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Student 1 • Prof. Mani • Fall 2020

Discourse Community Narrative

R/Foodporn is infamous for sharing irresistible foods and erotic reactions to them. While some members use words like “horny” as an immediate response, others explicitly share observations of how “dick shaped” a particular food is. Analysis in the language used in this subreddit makes a clear connection between food and sexual arousal. This is done through tones of informativeness, campy humor, explicit reference, and insatiable desire that help demonstrate how one topic manifests several interpretations. It is only through these interpretations that one is able to understand not only the subreddit but the topic of food porn itself

This community proves that titles are suggestive of the content and also set guidelines for language used by members. Since porn is referenced, this is the appropriate space for words like “horny,” “so sexy,” “fuck” or “jack off” to appear in comments without judgment. This is the foundation of the community’s language and allows for several tones to appear in one post. Since members are responsible for deciding if the content displayed is “appropriate” food porn, an informative tone surfaces in user interactions. For example, under a chocolate tart post u/HumanHundred commented “that’s the kinda food that’s so good it’s close to actually being pornographic.” U/GreenMedallion replied with “... chocolate is meant to be an aphrodisiac so yeah, you’re not wrong hahah.” The term aphrodisiac is relevant to community values because it’s defined as foods that arouse sexual instincts. U/GreenMedallion informed why the chocolate tart is acceptable content considering the topic. This exchange provided information that informed not only HumanHundred but also other members viewing the comment section as well.

Arousal from these images trigger comments from members longing for the food displayed. Posts become the home for expressions of desperation like a lobster dinner image where u/RebellischerRaakun commented, “you’re so blessed to get food like that fucc me” following with an emoji of agony and despair. The tone of insatiable desire in these comments reveal that acceptable food porn are dishes one wishes they were eating. This could explain the few “healthy” foods posted since it’s improbable

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someone would prefer eating salad over pizza, for example. Images depicting ideal “cheat day” foods are the goal for posts shared. It’s the dishes one looks forward to indulging and stimulates their senses the most. The indulgence of these foods, much like the indulgence of sex, creates the narrative of this subreddit and influences the amorous responses that define it.

Comments also reveal tongue in cheek humor that blurs the line between food and porn amongst its members. It’s fascinating to see how challah french toast can elicit responses like “this makes me really horny” from u/Tubby-Thor or replies like “raise your hand if you’re horny for french toast” from u/RedArrowRUS. This playful and humorous exchange shows that though reactions can come from genuine arousal, it’s likely meant in a campy way. Some users like Numptymoop, have even commented “Yeah why does food do this for me and not people, wtf.” Though this question was likely meant as a joke, it’s still valid.

In researching this community, one could genuinely be curious how porn and food could possibly be compared. The sexual tone draws from how synonymous food porn is to watching porn. The objective is to arouse desire making users wish they were eating the food displayed. Watching porn has similar objectives as it’s meant to make one desire sex and wish they were engaging in the intercourse presented. Imagery is an important factor to both as you can’t touch, feel, or taste the food or sex displayed. Despite this, other senses are somehow stimulated by looking at these visual artifacts. Although one circumstance is sexual and the other isn’t, the similarities have made them interchangeable to each other. This allows r/foodporn to inhabit comments like “omg I just legit licked my screen,” with drooling emojis. Though there’s reasonable doubt that this user actually licked their screen, this light-hearted wordplay demonstrates how the connection between porn and food is exaggerated for comedic purposes.

Members stray away from innuendos and instead use language to explicitly reference sexual elements. In this community it’s normal to come across comments like one from u/THEREALKEVINSANE that reads “I’m going to jack off now” in response to a hamburger. Unsurprisingly, this wasn’t the only example as user NoneHaveSufferedAsI replied “[enters the matrix and proceeds

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to masturbate] *jack in, jack off.*" It's one thing to note that food has similarities to porn, however, it escalates when it's shown to create sexual experiences all on their own. These comments also play into the campy tongue in cheek humor amongst this community much like the ones that use language to simulate sex. For example, below an image of lasagna u/nanobitcoin said "oh yes. Fuck yes!" mimicking the sound of moans. U/ExoSierra commented "that looks orgasmically delicious" showing how alike the sensation of eating delicious food is to the pleasure of having an orgasm. There were even visual comparisons made when u/disneyho noted, "this is quite literally dick shaped." The simulation of sexual experiences through food is a notable aspect of communication in this subreddit. Sexual terminology is the dictionary from which members find the words to describe their reactions creating an experience being part of a community with a language of their own.

This subreddit is home to several tones that arise from the unifying topic of food porn. Although the use of sexual terminology is unique to these members, aspects of their community can be applied in other areas. The analysis of various tones stemming from a singular topic is applicable on a larger scale. One may scroll through comments with a prudish tone and find them vulgar whereas another may find the campy humor endearing or comedic. The same goes for other topics unrelated to food porn; subjects will be interpreted differently by different people. Whether due to personality traits, social upbringing, economic status or moral righteousness can be determined by future inquiries but one observation remains important. R/foodporn, no matter how raunchy the members may seem, interpret the topic of food in tones that are distinct, but all related by sensual reference.

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Rhetorical Analysis of a Cultural Artifact

Cultural artifacts in the form of tantalizing images are the basis of the food porn subreddit. Members are primed to respond to the presentation of these artifacts because the meaning of food porn has largely to do with this provocative display. Responses are usually seen through racy reactions or stamps of approval. Others include expressions of agony, envy, and longing for the food displayed. These reactions also may serve as motivation and purpose for a member to continue posting their artifacts. Such an environment creates a space where members can confidently display their food often in exchange for praise, and as a result their artifact is circulated more. The exigence of quarantine also allows for more free time to create dishes, and therefore, these images circulate and earn badges. Members then continue this interaction in an effort to maintain the overall culture of r/foodporn.



Since pizza is the epitome of food porn, those artifacts tend to do well and be up to par with community values. In a zoomed image of their own pizza, u/jessdoit highlighted the perfectly thin crust with cheese and toppings that are browned to perfection. Looking at the crisp and doughy crust, one can almost imagine what it would be like to eat a slice. There is also tomato sauce that peeks through the melted cheese, pepperoni, jalapeños, sausage and lemon zest that was sprinkled evenly on top. There are also missing slices showing that because it looks so delicious, u/jessdoit probably couldn't wait to take a picture before grabbing a piece.

This entices hunger and envy in members seeing this artifact. The key to producing this effect is a clear and zoomed image that shows the different ingredients and elements of the dish, such as the toppings in this pizza. This image also received seven awards/badges, which proves how presentation must be up to par to receive similar accolades.

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The user's purpose was to receive praise which is only amplified by the caption that read it was freestyled and "almost all from scratch." It's rare one has the time or culinary skill to make pizza dough, combine the right ingredients, or even bake it at the right temperature to receive these results. It's also out of the ordinary to make a beautifully "freestyle" pizza as opposed to ordering out which adds value to the artifact itself. It creates a sense that the creation of this pizza was effortless, not straining or difficult. These images are targeted towards other members that can share, give their stamps of approval, ask for the recipe, or include their immediate reactions. R/foodporn reveals itself to be a space where interactions are defined by people displaying their food, showing off their skills and receiving praise on its presentation.

In addition, the influence its exigence had was revealed in a caption that read, "just made the best possible pizza while having yet another existential crisis." The creation of this artifact could've been a form of relief from circumstances this member is enduring. This could be due to quarantine and COVID affecting everyone's daily lives. There are several other posts from members who are also undergoing similar existential crises. Spending months confined in their homes have made many lives completely consumed by the pandemic. Taking up hobbies has served to be beneficial for many looking for escape from the harsh reality much of the world is dealing with. This could've been the case for this user and others that post their dishes and show pride in exhibiting them. Pizza is also somewhat synonymous to "eating your feelings" making it one of the most popular foods to order out, especially when in person dining is prohibited. As an easily accessible food, pizza isn't a dish people normally make or believe could be produced similarly to one from a restaurant. Since u/jessdoit likely created their version during quarantine as opposed to ordering out, it helps impress the larger audience and motivates the artifacts' circulation.



Though tarts don't epitomize food porn, they are well received due to beautiful presentation or high levels of ability. In a collage posted by u/GreenMedallion, the first image contains an artisanal tart with its most noticeable trait being

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a flawless lattice pattern. It's made with thin strips of dough cut in equal dimensions placed evenly and browned perfectly. Below the areas exposed by design,

there's also evenly browned dark chocolate filling. As the eyes finish gracing the intricateness above, they fall to the bottom left corner to a pie that was executed just as well. The image appears to be taken right before it was placed into the oven as the dough is uncooked. However, the main attraction was in the fruit's placement. It appears to be cut in slices that are placed resembling a rose blossoming from the middle. The center has pieces that are cut thinly and placed closer to resemble the bud. The outer edge, however, has increasingly bigger slices to resemble the bigger petals of a rose. Rightfully so, the image received the Star Struck award leaving members in awe of its execution. Presentation dominates the circulation of this subreddit because while one may not feel an uncontrollable urge to eat this, members are enticed by its difficulty. The execution is seen as unattainable to the average homecook demonstrating that r/foodporn also values the difficulty of the dishes displayed.

Envy and praise circulated around this artifact is centered around the culinary ability needed for execution rather than the taste itself. Though these tarts likely taste delicious, they are presented looking "too pretty to eat." The praise this user received comes from members appreciating and acknowledging their talents. The word "homemade" was used in the caption most likely to strike envy in members that wish they had the culinary ability to accomplish this themselves. On the contrary, a beginner may see the artifact and feel motivated to perfect the execution or even ask for the recipe. Due to precision in the lattice and rose-like placements, one could make the assumption that the creator is specialized in the field. It's clear that these tarts were not a first attempt and were likely made enough times to achieve guaranteed success. The technique demonstrated in this artifact is impressive to the everyday cook/baker at home. Amongst praise received, this user can be considered an expert that other members can trust with recipes and food tips, which may be another form of recognition they're seeking. In a community that is meant to celebrate the presentation of food, r/foodporn creates a space where artifacts are able to

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flourish for that and the skill required.

Quarantine allows for time to perfect a culinary ability that members can show off to the subreddit. Depending on experience or secondary research done, one can be evaluated as a beginner, intermediate or advanced. With the time afforded to use hobbies as a relief, one can really spend time to adopt the craft and dedicate themselves to perfecting it. This could include watching cooking shows or following recipes that will get them to the same skill level as u/GreenMedallion. In posting this image, the user appears to be advanced as their dish looks to be made by a pastry chef rather than a beginner. This likely served as motivation for a “beginner” member to seek secondary research and begin baking for their own relief. Unless one is a cooking prodigy, it would be difficult to obtain perfectly executed results like this on the first try. U/GreenMedallion may also have been a beginner who in quarantine was able to reach an advanced level by attempting the dish repetitively which resulted in the perfection displayed.

Members post their artifacts with the intended purpose of it circulating well within the community. A common thread that exists in these two examples is the search for forms of recognition and praise from others. Whether that be a stamp of approval or remarks of longing for the food displayed, these comments serve to validate these users and make their effort worthwhile. This very motivation could be needed encouragement for a member to continue cooking and finding their own relief during this time. However, this behavior isn't just centered in r/foodporn, but in many areas of our lives. We all, even without meaning to, look for the validation of others to justify ourselves. Approval can bring a smile to one's face and make them feel validated in a way that is needed. Especially in our current circumstance as we are sequestered from one another, it is these stamps of approval that can help spread positivity in online spaces. Though COVID may have hindered our lives, it allows members the time to uncap their culinary potential in a community-based environment. It is through these online interactions, that they can begin to feel some sense of social normalcy during straining times.

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Virtual Ethnography

Introduction

The food porn community on Reddit is infamous for sharing erotic reactions to images of decadent dishes. These cheat day foods are presented in a provocative display that trigger the vulgar reactions from members who see them. These sexual comments have become synonymous to this subreddit and define this community 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 also appear 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 reactions. This reveals that apart from this concentrated community on Reddit, the concept of sex is influenced by stigmas in place that restrain the minority from freely expressing themselves. For the heterosexual man, online spaces allow their sexual expression to be made freely whereas other stigmatized groups like women or homosexual individuals are made to feel timid when speaking on the subject.

Methods

Finding examples of users using provocative language wasn't difficult in the non-participant observation conducted. The association between sexual terminology and reactions to food is the most prominent pattern amongst this community. Under every post, one is bound to see multiple references that include this kind of language. However, in finding the most outlandish comments one would have to look under the beloved unhealthy comfort foods. For example, images of pizza, desserts, hamburgers, etc, will produce the comments that are most notably associated with this subreddit. Since food porn is ingrained in our culture, we all have our own idea of the concept, and it is likely that the food that

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first comes to mind is the same dish others would recognize as well. Looking below these images, the explicit comments are sprinkled heavily throughout the entire thread, so it was about picking the ones that best represent the community. Scrolling through the images displayed most provocatively made the process easier, specifically when determining which dish is most synonymous with food porn.

Observations

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 in which cluelesswench commented, "I would fuck this" and received 390 points. This comment serves as a general example and doesn't attach itself to a specific gender. Both a man or woman could comment this freely without others being able to guess their gender. For 23 points, a6245912 commented, "that's what good pussy sounds like." This comment seems to be from a male member as these responses most naturally associate 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 men 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 daobear, for example. This comment is one of the few that seem to have been by a woman due to the fact that moaning is more associated with the female response to arousal. For observers of this space, it quickly became clear that different forms of sexual expression occupied most of the online platform.

Analysis

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Provocative language was evident in the majority of user comments, which showed the difference between how genders communicate. Men tended to push the boundaries and the most explicit comments were likely made by them. The females, however, made more generalized comments, if they even chose to comment at all. Looking through them, one can see that most come from seemingly heterosexual male members who reference a form of masturbation or arousal in various posts. However, it is difficult 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. This might make one wonder 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 stigmas that have carried themselves to our online spaces and have thus influenced the behavioral dynamic of the members of this subreddit.

Results

Sexual minorities face barriers that cause them to feel suppressed and silenced when expressing themselves in online spaces. 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 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 can make it quite impossible for those with different sexual orientations to truly feel comfortable sexually expressing themselves 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 can follow. In the food porn subreddit, most of the comments seem to be made by heterosexual individuals but there are no defining comments that could be interpreted to represent a

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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 the transfer of societal stigmas to online spaces, homosexuality is still condemned causing these users to hide behind the comments in order to escape a negative response. Though miscellanea 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 sexual orientation, they do not have to restrict their sexual expressions in fear of the response.

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 in online spaces it is easier for women to express themselves sexually in the form of images rather than comments “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 female’s sexual expression differ from each other in that women have been accustomed to express it visually whereas 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 in this community. Centuries of women getting objectified for their bodies and having their sexuality be a visual aspect make it difficult for them to sexually express themselves in rhetoric forms. One can then conclude that it is a natural pattern that more men will comment wanting to “jerk off” and that more of those behaviors will be 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.

The male form of masturbation is a popular reference amongst the explicit comments of this subreddit, whereas the women form is rarely spoken of. In an article called “Why Don’t We Talk About Female Masturbation,” Daniella Fleicher poses that same question and provides her analysis as to why that is. She begins

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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 why in r/foodporn female masturbation isn’t referenced at all compared to males. If a woman member wants to express herself sexually in reaction to a 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 no attention was devoted to do the same for women signifies how there is a lack of conversation about it and thus a lack of comments on it as well.

The lack of communication about female masturbation that exists within society then translates to our online spaces where there is a lack of comments on the subject. Fleischer writes that she doesn’t think “anyone can deny that there is an ease to which we allow men to own their 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 stigma that make it difficult for females to express themselves confidently 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 in other platforms it may carry on and translate to the behaviors they have in this community as well. That is why even in this online space, they can feel the same effects of that which then turns into a lack of female presence in the comment section of r/foodporn.

Discussion

The food porn subreddit, though it may be different in its values, reflects the same societal structures and stigmas as every other space on the internet.

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We have tried to silence and stifle the sexual expression of homosexuals and women who have to worry about the response they will elicit. In doing that we have allowed for the heterosexual male to feel confident in his expression and dominate the space. The analysis of these topics is required in order to provoke change 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 create opportunities for others to do the same. We must normalize the sexual expression of these minorities just like it has been for the heterosexual male. This topic deserves more inquiry in order to help rectify the issue. Other points that can be further researched are 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 the minority as well.

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Letter of Reflection

Though this semester had its challenges I'm both confident and proud of the pieces of writing I have submitted for my last portfolio. This semester has been one of learning and growth and I can honestly say my writing has improved immensely. In high school I wasn't accustomed to review/editing, assignments were turned in when the first phase of writing was finished. Teachers would say editing is important, but when most regents and AP exams consist of you writing an essay on a time limit, it was hard to put that advice into practice. However, had that been the case here my essays would have looked tremendously different. I have made several conferences, both with the professor and the writing center and with those experiences I know that there was room for improvement. There were instances where I would go into these conferences and believe that the job was done and that no further edits would be made. Looking back I feel ridiculous to have thought that and I found myself taking days to edit each essay in this final phase.

At first it was difficult to fully understand the parameters of the assignments because they were so vastly different from what I was used to. There were many times I thought I knew what I was doing only to realize that my train of thought was going to a completely different direction. In those instances, I thank the professor for not only meeting with me but also responding to my frequent questions through Slack. It helped me get my thoughts on track when I felt them slipping. An example would be for my controlling claim for Ethnography, originally, I created a claim that was repetitive and reiterated my last essays. However, in my conferences I was pushed towards another direction that led me to the paper I'm most proud of.

I also learned the art of conciseness. Much of the work done in my final drafts consisted of me cutting at least 600 words from each of my essays. I'm a wordy writer and in high school I was trained to write as much as I could. The more pages and unnecessary material included the higher the grade I would receive, and it took me time to realize college is different. However, in cutting my writing I realized that most of it was me trying to fill the page until I felt secure. I felt uncomfortable writing anything less than five pages and the editing process for phase three taught me a lot. It showed that though being a wordy writer is

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beneficial for the drafting process, I should expect to cut out a good percentage of that for final work. These realizations I've had were due to help from the professor because the grading system implemented pushed me to make improvements and get adjusted to college writing. I thank her and the editors at the writing center because my final results wouldn't have been possible without them.