

**'Real men don't diet': an analysis of contemporary
newspaper representations of men, food and health**

ABSTRACT

Little research to date focused on the meanings men attach to food and the relationship between diet and health. This is an important topic in light of the current 'crisis' in men's health and the role of lifestyle factors such as diet in illness prevention. Since the mass media is a powerful source of information about health matters generally, media representations bear critical examination. The present paper then reports on an in-depth qualitative analysis of contemporary UK newspaper articles on the topic of men and diet (N=44). The findings indicate a persistent adherence to hegemonic masculinities predicated on health-defeating diets, special occasion cooking of hearty meals, and a general distancing from the feminised realm of dieting. At the same time, men are also constructed as naïve and vulnerable when it comes to diet and health, while women are viewed as experts. The implications for health promotion with men are discussed.

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Introduction

The topic of men and diet is an important one to investigate since a healthy diet is widely accepted as protecting against major illnesses (e.g. Wong & Lam, 1999) and since men are now regarded as a group vulnerable to heart disease and cancer (Courtenay, 2002) who on the whole are not given to healthy eating (Department of Health, 2003). As well, media representations about health are now ubiquitous and increasingly regarded as influential (Seale, 2002). The present paper draws on an analysis of media representations of men and diet, arguing that men are positioned outside this 'feminised' sphere, whether they are constructed as 'diet-poor' or 'diet-aware'.

Food-related activities, such as shopping, cooking and eating are conventionally presented as female-centred (see Warde & Hetherington, 1994; Caplan, Keane, Willetts & Williams, 1998). Given women's traditional role in purchasing, preparing and providing food, it comes as no surprise that men know less about the health benefits of particular foodstuffs (Nutrition Forum, UK, 2003) or that

men report eating more high-calorie items and less fruit and vegetables than women (Barker & Wardle, 2003). Because food and health generally have been associated with femininity, hegemonic masculinities, defined by disinterest in the ailing body, tend to rely on women for advice and support when required (see Courtenay, 2000; Blaxter, 1990).

The term hegemonic masculinity is associated with the work of Connell and colleagues (e.g. Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and has become influential in the study of men's health issues (e.g. Connell, 2001; Courtenay, 2000; Gough, in press). Briefly, the concept refers to dominant constructions of masculinity which influence men's identities and practices, including health practices. For example, in most Western cultures men are assumed to be emotionally and physically strong, independent and prone to risk-taking (e.g. Seidler, 1989). Such attributes have been associated with unhealthy practices. For example, men are less likely to admit to pain or seek medical advice compared to women, which leads to delays in receiving treatment and often serious health consequences such as advanced cancer or heart disease (e.g. Kapur, Lunt, McBeth, Creed & MacFarlane, 2004). While only few men such as celebrated sportsmen or musicians can ever

(if at all) attain hegemonic status, all men are 'complicit' in supporting hegemonic ideals through their practices, whether it be weight training, promiscuity or high alcohol consumption. Connell's analysis also explains that hegemonic masculinity is maintained via practices which oppress women (e.g. domestic violence) and other, 'subordinated' and 'marginalised' men (e.g. homophobic abuse). Such practices clearly impact on the health of men, and women.

Concerning men's diets, there are very few dedicated studies which explore men's constructions of food and health in gendered terms i.e. with respect to the relationship between masculinities, food and health (but see Jensen & Holm, 1999; Roos, Prattala, & Koski, 2001; de Souza & Ciclitira, 2005). In particular, I have been unable to identify dedicated research examining how men from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds construe diet and health. While there is an abundant anthropological literature on the meanings of food cross-culturally (see Counihan & Van Esterik, 1997), the health properties attached to food specifically by men have not been studied in depth.

At the same time, some commonalities may pertain across subgroups of men. For example, Courtenay, McCreary & Merighi (2002) found that men from a range of race/ethnic backgrounds - with the exception of Hispanic men - had significantly poorer dieting practices than women, although there were some differences between subgroups of men. These authors cite only one other study of race/ethnicity and diet, so there is a clear need for further research in this area. In another study by Gough & Conner (2006), it was noted that male interviewees, regardless of social class background, tended to regard healthy eating with suspicion, linking it to government and media-sponsored agendas. These men also constructed healthy food as insubstantial, reinforcing the 'masculine' orientation towards large portions and plenitude. Arguably, there is a material basis for men's purportedly greater appetites, since men on average tend to have larger frames than women. As well, the conventional positioning of men within manual labour and sporting contexts emphasises the male body as a machine, designed to perform and in need of appropriate fuel. However, there is also great variation between men in terms of physical stature and in terms of participation in active sport and manual labour. Conversely, many women are larger than many men and women are increasingly entering

previously male-dominated domains such as competitive sport (Krane, 2001). Nonetheless, gendered discourses around diet continue to police women's appetites such that only modest consumption is allowed, in pursuit of the thin ideal (Bordo, 1993). For men, meat-based diets and bulk items remain privileged within discussions of food, particularly with reference to fitness rather than health (see Labre, 2005).

Mass media representations offer a great opportunity to investigate contemporary portrayals of diet-related phenomena. While feminist researchers have produced groundbreaking analyses of women and diet across a range of media texts (e.g. Bordo, 1993), to date there has been a dearth of parallel research on men and diet. As well as dedicated research with different groups of men, analyses of media representations can help illuminate current understandings of men and diet.

Media research on a range of topics provides a repertoire of concepts that may be useful in the context of media representations of men and health. For example, the predominance of medico-scientific discourse and reliance on 'experts' in media reports of health and illness is well

documented (see Gwyn, 2002). More specifically, the doctor-expert is often portrayed heroically, engaged in a battle against a deadly enemy (the use of war metaphors to depict the 'fight' against disease and death is also well established - Sontag, 1991). Another media tendency is to dramatize and simplify health stories, often from a medical perspective, but sometimes privileging a moral stance, for example in constructing passive smoking as a social problem (e.g. Malone, Boyd & Bero, 2000). In setting up accounts of health and illness, media reports often draw upon representations from other genres such as television and cinema, for example when health scares are conceptualised in science fiction terms (alien invasion etc., see Gwyn, 2002). This 'intertextuality' is also resonant in the work of Kitzinger (2002) on media 'templates', which illustrates the routine citation of previous, iconic, stories in order to frame our understanding of the current story - a journalistic practice which invariably suppress alternative readings of the story. In a similar vein, it can be argued that there is a media tendency to invoke stereotypical images and ideals concerning gender.

In the arena of men's health, there have been a few studies looking at media constructions of men's health in general

which demonstrate a reliance on narrowly defined hegemonic images of masculinity. For example, analyses of Men's Health magazine have identified dominant themes such as the pervasive invitation to 'burn fat, build muscle' (Labre, 2005) and much lauded activities such as meat-eating, beer drinking and womanizing (Stibbe, 2004). Analyses of newspaper representations in the UK also demonstrate the continued appeal of hegemonic masculinities. For example, a discourse analytic study by Lyons & Willott (1999) considered representations of men's health by a UK newspaper, this time the Mail on Sunday, in their supplement entitled: 'A woman's guide to men's health'. Clearly, as the authors go on to argue, women are constructed as knowledgeable and responsible for men's health, while men are presented as passive and helpless, and in need of women's protection. They argue that predominant discourse patterns located in the texts work to uphold conventional gender relations which position women as nurturers and men as naïve infants. Similar findings are reported by Gough (in press), based on his analysis of a special issue of another UK Sunday newspaper (The Observer) on Men's Health. Several inter-related discursive patterns were identified which drew upon essentialist notions of masculinity, unquestioned differences between men and

women, and constructions of men as naïve, passive and in need of dedicated help (see also Coyle & Sykes, 1998).

Given the current status of food in popular culture as evidenced by the high number of successful cooking programmes ('gastro-porn' - see Chamberlain, 2004), it is feasible that shopping, cooking and enjoying a greater range of foods have been absorbed into current definitions of masculinity. As well, how men negotiate their identities within the feminised realm of body- and image-consciousness (see Gill et al., 2005), has yet to be studied in-depth in relation to diet and health effects. The present paper then considers the dominant representations of men, masculinity and diet to be found in recent (2005-06) UK newspapers.

Method

A database of UK national newspapers (newsbank.com) was searched for articles pertaining to men and diet during one year (Jan 2005-06). Hundreds of hits were generated using keyword combinations such as MEN-DIET, MEN-FOOD, MEN-EATING and sifted through for relevance. A great many did not relate directly to the topic of men and diet, for example articles featuring recipes, diets aimed at women,

restaurant reviews and interviews with celebrity chefs. With few exceptions, such features did not explicitly discuss men's views on food, health properties or otherwise, or men's eating practices. I did not disbar whole categories of feature from analysis however. For example, I included two recipe items featuring celebrity chefs which framed the meal in masculinised terms (in one piece, Gordon Ramsay refers to game as 'man's food', while in another Heston Blumenthal's production of madeleines for his wife is construed as a romantic, 'Casanova' ploy). Inevitably, as with all qualitative analyses of media materials, there are borderline cases to be considered for the final sample of features, where one has to make an informed decision about inclusion and exclusion. I am confident that I have selected only those features which overtly appropriate gendered constructions pertaining to men, diet and health. I can imagine other legitimate analyses, however, which, say, take a genre such as restaurant reviews and focus on how food is gendered, perhaps in very subtle ways, within that specific context. For the present study, following much painstaking filtering, a total of 44 features were considered relevant to the topic in question i.e. made claims about the way men

supposedly eat, cook or perceive food. I have classified these features as follows:

Topics	Number of articles
Men's diet and related health problems [cancer, heart disease, sexual dysfunction, obesity]	25
Men and cooking	8
Men and dietary change	8
Men, food and drink	2
Men and shopping	1

Articles varied greatly in length, from 26 to 1290 words with a mean of 410, and a total of 17,600 words. Both tabloid and broadsheet publications were covered, including Sunday editions.

Analysing the data

To examine the data in detail, I used concepts from Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and discourse analysis (e.g. Willig, 2000). The main aim was to

interrogate the representations of men and diet provided by the media texts. My suspicion was that understandings of men and diet would be structured by hegemonic concepts of masculinity (e.g. men like meat) and an association between men's diet and ill-health. In spite of this starting point, I made a concerted effort to remain open to unexpected themes and constantly refined and validated any emerging insights by considering any counter examples ('negative case analysis'). Initially, then, I went about analyzing the entire dataset, rather than selectively focus on material which confirmed my expectations. In practice, this translated as detailed, systematic, line-by-line coding to begin with, a 'bottom-up' mode of analysis grounded in the data - akin to grounded theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process generated myriad themes, which were periodically allocated to theme clusters, which in turn were continually contrasted and refined (the 'constant comparison' process). In addition, I attended to pertinent discursive strategies used within the data, so there was a dual focus on content (what is being presented?) and process (how is it being presented?).

Discourse analysis is increasingly being used to study health-related phenomena (see Willig, 2000) and is

particularly relevant for the study of media texts (see Day et al., 2004). For this analysis, I adopted an eclectic approach to discourse analysis, incorporating a focus on discursive practices (how discourse is used to perform specific functions within a text) and discursive resources (how texts are informed by wider cultural norms) (see Wetherell, 1998). In other words, I wanted to identify broad discourses of masculinity and nutrition presented within the texts while also considering the ways in which such discourses were promoted (and resisted) and brought off specific effects. For example, the discourse 'the male diet is bad for health' can be analysed with respect to the purported content of masculinity (e.g. sport- rather than diet-centred) and the ways in which 'unhealthy masculinity' is reinforced (e.g. by constructing *all* men as 'nutrition-poor').

Analysis

As can be seen from the grouping of articles above, the majority (25 of 44) of features concerned warnings about men's health resulting from dietary habits deemed to be 'male', such as eating too much red meat and too little fruit and vegetables. Conversely, other (fewer: 14 of 44) articles deal with the supposed rise of 'metrosexual' man,

a (middle-class) heterosexual male who partakes in traditionally feminine activities including new diets and cooking. Both sets of articles are analysed below and despite the ostensible contrasting masculinities assumed ('diet-poor' in the former set and 'diet-conscious' in the second), it is argued that the realm of diet as feminine is reinforced and that when men enter this realm they do so in 'masculine' ways. So, men whose diet is poor are presented as unlikely to change, while those men who have made changes have done so only superficially. As a consequence, hegemonic masculinities are reinforced by the media and the prognosis for changing men's dietary habits remains poor.

Warning! Male diet kills.

Within all articles that linked diet to health, male eating habits were implicated in the onset of serious illnesses, especially cancer but also heart problems, obesity and sexual dysfunction. What is striking is that all or most men are deemed to pursue health-defeating diets, regardless of class, caste, creed (though working-class men are often insinuated), or indeed lifestyle - and by implication all women are deemed to be more in touch with the health consequences of diet. The clear message is that men should change their ways in order to protect and enhance their

health. Ironically, however, calls for men to change are undermined by the prevailing notion that men's diets are somehow fixed and that men are constitutionally incapable of change. Moreover, often in these articles men are infantilised as naïve or deluded and in need of assistance from health professionals and women.

Invariably, when stories about men and food appear in the newspapers, reference is made to the supposedly restricted and unhealthy nature of the 'male' diet. This message is most vividly illustrated when associations with death and disease are invoked, especially when extreme cases are cited:

'a man of 20 who refused to eat anything but chips, buttered toast and baked beans has died of malnutrition' (Daily Mail, Man killed by diet of chips, toast and beans, 17/01/06)

MAN-MOUNTAIN Barry Austin was told he would die within five years if he didn't slash his calorie intake by 95 per cent. (The Express, Diet or die plea to beefy Barry, 23/09/05)

The relative youth of the man in the first case is highlighted as significant, as if problems associated with diet are normally expected of older age groups. The second example uses bare numbers ('die within 5 years') and dramatic language ('slash his calorie intake') to create a sense of urgency. Whether it is a radically uniform diet or

a penchant for large quantities of food, the message is that men run the risk of contracting life-threatening illnesses.

While the first two cases above concern men living in economically deprived areas, poor dietary habits and associated health issues are also extended to wealthier men:

'Britain is increasingly addicted to supermarket ready meals... having a grave effect on the nation's health. [] The main buyers are young urban professional men who choose them for convenience. Most do not look at the labeling, even though the meals are often high in saturated fat, salt and sugar'

(The Observer, Britain is hooked on ready meals, 09/10/05)

In this extract, the group of men cited are presented as having little time (their careers are demanding?) or desire (they do not deign to consult food labels) for healthy eating. Another extreme case cited concerns a review of the journalist William Leith's book about his 'losing battle against his raging appetite' (The Guardian, Fat boy grim, 15/10/05). The focus of the book and the review is very much on excess, underlining the association between men and heavy consumption (whereas with women the traditional relationship to food concerns self-denial). While the reviewer praises the candour and originality of the account - 'bizarre' habits such as eating stationery are described

- there is little sympathy for Leith's situation: 'there is a disaffecting dollop of complacency at the heart of the book... which less metropolitan readers may struggle to find much sympathy for'. There is also a critique of men in general confessing their inadequacies, satirised as follows: 'heaven knows what floodgates it is likely to open

- books about the trauma of going bald, drinking too much beer, maintaining the perfect abdomen? It could be that fatuousness is no longer a feminist issue.' This is an interesting statement which uses irony ('trauma') and a 3-part list (bald, beer, abdomen - see Jefferson, 1990) to trivialize potential male concerns and then construct the confessional as a feminine ('feminist') genre which is perhaps not appropriate for (privileged) men.

As well as general concerns about men's poor diet, many articles deployed bold warnings about specific diet-related diseases, notably cancers. Some features merely mentioned 'the facts':

MEN with high cholesterol are more likely to get prostate cancer, scientists said yesterday.
Just more than 30,000 men are diagnosed each year in the UK. About a third die from the disease.
(Daily Mirror, Fat in link to cancer, 18/03/05)

This short article features fact construction through the use of experts ('scientists') and statistics to emphasise

the urgency of the message, both time-honoured journalistic strategies (see Gwyn, 2002; Potter, 1996). Explanations for men's vulnerability to such cancers, and exhortations for men to change their lifestyle, tended to stress the importance of diet:

Fellas urged to take action on killer flab.
Cancer rates among Irish men could be slashed with simple changes in diet.
...over 60% of Irish blokes say they couldn't care less about their weight
Irish Cancer Society boss John McCormack said: 'We're not asking men to go on extreme diets or become athletes overnight. It can be as simple as making small changes in what you eat and putting a bit more energy into everyday activities.'
(The Sun, Cancer risk of bulging bellies, 08/11/05)

As well as the use of expert discourse and statistics, this report locates a cause of cancer with men's putative disinterest in their body shape and implicit ignorance about healthy nutrition. However, note the sensitivity with which health advice is dispensed: only 'simple', 'small' and 'everyday' dietary changes are mooted (not 'extreme diets'), as if men are incapable of major transformations and/or are unwilling to compromise their traditional diets. Here, masculinity is defined - and upheld - as indolent, unhealthy and diet-averse.

Specifically, men's diets are presented as high-fat and lacking in fruit and vegetables:

President of the European Men's Health Forum Dr Ian Banks warned men to take more notice of their diet:
"Eating lots of fruit and vegetables and choosing mainly wholegrain cereals and breads and avoiding excess fats and oils will help weight control and may reduce risk"
(Daily Mirror, FATTIES TELLING PORKIES, 08/11/05)

So, many men are damned as deficient in terms of nutritional practice, a situation which they are called upon to rectify urgently in light of cancer risks.

The traditional link between men and red meat (see Roos et al, 2001) is also underlined:

'A healthy diet is important, even for men in their 20s and 30s," says Georgia Diebel. Meat lovers beware - vegetarians are 30 per cent less likely to get the cancer than carnivores.
(Daily Mirror, HOW TO BEAT THE biggest man killers, 23/11/05)

The incorporation of younger men into the field of healthy eating ('even...') serves to reinforce their routine exclusion from the world of nutrition. Mention of men is then immediately followed by reference to meat lovers, therein creating an image of male carnivores and by extension a group vulnerable to cancer. The construction of men as unhealthy eaters is further crystallized by sex difference discourse:

IRISH women are eating more healthily than men - and that's official.

A cancer survey of the UK and Ireland published yesterday shows Ireland has a higher rate of deaths from prostate and bowel cancers than in the UK and it is rising. Dr Harry Comber, director of the national cancer registry, warned Irishmen will have to change their diet and follow a healthier lifestyle.

(Daily Mirror, Male diet in cancer warning, 06/07/05)

Of course, the positioning of women as diet-conscious is well established (e.g. Blaxter, 1990). A sense of crisis is created by the citation of death and deterioration, and the language of necessity ('Irishmen will have to change...').

The reference to mortality is a common ploy in media 'scare' stories, dramatically constructing a life and death scenario that will impact on readers (see Gwyn, 2002).

Again, the power of medical science to render a situation 'official' is demonstrated, as the story is linked to a survey and reinforced by expert opinion.

Further, men are positioned as deluded about their body size, diet and vulnerability to disease:

'while obesity in women has doubled in 20 years, it has tripled in men. But men seem to be less troubled about the issue than women. Many are in denial about being obese. While 60% of women are said to be on a diet at any one time, nearly 90% of overweight men say they would not go to a slimming club. More than half say they would not consult their family doctor.

"There is no simple answer to this problem but our culture, eating fast food and paying no attention to the calorie intake, plays a part." Dr Banks said it was pointless to target men in the same way as women. He has written the HGV Man Manual to provide a 'gender-sensitive' way to inform

men about their weight and health.

"Around half of men who actually are overweight consider themselves to be normal weight (the reverse is true for women). Likewise overweight men are much more likely than overweight women to consider themselves physically attractive."

(The Daily Telegraph: Obesity epidemic will spread..., 13/06/2005)

Here, male 'culture' is to blame for the development of obesity, a culture predicated on junk food diets, lack of self-control, self-serving assessments of body size and a reluctance to seek help. This 'masculine' approach is contrasted with that of women such that (all) men are deemed to require dedicated targeting. These constructions of gender difference assume a homogeneous body of (unhealthy) men and obscure variation in eating habits and attitudes between men.

Overall, scare stories about men's diet and putative health consequences, despite urging men to change their habits, simultaneously reproduce a host of assumptions about men's diet which amount to an intrinsically health-defeating masculinity. Specifically, men are positioned as ignorant about nutrition and disinterested in healthy eating, and their diets are constructed as universally narrow and unhealthy. Such journalistic shorthand in reproducing hegemonic masculinities has been found in other media

studies (e.g. Labre, 2005; Stibbe, 2004), and is even encountered when men are located in the feminised realm of the kitchen, as I now discuss.

Men cooking, but in a 'masculine' way

Despite the majority of articles constructing men as deficient in dietary knowledge and practice, a small but significant minority (16 of 44) of articles positioned men as increasingly au fait with cooking and diet. Such closer involvement with food is predicated on beauty as well as health - 'metrosexual' man is concerned about a 'washboard' stomach as well as protecting his health. However, the articles construct shopping, dieting and cooking in 'masculine' terms, lest men are emasculated by entering such feminine domains. For example, military and sporting metaphors abound, with men in the kitchen setting and attaining key objectives and men on diets also weight training in order to maximize a muscular physique. Furthermore, 'feminine' diets are ultimately construed as extreme, and unsuitable for men who universally prefer 'hearty' meals. Ultimately, these ways of representing men in food-related contexts often serve to reinforce hegemonic masculinities and arguably foreclose the development of health-consciousness in men.

With articles about men cooking, for example, the specialness of men cooking is emphasized:

'At least 39% of males are expecting to be on roast turkey duty, according to a survey by the Glenfiddich whisky company. The findings are released to coincide with the launch of Scotland's first men-only Christmas cooking course'

(Daily mail: Man's place is in the kitchen this Christmas, 16/11/05)

The novelty of men cooking is highlighted in this piece - it is what makes it newsworthy. Yet, reference to meat ('roast turkey'), alcohol (whisky) and homosociality ('men-only') conjure up hegemonic masculinity. Further, the notion of 'duty' suggests a military exercise, a metaphor which is joyously celebrated in another article, again on Christmas cooking:

'preparing a successful Christmas lunch needs the same skills as a military campaign... Christmas is when Kitchen man comes into his own. It brings out the inner Napoleon in all of us, because the most successful Christmas meals are like the most successful military campaigns - a product of planning, equipment, recruitment, tactics and strategy'

(The Times: In which we serve, 20/12/05)

Here, men are constructed as rational, forward thinking and goal-oriented. Moreover, these attributes comprise an essential masculinity ('the inner Napoleon in all of us') which men can draw upon in cooking situations, and which are contrasted with women's 'incompetence' and 'feminine

frippery' later in the article. Other 'masculine' metaphors are deployed in the context of men and food, for example man as 'hunter-gatherer'. In an introduction for recipes involving game, the celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay states: 'Rightly or wrongly, I associate game with being man's food. It has the whole hunter-gatherer feel about it. You shouldn't play around with it either'. (The Times, 'I think of game as being man's food, 10/09/2005). This primeval image even makes its way into an article on men baking:

But what's really remarkable is that in each case it's the man of the house who's up to his elbows in flour. Suddenly men who've never shown the slightest interest in matters culinary are talking Italian flour and sourdough starters. "I've become a baking widow," laments one friend, as another batch of breadsticks are proudly produced from the oven. "Why can't he take up golf like any normal husband?" Chef Richard Bertinet puts the appeal down to the hunter-gatherer thing. "It's like natural foraging. You transform a few base elements into something that will provide for your family. Seeing your child eat your own bread is very satisfying."

I think it's also that most men are natural show-offs in the kitchen. We may not like the day-to-day stuff, but we love to cook to impress

(The Times, Loafing about - Foodie at large, 15/10/05)

The novelty of men baking is foregrounded ('remarkable') and evidenced by quotes from experts and female partners. The 'abnormality' of men baking is reinforced in the contrast with normative sport ("Why can't he take up golf like any normal husband?"). The account provided by a professional chef renders something domestic as something primeval and manly. Quite literally, male bakers are

presented as 'breadwinners' in providing something essential for their family. Another explanation is then offered - men are inveterate exhibitionists who enjoy impressing others with their culinary talents on occasion. Implicitly, the 'day-to-day stuff' is the business of women (see also below), and special occasion cooking is for men. Elsewhere, in a feature on a male celebrity and his culinary habits, masculine attributes of autonomy, control and leadership are underlined:

'The idea that men don't cook is rubbish. I do all the cooking in my house. In fact, I'm a bit of a control freak when it comes to the kitchen. I always cook for myself because I'm so greedy; I love not having to share anything, and not having to worry about people's food likes and dislikes. When you think of the top British chefs you could count the females on one hand. I think that's because men have carried on doing their usual 'we're the boss' sort of thing: it's a very macho environment. I suppose men do go on diets just like women, they just hide it more. I eat what I want but I know I would be a fat bastard if I didn't run. (The Observer, The lads who lunch: Food has always been the way to a man's heart, but who needs a woman to cook it, 13/1105)

Whereas women's cooking is designed for other's pleasure and wellbeing (men, children - see Caplan, Keane, Willetts & Williams, 1998), here men's cooking is presented as a (preferably) solitary, selfish pursuit which produces desirable food in the right quantities. As well, men are construed as outside 'dieting' by virtue of secret diets

and a preference for sport and exercise over dieting to control weight (health protection is not mentioned). Sex difference discourse is used to reinforce hegemonic masculinities: men are devious about diets while women are open; male chefs are macho compared to women etc. Sex difference discourse is also invoked to account for sexism in the restaurant industry, with women construed as mundane cooks and men as celebrated (and celebrity) chefs:

'because women are instinctively and most obviously the providers of food (through breast milk or a relentless rota of three workmanlike meals a day), they have been emphatically excluded from its fancier manifestations. What comes naturally is made to seem invisible. What comes at a sweat - the strops and swagger without which Gordon Ramsay or Anthony Bourdain find it impossible to run full service - is what we look for, pay for and talk about for days afterwards.'

(The Guardian, A domestic goddess, maybe, but never a chef..., 27/06/05)

So, men cook with a 'swagger', a powerful and attractive masculinity which transforms the cooking environment and the food served within it. For men, cooking is presented as a competition laden with copious rewards, whereas for women cooking is a matter of work where recognition is unforthcoming. Yet, the ubiquity of various male celebrity chefs arguably obscures the relative scarcity of 'ordinary' men in the kitchen, not to mention the constricted male diet. For example, another feature sets out to decode men's

relationship to food decoded for the benefit of women readers:

'There are men who know all about food. They are called chefs... for the majority of their brethren food is fuel, a means to an end. This is less often the case for women, which explains why there is a correlation between bachelorhood and atrocious eating habits.

'Barbecues... his chance to be Mr Alpha Male Caveman Play With Fire. Indulge him; it compensates for his obsolescence in every other realm of life.

'Spaghetti Bolognese: He knows how to cook it. It is his only trick (apart from barbecuing). Pretend to be impressed.

'Timing: Eating is a race. Biting is essential to render edible matter into mouth-sized chunks. Chewing is optional. (The Observer: 'Honey, I laid the table...', 13/11/05)

So, food is construed in pragmatic terms for men, something which provides 'fuel' for other more important activities and which must be consumed quickly (see also Roos et al., 2001). Having a more meaningful relationship with food is reserved for special cases of men (chefs), not something to be pursued by 'normal' men. Men are derided as meat-loving limited cooks desperate for women's praise in an imagined world where men are redundant. Such a portrait would probably be acknowledged as crude by the journalist in question, but this lazy mobilization of stereotypes which pervades the articles on men and cooking fails to examine questions of variability and complexity in men's attitudes to food. It would seem that the print media continues to be in thrall to sex difference discourse which perpetuates

conventional assumptions about men and women and which treats departure from gendered scripts as deviance (see also Day et al., 2004). Such hackneyed portrayals of men in the kitchen do not recognize the comfort and enjoyment that cooking food undoubtedly brings to some men in the current food-centred climate (Chamberlain, 2004) and have the potential to alienate some male readers. As well, the psychological benefits of cooking are underplayed and, as I now discuss, the general health benefits associated less 'masculine' diets are dismissed.

Real men don't diet

When diet as opposed to cooking is covered by the newspaper articles, the idea that men are increasingly diet-conscious is ostensibly conveyed:

'men are becoming as mad as women about food...
Leith starts extreme diets with great success and then eats
56 rounds of buttered toast two days later'
(The Observer: And this year I'm giving up... diets',
01/01/2006)

Here, dieting is established as a female domain, an irrational place which is attracting more men. The extreme case of William Leith is highlighted, a journalist who has written a book on his troubled relationship with food (also discussed above). However, unlike the dominant construction of men's diet as nutritionally poor, there are no

statistics or 'facts' about men's supposed uptake of healthier eating. Indeed, close scrutiny of these articles suggests either a rejection of contemporary health advice about diet or an orientation to diet which retains aspects of hegemonic masculinities. For example, a diet aimed at 'men as well as women' includes 'foods that men will enjoy - hearty casseroles, lean red meat, porridge, cooked breakfasts, even puddings... more rice and bulk' (The Times, End of the middle, 03/01/06). Here there is a concern to preserve the elements which men are assumed to value, with an emphasis on 'hearty' food with substance. In another longer piece, a male journalist reflects on men, including himself, taking up healthy eating:

'Forty-year-old men who used to admire Ollie Reed are now trading nutrition tips. James Brown wonders what happened to the hearty male diet.

You can't eat that, it'll be bad for your GI register, says my workmate Martin. Excuse my ignorance, but until a minute ago, I would have guessed that the GI register was something commander-in-chief Bush ticks in the morning to make sure none of his servicemen has gone AWOL. No, it's your glycaemic index, explains Martin. It's all part of the Greek diet I'm doing. I got it out of a woman's magazine and it's working.

I do indeed stop eating, open-mouthed -not because the food I am eating is bad for my GI register, but because we have reached a point where 40-year-old men who used to admire Ollie Reed are trading dietary information. This is beyond metrosexual. This is Tesco-metrosexual: spend as much as possible not on beauty products, but on food that keeps you slim.

Men are in danger of being as confused as women by the amount of diverse and conflicting dietary advice that is

available. We're reading about different fad diets in our wives' magazines every week...

Nowadays, my culinary life journey involves emotions. There was a time when lunch involved bacon and two pieces of bread. Now it involves glycaemic indexes, organic farming, guilt, health awareness and weight-watching. I'm not sure whether it's good to be health-conscious or bad to be worrying about it. Either way, I'm on the verge of food rage every time a waiter does anything but bring me more food.

And what of my friend Martin's diet? Reassuringly, within three days of his GI comment, we went to a Chinese for dim sum and the waitress had to bring a second table to accommodate all the food he ordered, including wrinkled skin of chicken's feet, which looked like Marigold gloves that had been heated up and shrivelled in the microwave. God only knows where that figures on the glycaemic index. (Sunday Times, Eating disorder - Health, 09/10/05)

A nostalgia for a past when men presumably emulated the drinking habits of the late actor Oliver Reed and did not have to contend with healthy eating is quickly established. This 'before-and-after' contrast is an effective device for augmenting the former state of affairs and lamenting the present (see Potter, 1996). Male ignorance about nutrition is announced in the first-person voice of the author ('excuse my ignorance') whereas the diet-conscious workmate is very much the alien 'other', indulging in a 'feminine' practice ('out of a woman's magazine'). It is worth noting that the reference to 'wives' positions metrosexual man as heterosexual - gay men seem to be excluded from the text (see also Seymour-Smith et al., 2002). The next paragraph continues to construct dieting men as ludicrous ('beyond

metrosexual'), a familiar trope that things have gone too far ('reached a point where...').

The 'dangers' of men entering this feminine fray are underlined: men risk being 'as confused as women' who read magazines encouraging 'fad diets'. Nostalgia for a simpler time is again conveyed, a time when eating was straightforward ('bacon and two pieces of bread') and without anxiety or uncertainty. In this allegedly joyless and complex food climate, a craving for large portions is presented as understandable. The association between masculinity and quantity of food consumed is then emphatically celebrated with the 'reassuring' collapse of the workmate's GI-diet in a Chinese restaurant. The 'normal' male diet is upheld and men are restored as naïve about food and health links ('God only knows where that figures on the glycaemic index'). So, although there is a flirtation with 'feminine' diets, a fondness for the traditional 'hearty' male diet is unquestionably promoted.

The title and content of another article explicitly define men as ignorant and macho about diet and health:

Dieting is for girls.
Real Men don't count calories, deny themselves carbohydrates or have a clue what's in the GI diet. Even when we try to diet, men aren't any good at it. We don't

like being told what to do. We resent anyone (wives and doctors included) thinking they know what's best for us. Plus, we have no self-control.

The Abs Diet... the message is obvious: this is the butchest diet in the world - and no one will think you're girly for going on it. Abs Dieters combine their tough-guy grub in a variety of enticing recipes, such as Macho Meatballs...

(Daily Mail, Real Men Don't Diet, 26/05/05)

Here, special diets directed at men are constructed in 'male-friendly' ways, in this case emphasizing 'toughness' and endurance. Men's relative ignorance about nutrition is underscored ('don't have a clue...'), as is a penchant for bulk (don't deny themselves carbohydrates'). In addition, men are presented as weak-willed and deluded, petulantly refusing to take on advice from knowledgeable others. This infantilisation of men has also been found in men's health discourses (Gough, in press; Lyons & Willott, 1999), and reinforces the notion of men's helplessness and alienation in the feminised world of dieting. So, despite the masculinisation of food prevalent in the media texts analysed, the notion of male vulnerability is implied at times, but not explicitly developed. Media framings of men's health overwhelmingly reproduce a clichéd depiction of masculinity which many men may well find outdated, patronizing and irrelevant.

Final Remarks

The above analysis highlights the influence of hegemonic masculinities in structuring media representations of men and diet. On the one hand men's diet is universally noted as health-defeating; on the other men are presented as increasingly interested in healthy eating. But across the dataset we have seen that diet continues to be construed as women-centred (hence 'unmasculine'), a situation which 'explains' men's reluctance to diet, their purported colonization of cooking and dieting on masculine terms, and their critique of healthy eating generally. This analysis then highlights the persistence, power and durability of hegemonic formulations of masculinity - although men's entry into the feminised domains of food and health could be read as revolutionising definitions and practices associated with men and masculinities, the manner in which men's relation to food and health is framed belies the continued dominance, in the media at least, of hegemonic masculinities.

Nonetheless, as well as being presented as taking control of cooking, favouring meat and avoiding fad (feminine) diets, men are sometimes constructed as simple-minded and vulnerable (to serious health problems) - a departure from hegemonic masculine ideals relating to intelligence,

strength and control. Yet despite heavy-handed warnings about the dire health consequences of 'male' diets, the arena of diet is trivialized and mocked in many of the media texts, so that in one sense men's relative ignorance can be discounted and their risky dietary practices even celebrated. And because of the general critique of diet and health, the exalted positioning of women as knowledgeable and responsible when it comes to food and nutrition is undermined. Moreover, women are also positioned within the unseen, unglamorous world of mundane cooking, while male 'chefs' hog the limelight on special occasions. In sum, these media texts on men, diet and health conspire to privilege hegemonic masculinities which work to defend men in 'alien' territory and subordinate women, despite appearances to the contrary.

This media fascination with sex differences, along with the construction of superficially 'metrosexual' masculinity, arguably fall short of demonstrating the complexity and variability of masculinities (see Connell, 1995). Indeed, this charge has been leveled at men's mass market magazines (e.g. 'Men's Health'; 'Loaded') i.e. that there is only lip service to new forms of masculinity (Chapman, 1988) or, at best, an oscillation between conventional and 'new' forms

of masculinity (see Benwell, 2004). As media scholars have noted, reporting of health and other stories is bounded by journalistic conventions and constraints which often sensationalise and simplify the phenomenon in question (Gwyn, 2002; Kitzinger, 2000). Various strategies such as attributing claims to experts, referencing statistics and making associations with related stories all work to present material as factual and beyond question while suppressing alternative perspectives (see Kitzinger, 2000; Potter, 1996). As we have seen with the articles on men and diet, facile recourse to a limited repertoire of hegemonic masculinities to signify 'the way men are' (see Seymour-Smith, Wetherell & Phoenix, 2002), also found in other genres such as mass market men's magazines (see Stibbe, 2004), conspires to deny men 'healthy' positions within the world of diet. As many of the media features reviewed display a concern about the health of men, it is unfortunate and ironic that the maintenance of 'unhealthy' hegemonic masculinities is privileged.

It follows, then, that to promote healthy eating in men, media framings of men and diet need to expand to accommodate a greater array of masculinities. For example, it should be acknowledged that men can be interested in a

varied, healthy diet rather than preoccupied only with red meat and bulk, and that (some) men spend time on and derive pleasure from cooking for themselves and others. As well, because of ethnic, cultural or religious codes, many men may follow diets much different to those depicted in the newspaper texts. Variation in men's diets is also influenced by social class (Roos et al., 2001), as well as other factors such as age (Stockley, 2001), and it can be argued that more refined, diverse and healthy diets are the preserve of middle-class groups, or even that healthy eating itself is a middle-class construct (see Lupton, 1996). Clearly, in order to engage more men from different backgrounds to take up healthier eating, media features will need to recognize diversity between men, entertain the possibility that some men are actively interested in what they eat and how it affects their health, and produce advice tailored to specific groups of men so that particular concerns and constraints are taken into account. Features which address unemployed men or men on a budget, for example, will obviously differ from features which target professional men, or men from minority ethnic and subcultural communities.

To build on this study, it would be interesting to study reader's reception of media representations of men and diet, since consumers do not simply accept at face value what is presented to them (see Benwell, 2005). It would also be interesting to analyse other media texts, such as male-targeted magazines, internet sites and indeed health services publications. As well, the role of humour and irony in constructing men's health and masculinities in the media bears closer analysis, since this was a strong feature of some of the material analysed here. Benwell (2004), for example, has commented on the use of irony in men's magazines and the reproduction of an 'evasive' masculinity wherein 'old' and new' masculinities are invoked but neither is exclusively privileged. In sum, the facile media reliance on stereotypes of masculinity and gender differences generally require deconstruction so that more sophisticated and hopefully effective health interventions for men incorporating diet can be designed.

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