



Short Communication

The great is the enemy of the good: Hedonic contrast in a coursed meal

Jacob Lahne^{a,*}, Debra A. Zellner^b^a Department of Culinary Arts and Food Science, Drexel University, 101 N 33rd St, Philadelphia, PA 19103, United States^b Department of Psychology, Montclair State University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 April 2015

Received in revised form 27 May 2015

Accepted 28 May 2015

Available online 29 May 2015

Keywords:

Hedonic contrast

Restaurant dining

Ecological validity

Consumer-food research

Meals

ABSTRACT

This study investigates whether hedonic contrast occurs between foods served in different courses within a meal. In particular, does the hedonic value of an appetizer affect the hedonic value of the subsequently eaten main course? Hedonic contrast is known to occur in laboratory settings, but so far it has not been demonstrated in ecologically valid, real-world meal situations. To that end, this study was conducted in an ecologically valid setting – a training restaurant in a culinary school. Two groups of subjects ($N_s = 35$ and 29) were served the same pasta main course after either a good or mediocre bruschetta appetizer. The pasta was rated worse (and hedonically negative, $M = -9.4$) by subjects eating the good appetizer than by subjects eating the mediocre one (who judged it as hedonically positive, $M = 17.4$). This suggests that the hedonic value of an appetizer can influence the degree to which a diner likes the main course of a meal. Implications for the phenomenon of hedonic contrast and for meal services in restaurant settings are discussed.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Il meglio è l'inimico del bene.

[Voltaire (1770/1967, p. 428)]

Most of human food consumption occurs in the context of a meal. Meals usually consist of more than one food served during one occasion. Recent research has started to focus on liking for foods in the context of a meal (see Meiselman, 2000, 2009). Studies conducted using “real people eating real foods in real eating situations” (Meiselman, 1992, p. 49) have investigated how factors such as the meal setting (Edwards, Meiselman, Edwards, & Leshner, 2003; Meiselman, Johnson, Reeve, & Crouch, 2000) and arrangement of the food on the plate (Zellner, Loss, Zearfoss, & Remolina, 2014) influence liking for the taste of food in the meal.

Although different foods occur together in a meal, there has been little research on how liking for one food might be influenced by other foods in the meal (but see Jimenez et al., 2015). In a meal different foods can be served either simultaneously or sequentially, in “courses”. In the United States, the adoption of the “coursed meal” convention of *service à la russe* dates from the end of the 19th century (Visser, 1991/2008). By the beginning of the 20th century, serving meals as a series of courses, including both an appetizer (usually soup or salad) and a dessert was thought of as

a social necessity; to do otherwise was uncultured (Carroll, 2013). As a result, in contemporary restaurant culture different dishes are served sequentially in order to conform to this norm; in general, the standard American restaurant meal consists of an appetizer, a main course or “entrée”, and a sweet dessert (Gisslen, 2015; Labensky & Hause, 2007).

For the most part, appetizers are meant to be piquant, exciting, or intriguing; to whet the appetite (Gay & Gay, 1996); and to be “OMG [“Oh My God”] dishes” in the words of the *New York Times*’ restaurant critic (Wells, 2015), in contrast to the more stolid “meat with vegetables” (Carroll, 2013, p. 80) of the main course. Thus, American restaurant meals follow the “threefold pattern of the formal European dinner... overture, climax, sweet final flourish” (Visser, 2008, p. 230). With variations, this pattern can be found in many Western dining experiences. However, recent trends are towards an emphasis on “small plates” – appetizers – served in staggered courses, perhaps because the main dishes are increasingly thought of as less “good” (e.g., Wells, 2015). One possible explanation for this perception is that the very nature of the appetizer – its exciting, piquant flavors – leads the consumer to compare it with the subsequent courses, to the latter’s potential detriment.

This comparison might result in hedonic contrast, when the hedonic value of a target stimulus moves in the direction away from the hedonic value of other stimuli presented with that stimulus. Hedonic contrast has been found within a meal-course when multiple foods are served on a plate (Jimenez et al., 2015). Jimenez et al. found that when an imitation chicken tender was served on

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: jlahne@drexel.edu (J. Lahne).

the same plate with two hedonically positive sides, the tender was rated as less good than when served with two hedonically negative sides.

Hedonic contrast has been demonstrated with many stimuli (e.g., Cogan, Parker, & Zellner, 2013 – faces; Tousignant & Bodner, 2014 – photographs; Parker, Bascom, Rabinovitz, & Zellner, 2008 – music; Rota & Zellner, 2007 – flowers). The majority of the studies on hedonic contrast occur with sequential presentation of the stimuli rather than simultaneous as in Jimenez et al. (2015). If such hedonic contrast also occurs with sequential presentation of foods, how much one likes one course in a meal might well be affected by how much one liked previous ones. In particular, the degree to which a diner likes an appetizer might affect how much they like the main course.

Although hedonic contrast has not previously been investigated using different foods presented sequentially within a real meal, it has been found with similar foods presented sequentially in a laboratory setting. Zellner, Rohm, Bassetti, and Parker (2003) found that if a set of hedonically positive juices preceded a set of less good test juices, those test juices were rated as negative. In this study the stimuli were all very similar fruit juices, while in a real-world meal the appetizer, main course, and dessert can be quite dissimilar foods with very different flavors.

As Fechner (1898, according to Beebe-Center, 1932/1965) pointed out and subsequent research has found, how similar the stimuli are thought to be to one another can affect the degree to which hedonic contrast can occur. So, for example showing subjects a set of hedonically positive birds that are called “Tropical Birds” has less effect on the hedonic ratings of a set of North American birds (called “North American birds” by the experimenter) than the same tropical birds have on the same set of North American birds when all birds are called “birds” (Zellner et al., 2003).

Thus, while presentation of a hedonically positive appetizer prior to the main course should result in hedonic contrast and thus lowering of the hedonic value of the main course, it is possible that thinking of the appetizer and main course as different things will eliminate any contrast. On the other hand, since both the appetizer and the main course are served within a “meal”, which is one event, one might see hedonic contrast.

This study investigates hedonic contrast between the appetizer and the main course in an “Italian meal” which was served in a student-run, culinary-training bistro on a university campus. Two different meals, served on two different days, consisted of a very good or less good tomato bruschetta as the appetizer and the same, mediocre pasta dish as the main course. Since subjects were served both the appetizer and main course as part of the same meal and the two items were thematically similar (Italian) we expect that the pasta will be rated as less hedonically positive after the more hedonically positive bruschetta than after the more mediocre one. This would be the first demonstration of hedonic contrast occurring between courses in a meal.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

Subjects were 64 volunteers (48 females and 16 males) recruited on the campus of Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA, USA. Their ages ranged from 18 to 63 years (mean age 23.4 years). They were students and employees of Drexel University. They reported dining out on average 1.5 times/week. All were screened for allergies and dietary restrictions during the consent process and were asked not to participate if they were allergic to or could not eat any of the ingredients.

2.2. Design and materials

A set of experimental meal items were pilot-tested previous to the main study. A main course – “*pasta aglio e olio*” (pasta with garlic and oil) – was selected because it was given ratings near hedonically neutral; an appetizer – bruschetta with tomatoes – was selected because the two different preparations elicited significantly different hedonic ratings: one extremely positive and one mildly positive. Ingredients for all dishes are in Table 1. All dishes were prepared by the staff of the Academic Bistro at Drexel University, and served by the researchers.

In order to reduce bias, this study was a between-subjects design: subjects were randomly assigned to either the Good-appetizer condition on Day 1 ($N = 35$, 27 females) or the Mediocre-appetizer condition on Day 2 ($N = 29$, 21 females); subjects could not participate on both days. Although testing the two groups of subjects on two different days was not ideal, it avoided serving the two types of bruschetta on the same day and having subjects see that others in the same room received what was clearly a better or worse appetizer. Given that the kitchen served only one small café, that the main was a simple pasta prepared under the close supervision of a professional chef, and that on both days each lunch was made-to-order, the risk that the main dish varied on the 2 days was minimized. In addition, we tested on the same day of the week so as to reduce any variation from this factor.

In each condition, subjects were served a meal consisting of an appetizer – 2 pieces of bruschetta served on a rectangular, white china plate – and a main course – the pasta dish in a white china bowl on a white china plate with a paper doily. The only difference between the two conditions was the appetizer – mediocre or good (Table 1).

This study design was approved by Drexel University's IRB.

2.3. Procedure

Research was conducted in the Academic Bistro Restaurant, run by the Culinary Arts program at Drexel University. All subjects were served a two-course meal (appetizer and main) and provided responses to a paper questionnaire. Research was carried out on two consecutive Tuesdays at lunch time, with all subjects on Day 1 receiving Good appetizers and all subjects on Day 2 receiving Mediocre appetizers. In this way subjects were not potentially biased by seeing a different appetizer served to others.

Subjects were seated freely at a variety of tables with place-mats, water glasses, paper napkins, silverware, and a pitcher of water. Subjects were incentivized with the prospect of a free lunch. Reservations for the free meal were staggered in order to ensure

Table 1
Meal-item ingredients.

“Good” Appetizer: bruschetta	“Mediocre” Appetizer: bruschetta	Main: pasta aglio e olio
Tomatoes (cherry)	Tomatoes (hard Roma)	Pasta (Barilla® Campanelle, cooked)
Garlic (minced)	Garlic (minced)	Olive oil (extra virgin)
Red onion (brunoise)	Red onion (brunoise)	Garlic (minced)
Olive oil (extra virgin)	Olive oil (blended)	Water
Salt (to taste)	Salt (minimum)	Salt (minimum)
Pepper (to taste)	Basil (dried)	Parsley (fresh)
Basil (fresh)	Baguette (sliced 1/8 inch thick, toasted)	
Balsamic vinegar		
Lemon zest		
Baguette (sliced 1/8-inch thick, toasted)		

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4316924>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4316924>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)