction in which to take our research. However, performance of masculinity was not central to our initial study on which this paper is premised and was also not raised by our participants. It is thus not addressed in this article although we will look interrogate this theme in another paper.

³ The majority of our fieldwork took place between June and September 2013, with a number of follow-up discussions taking place until April 2014.

themes, which were then unpacked and cross-referenced. Finally, in keeping with the participant-led ethos of our research, drafts of this article were circulated among our participants and comments were solicited. While none opted for editorial control, they were empowered to suggest changes and comment on accuracies. Furthermore all rejected the offer of a pseudonym, in part because their avatars and taglines are key tenets of their digital identities.

(Un)Civilised Eaters, Excess and Extreme?

[It] is about gluttony, and gluttony is wrong. It's wasteful. Think about people that are starving to death... I think it's an embarrassment (Brion 2010 talking about Alton Brown's [American personality and chef] feelings towards excessive eating).

The horror of watching someone gorge for 10 minutes -- and often vomit violently mid-way -- is an affront on so very many levels.... What is the commentary on our waste of food, our nation of obese overeaters? Eating contests? Let's get rid of them (Nyad 2013).

Excessive, extreme, gluttonous, uncontrolled, disgusting, obese, unhealthy, uncivilised, hedonistic, irresponsible: These are just some of the terms invoked in mass media representations of competitive eating. Whether it is a individual consumer rising to the challenge and consuming a 6,000 calorie English Breakfast in a Norfolk Diner (Gore 2012), a small group of amateur eaters making themselves ill by eating the hottest curry dish possible (BBC 2011), or a professional commercially sponsored competition, such as *Nathan's Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest*, being broadcast on ESPN (www.nathansfamous.com), discussions of competitive eating – and eaters – are inevitably framed as diametrically opposed to 'good', 'healthy' and 'proper' eating practices, as perpetuated by public health discourses, gastronomes and

‘foodies’ alike⁴. The argument that the notions of ‘good’ and ‘proper’ eating invoked in such discourses are subjective and culturally and historically contingent has been well established (Aphramor et al 2013, Colls and Evans 2009, Guthman 2011), as has the way they are premised on ideas of civilised eating, controlled ingestion and self-regulating bodies (Lupton 1996, Mennell 1996). Models of good and proper eating are also morally laden (Coveney 2006) and politically charged (Bourdieu 1984). It is not surprising, then, that competitive eating, as *perceived* gustatory excess and the antithesis of control and discipline, is commonly depicted as a morally reprehensible and irresponsible practice. However, as we demonstrate below, social media provides the ‘precipitating agency’ (Rousseau in press) for competitive eaters to contest this convention, although they do so in a way that ultimately reinforces normative assumptions about health, food and the body.

With a few exceptions (Congalton 2009, Halloran 2004, Rubin 2008, Phillipov 2013, Vardi 2010), competitive eating has received little academic attention to date (Vardi *ibid*: 372), although there have been a number of ‘popular’ accounts (Bowles 2007, Fagone 2006, Nerz 2007). And, considering the backdrop of public health discourses advocating moderation, it is no coincidence that much discussion on the subject has readily engaged with the themes of transgression, reverse rituals and Carnavalesque performance. Phillipov’s (2013) discussion of the media controversy over ‘fat’ burgers in Australia is such an example. She interrogates the ways in which popular

⁴ We are not suggesting that the discourses of these groups neatly align into a hegemonic and homogenous model of ‘good’ food. An exploration of the ways in which they overlap, cohere and conflict is not the purpose of this article, although the argument that many of these discourses are commonly united in their criticism of competitive eating could be formulated.

representations and discussions of two calorie-loaded burgers – the Hungry Jack’s Quad Stack’ and KFC’s ‘The Double’ – were ‘subsumed’ into a public health framework (ibid: 1) and consequently condemned as an irresponsible food choice. The burgers thus become abject and ‘represented as objects of horror and disgust to be recoiled from: they are “horrifying,” and something that “anyone who cares[s] about their bod[y]” would avoid at all costs’ (ibid: 3). This was also conferred onto the consumers of such burgers, who were portrayed as lacking in civility and sophistication, regarded as culturally inferior and castigated for not eating in a morally responsible manner. As such, her work indicates how competitive eating, like consuming fast food and other ‘non-desirable’ dishes, is a particularly potent site for exploring how specific *individual* food practices are constructed as *socially* reprehensible, and for illuminating the political dynamics that underpin such morally laden discourses (Abbots and Coles 2013, Guthman 2011).

The ways in which we consume, then, is not just related to the condition of the self, but also that of wider society; a theme that resonates in mass media treatments of competitive eating, as in those on obesity (Colls and Evans 2009, 2013; Eli and Ulijaszek 2014; Guthman 2011) in which perceived wastefulness is condemned and issues of food justice and security are drawn into discussion. It is not just the individual who is ‘disgusting’ here, but also the spectacle of excess and waste. Embedded within this, as Phillipov (2013) shows, is a critique of the mass market and of seemingly reactive – often lower class – consumers who are apparently unable to discern from the surplus of options laid before them. The ways in which this discourse frames those who consume low value, mass market products as passive and uneducated ‘dupes’

who are the antithesis of taste has been subject to substantial criticism (Abbots and Coles 2013, Guthman 2003, Guthman 2011), and is further illuminated by Phillipov in the context of what she refers to as ‘extreme’ food. The competitive eater, in making ‘poor choices’, is thereby constructed not only as a reflection of the worst of late consumer society and the mass market, but also as a complicit actor whose actions, the narrative implies, are leading to ‘people starving to death’ (Brion 2010) and ‘a nation of obese overeaters’ (Nyad 2013). Even the more sensitive and nuanced – and less judgemental – accounts of competitive eating circuits (cf Fagone 2007) echo this theme in the ways they use such practices and contests to reflect on rampant consumerism and the contemporary food system. There is evidently a great deal of slippage, as both Guthman (2011) and Phillipov (2013) demonstrate, in the way these sensationalised discourses bundle and blend ideologies of ‘responsible’ consumption, embodied discipline, healthy eating and food security (see also Coveney 2006). Nevertheless, dominant discourses urge consumption of food to be tempered – moderated in the light of global food security issues, calorific claims and notions of health. In association, temperance is promoted as an attribute and value for which to strive. In the light of this valorisation of control and restraint it is hard not to judge excessive eating as a problematic departure from what is globally and individually right and good (de Solier 2013), and we now turn to explore ways in which both excess and order align.

Becoming a Gurgitator: The Production of a Digital Eating Identity

Popular representations of eating competitions typically depict food as the pivot around which the practice coalesces. Even though individuals are quite

clearly competing against each other in contests such as Nathan's, media reports and promotional material alike talk of steaming mountains of hot dogs, cheese burgers, fries, steaks, pancakes, deep-fried asparagus, pizzas, clams and even kangaroo waiting to be vanquished (see Cloake 2012, Collier 2013, Edible 2013, Jordon 2001). This indicates that it is food itself, instead of co-competitors, which pose the real challenge or enemy to be conquered, a point to which we return later. Academic treatments of competitive eating have followed a similar path in focusing on the foodstuffs being ingested and the 'spectacle' (see Bryant 2003, Congalton 2009, Halloran 2004, Phillipov 2013, Rubin 2008), rather than the embodied act of eating and its material visceralities (see Abbots and Lavis 2013, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008, Longhurst et al 2009). It is easy to see why this is the case. On first inspection, competitive eaters' skills are attributable to their capacity to 'perform' and eat large amounts of food in haste, and the types of food selected are neither materially nor symbolically incidental to this process, but are instead, as both Rubin (ibid) and Phillipov (ibid) highlight, abject and taboo. Moreover, if sales and viewing figures are to be a guide, explicit 'thick descriptions' of such foods (see Bowles 2007, *Man Vs Food*) hold some traction with a public who can vicariously participate in the 'horror' without the embodied risks. However, our participant responses indicate that this focus on the spectacle of food maybe more of a preoccupation of commentators, viewers and readers than of the gurgitators themselves.

So, who is an eater? We are all eaters, of course, but the method of eating employed by our participants is not an attractive option to all bodies. The gurgitators with whom we spoke pack food into their bodies and have intense

and charged relationships with their eating moments – not because of the deliciousness of the food ingested but as a performance of physicality. Consequently they reject the notion that it is the food that makes this event extraordinary; rather it is that they eat in a particular manner that differentiates it from day-to-day eating. It is this capacity that opens the door into the amateur world of competitive eating, a move that has significantly altered the lives of our participants, as Colin explains:

About 5 years ago I completed a restaurant challenge in Melbourne by accident. I finished the huge pile of meats and chips, and the waiter came over and said “Congratulations, we’ll take your picture for the wall.” My reaction was “Huh?” I didn’t even know it was a challenge!

Colin’s entry into the world of amateur competitive eating is not atypical. It is often inadvertent, and many of our participants only recognised they had a skill after others acknowledged that their abilities to ingest were exceptional. These formative moments often provoked our participants to reflexively engage with their ingestive capabilities and, following this initial realisation, many instigated what has become a significant pathway to self-expression, notoriety and possibly minor celebrity status. In short, recognition (from others) of the ability to gurgitate—take in and contain substances—was the catalyst in the construction of a new social identity – that of ‘gurgitator’ – a person who is good at eating. As one of our participants, Mark, confirmed, ‘eating has definitely improved my social standing. Whereas before, people I wouldn’t have known that well would have made small talk when they met me, now its questions about my challenges. They seem interested, not disgusted’. As such, it is predominantly the talented eaters who sustain, advance and

support the amateur competitive eating movement around the world today by promoting, organising and competing in eating events they create.

Amateur competitors choose a name to fit their eating persona; not unlike a computer username or choice of game avatar it signifies aspirations and abilities. Congalton (2009) regards these nicknames as similar to those adopted within other sports, in that they enable the ‘presentation of the self as a competitor’ (2009: 182), the performance of a particular role and the carving out of a unique place within the sport and fanbase. However, we suggest that this construction of a digital eating identity is a little more complex than Congalton’s argument allows, as performers’ names are illustrative of, and emerge in dialogue with, competitors awareness of, and resistance to, public perceptions and misperceptions. For example, Neil Thomas, a founder member of The Irish Competitive Eaters group uses a picture of Mr Greedy⁵ as his Facebook identifier, a picture of a shirt stretched over wide girth with bursting buttons as his background and Glutton#1, as his tag. Neil, like others in the group, repeatedly uses humour to acknowledge social opinions about the occupation. He is also the health editor for a satirical online news *The Rake and Herald*, that offers a gaudy and thoroughly irreverent parody section on competitive eating for its readers and is a member of *Stealing Food from Starving Africans*, a Facebook group that pokes fun at the critics who judge competitive eating as a measure of affluent waste and capitalist greed.

⁵ A popular children’s cartoon character from the Mr Men series who lives in Roly-Poly House, Fatland and ‘can eat his way through as much food you or I could eat in a week in an hour’ (www.themistermen.co.uk).

But despite the overt humour encircling Neil, he is serious about what he calls his ‘organised gluttony’. Categorising himself as an endurance eater who doesn’t ‘prescribe to the ‘food as body fuel’ school of thought’ he works to eat past satiety and told us that he receives satisfaction from stretching his aptitude to ingest. He explains:

I actively do eating exercises in order to stretch out my stomach lining, therefore increasing capacity... I train once every week, usually a Wednesday or a Friday because those are the days I'd be in the city center. There are numerous all you can eat buffets. I'd usually prefer to go it alone, that way I don't have to worry about table manners. I use these sessions to work on speed but they're also vital for keeping up stomach capacity. I always make sure that there's nothing important on my schedule for later that day. In training it's common for me to eat to reversal [vomiting], then eat more again. This practice goes a huge way towards increasing endurance. I've even left a buffet after a reversal, then gone to another and eaten more just to keep up the stretch.

Social media has played a critical role in Neil’s career. He began by watching YouTube videos and Facebook enabled him contact other competitors to solicit coaching and eating tips. It also provided a platform through which he could express his emergent food identity and ‘talk back’ (Barnes 2014 in press) to dominant discourses. Neil’s online media image and conversations show that an eater works to push not only his own, but also social boundaries in regards to eating. He seemingly breaks all the rules about correct eating and, in so doing, goes on to win competitions and fame.

Colin MacLaurin – aka Col the Conqueror - is a physics student from Brisbane, Australia who sees his behaviour in quite a different light. Taking a more strident approach, as his name suggests, Col aims to defeat or triumph over others via ingestion. As his first event win was seemingly effortless (and inadvertent), Col decided to cultivate his skill and has consequently gone on to

compete with regular success. His ability has without a doubt altered his life: he now runs his own webpage to promote competitions (www.bigeats.com.au) and is currently at the top of an amateur eaters Australian league table. Col explained that he competes because he is good at it; he likes that he can push past physical boundaries and states that competing is 'certainly not for the pleasure of eating'. For Col, competitive eating represents a challenge to ingest. He knows he has to drive himself, which he does despite conceding that eating this way has its risks - citing choking, tearing the stomach, water intoxication and issues around sodium levels as the main concerns⁶. Additionally, he was concerned with how competitive eating is represented by the mass media and is actively working to change perceptions through social media, stating:

It's important to me to shatter the stereotype that competitive eaters are fat... People frequently express surprise that I'm not overweight. ... I want to really encourage anyone considering eating challenges to look to the healthy lifestyles of many eaters. ...I also really like that ...when juxtaposed with the apparently contradictory unhealthy food [we are] shoveling into [our]...mouth[s].

Col's comments are telling in that he reproduces the dominant discourses that equate health with thinness, which have been called into question by those working within the arena of Fat Studies (Aphramor et al 2013) and Critical Geographies of Obesity (Colls and Evans 2009, Guthman 2011, Longhurst 2012). Col himself explained that he supports what he calls 'traditional' social views about eating and healthy diets and recognises that a lot of the food he eats when competing could be considered normatively 'unhealthy'. However

⁶ During research one informant (a member of the Facebook group 'dude where's my challenge') was hospitalised for excessive speed drinking as a result of attempting a 'nek-nomination' competition.

he is excited to explain that competitive eating should not be judged through this lens because the practice is quite clearly a sport that requires intense focus and preparation. Col points out that the exercise necessary to train is perennially ignored – a factor, he maintains, that needs addressing.

On the other hand, Hungry Todd Rungy (a larger than life, proudly American patriot and semi-professional eater who is just breaking into television) has other concerns about eating, which are not overtly body-focused but more politically orientated. His online tag claims he is actively ‘fighting for the freedom to eat’. When questioned about the meaning of this headline, he stated he was working to simultaneously stop people feeling oppressed about what they eat and to stop hunger altogether - by being the best at eating he believes he can draw people’s attention to his effort.

There’s some of that [i.e. people feeling controlled by nutritional advice]...people telling you what to eat, ‘oh you should only eat 3 tacos’ or ‘you can only have 16oz sodas’ – but also, some people don’t have the freedom to eat ANYTHING, and I think that’s wrong (original emphasis).

Hungry Todd Rungy’s social media campaign indicates tensions around food security and the slippage that can occur between social justice, health and food (see Guthman 2011), as well as speaking to a deeper libertarian concern in which issues of food availability and a sense of social curtailment of eating freedoms combine; a reflection, perhaps, of the discourses of responsibility and self-care of the eater dominant in normative food discourses (Colls and Evans 2008, Guthman 2011).

For Mark, another member of the Irish Competitive Eaters, these anxieties mingle around his sense of healthy physique including body shape and size. He often eats to raise money for charity and says he loves food, is always talking about it, thinking about the next meal and brazenly eats anything he chooses. Mark prefers to eat alone when he eats quantities, as he does not like performing but just wants to complete the challenges. Being watched, he explained, makes him nervous and, as the eating can get painful, he tends to 'jump around...to move it along' he therefore prefers not to have an audience. Mark began our first Facebook conversation by discussing his weight, explaining that he was 'slightly overweight' on account of not having completed any challenges for a while. Like Col, he equated thinness with health and told us, 'a healthy body is a pure eating machine', while also suggesting that this eating machine should be a particular – read: thin – shape and size. His perspective therefore confronts notions of health, the body and eating while simultaneously reproducing assumptive conventions. In contradiction to orthodox ideas on diet and intake, he maintains that health for him is created and maintained by eating in excess, yet he also reproduces the hegemonic 'logic' that thinness is healthy, and healthiness is made manifest through thinness – a logic that Fat Studies scholarship has comprehensively critiqued (see Aphramor et al 2013, Colls and Evans 2009). Thus, we start to see how the defence of competitive eating appropriates and reiterates dominant health paradigms; our participants stress that their practice cannot be undisciplined or gluttonous *because* competitive eaters are thin (and healthy). Mark continued to explain that it is only upon eating excessively that he can call himself healthy.

Probably sounds strange but eating challenges help me lose weight and stay healthy...and this is to do with training. Before I started this I never really ate healthily...I tell people for the craic⁷ that eating challenges keep me fit and they laugh, but I've seen me lose a half stone in the week leading up to the challenge, I feel great and I destroy the food.

The above offers a flavour of the online amateur 'community of practice' and illustrates the diversity of meanings circulating eating identities. In contrast to other depictions that presume eating foods in this way is unhealthy and problematic, our data – in focusing on the personal narratives and perspectives of eaters – reveals them to be careful, considered and skilled ingestors working *within* instead of *against* orthodox consumption and nutritional frameworks. Thus rather than resisting discourses on health as Phillipov (2013) suggests, our participants processes are reworkings, appropriations or inversions (sometimes humorous and satirical) of normative eating discourses. Social media, moreover, provides the space through which these reworkings can be formulated and communicated. This, invoking Woermann (2012), enables competitive eaters to reflect on their own practices and in so doing construct their own digital identity in dialogue with mass media. We return to the question as to the extent this challenges the hegemony of such mass media discourses later, but first we explore the theme of discipline through notions of embodied control and physical training.

Sport? Disciplining and Training the Body to Eat

The historical emergence of disciplined eating and 'civilised appetites' has been discussed at length by Mennell (1996) who asks whether the patterns of self-control, restrained emotions and internal pacification elucidated in Elias's

⁷ The craic is a term used predominantly in Ireland that means fun, entertainment, conversation and gossip.

(2000) discourse on *The Civilising Process* are reflected in society's 'manners' of eating and individual appetite. Arguing that the civilising of appetite emerges through surplus (ibid: 32), Mennell draws a correlation between the availability of food and disciplined eating and argues that it is not just the foods that are selected but *how* they are eaten that becomes important. He describes an increase in refinement in courtly circles and a shift towards delicacy and restraint and concludes that while 'the possibilities for quantitative consumption for the expression of social superiority had been exhausted, the qualitative possibilities were inexhaustible' (ibid: 33). He thus points to the ways in which social relations not only sculpted how food was to be eaten, but also informed the social value placed on restraint and the self-disciplining of appetite. Against this historical backdrop, it is not surprising that judgements against those who were unable to exercise restraint were made. This is aptly illustrated by accounts of Samuel Johnson's notorious ravenous appetite and lack of delicacy at table, which uncannily echo mass media reports of eating competitions:

When at table, Johnson was totally absorbed in the business of the moment: his looks seem rivetted to his plate; nor would he, unless when in very high company, say one word, or even pay attention to what was said by others, till he had satisfied his appetite, which was so fierce and indulged with such intenseness that while in the act of eating, the veins of his forehead swelled and generally a strong perspiration was evident. To those who sensations were delicate, this could not but be disgusting; and it was doubtless not very suitable to the character of a philosopher, who should be distinguished by self-command (Boswell 1791 in Mennell 1996: 32).

Whereas Thring (2009) reports on competitive eating:

I came away thinking that this isn't a sport. It isn't even a leisure activity. It's an eating disorder. It saps the meaning and importance and fun of food and vomits it - or 'has a Roman incident' as they say in the trade - into a spluttering, gluttonous mess.

Johnson's appetite may have been shaped by a personal history of abject

poverty, but Boswell's commentary, and Mennell's argument of social differentiation more generally, highlights the way table manners and control of appetite (or lack thereof) have become reflections of social standing, with Mennell continuing to argue that the upper and upper-middle classes often criticised the 'greed' of those below them in the social order (ibid: 37). Our participants, however, do not regard their practice as greed or gluttony but instead as practised discipline. This was particularly evident in the manner that they framed their practice as 'sport', as one of our participants, Naader Reda confirmed: 'though it sounds absurd, I believe this is a sport. It takes skill, training and some amount of natural ability to be good at mass eating or speed eating'.

Yet, excessive eating practices trouble the definitions of what constitutes a sport. This is not only because of what, (and the amounts of what) is consumed, but also because a sport is typically associated with life enhancing, physically energising activities. Competitive eating as sport thus creates a series of paradoxes and contradictions as there appears to be a disconnect between normative discourses on 'healthy' activities and the practices it advocates and encourages (Congalton 2009). However, all our participants pointed out that sports are not altogether necessarily health enhancing; citing sumo wrestlers and Tour de France riders who break down muscle *en route* as examples of the diversity of practices labeled 'sport', and as illustrative of how sport and health are problematically entangled. All participants were clear, however, that competitive eating is a sport, based on their belief that it is hard to achieve and succeed. One has to train and be skilled to practice and participate. As Col the Conquerer surmised: 'I do believe it qualifies as a

"sport" in other ways: in the sense that you're pushing your body, and also in that the training is very intense...Stretching your stomach is very difficult'.

Congalton (2009: 182) states that it is through such discussions of rigorous training that 'competitive eaters frame themselves as sports professionals'. He further argues that this process, together with form and structure of competitions, the language used and the spectacle and drama invoked, enable competitive eating to be associated with more 'traditional' sports, and thus identified, by both participant and spectator, as 'sport' (ibid: 175). Gurgitators' intense training routines have also been the subject of more popular discussions of competitive eating (see Fagone 2006, Nerz 2007) and, likewise, our research participants also believe that they need to work and train hard to be capable and victorious. In contradiction to the idea that all beings instinctively eat, they explained that their specific eating methods effectively develop only out of extreme training sessions, which demand mastery of the complex sets of physiological controls needed to support and encourage stomach capacity. Mark, for example described how he uses the advice from The Pro Eaters USA (a group of American body builders and fitness instructors) to realise how to eat past ordinary capacity. This is achieved by ingesting vast quantities of substances that exit quickly, such as '4 litres of water in 10 mins each day' so as to stretch the stomach and leave him empty but elasticated. His account of the tactics used to increase capacity challenge notions that competitive eaters do not consume 'healthy' food:

In the week leading up to a challenge... large amounts of cabbage and broccoli is also great for stretching and excellent for the metabolism. On day of challenge no solids at all, maybe soup or yogurt only. Half hour before the challenges I have a rice cake for energy. I have stopped

drinking coffee and now only drink green tea. I...always try to be strict with my prep work

Capacity, Mark warns, is both mental and physical. Accordingly, one needs to be able to push past both barriers to achieve success in eating challenges, as Col further illuminated:

Abstaining before and after a contest, e.g. a liquid diet of protein shakes etc. for 2 or 3 days before and after a contest...That requires good control! Eating quickly involves swallowing with less chewing. Eating large quantities is unpleasant, [because] you're pushing to your limit. One might say its "control" in the sense it's not pleasurable; from pleasure you'd stop eating much earlier, but you're pushing past this.

In addition, competitors told us they spend time in the gym in preparation of eating as they need to physically and mentally strengthen.⁸ For another of our participants, Naader Reda of the social media site *Freak Eating* this was necessary because 'food can definitely overwhelm or mentally destroy a person if it really sickens you or is hard to eat quickly', but others did not refer to the agency of substances other than their own bodies. For them it was their own ingestive potential that was being trained and tested, without which their success would not be secured. Their behaviour and relationship with ingestion needs to be relentlessly worked at and is demonstrably not *laissez-faire* or out of control, as popular representations depict. Quite the contrary: Our participants' responses reveal control as a recurring theme weaving through their training and eating practices.

Furious Pete, a prevailing online presence for eating in excess, is illustrative of

⁸ Participants spoke of spending 'long hours on the treadmill' (Col) and cited eating success as connected to 'lots of gym work' (Mark). According to Mark 'some of these guys...hit the gym for maybe 4 or 5 hours a day...daily exercise, no gimics or fancy routines, that's the key'.

how these themes coalesce. A young Canadian eater hailed as an inspiration by many other gurgitators, Pete overcame life-threatening anorexia by taking up competitive eating. Now through his grueling regime of exercise and body-building, alongside eating competitively, he presents an online narrative that links his current physique with what he calls a ‘fitness transformation’ (Furious Pete 2012) that is available to everyone. He openly and unequivocally connects his success in eating competitions with his teenage anorexia, maintaining it produced the relationship he has with his body today, suggesting that his present situation emerges directly from his corporeal jurisdiction. In other words, Pete has adapted his previous propensity to control ingestion and has applied it to the competitive eating arena. His ability to excel in ingestive control now derives from enabling excess, instead of restricting it. For Furious Pete, eating has not come easily and is a serious challenge. Johnnie Excel, a successful amateur competitive eater, is negotiating similar issues and was very frank about how fraught his relationship with ingestion had been. Now that he trains to compete, however, he realizes that you shouldn’t ‘think of it as eating but rather just packing as much food away’. Yet he also hints at the tensions that conflate around ingestion, explaining that ‘only true fans can appreciate the physical discipline needed to be great at the sport...in the last year [I] have *lost a lot of control* and have been on hiatus to get my weight back in check...’ (our emphasis).

Successful competitive eaters, then, emerge as masters of a certain kind of physical control in the ways in which they train their bodies – and minds – to ingest. As such, they can be seen as the epitome of civilised eating, in that they exert discipline in their interactions with food, both in quotidian contexts and

while competing. Mass media representations obscure this embodied process, and this control, perhaps in part because of their focus on the food being consumed and/or the ‘spectacular’ performances. However, in moving beyond the hype of eating competitions and their media portrayal, we can see a very different aspect emerging: instead of gluttonous uncontrollable waste, there is order, governance and discipline. This does not, however, necessarily negate or absolve the inherent power dynamics that inform our participants’ relationship to food, eating and their bodies, and it is to these broader, more intransigent dynamics we now turn.

Deploying Social Media to Subvert Hegemonic Media Models of Civilised Eating?

The ways in which our research participants use social media to emphasise the discipline and control of their practice and work to reposition their sport, is testament to how they deploy the technology to construct their practice – and their own digital identities – in dialogue with the mass media representations. It also indicates the interplays between mass and social media platforms, as competitive eaters ‘talk back’ (Barnes 2014 in press) to their critics and prosume food knowledges. However, while our participants’ narratives appear to invoke a rhetoric of cyber-libertarianism (Chia 2012), their responses also demonstrate the extent that conventional assumptions of disciplined bodies and ‘civilised’ eating remain embedded and valued. In the world of competitive eaters, ‘civilised eating’ may take on a somewhat different meaning in this context to that discussed by Mennell (1996): It is not equated to having a discerning palate or minimising the quantity consumed in order to express social distinction, but is instead about training your body beyond its instinctive capacity for ingestion to create a social status of a different type

with Facebook and YouTube provide the ‘precipitating agency’ (Rousseau in press) to construct and communicate this status.

Yet, among the gurgitators there are also echoes of the Cartesian dualism invoked by Mennell, particularly in the ways that the body becomes alienated and eating (or not), a mechanism for self-control. This process has been discussed at length by Lupton (1996) who describes the sense of separation experienced by individuals as a result of the dominant discourse which privileges self-control and is founded upon notions of civilised bodies (ibid: 131). Resonating with Mennell, she examines the ways in which eating becomes discursively constructed as a descent towards animalistic behaviour and a lack of order – a value system that are clearly evident in mass media depictions of competitive eating. Consequently, individual eaters who are unable to control such ‘urges’ feel ‘guilt, shame, self-disgust and frustration’ (ibid: 141). In response, there is a move, especially within Fat Studies scholarship, to (re)emphasise the pleasure and enjoyment of eating and a re-engagement with the embodied experience of ingesting (Aphramor et al 2013) and to explore spaces of fat acceptance (Colls 2012). This resistance, of which Phillipov’s (2013) burgers can also be seen as part, can thereby be regarded as a contestation of normative healthy eating paradigms and a challenge to self-discipline and ‘food fascists’ (Lupton ibid: 147). There is pleasure to be taken in such hedonistic transgressions.

Competitive eating appears, on the surface, to be the poster-boy (or girl) of this ‘movement’⁹ in that it appears to empower individuals to eat how much, what and how they choose. Yet, our data shows quite the contrary. For our participants, competitive eating is not about connecting to a deep-rooted animalism, as mass media portrayals often convey, nor is it about privileging hedonism and pleasure in food. Rather it is concerned with creating a different type of relationship with eating and the body, and, in turn, reflexively constructing and presenting a new digital food identity premised on an alternative interpretation of self-control and the disciplined – and healthy – body. At times competitive eaters, like the *Stealing Food from Starving Africans* Facebook group and Hungry Todd Runge, use social media platforms to overtly challenge hegemonic normative discourses on food security, waste and consumption, whereas others, like Col the Conqueror, uphold and support ‘traditional’ views about healthy diets and thin bodies. Despite their multiple stances and motivations, all, however, are in a continual process of appropriating and inverting notions of what constitutes ‘civilised eating’, and in so doing, they call sensationalised mass media representations of their sport into question.

Social media is the key facilitating mechanism in this process. All of our participants mobilise social media sites to create dialogues not only between networks of eaters, but also between eaters and challengers: they are the central platforms through which digital eating identities are constructed and

⁹ We use this word cautiously as it implies an organised and somewhat coherent opposition, and there is little evidence to support such a claim. However, the responses of our research participants, together with work within Fat Studies and Critical Geographies of Obesity suggest that there is a groundswell of opposition to normative discourses of controlled food intake and that this does, at times, find an outlet through conscious political action and organisation (see Colls 2012).

represented, knowledges about training and challenges are transmitted, and support, garnered. As Neil confirmed, ‘what social media has done is allow us to unite and organise’. Eaters further use such sites to ‘talk back’ to mass media commentators who criticise their practice, as Todd’s libertarian ‘Fighting for the Freedom to Eat’ tagline indicates. The extent that this challenges the mass media is subject to some question, and the continuation of popular media representations of the sport discussed above suggest that, in many ways, competitive eaters voices remain unheard, unnoticed and/or ignored. Our research with competitive eaters does, however, show that social media can facilitate the communication and transmission of counter-discourses and create spaces of (relative) autonomy, and that these processes do not occur in isolation but rather in dialogue with mass media. In other words, following Barnes (2014 in press) and Rousseau (in press) dissenting digital discourses of food do not occupy a hermeneutically sealed space but instead engage with, attempt to challenge, uphold and are shaped by the cultural authorities that hold the ‘mainstream’ ground in reference to what constitutes ‘good’ eating practices.

Questions thus emerges as to whether this constitutes a democratisation of knowledges, whether the ‘expert’ voice is countered by more dissenting voices (see Rousseau 2012), and the extent any democratisation is mediated by intransigent political dynamics (Chia 2012, Sunstein 2007). In the context of competitive eating, our findings suggests that social media can provide an agentive platform that has the potential to counter hegemonic discourses, as it increases the numbers and types of voices and perspectives that are presented (if not always heard). This potential does not, as we have seen in reference to

mass media representations, equate with competitive eaters having control of the depiction of their practice to a wider audience. There may be a multiplicity of voices, but some are louder and arguably carry more authority than others. Yet, as Phillipov (2013) and Lupton (1996) hint, discourses of eating are not necessarily countered just by words and narratives, but also through bodily actions and the continuation of eating practices deemed as ‘unhealthy’ or, in this case, grotesque, uncivilised and undesirable. As such, the fact that individuals continue to eat competitively – in the face of both normative nutritional advice and negative depictions of eating practices that do not fit this narrow (and moral) framework – can be interpreted as a challenge to such discourses. Moreover, eaters’ bodies do not become what they ‘should’, according to discourses on obesity and thinness (Lupton 1996). On the contrary, our participants deploy social media to present the ‘ideal type’ gym-trained and healthy bodies of those following a ‘healthy’ lifestyle, however problematic and assumptive these models may be (Colls and Evans 2009, Guthman 2011)

The extent that eating competitively (or consuming that Quad Jack burger) occurs because *or* despite of hegemonic models of civilised food practices is, as we have shown, dependent on individual circumstances and political outlooks, although a number of our participants, for example, Hungry Todd Rungy and Neil Thomas, actively model their eating practices in opposition to their critics. This does not occur across the board and we are therefore cautious of framing competitive eating as resistance, however tempting it may be to do so. Nevertheless, we can claim with some confidence that, whatever the motivation, competitive, or more broadly ‘uncivilised’, eating does not

continue to be practised because of consumer ignorance, as some sectors of the media would like us to believe. We thus echo Guthman's (2011) discussion of obesity in highlighting that this is not an issue of education (or lack thereof). All of our research participants are aware of normative healthy eating discourses and nutritional advice. However, unlike mass media portrayals, they do not always see their competitive eating practices in conflict with such guidelines, but instead, at times, aligning with them and, as Mark's comments show, creating the capacity to follow them.

This initially appears irreconcilable with the explicitly resistant stances of Todd and Neil, but a close reading suggests that they are not so far removed and that distinctions need to be made between defying popular portrayals of competitive eating, countering authoritative voices and resisting hegemonic frameworks of 'civilised' eating. All our participants use the empowering character of social media to contest mass media representations of competitive eating as grotesque and disgusting. Many also attempt (sometimes overtly) to counter and 'talk back' to mass media voices that look to shape and influence individual eating behaviours and preferences, and denigrate those who do not 'fit' a narrow and subjective model of what they argue constitutes disciplined and civilised eating. As such, our participants confront the authority of these models and look to gain autonomy and freedom to eat what and how they choose. However, as Foucault (1978) has shown us, disputing the content of hegemonic paradigms is not tantamount to challenging the frameworks themselves. Instead, it reproduces the very logic on which dominant discourses are premised. As Foucault surmised, '[w]here there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this

resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power (ibid: 95). Through this lens, our research participants may differ from others in terms of what constitutes disciplined eating, but in doing so they do not contest the notion that eating *should* be disciplined. On the contrary, by reconfiguring the content, they inadvertently reinforce the model that frames that content. Thus, the dominant logic of ‘civilised appetites’ (Mennell 1996) is reproduced.

Conclusion

Competitive eating appears, at first glance, to be eating unnecessarily, uninhibitedly, and out of control. It is, according to mass media depictions, ‘disgusting’ and ‘grotesque’. However, the voices of competitive eaters reveal a different perspective. For our participants, excessive eating relies directly on controlling ingestion: control, in this context, is defined in relation to an individual’s ability to train their body to be able to eat without restriction. As such, in contrast to popular ideas that judge this practice as ‘out of control’ and demonstrative of greed and excessive consumption, our participants show that the potential to eat in surfeit epitomises, establishes and validates their sovereignty and authority of flesh by presenting a feature that defines their person, that is: the capacity to visibly force or influence their body in ways that others cannot. This conception reveals another face of competitive eating. Instead of the manifestation of the ill-health and excess of food (and the bodies it produces), competitive eating, and its social media representations, transforms into a practice that allows individuals to demonstrate and attain control over their consumption.

Developing the capacity to ingest an amount or type of food that challenges accepted norms of what constitutes a necessary portion for one adult thereby enables certain individuals to construct a digital identity as an ‘eater’ or ‘gurgitator’. This, in turn, provides a mechanism to achieve status and fame within a particular social network. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube provide the critical platform through which this status, and the social relations that enable its production, are formed and enacted. Social media can thus be regarded as a mechanism through which counter-discourses – by enabling the reflexive construction of alternative digital eating identities – are created and communicated. However, this does not mean that social media spaces are autonomous. Instead, we have argued that competitive eaters are in constant dialogue with normative representations of their practice as they work to dispute the ways their sport is represented and contest authoritative hegemonic frameworks of what constitutes civilised eating – a process that, paradoxically, reiterates the hegemonic paradigm of discipline as a key value in relation to food and eating. Thus, social media provides a route for self-determination, as eaters both produce and consume – or prosume – food knowledges in their appropriations and subversions of notions of disciplined bodies.

This online process of self determination and representation does not occur, however, solely through a process of reflexive digital self observation, as Woermann (2012) suggests. Instead, we have stressed how digital identities emerge through ‘talking back’ (Barnes 2014 in press) to the authoritative mass media voices. Like Rousseau (in press) we are cautious of attributing social media with too much democratising agency, preferring instead to have shown

how users use such platforms to potentially destabilize knowledge hierarchies and add their voices to discussions about what constitutes good and proper eating and healthy bodies. Social media can hence be regarded as a tool to be deployed in the creation of counter-discourses that can be empowering but remains ultimately constrained and embedded with the conventions of the mass media.

Bibliography

Abbots, E-J. and Coles, B. 2013 Horsemeat-Gate: The Production of a Neoliberal Food 'Scandal'. *Food, Culture and Society* 16(4): 435-550

Abbots, E-J. and Lavis, A. 2013. 'Introduction: Contours of Eating: Mapping the Terrain of Food/Body Encounters' in *Why We Eat, How We Eat: Contemporary Encounters Between Foods and Bodies*. E-J Abbotts and A. Lavis (eds.) pp. 1-14. Farnham: Ashgate

Adema, P. 2000 Vicarious Consumption: Food, Television and the Ambiguity of Modernity. *Journal of American Culture* 23(1): 113-123

Aphramor, L., Brady, J., and Gringas, J. 2013 'Advancing Critical Dietetics: Theorizing Health at Every Size' in *Why We Eat, How We Eat: Contemporary Encounters Between Foods and Bodies*. E-J Abbotts and A. Lavis (eds.) pp. 85-102. Aldershot: Ashgate

Barnes, C. 2014 in press Mediating Good Food and Moments of Possibility with Jamie Oliver: Problematising Celebrity Chefs as Talking Labels. *Geoforum*

BBC 2011 'Pair in hospital after Kismot 'killer' curry contest', 5 Oct 2011
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-15183070>
[accessed 31 Jan 2014]

Biltekoff, C. 2013 *Eating Right in America: The Cultural Politics of Food and Health*. Durham and London: Duke University Press

Boellstorff, T. 2008 *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press

Boellstorff, T., Nardi, B., Pearce, C., and Taylor, T. L. 2012 *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method* Oxford: Princeton Press

Bourdieu, P. 1984 *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. New York and London: Routledge

Bowles, T. 2007 *A Year of Eating Dangerously: A Global Adventure in Search of Culinary Extremes*. New York: St Martin's Griffin

Brion, R. 2010 Alton Brown Calls Man V Food Gluttonous and 'Disgusting', *Eater*, 28 Sept 2010. <http://eater.com/archives/2010/09/28/alton-brown-calls-man-v-food-gluttonous-and-disgusting.php> [accessed 10 Feb 2014]

Bruns, A., 2008 *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*. New York: Peter Lang.

Bryant, S. J. 2003 International Federation of Competitive Eating. *Journal of Agricultural & Food Information*, 5:1, 3-8

Chia, A. 2012 Welcome to Me-mart: The Politics of User-Generated Content in Personal Blogs. *American Behavioral Scientist* 56(4): 421-438

Cloake, F. 2012 The Rise of Eating Competitions *New Statesman* 1 Nov 2012 <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/culture/2012/11/rise-eating-competitions> [accessed 17 Feb 2014]

Collier, R. 2013 Competitive Consumption: A Profusion of Pie, Pizza and Pulled Pork. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* Vol 185. No. 4

- Collins, K. 2009 *Watching What We Eat: The Evolution of Television Cooking Shows*. New York: Continuum
- Colls, R. 2012 Big Girls Having Fun: Reflections on a 'fat accepting space'. *Somatechnics* 2(1): 18-37
- Colls, R. and Evans, B. 2009 Critical Geographies of Fat/Bigness/Corpulence: Introduction, Questioning Obesity Politics. *Antipode* 41(5): 1011-1020
- Colls, R. and Evans, B. 2008 Embodying Responsibility: Children's Health and Supermarket Responsibility. *Environment and Planning A* 40: 615-631
- Colls, R. and B. Evans 2013 Making Space for Fat Bodies? A Critical Account of the 'Obesogenic Environment'. *Progress in Human Geography*: 1-21
- Congalton, K. J., 2009 'Competitive Eating as Sport: A Simple Recipe for Everyone' in *Sporting Rhetoric: Performance, Games and Politics*, B. Brummett (ed.), pp 175-195. New York: Peter Lang
- Coveney, J. 2006 *Food, Morals and Meaning: The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating* (2nd Ed). London: Routledge
- Edible, M. 2013 How Competitive Eating Left Me Full of Happiness *New York Post* 22 November 2013 <http://nypost.com/2013/11/22/how-competitive-eating-left-me-full-of-happiness/> [accessed 23 Feb 2014]
- Eli, K. and Ulijaszek, S. (eds.) 2014 *Obesity, Eating Disorders and the Media*. Farnham: Ashgate
- Elias, N. 2000 *The Civilising Process* (2nd Ed). Oxford: Blackwell
- Fagone, J. 2006 *Horsemen of the Esophagus*. New York: Crown
- Foucault, M. 1978 *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. New York: Random House

Furious Pete. 2012 120lbs (Anorexia) to 230lbs Transformation story *Furious Pete* [YouTube] 25 June 2012

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvILb8psZpM> [accessed 28 April 2014]

Gore, A. 2009 'The REALLY big breakfast: 6,000 calorie fry-up is slammed by health campaigners... but a hit with diners', *Daily Mail*, 29th January, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2093449/The-REALLY-big-breakfast-6-000-calorie-fry-slammed-health-campaigners--hit-diners.html> [accessed 31 Jan 2014]

Guthman, J. 2011 *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice and the Limits of Capitalism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press

Guthman, J. 2003 Fast Food/Organic Food: Reflexive Tastes and the Making of the "Yuppie Chow". *Social and Cultural Geography* 4: 45-58

Hall, S. 1980 "Encoding / Decoding". In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Love and P. Willis (eds.) *Culture, Media, Language*. pp. 128-138, London: Hutchinson,

Halloran, V. N. 2004 Biting Reality: extreme eating and the fascination with the gustatory abject. *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4 (Spring): 27-42.

Hayes-Conroy, A. and Hayes-Conroy J. 2008 Taking Back Taste: Feminism. Food and Visceral Politics. *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 15(5): 461-473

Horst, H. A. and Miller, D. (eds.) 2012 *Digital Anthropology*. London: Bloomsbury

IFoCE. 2013, *MLE: Major Eating League* <http://www.ifoce.com> [accessed: 10 Feb 2014]

Jordan, T. 2011 The Performer: Furious Pete Czerwinski Competitive Eater *Canadian Business* 8th Sept, Vol. 84, 15

<http://www.canadianbusiness.com/lifestyle/the-performer-furious-pete-czerwinski-competitive-eater/> [accessed 17 Feb 2014]

Jurgenson, N and Ritzer, G., 2010 Production, Consumption, Prosumption
The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital “prosumer”. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 10:1, 13–36.

Lupton, D. 1996 *Food, The Body and the Self*. London: Sage

Longhurst, R. 2012, ‘Becoming Smaller: Autobiographical Spaces of Weight Loss’ in *Antipode* 44(3): 871-888

Longhurst, R, L. Johnston and E. Ho 2009 A Visceral Approach: Cooking ‘at home’ with migrant women in Hamilton, New Zealand. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 34(3): 333-345

Mennell, S. 1996 *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Illinois: Illini Books

Miller, D. 2013 *Tales from Facebook*. Cambridge: Polity Press

The Mistermen, http://www.themistermen.co.uk/mr_men/mr_greedy.html
[accessed 27 April 2013]

Nerz R. 2007 *Eat This Book: A Year of Gorging and Glory on the Competitive Eating Circuit* New York: Martin’s Press

Nyad, D. 2013, Eating Contests: American Shame, *Huffington Post*, 8 June 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/diana-nyad/eating-contests_b_3716031.html [accessed: 10 Feb 2014]

O’Neill, S and M. Boykoff 2011 ‘The Role of New Media in Engaging with Climate Change’ in *Engaging the Public with Climate Change: Communication and Behaviour Change*, L. Whitmarsh and S. O’Neill (eds.), pp 233-251. London: Earthscan

Phillipov, M. 2013 Resisting Health: Extreme Food and the Culinary Abject. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*: 1-14

The Rake and Herald [online] Available at
<http://www.therakeandherald.tv/competitive-eating/365-dates-with-mary.html>

Ritzer, G., Dean, P., and N. Jurgenson, 2012. The Coming of Age of the Prosumer. *American Behavioral Scientist* 56(4): 379–398.

Ritzer, G., 2014. Prosumption: Evolution, revolution, or eternal return of the same? *Journal of Consumer Culture* 14:1, 3–24.

Rousseau, S. 2012a *Food Media: Celebrity Chefs and the Politics of Everyday Inteference*. London: Berg

Rousseau, S. 2012b *Food and Social Media: You Are What You Tweet*. Lanham MA: Altamira

Rousseau, S. in press 'Is Sharing Caring: Social Media and Discourses of Healthful Eating' in *Careful Eating: Embodied Entanglements Between Food and Care*. E-J. Abbots, A. Lavis and L. Attala (eds.) Farnham: Ashgate

Rubin, L. C., 2008 'Beyond Bread and Circuses: Professional Competitive Eating' in *Food for Thought: Essays on Eating and Culture*. L. C. Rubin (ed.), pp: 248-264. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company.

Sandomir, R. 2007 'The Hideous Masters of Gluttony' *The New York Times* 6 July 2007
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/06/sports/othersports/06sandomir.html?fta=y&_r=0 [accessed: 23 Feb 2014]

Slocum, R., Shannon, J., Valentine Cadieux, K., Beckman, M., 2011. 'Properly, with love, from scratch': Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution. *Radical History Review*. 110, 178–191.

de Solier, I. 2013 Making the Self in the Material World: Food and Moralities of Consumption. *Cultural Studies Review* Vol 19 (1) pp 9-27

Stealing food from starving Africans [online] Available at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Stealing-food-from-starving-Africans/328542832853>

Sunstein, C. R. 2007 *Republic.com 2.0*. Princeton University Press

Thring, O. 2009 'Competitive eating: fair or foul', *The Guardian* 17th Sept <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2009/sep/17/competitive-eating> [accessed 3 Jan 2014]

Vardi, I. 2010 Feeding Race: Eating Contests, The Black Body, and the Social Production of Group Boundaries Through the Amusement in Turn of the Twentieth Century America. *Food, Culture and Society* 13(3): 371-396

Woermann, N. 2012 On the Slope Is on the Screen: Prosumption, Social Media Practices and Scopic Systems in the Freeskiing Subculture. *American Behavioral Scientist* 56(4): 618-640