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Introduction to the special issue: Eating like a 'man': Food and the performance and regulation of masculinities

The impetus for this special issue arose from a conversation about a 2012 consumer research study revealing that US men associate meat-eating with masculinity (Rozin, Hormes, Faith, & Wansink, 2012). The research findings were widely publicised in the global press with headlines spruiking the study's main message: 'real men' do not eat vegetables. We were intrigued that although a considerable body of interdisciplinary feminist and gender research has critically engaged with 'hegemonic masculinity', Connell's (1995) germinal conceptualisation of culturally idealised performances of masculinity, and its evolution,[1] public interest in masculinities and food still seemed to revolve around banal gender stereotypes about men's food choices, particularly the deeply entrenched western cultural view of meat as an 'archetypal masculine food' (Sobal, 2005, 135). Although the extant literature has provided evidence for the relationship between gender and the preference for certain types of foods (e.g. Lupton, 1996; Ruby & Heine, 2011), the media attention devoted to this research study merely reasserted and protected the hegemony of white male heterosexual masculinities. As Halberstam (2002) has observed, the exclusive attachment of masculinity to a subset of privileged (biologically male) bodies encroaches on our ability to shift current understandings of gender and power. This raised questions for us in terms of how the conversation about food and its intersections with masculinities and feminist theory, in particular, has grown and developed from its early foundations and how we can continue to move the conversation forward.[2] We decided to edit a special issue that would uniquely contribute to the field by providing a more nuanced answer to a seemingly simple question: What does it mean to eat like a 'man'?

Food and eating offer especially useful lenses through which to explore questions about what it means to be or act like a 'man'. This is because food is never just 'something to eat', but is instead a material and symbolic resource through which individual and communal identities are constructed and affirmed (Bourdieu, 1984; Counihan, 1999; Inness, 2001; Mennell, 1996). Food's embeddedness in questions of meaning, identity and the everyday makes it one of the key ways in which both men and women 'do gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 127). Who cooks, who eats, what types of foods are eaten, when and under what circumstances, are closely linked to the institutions and social structures through which gendered meaning, power and identities are constructed and negotiated. It is this connectedness to everyday structures of power and meaning that makes food, as Levi-Strauss (1963, 89) observed in a slightly different context, not only 'good to eat', but also 'good to think'. That is, the food we (do or do not) eat offers not just physical sustenance, but is also embedded with ideas about who we are, how we live and how our relationships and identities are structured.

But despite a long history of feminist scholarship examining gendered patterns of consumption, gendered metaphors of food, and numerous studies of food as a site for the performance and regulation of gender, most major studies have tended to focus on the experiences and practices of women (e.g. Avakian & Haber, 2005; Bordo, 1993; Counihan, 1999; Lupton, 1996; Probyn, 1996). This has been for a range of good reasons. Food's interwovenness into the routines of daily life makes it useful for revealing the particularities of time, place, and culture through which women's everyday lives can be contextualised (Avakian & Haber, 2005, 7). Food's connection to family, to the gendered division of household labour, and to both dietary restraint and 'fatness', has also made food a focus of feminist scholars interested in understanding women's experiences (Bordo, 1993; DeVault, 1994; Lupton, 1996; Orbach, 1978). Nonetheless, the marginalisation of men and masculinities in this area has also been surprising given the positioning of hegemonic masculinity at the centre of gender relations (Connell, 1995). Some attention has been paid to the special prestige enjoyed by conventionally 'masculine' types of foodwork such as hunting, barbecuing, and professional (paid) cookery (e.g. Deutsch, 2005; Swenson, 2009), but most of the major studies on food and gender have focused on the bulk of the ordinary, domestic, 'feminised' food work that has traditionally been done by women.

Despite the rapid growth of masculinity studies as a field of interdisciplinary research in its own right with deep roots in queer and feminist theories (e.g. Connell, 1995; Halberstam, 1998; Kimmel & Messner, 1995), masculinity remains an

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invisible presence in studies of gender, food and eating. Prior to this special issue, the main contribution to the study of food and masculinities was a 2005 special issue of *Food and Foodways*, entitled 'Mapping men onto the menu: Masculinities and food', which featured articles examining men and masculinities in a range of contexts, including men's fitness magazines (Parasecoli, 2005), Japanese television cooking shows (Holden, 2005), boyscouts (Mechling, 2005), urban firemen (Deutsch, 2005), public health officials (Block, 2005), married men (Sobal, 2005), 17th century Caribbean buccaneers (Wilk & Hintlian, 2005), and Norwegian tradesmen (Roos & Wandel, 2005). While some of these studies considered the ways in which men's cookery can complicate hegemonic forms of masculinity, most focused on men's cookery in traditionally 'masculine' environments (Julier & Lindenfeld, 2005, 9). Subsequent work has also tended to focus on the ways in which food and eating can be incorporated within recognisably hegemonic masculine identities (e.g. Buerkle, 2009; Hollows, 2003; Swenson, 2009).

To date, we still have a limited understanding of the complex ways in which men and masculinities are drawn into the politics, preparation and consumption of food in terms of discursive constructions or embodied experiences, particularly those that exist outside of hegemonic norms. *Women's Studies International Forum* is the ideal place to explore this topic further given the journal's long and rich history of examining gender and its production, perpetuation, and transgression. As there have been no special issues focussed on masculinities or food in this journal to date, we feel privileged to be able to use this forum to showcase the work of internationally recognised and emerging scholars in the field.

This issue has been titled 'Eating like a 'man': Food and the performance and regulation of masculinities' to reflect our desire to build a special issue that sees masculinity as a flexible concept and that highlights research that takes methodologically distinctive approaches to men's (and women's) relationships to masculinity, eating, and embodiment. The articles in this special issue raise important questions on several levels: conceptually (how can masculinities help to us understand and define contemporary gendered relationships to food?), culturally (what discourses of masculinity are attached to food, and how do men and women negotiate these in their daily lives?), and politically (how can feminist perspectives on food and masculinities assist us to understand, and contest, relationships between food, eating, gender and social power?) Each of the papers in this collection explores these questions in different ways.

We open with a paper that takes an innovative approach to what Claire Tanner, Alan Petersen, and Suzanne Fraser describe as a 'pervasive silence' surrounding Australian fathers' involvement in feeding their families and their relationship to nutritional care work. In 'Food, fat, and family: Thinking fathers through mothers' words', the authors situate their qualitative study in the context of childhood obesity discourses that attach primary responsibility for the feeding and care of children to mothers' bodies and maternal practices. Through an intertextual reading of mothers' accounts of fathers' involvement in food work, the authors provide new, critical insight into the dynamics of power that produce and sustain gendered responsibilities in heterosexual households. The paper reveals the ways in which mothers' accounts contrasted their own responsibility, altruism, and commitment to 'healthy' food choices with disclosures about paternal authority, selfishness, and complacency with respect to men's own and their children's diets.

Following this is Shu Min Yuen's exploration of changing discourses of contemporary Japanese masculinity in her paper, 'From men to 'boys'—The cooking *danshi* in Japanese mass media'. Yuen analyses the phenomenon of the *bentō danshi* ('boxed-lunch boy'), which was popularised in Japanese mass media in the late 2000s. In Japan, *bentō* preparation has been traditionally conceived as women's work, with men's cookery largely confined to the professional realm and to the more 'masculine and muscular' style of *otako* cooking. However, Yuen argues, men's increasingly prominent involvement and investment in preparing their own workday lunchbox reflect both a desire on the part of male workers to save money following the global financial crisis in 2007–8 and a response to changing notions of masculinity in early 21st century Japan. That these cooks are represented as *danshi* (boys) rather than *otako* (men) suggests that they are, at least in part, feminised by their involvement in everyday domestic labour, but since the *danshi*'s cooking occurs *in* the home, but is not *for* the home, the primacy of work in the construction of Japanese masculine identity remains largely unchanged. Yet while some aspects of hegemonic masculinity persist, Yuen suggests, the prominence of representations of the *bentō danshi* in a range of popular media texts nonetheless signals a softening and expansion of gender expectations for men in contemporary Japan.

Michelle K. Szabo examines the lived experiences of Canadian male home cooks from various social backgrounds in her article, '"I'm a real catch": The blurring of alternative and hegemonic masculinities in men's talk about home cooking'. Drawing on multiple data sources including in-depth interviews, food journals, and cooking observations, Szabo unpacks the multiple ways in which men frame their cooking responsibilities, ranging from seeing cooking as a 'gender neutral' practice (food preparation is a basic skill that has little to do with gender) to viewing it as a reflection of alternative/non-hegemonic masculinities (men value their 'feminine' qualities and do not see food preparation as strictly 'women's work'). However, Szabo observes that men who distanced themselves from 'macho' masculinities paradoxically reaffirmed them in other ways, namely in their association of home cooking with romantic (heterosexual) seduction and being a 'good catch' for women. Female partners, she argues, have a distinctive role in reinforcing an unequal division of labour when they take on less visible, more onerous tasks in the home to compensate for a male partner who is a 'catch' and cooks regularly.

In 'Gluttonous crimes: Chew, comic books, and the ingestion of masculinity', Fabio Parasecoli explores how the comic book series, *Chew*, uses food to reimagine the hegemonic masculinities normalised in other popular cultural forms, including western comics, detective fiction, and Japanese manga. The series' protagonist, Tony Chu, is an Asian detective with 'cibopathic' powers that enable him to psychically and viscerally experience everything that has happened to the food, flesh and objects he ingests, making the consumption of everyday meals a source of great anxiety and anguish. In constructing a male hero that

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