

## ESSAY 3 PHASE 2

Student 1 • Prof. Mani • Fall 2020

### Introduction:

The food porn community on Reddit is infamous for sharing irresistible foods and their erotic reactions to them. For one who chooses to keep up with the frequent posts made by users of this subreddit, they will scroll through endless photos of all that is delicious and decadent. That includes pizzas cooked and topped in infinite different ways, desserts filled with chocolate and gorgeous presentations, sandwiches with cheese melting off the sides and so much more. This is the subreddit for the person that though may not be able to eat these foods everyday, these posts will tantalize them endlessly with what they can't have. These cheat day foods are presented zoomed in images that accent their provocative display and trigger the vulgar reactions from the members who see them. These sexual comments have become synonymous to this subreddit and define this community almost entirely. The most vulgar responses that seem to be pushing the boundary of appropriateness more often than not reference the male genitalia and wanting to "jerk off" for example. These responses seem to be gendered as the seemingly male commenters are more comfortable in pushing the boundaries with their explicit responses. Although this space is anonymous, there are few examples, if any, of the women's genitalia in these vulgar responses. This reveals that apart from this concentrated community on reddit, the concept of sex is still gendered and that stigmas are in place that restrain the minority from commenting freely on them. For the heterosexual man, online spaces allow their sexual expressions to be made freely whereas other stigmatized groups like women or homosexual individuals are made to feel timid when speaking on the subject.

### Method:

Finding examples of users using provocative language wasn't difficult to find in the non participant observation conducted. The association between sexual terminology or innuendos and reactions to food is the pattern that is seen most prominently amongst this community. Under every post that has any amount of comments one is bound to see multiple references and comments of the sort.

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However for someone looking to find the most frequent or outlandish comments they are most likely going to find it under the beloved unhealthy comfort foods. For example, an image of pizza, dessert, hamburgers, lasagna and elements of the sort will produce the comments that are most notably associated with this subreddit. Since food porn is ingrained in our culture, we all have an idea of what the epitome of the concept is and it isn't unlikely that the food that first comes to mind when thinking of this topic is the same dish that many others would recognize as well. Looking below these images, the explicit comments are sprinkled heavily throughout the entire thread and it is about picking the best examples out of the many to choose from. The process then continues to be scrolling through the images and seeing which is displayed most provocatively, which food is most synonymous to the concept and looking through the comments.

### Observation:

There are several interactions noted between the members of this community. An image was posted 12 hours ago by v/lovesdemise of honey glazed sweet and spicy fried chicken and buttermilk mac and cheese. The comment section under this post consists of 85 comments and several interesting interactions. Cluelesswench commented "I would fuck this" and received 390 points. This comment serves as an example of the comments that are more general and don't necessarily attach themselves to a specific gender. Both a man or a woman could comment this freely without others being able to guess what their gender is. For 23 points, a6245912 commented "that's what good pussy sounds like". This comment seems to have been commented by a male member as these responses most naturally associates themselves with a heterosexual male and them knowing what "good pussy" sounds like. ByahTyler then commented "then take a post nut nap" and received 7 points. From this response we can also infer that BryahTyler is a male commentator since "nut" is more commonly referred to the form of release of dopamine in males when they have reached their climax. Similar sexual references were made under an image posted 2 hours ago by user u/No-Way-Im-Sober, where their smoked brisket pizza received reactions like "*moans in pizza*" by

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users like daobear who've embraced the norms of this subreddit. This comment is one of the few explicit comments that seem to have been made by a woman due to the fact that moaning is more associated with the female response to arousal instead of a male. These comments all act in accordance to the overall culture of this community in different ways but all combine explicit details to describe their reactions to the post displayed.

### Analysis:

Originally scrolling through the food porn community on Reddit, the comments are the most notable characteristic. For one looking to investigate this online space, you can already tell that the comments are going to be explicit and a form of sexual expression for the members in their reactions to food. Looking through the comments you see that most of them come from seemingly heterosexual male members as you will read them referencing their form of masturbation or arousal to the food displayed. However, you have to look very hard to find comments from seemingly female members who reference their own arousals openly like the males do. There is also a large prevalence of miscellaneous comments that could be interpreted by all genders or sexualities but there are rarely specific representations of these groups in the comment section like it is for the heterosexual male. This brings up the curiosity of wanting to find why a specific demographic is made to feel comfortable sexually expressing themselves in a particular comment section whereas others are not. Immediate considerations draw to societal structures or stigmas that have carried themselves to our online spaces and have thus influenced the behavioral dynamic of the members of this subreddit.

### Results:

For some it has been a long struggle of breaking barriers and pushing past stigmas that have forced them to stay quiet on the topic before. For others societal

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structures have transferred to these online spaces and have allowed them to always feel comfortable to push the boundary when speaking about sex. Kath Albury writes her analysis on the subject in *Sexual Expression in Social Media* which serves as a chapter of *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*. The chapter references bodies of research done in different online spaces and how they are used to stigmatize homosexuals. It is noted that these online spaces can make these users subject to “a range of violations of trust, ranging from racist abuse, shaming based on HIV status, sexual violence, blackmail and robbery” (Albury 448). Online spaces like these can make it quite impossible for homosexuals and people with differing sexual orientations to truly feel comfortable in expressing themselves sexually on the internet. In a world where they are often condemned and viewed as an “abnormality” it can be easy for users to feel silenced to avoid the repercussions that would follow. In the food porn subreddit, most of the comments seem to be made by heterosexual individuals whether that be male or female but there are no defining comments that could be interpreted to represent a homosexual user. Instead there are many miscellaneous comments made like “I would fuck this” that could easily apply to both demographics. It could be that due to societal stigmas that have transferred to online spaces that condemn homosexuality, these users could be hiding behind comments like these in order to escape a negative response. Though a comment like that can allow them to express themselves to some degree, it does not give them the liberty of doing so freely. For heterosexual individuals that are considered the acceptable and normal sexual orientation, they do not have to worry or restrict their sexual expressions in the same way in fear of the response it may receive while homosexuals are made vulnerable to prejudice.

Despite different sexual orientations, the ability to openly express yourself in an online space has also been proven to be heavily gendered. Albury references webcammer studies done by Kibby and Costello that “observed that it is ‘easier’ for women to perform” or in other words express themselves sexually through images as opposed to writing about it in online spaces “due to the centrality of women’s bodies as erotic objects” for the male gaze. She then writes that this transition becomes slightly difficult for the male who begins to feel “a little uncomfortable to present themselves as objects of female gaze when women have been them for centuries.” The conclusion then becomes that males and females sexual expression

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differ from each other in that women have been accustomed to express it visually like in pictures, men have been encouraged to speak about it openly (Albury 452). Since the images of r/foodporn are food related and not a space for amateur exhibitionism, women members may find it difficult to express themselves sexually in this community. It has been centuries of women getting objectified for their bodies and having their sexuality be a visual aspect that it is difficult for them to rhetorically express themselves in that way. One can then conclude that it is a natural pattern that more men will comment wanting to “jerk off” and that there will be more of those behaviors observed in this subreddit as opposed to the other way around. However, it can also be concluded that in a space where amateur exhibitionism is displayed that there would most likely be more women images as cultural artifacts than that of males.

Most of the explicit comments that form a part of the food porn community on Reddit reference male masturbation and very rarely is the female form brought up. In the midst of the very few comments that one can conclude came from a female user, there are often references “moaning in pizza” as opposed to the topic of masturbation itself that is very popular amongst males. In an article written by Daniella Fleischer, she begins by listing twelve names for male masturbation that came to mind with “jerking off, whacking off, whippin’ the bishop” as a few examples. She then writes about a site she encountered that listed at least 1,000 ways to describe male masturbation when for women only a few euphemisms came to mind (Fleischer). This similar experience could be a reason that female masturbation isn’t referenced at all compared to males. If a woman member wants to express herself sexually in reaction to a food porn post and she is unable to find the words to describe what she intends to express, it may cause her to not comment at all. The fact that so many euphemisms were created and popularized for men to describe their masturbation but not even half of the attention was devoted to do the same for women signifies how there is a lack of conversation about it.

The lack of conversation about female masturbation that exists within society then translates to our online spaces where there is a lack of comments about it as well like in r/foodporn. Fleischer then writes that she doesn’t think “anyone can deny that there is an ease to which we allow men to own their

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sexuality that is denied to women” and explains that women who like sex are regarded as “noteworthy at best” or “perverted at worst” (Fleischer). Societal structures have attached names and stigma that make it difficult for females to express themselves confidently in general and especially in online spaces. Being considered either noteworthy or perverted could cause you to become a target for unwanted male attention. Interactions like these could also cause women to turn off the idea of openly expressing themselves sexually in online spaces all together in fear for unsolicited attention that will cause them to feel uncomfortable. Even though Reddit is an anonymous space, if a woman has to carry that discomfort and fear in other platforms it may carry on and translate to the behaviors they have in this community as well. That is why even in an online space like Reddit, they can feel the same and the effects of that then becomes a lack of female presence in the comment section of a community like r/foodporn.

### Discussion:

The food porn community on Reddit, though it may be different in its values, reflects the same societal structures and stigmas as every other space on the internet. We have tried to silence and stifle the sexual expression of homosexuals and women who have to worry about the response their reaction may elicit. In doing that we have allowed for the heterosexual male to feel confident in his expression and dominate the space with their views. The analysis of these topics are required in order to provoke the change that is needed because everyone no matter the gender or sexual orientation deserves to feel confident in expressing their sexuality. In doing this, we must also rely on the brave representatives of sexual minorities who in expressing themselves may receive backlash but create opportunities for others to do the same. We must normalize the sexual expression of these minorities just like the heterosexual male expression has been for centuries and to do that we need to inspire others to speak. This topic deserves more inquiry in order to help rectify the issue. Other points that can be further researched and explored are perhaps the stigmas that may exist within these minority communities and if there is a hierarchy of their own. This could help reveal that the stigma may not just be from the privileged group in this case, but within

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the minority as well. I would also like to title my essays other than "essay 3 phase 2" so finding the appropriate title will be another action step of mine.

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### Works Cited

Albury, K 2018, 'Sexual expression in social media', in *The sage handbook of social media*, SAGE Publications Ltd, 55 City Road, London, pp. 444-462, viewed 18 November 2020, doi: 10.4135/9781473984066.n25.

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