PLEASURES, PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES:

Eating at a Uruguayan Social and Sporting Club

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Abstract

According to the National Health and Medical Council (NHMRC, 2013), a leading body in health and medical research in Australia, the rising incidence of obesity and non-communicable chronic diseases is evidence that individuals need to improve their food choices. One prominent yet contested method of intervention is public dietary education (Lindsay, 2010). Framing the Australian Dietary Guidelines as pedagogical—that is, as a social process that attempts to influence a population's actions, feelings and thoughts—enables us to critically consider the manner in which food pleasures are problematised (Sandlin, O'Malley and Burdick, 2011). Food's capacity to evoke pleasure, the Guidelines assume, is an effect of its physicality; an effect of its qualities like 'palatability', which is problematic as it increases the likelihood of 'increased food intake' (NHMRC, 2013; 222). Thus, according to this logic, eating can and should be controlled if weight loss is to be achieved (Mol, 2012). Yet when thinking deeper about this normative conceptualisation of food pleasures, the meanings and nuances of enjoyable eating and how they play a role in health and wellbeing are left unattended to. Mol (2010) reminds us that eating is an event, which encompasses times, places, materialities, feelings and bodies. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork conducted at a Uruguayan Club in Sydney's suburb Hinchinbrook acquired for a Master's thesis, I posit that food pleasures are achieved through practices, where bodily perceptions are entangled with social interactions, relations, memories and feelings. In so doing, I argue that we may think of pleasurable eating not as a danger to wellbeing, but rather as an essential part of it.

Keywords

Health and wellbeing, food policy, food pleasures, Australian Dietary Guidelines, diasporic foodways

Introduction: Guidelines and food pleasures

According to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2013)—a leading body in health and medical research in Australia—the rising incidence of obesity and non-communicable chronic diseases is evidence that individuals need to improve their food choices. Although this position is becoming increasingly salient within public health schemas, it has also proven to be deeply controversial. In the Global North and increasingly in the Global South, 'diet-related' morbidity and mortality concerns, pertaining to overweightness and obesity, have resulted in health advocates, community leaders and politicians calling for effective interventions (Lindsay, 2010: 476). In Australia, the Federal Government has been providing public nutrition advice for over seventy-five years through health policies and educational resources; a recent and prime example being the 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines. As an update to the 2003 version, the revised Guidelines were developed by the NHMRC and other expert bodies such as the Dietary Guidelines Working Committee to provide health-care professionals, policy makers and the general public with dietary advice that is 'based on the best available scientific evidence' (NHMRC, 2013: iii).

In its entirety, the Guidelines consist of a series of evidence-based educational resources that are freely available on the website, eatforhealth.gov.au (NHMRC, 2015: accessed 20 July 2017). They include five core recommendations, an updated version of the food group pyramid, health educator guides, online learning materials, virtual nutrition and energy calculators, and an information booklet that lays out the supporting scientific evidence. The NHMRC posits that providing 'practical and realistic' public nutrition education is an essential part of fostering 'health behaviours' in Australia, as they state, 'Education has an important role in establishing health behaviours and the readiness of individuals to effect behavioural change' (2013: 15).

As it is clear, the prime responsibility of health in this mode of thought is located at the level of the individual; the risk of overweightness, obesity and subsequently chronic illness may be diminished by effecting 'behavioural change'. As Deborah Lupton (1995) argues, this kind of focus on individual conduct has become commonplace practice in contemporary public health schemas, yet also remains a contested means for intervention. Drawing from a

selection of critiques that problematise public dietary education, this paper focuses on how food pleasures are conceptualised specifically the Australian Dietary Guidelines. Or to put in other words, how food is considered to be enjoyable and what kind of effects does this enjoyment have.

For many scholars, the ways in which contemporary public health targets individual conduct seldom recognises structural, economic and environmental factors that play an irreducible part in shaping and stratifying population health (Coveney, 2006; Evans, 2006; Lupton, 2014). As recent work illustrates, the logic of public health and nutrition education is based on a view that a rational and autonomous individual will adhere to the health advice with which they are provided, and can make necessary changes to improve their own health in the ways specified (Lindsay, 2010; Lynch et al., 2007). Jan Wright and Valerie Harwood's conceive of the term 'biopedagogy' to analyse how 'obesity related' education has proliferated within educational systems such as schools, online platforms and the media (2009: 3) . Pedagogy in this sense is not restricted to formal educational institutions, but is a pervasive influence that operates in all avenues of life. By using the Foucauldian term 'biopower' alongside 'pedagogy', Wright and Harwood argue that certain populations are placed under constant surveillance at the level of the corporeal, or to use the Foucauldian term, 'bios' (ibid: 3). In so doing, biopedagogies teach individuals to 'improve' themselves by adopting 'healthier lifestyle choices' in terms of exercise regimes and food consumption.

The Guidelines are a prime example of biopedagogies, which seek to incite a population to make 'make healthy food choices' (NHMRC, 2013: 7). In other words, healthy food choices are determined by food's nutritional value. Eaters are encouraged to prioritise a 'healthy' body weight, and in so doing they should control their food intake and food pleasures. As Else Vogel and Annemarie Mol state in their study on obesity and dietary schemas, '[Health] campaigns target what public health researchers call health behaviour. They admonish us to behave, that is, to take control over what we eat and abstain from excessive food pleasures' (2014: 306). The body in these schemas, Mol suggests, reiterates a mind-body distinction where individuals require nutrition information to control their own bodily impulses (2012: 383). According to this logic, a body will over-indulge in 'hedonistic' pleasures unless restricted. For instance, the Guidelines defines 'discretionary foods', which are foods with relatively high amounts of fat, salt and sugar (NHMRC, 2013: 24). In one of the Guidelines'

supporting studies, discretionary foods were described as 'palatable' because they have a relatively higher 'energy' density (McCrory, 2006: 452). As the Guidelines state, although discretionary foods may add variety and enjoyment to a diet, most people will need to increase their energy expenditure to 'burn up' the additional kilojoules discretionary foods provide in order to maintain a healthy weight (NHMRC, 2013: 24). Pleasure is problematic according to this logic, as the higher the palatability the higher the likelihood of 'increased food intake' (ibid: 222).

Framing the Australian Dietary Guidelines as pedagogical—that is as a social process that attempts to influence a population's actions, feelings and thoughts—enables us to critically consider the manner in which food pleasures are problematised (Sandlin, O'Malley and Burdick, 2011). While a vast amount of content is dedicated to nutrition and dietary advice in the Guidelines, very little space is given to a discussion on preferable and enjoyable food practices and how they may influence the way people eat. Eating is an 'event' that encompasses times, places, materialities, social relations and the senses (Mol, 2010: 217). As Nick J. Fox argues, human emotions are an essential part of how social life manifests, which suggests that a more enriched understanding of food pleasures is necessary (2015: 301). When thinking deeper about the Guidelines' normative conceptualisation of food pleasures, it fails to recognise the body as a feeling, relational and 'fleshly' entity (Lupton, 2017: 92). Furthermore, there is little critical thought inherent to this conceptualisation that food pleasures may be an important and valuable part of good health and wellbeing.

This paper contributes to studies on public health pedagogies through a case study of food pleasures. I draw on ethnographic fieldwork conducted at the Uruguayan Social and Sporting Club in Sydney's suburb Hinchinbrook. The Club was founded by Uruguayan migrants forty years ago, though many regular patrons visiting today come from other parts of South America. It houses an *asado* (South American barbecue), cafe and bistro, South American dance nights, live music and Spanish language classes. As stated in its objectives the business aims to provide a 'space of expression, assembly and entertainment through the feel of Hispanic and Latin American culture' (Bruntech, 2018). Patrons visit to dance, volunteer, listen to live music, and to socialise with friends, family and other members of the community. And of course, to eat.

Drawing from data acquired through qualitative interviews and fieldwork notes, I posit that food pleasures are achieved and reproduced through practices, where bodily perceptions are entangled with social relations, materialities, memories and feelings. My purpose is twofold. First, to reiterate the failure of public health pedagogies like the Guidelines to understand eating as a spatial, embodied, sensory and relational practice. Second, to suggest that we may think of pleasure and eating not as a danger to wellbeing, but rather as an essential part of it.

Conceptualising food pleasures

This section articulates how food pleasures can be imagined as enactments by drawing from sensory and care studies. It is important to point out that within emerging scholarship that is drawing affect theories together with pedagogical studies, relations between bodily experiences and learning have been explored (Springgay, 2011). Though the purpose of this paper is not to concrete identify how food pleasures are pedagogical per se, Stephanie Springgay's reiteration that learning 'takes place in the feeling, sentient and moving body' is a salient proposition to consider vis-à-vis the efficacy of the Guidelines (ibid: 637). Importantly, Springgay's study on sensorial pedagogy draws attention to sensory experiences and how they are essential for embodiment, a point that I will elaborate in this section. I begin with a discussion on perception by drawing from Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Deborah Lupton, specifically focusing on what Lupton describes as 'fleshly bodies' (2017: 92) . Following this I review Mol's description of eating 'events' to discuss the relations between space, time and materialities, and how these relations are fundamental to a conceptualisation of food pleasures (2010: 217).

In the tradition of phenomenology, sensory engagements have been considered essential for embodiment and world-making. As philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1968) explained, humans learn to make sense of the world through their bodily senses. In contrast to naturalist accounts of perception, he argued that a perceiving subject is not to be understood as an organism that passively responds to stimuli but 'as an embodied subject, that stands in an intentional relation to the world' (ibid: 96). Embodiment is thus considered fundamentally interrelational or intercorporeal. Recounting this theoretical position in her own work on digital bodies, Lupton builds on Merleau-Ponty's position in saying that we 'experience the

world as fleshly bodies, via the sensations and emotions configured by and through our bodies as they relate to other bodies and material objects and spaces' (2017: 92). Thus, the body is always situated within an 'assemblage' of things, and what it experiences is dependent on times, spaces, histories, and other human and non-human entities (Springgay, 2011: 651).

This position is fundamental to an articulation of food pleasures, as it highlights the body's situatedness and connection to the world. In this persepective, food pleasures are conceptualised as derivatives of human and non-human assemblages, not simply as the effect of a food-body interaction. Thus, in this conceptualisation, neither biology nor culture is privileged; instead they are recognised as entangled. As Phillip Vannini, Dennis Waskul and Simon Gottschalk point out, 'Humans sense as well as make sense. This process of sense-making entails minded and embodied social and cultural practices that cannot be explained or reduced to physiological processes alone' (2011: 15).

Food and materialities: good eating

In recent years there has been a revived scholarly focus on materialities and the ways in which they shape and are shaped by social life, particularly in new materialist and relational materialism turns (Mol, 2012; Woolgar and Lezuan, 2013). In one notable study, Mol (2010) conducted ethnographic research on feeding care provided for residents in a Dutch nursing home. The primary consideration for feeding care in the home, Mol points out, was food's nutritional qualities. For example, the choices of ingredients used in the residents' meals and the kind of methods adopted for cooking were essential considerations for the nursing home staff in providing feeding care. The secondary consideration, and often the lower priority of the two, was attending to feeding practices that could be enjoyable for residents. As Mol explains, improving the ambience and 'cosiness' of the resident's meal times encouraged them to enjoy their food and thus eat more, while also improving nutritional absorption and their quality of life (ibid: 218). Creating a sense of cosiness was a kind of care, and involved many elements:

> *There should be a proper table cloth on the table, or (if this is asking too much) the paper placemats used should be nice and colourful, not dull and white. Rather than eating*

> *alone, it is better that people do so together. Putting serving dishes on every table is more homely and inviting than dishing up plates in the kitchen… Cosiness depends on ever so many elements of the dinner table and its surroundings.* (ibid: 217)

There are many ontologies of care, as Mol alludes to here. 'Good' feeding care, she explains, aims to provide enjoyable and culturally sensitive ways to eat, which means attending to kinds of settings and utensils. It means having a sensitivity to the ways in which rhythms, sounds and the presence of other people are affective. Mol draws our attention to the kinds of relative values given to material and non-material entities that are involved in good eating events, which is critical to consider in the case of food pleasures. Drawing from Mol's work we can imagine food pleasures as derivatives of localised eating practices. Morover, we can be sensitive to the relative values of food pleasures, and how they may attribute to health and wellbeing. We understand them, then, as not inherently 'natural' physiological sensations, but rather as culturally constituted and invested with memory, meaning, emotion and value (Sutton, 2010: 220).

Methods

Undertaking an ethnographic study traditionally required the researcher's immersion in an unfamiliar site for an extensive period of time. The task was to subject one's own body and personality to the site of research in order to make plausible interpretations of a group's meanings and practices (Goffman, 1989: 125). As this study was concerned with empirical questions about eating practices and experiences that contrasted dietary advice in the Guidelines, I adopted what Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson define as ethnography, which

> *involves the ethnographer participating ... in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.* (1995: 1)

Thus, this study involved five months of fieldwork at the Uruguayan Social and Sporting Club located in Sydney's suburb, Hinchinbrook. The community business relies heavily on volunteer support, and as I had worked for many years as a barista I offered to volunteer in

the Club's café. After receiving ethics clearance from the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee, I worked at the Club fortnightly making coffee for patrons, serving desserts and occasionally eating dinner with Club members and fellow volunteers.

A total of nine semi-structured interviews were conducted during fieldwork. Interview participants were recruited based on the following criteria: a) they were regular attendees of the Club; b) they were above the age of 18; c) they identified as having a Latino/Latina and/or Hispanic and/or South American background; and d) they were fluent in English. Interviews went for an hour to an hour and a half, were recorded using a digital voice recorder and were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Interviewees provided both oral and written consent to be interviewed, and their names have been changed to pseudonyms. All but one of the interviewees were above the age of 50. All identified as having Spanish as their first language, and had Uruguayan, Argentinian, Polish, Chilean, Italian and Spanish backgrounds. Six identified as women, and three identified as men. Drawing from interview data, field notes and a series of personal vignettes, I use Mol's notion of eating 'events' as an analytical tool to illustrate how food pleasures can be imagined as the derivatives of practices.

I will sing, I will dance, I will enjoy life: A lively Club

On a Friday night I was walking through the Club's car park for the first time. It sounded like there was a special event happening, but as I found out later, the volume was pretty normal for the eve of a weekend. A South American band was playing, and I could hear laughter and muffled chatter coming from inside the building. I walked through the Club's entrance doors. A queue of people stretched from one side of the hall to the other waiting to buy dinner from the *asado*. As a number of committee members later told me, barbecued beef from the asado is the Club's best seller. An asado consists of a long grill fired with either coal or wood. The Club's asado is about two metres long and can cook a substantial amount of meat at once. People of all ages talked, drunk, mingled, listened to the music and watched dancers. Bottles of wine and beer, crumbs, wrapping paper, half empty plates of barbecued meat, bread, salad, dessert and birthday cakes were peppered along the dining tables. I was having trouble understanding the band's lyrics, but thankfully during an interview with Club volunteer Jacob he translated one for me, 'The song says, "I will sing, I

will dance, I will enjoy life, la la la. Life life, live the life. I will laugh, I will enjoy, life life, enjoy life."'

A significant portion of the Club's regular patrons migrated to Australia when they were either children or young adults, and thus the Club was used as a space to keep traditions continuing for themselves and their families.

Robin Cohen defined diasporas as collectives who 'settle outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories, [and who] acknowledge that "the old country" always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions' (1997: xi). As empirical studies on diasporic experiences have shown, space—defined as the product of social relationships—is frequently and continuously reconstructed when people collectively move from one place to another (Hagan, 1998; Massey, 2005), and food practices are an integral part of these processes (Cardona, 2009; Duarte, 2005). In Sanne Siete Visser, Ajay Bailey and Louise Meijering's study on social well-being in Ghanaian migrant communities in the Netherlands, they found that food served 'as commemorations of traditions in their home country', which helped alleviate the challenges of transition (2015: 609). The Club's committee members frequently explained to me that the space needed to be kept 'alive' not only for younger second and third generations to learn about their culture and heritage, but also for older, first generation migrants as they had established strong connections and social networks through the Club. During an interview with a longtime volunteer and committee member of the Club, Rebecca explained, 'We do it [volunteer work] as a service for the community. Obviously, there are a lot of people who speak good English and are also part of the community in Australia, but still sometimes you need to go to a place where you feel like you belong.'

Migrating from South America and Europe was commonly described as a lonely, challenging and at times difficult process, and so the community had become a 'second family' for many because of these shared experiences. During an interview with committee member, Bella explained this further:

> *The Club] is the only way, the only point of union that we have in the community, there are no other communities that have a place where to dance, where to come and have*

> *dinner where to chat with your friends, for the Uruguayan community there is only one place to get together. To eat together.*

For Bella and others I spoke with, there is an imperative to keep the Club continuing. As Bella alludes to here, material elements are involved in creating a 'point of union', and as other committee members explained, the food available is an essential component for sustaining a sense of belonging and community.

Beef from the asado was often described by Club members and patrons as a strong reminder of childhood, familial ties and place of origin. According to Rebecca the asado originates from traditional cooking methods used by Uruguayan and Argentinian 'gauchos'. The only food gauchos typically had access to while working on the land was their livestock, and so they would use a small grill positioned over a campfire to cook their meat. Not only does barbecued beef serve as a connection to place and an evocation of nostalgia, it enables interviewees to maintain their familial and social relations. As interviewee Marcel put it, 'it is the barbecue that brings people together'. During an interview with Club volunteer Elena, she explained:

> *We really enjoy the barbecue, because we used to have it over there [in Uruguay]. We really enjoy when we eat with the family together, you know? And very close friends, the closest person to me was my best friend. We eat together, it's a custom we have.*

When reflecting on these descriptions, materialities are rendered valuable because of their connection with places and practices, and it is difficult to imagine one without the other. Pleasure evoked by an asado, when thinking perhaps in a more wholistic fashion, can be attributed to the senses as much as it can be to memories, songs, conversations and collectives that form and reform. Without reducing food pleasures to a food-body interaction, we can instead recognise how the enjoyment of eating is bound up with many other elements (Mol, 2010). As Gill Bell and David Valentine remind us, food is 'packed with social, cultural and symbolic meanings', which are affective as much as they are subject to change (1997: 3).

Let's relax and eat: feelings and food pleasures

I waited in the Club's cafe for Jacob. He rushed around trying to finish the last administration jobs before we could have our interview. Every few minutes he came back and forth to ask for one more moment to finish his administration duties. It was a busy night, but then most nights at the club were busy. Jacob was born in Argentina and came to Australia in 1992. After a friend introduced him to the Club he joined as a volunteer; now he is the Club's treasurer. A few more moments passed and Jacob hurried back into the cafe with a relieved look on his face. Finally, he was free for our interview. We walked upstairs to one of the quieter rooms reserved for card games and dancing sessions, and after leading me into the room, Jacob immediately turned back to the door and asked what I would like to drink. I realised he was leaving to return downstairs. He later returned carrying a tray of two full plates of food and a longneck bottle of beer to share. As the food was neatly placed on a fold out table along with knives and forks, Jacob asked for a moment to settle. 'Let's relax and eat' he said.

If we are to return to Mol's description of 'cosy' eating practices, emotions configured by and through bodies are essential for the ways in which enjoyment and pleasure are experienced (2010: 217). In his work on affects, Fox recalls the Durkheimian term 'collective effervescence', a phenomenon that arose in the event of sacred gatherings (ibid: 302). Durkheim (1995) believed that the experience of this shared perception had a capacity to shape social action and orders; emotion, contrasted to rationality and reason, was believed to affect the production of social life. As Fox further iterates, 'What humans feel has a part to play in producing the world, from the progression of a conversation to the shaping of global politics' (ibid: 301). In this study, interviewee's emotions vastly changed their experiences of eating. Bodily feelings, they described, were dependent on their sense of relative times and spaces, and thus place is considered here 'not only a mental or social construct but as the sensuous experience of being in space and time' (Grasseni, 2009: 8).

Adrian was born in Sicily and migrated to Australia with his family in 1970. At the time of our interview he was working full time as a building construction manager. A friend introduced him to the Club about three years ago. Normally Adrian has little time to socialise throughout the week so he will volunteer on the weekends as he has a built a

network of friends through the Club's community. From what he remembered of his childhood, the dining room was a place where family life happened, as he said, 'Having a European background and that, meal times were a time for families to socialise, you know, get together to discuss the day… When I was growing up meal time meant everyone sat the table, and they sat together as a family and had dinner.' These days, at work, Adrian eats at his desk as he and his team won't have time to catch up and eat together during their lunch-break. Adrian will from time to time organise a lunch meeting at a restaurant, which helps 'notch it down and make everyone a bit more comfortable.' He explains that having a meeting over food in a place outside the office helps everyone relax:

> *I think it helps you to socialise because you're not, you know your focus is not, um solely on what you're discussing, you know. You might be thinking 'this looks nice, have you tried that?' or 'you should try this.' I sort of find that if you're having a straight out meeting in the office, it's totally different to sitting down having a meal, it just sort of makes it more relaxing.*

An enjoyable and relaxing meal—one that is social, time consuming and unhurried—involves many elements: a relatively different time, space, rhythm, focus, and a 'pause' where the flow of work ceases (Davies, 2001: 140). Food affects thoughts and conversations, and the way it tastes can vary depending on many things.

For some interviewees, taste connects with feeling. For example, Jacob explained that if he is eating with friends or relatives and he feels calm, relaxed and 'present', food tastes different. Morover, he explained that his senses are intrinsically connected with his emotions, as he explained, 'You feel different. If you feel different [and] your senses are different, the food tastes different.' Similarly for Maria, her enjoyment of eating is evoked by 'lively' spaces, as she said, 'It [the Club] is lively, always fun and lively. You feel good, and eating feels good.'

Taken collectively these descriptions underscore the relationality of the body, and how bodily feelings are inherently contingent. Interestingly, from what interviewees describe, it would seem that there is little separation between bodily emotions and the senses. Thinking from this position, perhaps food pleasures need to be cultivated (Vogel and Mol, 2014). We

may imagine them not as natural and homogenous experiences mediated solely by body and food, but rather as products of convergences between many elements.

Commensality and pleasure: Assembling the 'goods'

The spatial arrangement in the Club is designed to bring people together. The main hall is a large, open space with long tables lined in rows, and each dining table seats up to ten people. During my first shift at the Club, I sat to one the tables while I was on break. My supervisor Maria asked if I would like dinner, and as a vegetarian I had the option of either a combination of salads and bread from the bistro or a vegetarian pie from the cafe. I asked Maria what the pies were like and she said they were 'delicious'. They were flat, square and filled with cooked spinach, cheese and a boiled egg. I was curious when hearing about the boiled egg so I opted to give the pie a go. My fellow volunteers were busy at the time of my break, so I sat at an empty dining table, my phone in hand as to not appear completely alone, and ate. I looked around and observed all the other patrons sitting with their families and friends, talking and being together. No one was obviously gawking at their food as I was doing. The pie certainly was delicious, but it was me and the pie, *just* me and the pie.

Sociologists and anthropologists have long focused on commensal eating practices, especially within religious and ritualistic contexts. To draw from Jeffery Sobal and Mary K. Nelson's (2003) basic definition, commensality is a concept that refers to the practice of eating with other people. As Claude Fischler states, commensality has been recognised as 'one of the most striking manifestations of human sociality. Humans tend to eat together or, to put it more exactly, to eat in groups (2011: 529).' Commensal eating practices demarcate social boundaries and relations, and shape the ways in which social units are structured (Grignon, 2001). For all those I spoke with, social eating is good eating and interestingly, the pleasure evoked by food's taste changed depending on the presence of other people. Food underpinned how familial and social relations were maintained, where 'deep affective attachments' were engendered (Jasper, 1998: 398).

During an interview with Club member Evelyn, I asked what she found pleasurable about eating, to which she answered, 'We always like having someone to talk to during the food… When you share with other people, it's more fun!' For Evelyn, special eating occasions mean

being surrounded by loved ones; it was as if food was synonymous with 'family' when she exclaimed, "On the table, food is always around me!' Evelyn shared stories about day trips and holidays she had been on recently with friends and family; they would travel collectively, and she would be in charge of organising the food. Having enough food to feed everyone was the first consideration:

> *Even when we plan something to go out to the beach, or to other places, first we're talking about the food! When we go somewhere like the Blue Mountains, first we think, okay, we are going to fix enough food for everyone*. (Evelyn)

I asked Evelyn if food tastes different when eating with others, and she answered, 'Of course, yes. Yes, of course. Even when you are alone, and you have dinner, it's not really good for us… for me! It's terrible, it feels down.'

The experience of eating alone had varying degrees of severity between those who I spoke with. Rebecca commented, 'For me, I enjoy it [eating] more because, one thing is you're talking about the food you're enjoying. You enjoy, definitely when you eat on a table with other people, you eat lunch alone, you don't enjoy it as much.' Though Rebecca very much enjoyed social eating events—she spoke fondly of the asado as her family would often host large parties when she was young—she, like many others, considered lone eating not much of an issue.

Yet lone eating, for others, could be deeply evocative. This was the case for Bella, who migrated to Australia from Uruguay in 1974 with her husband and children. Bella's life at the time of the interview was a 'special' time, as her husband and mother had both passed away in the last few months. Talking about solitary eating was difficult; she recalled the normality of sitting across a table from her husband chatting about regular day to day things:

> *Since my husband is no longer with me, it's very hard for me to sit at the table and have dinner on my own. So I try to get involved in something else, and to get busy because I don't sit to have dinner on my own, I can't yet. I eat a little bit here and there but not like*

> *we used to in front of each other, talking and chatting and sharing things, that's why I can't do it yet, I can't do it*. (Bella)

Bella and others draw our attention to the ways in which food and shared food pleasures become entangled with social connections and intimacies. Eating is a relational practice in many senses, and if we are to return to the initial problem in the Guidelines that this paper seeks to address, relationality needs to be more thoughtfully considered. As is the case of feeding care and making 'cosiness', the relative values in of commensal eating reflect what seems to be missing from the Guidelines (Mol, 2010: 217). That being, an appreciation of how shared pleasures that are mediated by materialities like food may foster and vitalise social relations, kinships and friendships.

To conclude

This paper has carved out a version of food pleasure that contrasts with the Australian Dietary Guidelines' idea of how food is enjoyed. As a form of pedagogy the Guidelines aim to improve Australian diets through nutrition education, yet how they construct food pleasures is in need of further critical thought. As it is made clear in the Guidelines (NHMRC, 2013: v), the first priority of eaters is to 'achieve and maintain a healthy weight' by exercising educated decisions over what they eat, yet there is little recognition about how food pleasures can indeed be part and parcel of health and wellbeing. Eating is an event that involves materialities, social relations, histories, times and places, and thus food pleasures cannot be conceptualised without considering these contextual and continually changing factors. Framed in this way, pleasures derived from eating aptly rely on the social, spatial, temporal and the sensual. By drawing attention to the failure of food policy to recognise this, I do not to argue that we should necessarily abandon the Guidelines altogether. But a radical change in the content of public nutrition education is necessary and needed, that much is certain.

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