

Making Food Decisions in Obseogenic Environments: Understanding Views on Eating and Health in the Fast-Food Worker Population

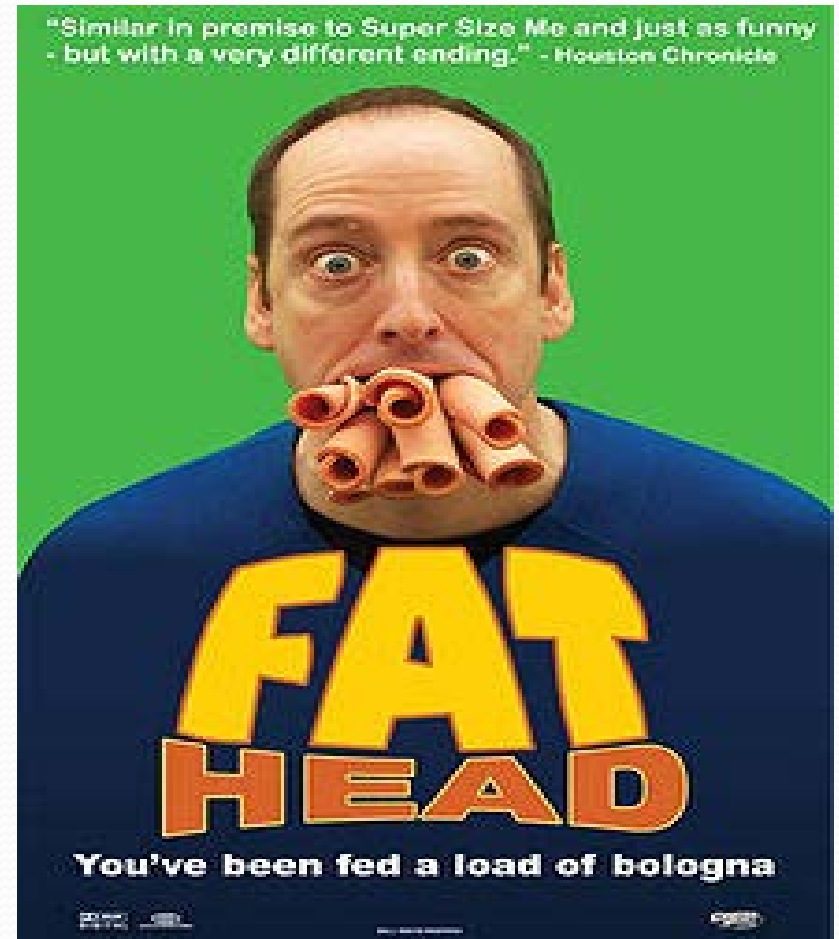
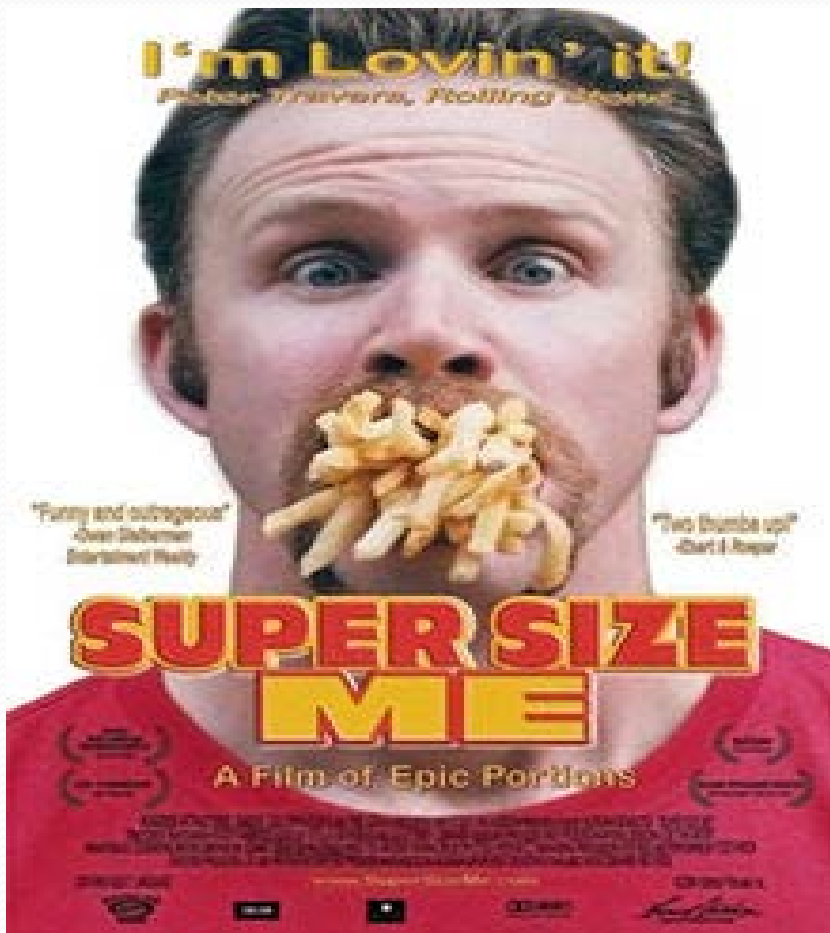
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Background

- Presentation draws on partial findings from my dissertation
- Question: Is fast-food and restaurant food making us fat?



Fast-Food in the Media



Morgan Spurlock vs. Tom Naughton
Role of agency in each film

Can it really be this simple?

- Fast food makes us fat
 - Politics
 - Obesity epidemic: fat as bad
 - Economic factors
 - What we medically know about weight gain
- So why does this view prevail?
- What would this logic say about fast food workers?

Fast-food & Academic Literature

- Socio-geographic literature
 - Living in and working/studying near fast-food is correlated with increased BMI (Davis and Carpenter, 2009, Delormier, 2009)
 - Working close vs. working in
- Social determinants of health literature
 - Social conditions lead to increased risk of negative health outcomes (Link and Phelan, 1995)
 - Social conditions experienced by food service workers
- New advances: low SES does not put people at risk for increased BMI (Zhang and Wang, 2012)

Viewing this Sociologically

Structure

- Social patterning

Agency

- Ability to act
- Decision making ability

Pierre Bourdieu:

- Habitus, taste, culture
- Field
- Power and the ability to act
- Symbolic Violence

Research

- Mixed methods approach
- Logistic modeling using Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) cycle 5.1
- Qualitative interviews with 15 fast-food workers in Southern Ontario
- Reflexivity in social research

Results

- The food service worker population is LESS likely to be overweight or obese (BMI), or to perceive themselves as being overweight or obese, than the general Canadian population
- Null Contributions: Younger age, smoking rates, avoidance of food, gender (BMI only)
- Risk Contributions: Food insecurity, full-time work status, non-single, middle aged
- Insignificant: Income
- What about social class background & habitus formation?
Bourdieu

Role of Gender

- Female fast food workers are less likely to have high BMIs
- Female fast food workers are more likely to self-report as being overweight or obese
- Role of symbolic violence
- Elements of self-regulation

Qualitative Findings: Explaining the Why

- Background contributing to BMI:
 - Case of young involvement in fast-food work
 - Marginalization and growing up on reserve
 - Lower class backgrounds and being raised on social assistance
 - Higher class backgrounds and varied understandings of food
 - Food-type consumption in childhood
 - Temporary view of work: the protective habitus
 - Smoking and field position
- Habitus formation & field position

Participant Characteristics

	Workplace	Tenure	Hours/Week	Sex	Age	BMI	Smoke	Childhood Class	Current Class	Current Living Situation	Self-View of Weight
1	Harvey's	4.5 Years	36	F	21	23.0	Quit	Middle	Upper	Mom, Step-Dad	Average
2	McDonald's	8 Months	30	M	25	30.7	Yes	Working	Working	Roommate	Overweight
3	William's	1 Week	40	F	23	19.1	No	Middle	Working	Roommates	Average
4	Harvey's	6 Months	30-35	F	22	25.1	No	Working	Working	Mom	Slightly Above
5	Subway	2 Years	35-45	F	20	21.1	Yes	Middle	Middle or Student	Roommates Parents at home	Average
6	Burger King	3 Years	40	M	18	25.4	Yes	Middle	Middle	Mom, Step-Dad	Slightly Above
7	Tim Horton's	2 Years	40	F	22	25.7	No	Middle	Middle	Boyfriend	Average
8	Burger King	3.5 Years	40	F	23	39.7	Yes	Working	Working	Partner, 7mth old twin sons	Over Average
9	McDonald's	2 Years	15	F	19	41.0	No	Working	Working	Mom, Dad, Brother	Above
10	McDonald's	3.5 Years with breaks for school	17-40	M	19	27.9	No	Middle	Working	Roommates Parents, sister at home	Slightly Above
11	Burger King	2 Years	8-26	M	18	19.9	Yes	Middle	Working	Brother, 2 sisters, Mom, Dad	Underweight
12	Burger King	3 Years	20-25	M	19	23.1	Quit	Middle	Working	Brother	Average
13	Tim Horton's	6 Years	10-30	M	21	21	No	Middle	Upper	Mom, Dad, Sister	Underweight
14	McDonald's	1 Year	30	F	19	26.6	No	Middle	Middle	Dad, Brother	Average
15	Tim Horton's	6 Months	16	M	21	18.3	No	Middle	"Student class"	Roommates	Underweight

Dominant Views on Weight

- Yeah. Basically this new manager at my work came – he told me about this sort of – supplement. I just ordered it – I got it yesterday – I have yet to open it – but that will happen very soon.
- But yeah – I was checking into some stuff – there was like a meal plan– my manager at McDonald's, he's on it right now and he was telling me about it. It's like a 90 day thing and you get these shakes and stuff that you make...but I always figured it would be good for me because I don't always get the chance to eat.

Consuming Food

- Uh – if I ate too much of it, definitely. And like – it wasn't the “getting sick of it”, it was the knowing that I'd eaten it every day. I got addicted to it basically, honestly. I want it all the time now I can't get it for free.
- Views of food being unhealthy
- Different ideas of healthy food: muffins vs. burgers

Cost of Food

- Cost, cost makes a difference. Yeah, oh yeah, I use the discount. For sure – every dollar helps. And – I guess I try to look for stuff that is not going to make me sick. Not a lot of things do but I will eat something and then I eat more and then I have a coffee with it and then I have a smoke – it does not sit quite well.
- To me really it's just – like now anyways it's just – it's not that I eat it because I like it. I just eat because I'm so busy. I don't know if you would call it like easy. I see I eat a lot of McDonald's, but I don't like it. But it's so easy and I have a little bit of money, and it's so cheap and I get 50% off so it's just like – I don't know.

Time Considerations

- Um – but during my work shifts, usually I would eat McDonald's – just because there really was not a lot of options. Occasionally, like very rarely, I would bring something. There was a Subway across the street – so obviously that was a healthy option. I would sometimes eat there, or get someone to go over there, or go over there depending if I had any time. Or occasionally I would bring food from home – but because it was 8 hours I would usually end up eating McDonald's at least once.

Workplace Conditions

- The two major concerns [at work] are speed of service and what was the other one? Speed of service, and oh, labour. Speed of service versus labour. So, they wanted your entire transaction to be under 2 minutes from the time the customer pulled up to the speaker to the time they left. Well, 2 minutes 30 seconds was head office standard, but here at the time it was 2 minutes for our restaurant, yeah. They wanted labour as low as low can be, so they wanted it under, I can't remember the percent they wanted it, they wanted 2% was the target, the goal, of sales. But I think it was never anywhere near there. I don't really, I can't remember the percentages, the lower the better. So yeah, they would constantly want you sending people home if it was dead. And, but you can't really do that because it's an unpredictable market. It's an unpredictable business. Like, some days you can walk in thinking, yeah it's going to be dead today or we're going to have like 5 customers until lunch. Next thing you know, you have a bus pulling up in the middle of the summer and like, you and one other person in the kitchen, and then all of a sudden, you have 300 people in the lobby and then you're like, oh my god.

Views on Work

- Oh yeah – I definitely don't want to be in fast food anymore – so I'm working extra hard in school. It's just like a nightmare getting away from it...[I want to be] working for a company hopefully in my field. I don't know specific job titles or descriptions yet – but definitely what I'm doing [in school] now.
- Major form of shared habitus
 - Prevailing similarity
 - Temporary/protective habitus

Symbolic Violence & Self-Regulation

- Reasons for consuming food vs. reasons for avoidance
- Symbolic violence: Dominant ideology, those with power in social fields perpetuating ideals and social norms
- Self-regulation of food consumed at work
- Regulation often in line with popular views perpetuated in the obesity epidemic media (muffins vs. hamburgers)

Back to the CCHS 5.1

- Lack of specific occupational categories
- Relative youth of food service workers
 - Aging and weight gain
- Familial support, students, part-time
 - Full-time work and weight gain
 - Assumptions associated with food service work
 - “Looking for a job to do while your children are at school?”
 - “Need a job that you can fit around your school schedule?”

Conclusions

- Null finding: new questions emerging
- Elements of agency, but often constrained by habitus and lived experiences
- Field position influencing food choice
- Agency constricted by habitus
- Protective habitus

Important Future Questions

- Can we hypothesize that as workers age in this field they become more at risk?
 - What implications does this have?
 - Retirement to work
- How can we further investigate the role of the temporary protective habitus?
 - Shared commonalities

Questions & Comments

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