Clean Eating and Instagram: Purity, Defilement and the Idealisation of Food

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Introduction

Food is a foundational part of social life. We not only eat as a means of sustenance, food is also integral to the creation and maintenance of communities where it is used to "convey images of public identity" (Fine 1996: 1). From a sociological standpoint, the various ways we consume food offers insight into human sociality. Sociology's interest in food can be described as falling into two overlapping areas: first, food systems relating to the production, environmental and developmental impacts of food and second, food politics that focuses food as a vital ingredient for social identities and cultures more broadly (DeSoucey 2017). While sociologists have explored food in various social contexts, scholars have been slow to explore digital technologies and their contributions to contemporary food cultures (Lupton 2018a:66). Users of social media can now connect and network with a range of local and wider networks that facilitate an increasing interest in food media (Pennell 2018: 257). Digital technologies contribute to the quantitative shift in audience reach, with an associated increase in the extent to which recording profane aspects of everyday life is now readily undertaken and shared en masse (Chopra-Grant 2016: 128). A series of technological developments have facilitated this change including the ubiquity of smart phones, digital cameras, mobile broadband, and the proliferation of online social networks that enable instant communication with public audiences and the creation of taste communities based around shared interests (e.g. lifestyle and dietary practices) (Baker and Walsh 2018).

The visual dimensions of food are enhanced by digital media. For example, the emergence of "foodtography" or "food porn"—a term describing the enhancement of food imagery designed to excite a 'sense of the unattainable by proffering coloured photographs of various completed recipes' (Cockburn, 1977; see also Mcbride 2010) —indicates the interest for spontaneously shared images of food presented to various audiences that serve as a foundation for remembering (Pennell 2018: 263). Such images provide opportunities for discussions and representations of food that reach much larger audiences comparative to traditional media (Lupton 2018a: 66; Rousseau 2012). The proliferation of cooking programming on television and its convergence with user generated food content on social media are suggestive of a preoccupation with documenting and sharing images of food that showcase 'serious amateurs' and 'ordinary experts' (Lewis & Phillipov 2018; Baker & Rojek 2019). This shift towards the ordinary has been conceptualised in terms of what is referred to as the 'demotic turn', to describe the increasing visibility of 'ordinary' people in the media today (Turner 2010). The visibility of ordinary people in the public domain has increased people's access and exposure to visually succulent and beautifully portrayed dishes that regularly make use of less than healthy foods (Spence et al. 2016: 54). But celebrity chefs and social media influencers (those who practice micro-celebrity on social media as a vocation) have also become part of a new media landscape that promote an ethics of "good" eating and food consumption (Lewis and Huber 2015: 290; Biltekoff 2013; Contois 2017) that mediate what "foodscapes could and should be, how they could and should operate, and for whom they could and should work" (Johnston and Goodman 2015:209). These foodscapes that are increasingly embedded in social media contexts project normative ideas about what constitutes a "good" meal and simultaneously, foods to be restricted or altogether avoided (Johnston and Goodman 2015). The ubiquity of social media has led to criticism of the tendency to document and share images one's meal in photographic form (Gander 2017; Wong 2016). These criticisms are reminiscent of Sontag's (1977) objections on photography and the increase in the documentation of the banal. Many profane examples of food photography abound to signal lifestyles centred around the production and consumption of food media (Atwal et al. 2019; Mejova, et al. 2016; Rousseau 2013). In this paper our focus, however, pertains to food imagery of a distinct variety: food imagery removed from the mundane that is carefully curated and rendered as sacrosanct. We explore food that is primarily created for visual consumption rather than digestion. By providing a close reading of several key top posts imagery associated with clean eating we argue that a visual trope of purity is rife in relation to popular 'clean eating' food photography which deploys images to project a form of food ethics that strategically and repeatedly emphasizes notions of health as a lifestyle.

To present this argument we draw on Mary Douglas' (1966) account of purity as it relates to the morality of food and Erving Goffman's (1959) notion of the dramaturgical imperative that seeks social validation through appearance and idealised imagery of the self. While these accounts predate the advent of digital

media, we suggest using these theories prove analytically insightful for exploring digital interactions anchored through visual media. While the food photography considered seldom found literal representations of people eating food, we argue these pristine images of food come to represent artefacts that are exhibited as "still forms of the presentation of self" (Hogan 2010: 377). Clean eating food photography attains a visibility that venerates the moral dimensions of food (Douglas 1966) through promoting a visual form of purity that channel an ethics of food that is increasingly present in wider foodscapes (Biltekoff 2013; Contois 2017; Johnston and Baumann 2015; Johnston and Goodman 2015; Lewis & Huber 2015; Lupton 2018b; de Solier 2013a; de Solier 2013b). While off-line personal exhibitions like a portrait placed on a mantel represent an individual, in this article we argue that networked food images on Instagram speak to communal exhibitions of self that confer and connect with collective identities that coalesce around the use of clean eating hashtags.

This article is organised as follows. First, we discuss Instagram as a social network site centred around visual culture. We then discuss the role of photography and hashtags on this platform to contextualise our understanding of "clean" eating. Next, we consider the symbolic notions of purity and defilement within the food culture of "clean eating" by exploring top posts—images that attain a heightened visibility on Instagram. We then explore how these popular posts associated with clean eating visually idealise food by staging its presentation and preparation, removing it from the profane and enhancing its visual purity through rendering it sacrosanct. These images of food become important symbols that act to unify identities bound with an ethics of eating 'good' foods, but also appeal to visual consumption, rather than literal acts of eating. Our contribution extends the ritualistic understandings of food's symbolic dimensions into this mediated context by critically analysing how it functions on the social media platform, Instagram.

Instagram photography, hashtags and methodology

Instagram is a social media application designed for mobile devices[i]. The app enables users to share photographs and videos with their followers and public. Launched in 2010, the app is configured around sharing photographs and by 2016 it reached the milestone of having the 20 billionth image shared by approximately 800 million users (Instagram, 2017a; 2017b). The app requires users to create profiles and suggests other users to follow, however, there is no technical requirement of reciprocity. Ironically, despite invoking the notion of instant communication (as indicated by the prefix – 'insta'), the images typically shared are mostly staged, edited and rehearsed.[ii] Indeed, Instagram users adopt numerous editing techniques like filtering, cropping, blurring among other functionalities that are easily applied to images within the application and beyond (Zappavigna 2016: 273).

Instagram serves to reinforce the elevation of digital photography, representing a shift from use by families to use by individuals; from a role that once concerned the documentation of activities to one of sharing of social experience (van Dijck 2008: 60; Walsh and Baker 2017; Walsh, Johns, and Dale 2019). The affordances of digital photography encourage ubiquitous photography, ubiquitous not merely due to the increasing volume of photographs, but also discourses and practices pertaining to photography that are pervasive across contemporary society (Hand 2012: 11). For example, consider the colloquialism "pics or it didn't happen". But even prior to its digitisation, photography at its most fundamental level enables the appropriation of social action. It condenses everything but "static visual arrays" that render the depicted subject permanently accessible to be "attended anywhere for any length of time, and at moments of one's own choosing" (Goffman 1979: 10). Rather than simply offering candid representations of a subject, a central feature of photography—that Instagram arguably intensifies—is the eschewal of the mundane for high symbolism (Goffman 1979: 19). Instagram offers additional avenues to maximise the visual components of food photography and piques interest in the symbolic dimensions of food. Through editing, cropping and filtering techniques, users can enhance images. At the time of writing, Instagram provides its users with up to 40 predetermined digital filters that alter uploaded photos by modifying colour, contrast, saturation and distort other visual qualities, thus representing the digital equivalent of an analogue filter, such as a piece of glass or plastic placed in front of a lens (Zappavigna 2016: 285). Filters are commonly applied to images of food with the aim of modifying colour and lighting balance, often rendering the foods depicted more appealing. In this

respect we suggest that like the way certain environments—like an art gallery or shop is typically organised to encourage a particular kind of looking (Emmison and Smith 2000:186)—Instagram and its affordances accustom users to engage with imagery that stimulates an active gaze (Zulli 2018). The widespread and presumed use of visual filters has also led to a "no filter" hashtag, indicating that a user has explicitly forgone the use of filtering techniques prior to uploading, ostensibly suggesting that an image might be somewhat more "authentic". Images represent the anchor point of a post and are the primary way users of an application seek to achieve social and commercial validation and interest in their profile. The visual dimensions of foods also speak to a greater connectivity that mark shifts in social attitudes around food and its role as a source of identity construction for those voyeurs who consume these clean eating images online, but may not partake in literal gastronomic consumption of foods connected with this lifestyle.

Hashtags on the other hand are a type of textual indexation that allow users to categorise their photograph, associating it with key terms (e.g. #health) and other users who also are interested in a given theme, thus making the post discoverable to wider online audiences (Baker and Walsh 2018). A hashtag's visibility across the platform render a post with greater prominence compared with other ways of interacting via social media (i.e., likes and commenting) which tend to be more explicitly targeted towards individual users (Gerrard 2018: 4494). Hashtags appeal to users that may be interested in particular themes and simultaneously enable access to an affirming audience by "liking" and commenting on content (Herrera 2017: 8). Hashtags affixed to photographs therefore enable a greater number of interactions between Instagram users and in this sense facilitate small but symbolic signals from users that their content has been affirmed by an audience. Like face-to-face "supportive interchanges" (Goffman 1971), or digital "empathy rituals" these behaviours allow users to affirm each other's "platform performance" via mediated exchanges that signify behaviours that socially validate and acknowledge a generic relationship between doer and recipient (Brownlie and Shaw 2018: 108). Hashtags thus enable interactions between those who post, and those who make up an audience for a potential hashtag, highlighting the importance of the content disseminated to attract and generate engagement with a post anchored by hashtag. Operating as a type of "networked public", hashtags render content reachable to users across the platform; users who post content with a hashtag afford the public increased ways to engage and interact with one another (boyd 2010: 42). Hashtags also alter how users engage on the platform, providing the capacity for users to enter taste communities comprised of like-minded individuals with an interest in similar content. As a result, like-minded users can connect with one another and form notions of community through shared content that in the case of clean eating, affirms ethical ways of consuming food.

For this study 9 "top posts" were collected over a period of 8 days, totalling to 144 posts contained in the dataset. We collected top posts using #cleaneating and #eatclean as well as associated textual information (e.g. captions, comments and likes). Rather than examining all content enlisted under these hashtags, our focus was exclusively on top posts. At the time of data collection top posts appeared on trending hashtags and places to show users 'some of the popular posts tagged with that hashtag or place' (Instagram, 2017b). Instagram's interface displays the nine top posts and the nine most recent posts at any point in time. While the exact algorithm for top posts remains unknown, the application programming interface (API)—an engineered interface that facilitates user access to the functionality and data contained by a software service or programme—ranks top posts according to the quantity of engagement (e.g. 'likes', comments) and the quality (the engagement rate of interaction by followers).Top posts appear to achieve relatively high levels of quantitative engagement (for example the number of "likes," and comments provided) and in terms of the quality of these engagements (for example the rate of interaction by followers). Whereas "recent posts" privilege communication from the standpoint of the producer in that they post chronologically the most recent post ascribed with a given hashtag. In this respect they privilege communication from the standpoint of the producer. Posts that are collected under this dimension of the platform are disseminated chronologically without considering a post's engagement rate or validation by other users. But with the exception of 'likes' and comments, this means of assessing images through recent post status provides little sense for the reception of the post by the public. The value of analysing top posts for a given hashtag is that this list signifies those images validated by others (Baker & Walsh, 2018). Top posts therefore are highly visible

to users on the platform, representing that a post has achieved considerable circulation and attention by users. In focusing on top posts we should note the following limitation: top posts may not provide the diversity of content associated with a hashtag, given they are merely the most popular. By focusing only on clean eating top posts we gain insight into techniques deployed in these high-status posts that garner visibility and attention (Marwick 2013: 187) and that are likely to be modelled by other users to replicate high levels of interest and engagement.

Upon collection of the dataset, we organised photographs by grouping them into common visual themes. We inductively settled on 8 categories: *food*, when food items were depicted; *glamour shot*, when the subject was adorned in makeup or active wear; *kissing pout*, when the subject made a kissing pout with the mouth, suggesting a seductive sexualised facial expression; *before/after shot*, when the image used visual collage to document a person's physical transformation; *muscle presentation*, when the subject incorporated exaggerated display of bodily muscles; *advertisements*, when posts were used to advertise a service or product **(overwhelmingly these were forms of native advertising where products or services were situated within ostensibly produced user content, as well as providing links to services in the comments)**; *nature shot*, when the image incorporated an individual situated in a natural environment; and *no category*, for when posts were not identifiable via the categories above. Unlike food blogger photographs, which typically refrain from including faces or bodies in their photographs (de Solier 2013b: 153), the body was the focal point of many of the images collected in **our data set.** While food featured less frequently in our sample (only 24 per cent of top post images contain food, n=35), the body was used to stand in for its nutritional qualities as evidence of the outcomes of ostensibly adhering to a clean eating diet and lifestyle.

Category	Frequency
Glamour	18
Kissy	2
Food	35
B & A	18
Muscle	60
Advert	79
Nature	3
NC	2

Figure 1. Top posts for #cleaneating and #eatclean hashtags

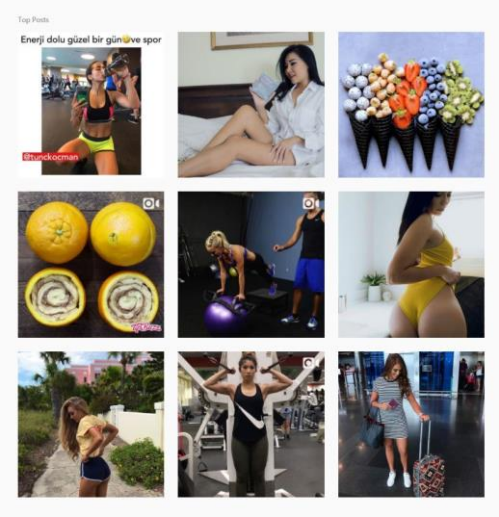

Figure 2. Top post interface display for #cleaneating. Displaying the images receiving top post status on the 8th August 2017.

While visual representations found in posts associated with clean eating hashtags draw considerably on imagery of the body for the period under study, our focus here concerns top posts that only portray

images of food.[1] Our justification for this focus is that we aim to consider the practices, techniques and tropes deployed to maximise engagement with clean eating food imagery. While clean eating hashtags were certainly associated with body display, images that depict the body contained no representations of food (see Authors 2018, 2020 for an analysis of the connections between the body and clean eating). The food imagery associated with clean eating hashtags summon a visual symbolism of purity and use techniques that enhance food's presentation. Rather than mundane portrayals of food, clean eating posts represent highly bespoke imagery of food that significantly contrasts from practices of taking photos of one's meal or 'food selfies' (Middha 2018). Our focus is therefore not only justifiable, but integral given as Atwal et al. (2019:454) argue that consumer-generated images within a gastronomic perspective have tended to receive limited attention from academics. In presenting the following analysis we report on the most prominent photographic tropes associated with clean eating hashtags as they relate depictions of food. By posting curated food imagery online, food's visual dimensions are used as a vehicle to project healthy identities and a form of food ethics (see also Johnston and Baumann 2015:189).

"Clean" eating and the symbolic codes of purity and defilement

Instagram is a platform that maximises food's symbolism. Were Mary Douglas alive today she would surely be sensitive to food's place on the platform given her insistence that we must recognise how food enters the moral and social intentions of individuals and groups (Douglas 1984: 10). Symbols of purity are imbued in not only the presentation of particular food situated within clean eating photographs but are partnered with ethical discourses in comments and text associated with posts. We suggest clean eating posts represent a continuation of ethical food media that provides a heightened visibility regarding food consumption by packaging this content within a degree of popular cultural cachet (Lewis & Huber 2015: 291-2). Like other food related identities, such as "foodies", who use sophisticated culinary consumption as a way of distinguishing themselves and incorporating food as a key part of their identity (de Solier 2013a; Johnston and Baumann 2015), clean eating proponents encourage an implied morality concerning food that positions particular forms of food consumption as superior to others that are modelled on "culturally constructed needs and desires" (de Solier 2013a: 16). But unlike foodies—whose emergence was earlier and initially less reliant on digital media (de Solier 2013b:51)—clean eating proponents have actively infiltrated social networking sites, such as Instagram, to promote clean eating content (Allen et al. 2018: 2). While there is no single definition of "clean eating", practitioners of the diet are bound by their consumption of foods perceived to be "natural" and wholesome, free of chemicals, additives, preservatives, refined and highly processed ingredients (Allen et al. 2018: 2; McCartney: 2016). Though used to describe a variety of diets (e.g., vegan, vegetarian, pescetarian and ketogenic), the dietary practice is predicated on the basis that one should consume foods recognized by the clean eating community as "healthy", "pure" and "clean" and correspondingly, eliminate the consumption of "foods considered to be unhealthy or impure" (Nevin & Vartanian 2017: 1; Dickson et al. 2018). Clean eating has had a lively presence on Instagram (at the time of data collection between 30 and 40 million instances of the #eatclean and #cleaneating occurred). This focus is warranted given promoters of this lifestyle movement generate considerable social media content that has also been linked to unintended health consequences. This is because while advocating restrictive eating patterns, many advocates offer advice without requisite qualifications or training, with most promoting suggestions based on their passion for food (Dickson et at. 2018: 2) or certain lifestyles (Baker and Rojek 2019) rather than expertise. It is also noteworthy that while clean eating as a dietary trend might appear limited, some accounts suggests that close to forty per cent of young people (aged 18–30 years) report practices consistent with clean eating; for example, excluding dairy from their diet (Allen et al. 2018: 2). Given the cultural currency that this lifestyle represents, it is intriguing to consider how this dietary practice is suggestive of a shift in the public's relationship with food. As Cloake (2017) notes with respect to British food consumption, while 'bad' foods once may have meant the unregulated consumption of adulterated foods high in fat or foods produced via less humane production processes, those who took pleasure in wholesome foods were never viewed as sinful.

[1] We should also note while food studies is best conceived as the study of not merely food, but also eating of which the body is part (see for example Tompkins 2012; Biltekoff 2013) in this paper our focus remains on the visual tropes of food imagery associated with #cleaneating.

Food operates as a cultural resource that is symbolic; when imbued with notions of cleanliness this positions food as symbolically pure, and when defiled, it becomes cast as a type of pollutant. Symbolic meanings are seldom derived from inherent or innate properties, but rather configured in terms of how they are positioned in a system in relation to other cultural symbols (Zerubavel 1997: 72). As Mary Douglas (1966: 35) explains:

> Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity.

To generate cleanliness, avoidance of dirt must be learned through achieving an order that distinguishes between foods perceived as pure from those that pollute. This understanding of dirt avoidance stems from matters of hygiene and aesthetics, as opposed to religion (compared with premodern cultures), emphasising the sensibilities regarding purity and defilement are linked together in symbolic codes found within secular ritual (Douglas 1966: 35). These codes connect with folk vulnerabilities regarding bodily boundaries, where "germs" and "chills" penetrate through unprotected parts of the body (Greenhalgh and Wessely 2004). As a result, eating and health become rooted to the notion that food is a source of not simply energy but also a potential cause of illness and disorder (Poulain 2017: 72). Consuming foods hygienically imbues behaviours that compel good citizenship: "Thus, we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion" (Douglas 1966: 3). Notions of morality are bound with purity therefore not simply as a means of escaping contagion but in the purist of group identity formation. As Inglis (2002: 209) argues, Douglas' account of purity and defilement conceives of cleanliness as imputed to members of the in-group rather than the out-group and therefore strengthens the social relations of individuals in a given social grouping. Despite their universal significance, symbols of purity, cleanliness and dirt are socially constructed and culturally defined. Dirt is an arbitrary concept and a relative term with food perceived as dirty when it does not fit into the cultural system a particular society has created. As Douglas explains, "Our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications" (2002, p. 45). Cleanness and uncleanness serve as symbolic functions to maintain society's boundaries; disgust felt towards those who transgress social boundaries. Purity is, thus, best understood as the achievement of an ordered system, collectively classifying acceptable foods to consume, while also rejecting others as pollutants; as a signifier, purity speaks to the collective through its relationship with the defiled, rather than simply being an inherent property or condition of a phenomenon (Douglas 1966: 35). For example, consider the role of symbolic codes in the regulation of a vegan diet that are tied to lifestyle preferences and ethical citizenship (Forchtner & Tominc 2017: 415-6). This point is further illustrated by divisions and sub groupings within the vegan community, which vie for authenticity based on the degree to which they perceive and project themselves as remaining pure in terms of animal contamination, despite veganism in practical terms being "an impossible achievement" (Greenebaum 2012: 143).

Drawing on Douglas' idea of purity as a system that protects the individual from pollutants and projects an idealised version of the self to a community of others, we suggest clean eating imagery also presents notions of health by setting itself apart from "dirty" foods. This is especially significant given the ways clean eating posts are imbued with a morality revolving around the production and visual consumption of particular foods. Indeed, we suggest clean eating depictions online are linked with other restrictive diets in that they compel individuals to become "responsibilized" around consumer choice; to choose the "right" lifestyles so they can enjoy their time cooking food (Johnston and Goodman 2015: 212). Clean eating is connected to a wider tendency in contemporary food cultures that concern the "mainstreaming" of ethical concerns imbued in lifestyle choice, seamlessly blending marketing and promotional platforms with moral concerns around food used to mobilise as materials of identity construction. In a similar vein to how Australian supermarkets present themselves—with the assistance of celebrity chefs—as "good citizens" with concerns for animal welfare that is blended with notions of pleasure, lifestyles and taste-based qualities of "fineness" and "deliciousness" (Lewis and Huber

2015:298), we too suggest in the case of clean eating imagery an ethics of food is projected that reinforces pleasurable and healthy lifestyles. While social media may seem insignificant, it is worth remembering that all material culture that involves practices of consuming and producing leisure and lifestyle are not trivial, they play a vital role in the creation and maintenance of social identity in the modern world that is "a productive, reflexive, and serious making of the self, riddled with moral anxieties" (de Solier 2013b: 6). Clean eating posts become another means to project an ethics of healthy consumption that "mainstreams" these concerns on the platform, one that speaks to a collective identity generated through the symbolic dimensions of digital food culture.

Signs of purity: the symbolic representation of "clean" food

Images of clean foods are situated within wider foodscapes, juxtaposed to the proliferation of rich and gluttonous food imagery found in advertising and televisual media that provide a substitute source of pleasure (Spence et al. 2016: 55). For example, in one post a collection and assortment of fruits are prepared and presented in a bowl.

Figure 3. Fruit Bowl Top Post

In this image, cleanliness is invoked through presenting 'raw' ingredients in their 'whole', 'unprocessed' form. Though the human subject is absent from the photograph, the foods stand in for the user as 'clean' and 'pure'. Cleanliness is directly invoked by the use of hashtags that accompany the image in the caption of the post (e.g. #cleaneating #healthyeats #vegan #healthy #diet). The image itself provides a close-up of a bowl of fruit, a vantage that consumers might inhabit were they about to consume the foods depicted. Moreover, the bowl is positioned asymmetrically in frame, enhanced by the negative space that is augmented with the use of a filter that applies a white hue to the image. Visually these components combine with additional commentary reminding viewers that "every time you eat is an opportunity to nourish your body" and "#eathealthy". Together, the image and text project an ethics of healthy eating, suggesting a type of healthism that positions the ethos of individual responsibility as the source of well-being, attainable through the modification of diet and lifestyle (Crawford 1980:368). This logic of personal responsibility affirms the pursuit of healthy lifestyles that include the consumption of this type of food and that distinguish it from unhealthy consumption (Cairns & Johnston 2015: 156).

Figure 4. Raspberry and Banana Bowl Cake

While purity is found perhaps most unadulterated in our first top post, in figure 2 we see another motif associated with clean eating posts: the literal incorporation of defiled elements (or at least those perceived as such). As Mary Douglas informs us, notions of purity work as a signification through a relationship with the defiled (Douglas 1966: 35). Instances of clean eating subvert the literal symbolic presentation of clean foods that simply appear "clean" and "pure" by inclusion of paradoxical aspects that visually draw on notions of the unclean through their emulation of indulgent foods, while retaining their health status by using "clean" ingredients. A sensory incongruity, therefore, is deployed to generate interest. This refers to the use of one modality, for example the visual components of food that become intentionally mismatched with another sensory modality, for example, taste (Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman 2014: 218). One example that drew more heavily on this technique was figure three: vegan peanut butter chocolate balls.

Figure 5. Vegan Peanut Butter Chocolate Balls.

The image depicts food in its perfected final state; chocolate balls garnished with drizzled melted chocolate, adorned with edible petals. This presentation augments the food drawing the gaze of the viewer by adopting a close-up that frames the food as the prime focus; other chocolate balls are viewed

but remain blurred in the background highlighting focus on one ball directly in front of the camera. Accompanying hashtags inform viewers these treats are #plantbased #plantpowered #crueltyfree #eatclean #healthyfood. The term cruelty-free is significant, implying they are not made from animals, nor animal-derived ingredients or processes harming animals (Greenebaum 2012: 137), thereby, elevating the ethical status of the user who posted the image. Likewise, viewers can "feel good" consuming these recipes as they accord with a food ethics that incorporates a *taste* in various meanings of the word; both in the political act of consuming ethical desserts that are matched with decisions concerning ingredients, flavour and quality (Lewis and Huber 2015: 298). Gastronomically comprised of low-calorie substitutes, cleanliness is predicated on "clean" ingredients that are also perceived as ethical. Fears of transgression are negated by low-calorie ingredients: chocolate brownies without chocolate, bread without wheat, ice cream without cream and so on. What is removed from the recipe is integral to the food's symbolic significance. Comprised of fat-free, sugar-free, dairy-free ingredients, the food remains liberated of vices and moral impurities. The visual mimicry of high calorie food allows those who post these images to engage in normative ideals of food consumption that can become portrayed as morally and ethically defensible (Lupton 2018b: 7).

The incorporation of defiled elements represents a critical motif in food photography associated with clean eating top posts. An ever more jutting example was provided by a fitness blogger and displays a chocolate brownie with #healthydessert #lowcarb #healthyrecipe #weightloss. Again, appearing visually indulgent, negative connotations are negated by the recipe's "pure" ingredients and textual references to healthy lifestyles.

Figure 6. Red Velvet Chocolate Chunk Brownies

The discrepancy between food's visual qualities and its ingredients is transfigured; appearance diverges from gastronomic constitution, enabling the appearance of indulgence in food that nevertheless contributes to clean eating ethics that ultimately refutes a literal indulgence of dirty food. The hashtags accompanying the image indicate that because this is a #healthyrecipe one can bake their way to fitness. While appealing to an indulgent high-energy food sensibility, this trope shuns literal indulgence in lieu of consuming a decadent variant that subscribes to notions of clean eating. This appearance of indulgence, nevertheless, projects notions of healthism, focusing on the individual in pursuit of their own health by appealing paradoxically to notions of indulgence and moderation, honing this lifestyle pursuit and by implication, casting poor health as an individual failing (Crawford 1980: 378). If one can have their cake and ethically consume it, what possible reason is there to engage in defiled foods?

While those engaging with clean eating are compelled by food media to conform to a binary invoked in popular discourses regarding good and bad foods, it makes sense that this trope emulates notions of the defiled to further interest and engagement. By gesturing towards a symbolic defilement through the appearance of food such practices emphasise the categorisation of food, highlighting anomalous foods that seemingly—though not literally—depart from perceptions of clean eating. This reinforces the idea that rather than inherent, the symbolic uses of purity are shaped by the boundaries of systems that bring order to cultural experience (Douglas 1970: 73). These systems highlight that cultural notions of purity and defilement are "a relative idea" (Douglas 1966: 35).

In rendering the visual and gastronomic incongruent clean eating tropes garner attention and gaze through a denial; the defiled is incorporated but only visually. Using the appearance of defilement these posts incorporate unclean food as symbols directing the gaze of audiences by implying a transgression between symbolic codes. In this way, these practices link to Douglas' own account of secular defilement in that they incorporate the unclean phenomenon within "a narrative that venerates it as a symbol" (Duschinsky 2014: 562). Notions of cleanliness and defilement demonstrate the symbolic system that position particular foods as associated with clean eating that—through the shaping of symbols—standardise health as an important value. In creating these foods that acclaim the appearance of indulgence, while actually representing healthy ingredients, a tension is showcased that celebrates acts of consumer choice on the one hand and on the other emphasizes "the moral responsibilities of corporeal control" (Cairns & Johnston 2015: 156).

The idealisation of clean food: enhancing the presentation of purity on a plate

As a social media platform that privileges the visual, Instagram accentuates a dramaturgical imperative, urging validation through external approval of the projected image (Shulman 2017: 241). Given that digital photography's modus operandi is pictorial manipulation (van Dijck 2008: 70) it is unsurprising that clean eating imagery transfigures food to heighten its visibility and purity to garner attention in the pursuit of communal approval. Images of this kind draw upon techniques of idealisation. The term refers to instances of tantalising images of food that foster impressions superlative in nature, sacrosanct and consequently exaggerate symbolic codes of purity. Goffman (1959: 35) argues that individuals foster impressions that tend to incorporate a heightened exemplification of the "officially accredited values of the society", more than their behaviour warrants. Individuals therefore underplay activities and evidences that are incompatible with an ideal version of the person's projected image, and conversely, emphasise elements of interaction that typify the ideal social values in a congruent fashion (Shulman 2017: 113). Social actors toil to sustain positive impressions of themselves (Goffman 1959: 15). This view of social relations is one organized far more explicitly around the appearance, than the content of things (Lemert & Branaman 1997). While idealisation in its original formulation concerns interactions between people, we suggest it also applies to the presentations of self imbued within material culture. The staging of the interaction, its mediation and performance all come to crucially depend on the material and technological arrangements (Pinch 2010: 414). We suggest clean eating photographs represent important sites of exhibited performance. As Hogan (2010) contends, we can view impression management as exhibited in performances, rather than only as literally performed given we are dealing with media that is recorded. While exhibited performances may still signify an individual, they are no longer necessarily connected to specific audiences and therefore removed from the original situation in which they were produced (Hogan 2010: 380). Photographs therefore heighten the user's capacity to present an idealised self to their social network. Food becomes bound to not only the user who produces content for an online following but is aesthetically idealised using the image as a dramaturgical prop that seeks to garner validation through heightened and glamorized appearance. Consider the following image.

Figure 7. Food in the Air clean eating top post

In this photograph[iii] food is situated within its geographic context: the Amalfi coast. This technique employed use the context to visually enhance food. The foreground focuses on the food with relatively simple ingredients displayed within the context of the Gulf of Salerno. The background acts to enhance the foreground and contrast with the idyllic geography, imbuing the food with cultural context, connecting food with place. Colour plays a crucial role with respect to idealisation. The plated food with its relatively rustic arrangement, contrasts with the water below, suggestive of filters used to enhance the colour balance and evoke the geographical placement, rendering "more poignant the present moment, in particular the banal" (Zappavigna 2016: 286). The use of the plate also acts as a focal point in that it operates to contextualise: "the actual plate is critical to the final presentation; plate constitutes the frame for food…They also try to enhance the visual appearance of the food as much as possible" (Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman 2014: 115). This food blogger, Food in the Air (https://www.instagram.com/foodintheair/), makes prominent use of background scenery, incorporating it with extremely large close-ups of food, drawing the gaze of the viewer and enhancing the food depicted. As a framing device, the close-up in connection with the background is used to define what part of the image is significant and what elements are irrelevant, separating what one attends to in a focused manner from other aspects considered out-of-frame (Zerubavel 1991: 12). This technique marks the border between food and place, anchoring food in its geographical context.

Techniques of idealisation also result when the labour associated with the creation of food is omitted. This is a quality shared with all images collected for the project; no acts of preparation or labour associated with clean eating were depicted. All food images—excluding one image that made artisanal use of a pristine frying pan doubling as a serving dish—excluded cooking implements and indications of the labour involved with the production of food displayed (not to mention the labour associated with the production of these photographs). In this respect while many of the users who post images associated with clean eating tend to adopt a strategy of presenting themselves as amateurs who create passionate content because of their love of food. This is similar to other food bloggers whose professionalism—irrespective of how they present themselves—is 'evident in their scheduled, vast output and the high production quality of their work' (Dejmanee 2016:435).

A critical part of this presentational strategy stems from the concealing of dirty work does have precedence within food cultures, given the practices within the traditional spatial organisation of

restaurants designed to contain evidences of labour and dirt "backstage", within kitchens (Fine 1996: 32). While some restaurants also play on the division between kitchen and dining area, by holding on to this distinction a reinforcement of symbolic purity is possible. Instagram posts not only affirm the cleanliness of foods photographed but are suggestive of an order that is central to the management of pollution in that forms of work are omitted. Confirming the adage that "you eat with your eyes first," these posts privilege the pristine visual presentations of food that are seemingly ready for consumption. Such presentational practices impact on food's visual appeal and do not simply alter the acceptability of the food but are also said to play a role in perceptions of taste, odour and flavour (Delwiche 2012: 502). Therefore, these images of food captivate audiences; visual qualities are enhanced to maximise gaze. While we do not claim idealisation is exclusive to clean eating food on Instagram—given the many representations across foodscapes that present foods as much more appetizing than the actual products that they portray (Spence et al. 2016: 55)—the examples considered in this paper suggest that top posts take visual idealisation to an enhanced level and in a way that extends the purity depicted within these images.

The coinage of the term "food porn", which originated as "gastro-porn" is also indicative of the enhancement of food related images that has been present in food cultures for some time and that excite a "sense of the unattainable by proffering colored photographs of various completed recipes" (Cockburn 1977). The idea of the unattainable communicated in these images comes down to not merely the absence of labour, but the suggestion of an ease that links to another aspect of idealisation; the concealing of "dirty work" involved in the creation of these images. Dirty work is the act of concealing labour only to showcase the finalised product at the end in the hopes that an audience will judge a result "on the basis of something that has been finished, polished, and packaged" (Goffman 1959: 44; Hughes 1962). This is connected to the way these images are representative of a type of food porn in that limited awareness of the efforts gone into production are omitted. While representing a contested and slippery concept Mcbride (2010:41) suggests food porn speaks to a tendency in food photography which emphasises elements of watching vicariously, where there remains an unattainability about the foods depicted and that it "hides the hard work and dirty dishes behind cooking" (see also O'Neil 2003). The practice of omitting the dirty work in stylized depictions of clean eating mimic these dimensions of food porn in that they deploy "visual conventions and media platforms to heighten the pleasures of consumption while critiquing its resultant excess" (Dejmanee 2016:430). "Clean" foods depicted on Instagram do not necessarily represent examples for emulation within one's own kitchen. They are created to heighten the visual state of food associated with the user and in some instances transform food into art. Indeed this was another trope detected within clean eating food photography that appears to deemphasise food from profane contexts to exaggerate appearance is another dimension of the idealisation of food. Here the example of provided by the food blogger, alphafoodie, is indicative.

Figure 8. Aqua Blue Smoothie

The use of colour and framing highlight the perfected state of this breakfast smoothie. The food is presented from a perpendicular angle; the surface of the smoothie is displayed with additional fruits partially engulfed by the liquid. The use of a flower indicates further attempts at visual augmentation, another visual trope centred around appearance rather than matter, despite that these flowers may be toxic for humans (Ritschel 2018). Moreover, the close-up renders food larger than life transforming it from the profane and into a form of "ornamental cookery", visually showcasing food "from high angles, as objects at once near and inaccessible, whose consumption can perfectly well be accomplished by looking. It is, in the fullest meaning of the word, a cuisine of advertisement, totally magical" (Barthes 1976: 79). In this respect these perfected images of food can stand as identity markers for those who distribute them representing an exhibition site of users that can be found when other want to review content, rather than when the user is able to present and perform online (Hogan 2010:384), expanding the possibility of deploying user generated content to entice consumers. The absence of people in combination with the use of the close-up is reminiscent of conventions used in professional photography in cookbooks and magazines, which as de Solier (2013b: 154) notes is the same practice emulated by foodies, who similarly use food media in identity construction practices. Removing food from the mundane and rendering them as sacrosanct, these images come to enter the realm of art. In this way the profane details of daily life like eating also become "sacred," because it is these little details of culture that Douglas argues "shape or reflect or concentrate the larger focus, the culture itself" (Passariello 1990: 69). The visual depictions of food take on an aesthetic, sensory dimension and are evaluated in this way by producers and consumers (Fine 1996: 13). Elevating food into a type of visual art enhances the social occasions and actors that summon these qualities of food. Like edible art works from the past that were constructed from natural products and transformed into extraordinary objects to appeal to the senses and that were never made for literal consumption (Reed 2015: 14), clean eating top posts similarly seek to surprise, entertain and attract attention. Garnering attention through the visual dimensions of food the cultivation of status is achieved through food's display; mimicking qualities of food and enhancing the status of Instagram influencers.

Conclusion

Clean eating posts on Instagram indicate our preoccupation with producing and consuming visual representations of food. But unlike the sharing of profane instances of food that are momentarily to be consumed, the clean eating top posts explored in this article represent images of food that have become visually idealised and enhanced; strategically plating and using photographic practices to generate interest and attention by users of Instagram. While elements of idealisation are not unique to clean

eating Instagram food imagery, we argue that the examples considered in this article take these elements of idealisation to a considerable level and in so doing venerate notions of purity mobilised in these depictions. By exploring Instagram posts, we have examined how purity and idealisation are central visual elements embedded in the clean eating movement. And yet, despite the name, clean eating photographs also omit literal acts of eating. In part this might be because these posts are not merely captured prior to food's consumption but are purposefully created to heighten their visual significance for dissemination online. This significance of clean food is used to reinforce ideals about diet and health, as well as a "mainstreaming" of ethical concerns blending notions of pleasure, purity, lifestyles and "deliciousness" (Lewis and Huber 2015:298). While not all users who engage in clean eating hashtags on Instagram aim to garner this level of attention through food media, those who obtain top posts status overwhelmingly do so for commercial recognition. Our argument therefore sits within a larger context that suggests clean eating and its eschewal of dirty, unhealthy and indulgent foods provides the message that less industrialised food production is more 'natural', 'cleaner' and as a result 'healthier'. With this focus on clean foods a trend that simultaneously obscures the commodification of such food practices is also achieved which further disconnects the many consequences that stem from the veneration of certain foods and the sullying of others (for example, the proliferation of various diet manias, fat farms, health resorts, anorexia/bulimia, gastric surgery, cool-sculpting and a multitude of other body fashioning techniques and fads).

Instagram as a social media site configures identity; representations of food imagery function to proclaim communal understandings of identity manifest through pure foods. While individuals may not be copresent in online contexts they nonetheless still monitor and react to one another via online platforms (Hogan 2010:381). Additionally, commercial interests infiltrate these contexts, and this is suggested by the observation that of all top posts collected were posted by influencers and bloggers seeking to leverage interest from Instagram audiences (Baker and Walsh 2018). Rather than neutral spaces for sharing content, clean eating posts maintain disparities between high and low-status users that reduce complex relationships to visual displays of quantity and quality (Marwick 2013: 93). The emphasis on metrics demonstrates the importance of attention and also explains why top posts through the use of hashtags are an important way of garnering currency when commercial interest drives their proliferation. Hashtags are also a way of generating a sense of community by enabling users to cohabit spaces and share content with like-minded users; food is complicit in the staging of the self and communicates purity and esteem through extolling the cleanliness of "clean" foods. Food's imagery is imbued with a purity that assembles forms of food and their presentation as implicitly associated with an ethics derived from an individual's behavior, motivations and choices (Crawford 1980: 378). However, these posts at times also adopt a symbolic incongruity—techniques aimed at furthering the projected cleanliness in food by appearing "indulgent" and paradoxically conforming to a food ethics. Notions of purity and defilement concern not only the ingredients used within the foods presented, but also other possible moral contaminants associated with production processes of food. Our focus on clean eating and its bespoke imagery has suggested that the enhancement of food's visual dimensions are designed to project healthy identities to extend their visibility.

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[i] While the application can be used from a desktop computer, Instagram was designed as a mobile application that was developed in 2010 for use via a mobile phone (Zappavigna 2016: 271).
[ii] Users can add 2200 characters of text and include up to 30 hashtags per post. Hashtags play an important role in a post’s meaning and visibility.
[iii] While the clean eating hashtag does not appear directly on the image itself, it was nonetheless the 2nd ‘top post’ on Instagram for the #cleaneating top post page on the 1st of August 2017. This potentially is because this post was sponsored content, although this was not disclosed in the post, nor by Instagram.