

Exploring Food, Drink, and Place: Short Paper

Alvin Lin

August 2016 - December 2016

What if any connections can be made between Mead’s chapter on obesity and Bordo’s chapter on anorexia and bulimia. Do you agree with their conclusions? If so, why?

Modern society imposes a burden on many people due to its stress and high-speed pace. Meals and the consumption of food in today’s modernized, industrialized, stainless-steel sterilized society place many constraints on people due to social, nutritional, and economic concerns. In both Mead and Bordo’s arguments, the changing role of food in our society has contributed to many problems with regard to body image, leading to obesity, anorexia, and bulimia.

One primary example of why this is the case is discussed by Mead, who explains that food is used as a coping mechanism, and is tied to “a system of punishment and reward”. The obese are seen in our society as unhealthy and morally wrong, tied to “a lack of character” and “a blatant lack of self-discipline”, even if the aforementioned obesity is a product of society. Children are taught to eat what is given to them, and eat three meals a day or face punishment. They are then subsequently rewarded with more food in the form of “dessert, Sunday dinner, [and] holiday fare”. Mead notes that having three meals a day is an obsolete concept that is no longer relevant in today’s society where food is now more readily accessible. People who still live by it face obesity and shame from society, and should eat according to their own individual needs.

Bordo’s chapter discusses how body image in advertising and media has affected the public’s view of food across many different groups of people. She argues that the pervasiveness of eating problems is no longer limited to

“white, heterosexual, North American, and economically secure” girls and women. The concept of body image has become so ingrained in our society that children talk about it casually. According to Bordo’s statistics, 57% of girls have fasted, “one third of all girls in grades nine to 12 think they are overweight, and only 56 percent of seventh graders say they like the way they look”. This toxic viewpoint, backed by cultural imagery in the form of thin models and skinny bodies in media, is now a part of our culture that affects a large portion of the population.

Both Bordo and Mead’s assessments of today’s society and its relationship to food paint a grim image. Both are accurate in scary ways and show that society needs to change its values. Food’s relationship with today’s society has brought about obesity, anorexia, and bulimia due to mainstream advertising and archaic values. Bordo and Mead agree that by encouraging people to pursue their own eating patterns in ways that suit their own needs, body type, and self-esteem, these problems could steadily be solved.