



LEEDS  
BECKETT  
UNIVERSITY

---

Citation:

Pike, J (2014) "Young people and food: The moral project of the healthy self." In: A Critical Youth Studies for the 21st Century. Brill, 87 - 104. ISBN 9789004243750 DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004284036\\_008](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004284036_008)

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/2502/>

Document Version:

Book Section (Accepted Version)

---

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on [openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

**Author: Jo Pike, University of Leeds**

### **Young People and Food<sup>1</sup>: The Moral Project of the Healthy Self**

This is all down to Jamie Oliver. I just don't like what he stands for. He's forcing our kids to become more picky with their food...Who does he think he is all high and mighty? He can feed whatever he wants to his kids but he should realise that other parents think differently. (Perrie, *The Sun*, 16/09/06)

The above quotation is taken from *The Sun* daily newspaper and attributed to Sam Walker, one of the infamous 'Junk Food Mums' of Rawmarsh, South Yorkshire, UK. The momentous events in Rawmarsh unfolded as follows. In September 2006, the new academic year at Rawmarsh Comprehensive School commenced with the implementation of a revised, healthier school lunch menu and a shorter lunch break. However, some students were unhappy about the quality and choice of food and the length of time they were now required to spend queuing in the canteen. Parents on the other hand, voiced concerns over the lack of consultation by the school, both with themselves and their children. Consequently, a group of local women, many with children attending the school, embarked on an illicit enterprise to purchase and deliver food from nearby catering outlets directly to young people during the lunch break. This involved taking orders from students and passing contraband food items through the school railings. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this endeavour proved more popular with students than with the head teacher. As trade increased, sales of school meals plummeted and relationships between the school and the women became increasingly acrimonious. Since the school had no jurisdiction over the space beyond the school railings and both the head teacher and the women refused to re-evaluate their positions, a standoff ensued that was played out in the national and international media.

This incident was dubbed 'The Battle of Rawmarsh' in the UK tabloid press. Tensions escalated as parents' rights to determine what their own children could and could not eat were brought into conflict, not only with the views of the head teacher, but also with nutritional experts and health campaigners who had advocated school meals reform and the removal of 'unhealthy' items from school lunch menus for some time. The 'Junk Food Mums' were branded 'scrubbers' by Jamie Oliver and the popular press alluded to their notable deficiencies in terms of their morals, taste, intelligence and mothering abilities (Pike and Leahy 2012). They had illicitly breached the school boundary, they had undermined all rational efforts to improve

---

<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive school refers to state funded secondary education in the UK for young people aged 11 – 16 years.

their children's health, they were protesting in the wrong way, they were providing the wrong food and furthermore, they were overweight themselves. The depiction of these mothers in much of the tabloid press was particularly savage with one of the most vitriolic attacks coming from the women's own regional newspaper, *Yorkshire Post*:

If the rest of the world had ever wondered what goes on in deepest South Yorkshire, then they now know, thanks to the 'Rawmarsh Junk Food Mothers'. Quite aside from the sheer stupidity (and lack of respect) of shoving burger 'n' chips to schoolkids through a fence by standing on graves, the good ladies of Rawmarsh have demonstrated that the problems in our education system go back a lot further than one generation. I am trying not to be personally abusive, because I wouldn't want to come across any of them on a dark night, but, honestly, what an embarrassing shower. (Dowle, *Yorkshire Post*, 22/09/06.)

While Dowle judged these women to be shamefully stupid and ignorant, other commentators attempted to invoke affective responses of disgust through the deployment of recognisable cultural signs which distinguish the women as distasteful. For example, their cheap clothes that exposed too much flesh, their 'Croydon facelift' pony tails, tattoos, oversized earrings and of course, their excessively fat and grotesque bodies (Pike and Colquhoun 2012, Pike and Leahy 2012). The idea of 'taste' is central to constructions of the women of Rawmarsh's white working-class form of femininity and particular judgments about their corporeal appearance, bearing and adornment are elicited through these representations (Lawler 2002). Further, the near universal nature of the condemnation of these women as distasteful/disgusting subjects is denotative of deeper desires to know that "we are not alone in our judgment of the disgusting object generating consensus and authorisation for middle class standards, maintaining symbolic order" (Skeggs 2005, 970).

As Dowle's commentary in the *Yorkshire Post* demonstrates, the 'Battle of Rawmarsh' articulated particular anxieties around the moral condition of youth or more specifically, concerns that the distasteful, disgusting subjectivities literally embodied by the women of Rawmarsh might be reconstituted in their equally distasteful, disgusting offspring. This incident represents to some extent, a critical juncture in the transformation of school meals at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and in some senses, exposes the complexity and ambivalent status of school meals. Despite the obvious dominance of concerns with nutrition, it suggests that school meals have come to signify much more than simply what young people eat (Warde 1997). The 'Battle of Rawmarsh' offers a window into the different discourses and rationalities which circulated around school meals at that time and to some degree still do; of what it is possible to do, say and think about young people and food and consequently, what kinds of

actions, speech and thoughts are deemed irrational, unsayable and undoable. This battle brought together familiar adversaries in a game of power where previously divergent components converged and a variety of alignments between the media, health agencies and schools were forged. In this game of power, the stakes could not have been higher – the territory contested was the moral and physical condition of youth.

This chapter draws on earlier work based on ethnographic research conducted with young people in primary schools in the UK in 2006//2007 during the height of the school meals revolution (Morgan and Sonnino 2008). The study focussed on four case study schools within a city in the north of England and generated data through interviews and/or focus groups with teachers, lunchtime staff, head teachers, and parents and through a range of participatory activities with young people. Throughout the chapter I refer to these schools using pseudonyms and highlight the ways in which the everyday practices of school dining entice, persuade and cajole young people to engage in practices of self-formation that are part of a wider moral enterprise. I suggest how attempts to shape the desires and aspirations of young people in relation to food resonate with broader concerns about the contemporary condition of youth. Thus, the everyday lived experiences of young people in relation to food and eating become significant not only in elucidating how young people are governed but also how such attempts to govern open up spaces for 21<sup>st</sup> Century critical youth studies to engage with moral crises of youth. In this chapter I maintain that Foucauldian inspired analyses of government make possible a range of productive theoretical encounters for critical youth studies and consider how this might inform an understanding of the school meals agenda as a biopolitical project which renders the bodies of young people legitimate targets of government. Fundamentally, strategies of government configured around young people's food practices are accompanied by particular moral imperatives which shape young people's sense of self. They encourage young people to monitor and regulate what they eat, how, where, when and who with. In what follows I initially outline some of the policy terrain related to school meals before sketching out some of the key ideas drawn from the field of governmentality studies that have shaped and continue to influence not only my own work, but also the field of young people's health and wellbeing more generally. Subsequently, I illustrate how young people's food choices have become part of a moral project of the self and central to the formation of the healthy subject.

### **School food policy and the moral crisis of youth**

For the last decade, what young people eat has become a legitimate concern for state governments around the world in light of the perceived threat to health associated with rising levels of childhood overweight and obesity (Department of Health 2004, Department of Health 2008, Gard and Wright 2005, Rich 2010, Vander Schee and Gard 2011). In many neoliberal developed nations such as Australia, the UK and the USA, this concern has been rendered visible through recurrent and wide ranging reforms to policies governing the kinds of foods that may or may not be served in schools

In the UK under the successive Blair and Brown governments (1997-2010) school food gained prominence as a central component of public health policy, specifically as a mechanism to halt the year on year rise in childhood obesity (H.M. Treasury 2007). Waves of legislation introduced increasingly stringent food based and nutritional standards stipulating precisely what kinds of foods, including their minimum and maximum amounts of 14 different nutrients, should be served at lunchtime, throughout the school day, via vending machines, in after school clubs and in what are colloquially known in the UK as ‘tuck shops’ where children and young people are able to purchase snacks during their morning break (Statutory Instrument 2359, 2005).

At that time the Labour government had already pledged their commitment to reforming school food in the 2004 White Paper *Choosing Health*, (Department of Health 2004) but the problem of what young people ate at school was catapulted into the public’s imagination by celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver’s *Feed Me Better* campaign. This campaign built on the success of the UK Channel 4 television series *Jamie’s School Dinners* (2005) and called for increased spending on school meals and training for catering staff (Kelly and Harrison 2009). The ambiguous and often controversial figure of Jamie Oliver has subsequently attracted significant academic interest (See Pike and Kelly 2014, Lewis 2008, Kelly and Harrison 2009, Hollows and Jones 2010, Warin 2011). It is not my intention to pursue a discussion of the figure of Jamie Oliver here. Instead, I wish to emphasise three points regarding school food reforms at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: first, in the UK between 2004 and 2007 school food represented a policy area characterised by what Ball (2013) and Dunleavy and O’Leary (1987) have referred to as ‘hyperactivism’. That is to say, hyper-dynamic and overloaded with a proliferation of rapidly implemented policy interventions. Second, this hyperactivism drew into play a disparate range of stakeholders operating within academia, policy and practice, including, but not limited to parents, politicians, educators, nutritionists, head teachers, researchers, dinner ladies, celebrity chefs, government quangos and private sector organisations, although rarely

young people themselves. Third, the stimulus for policy reform was ostensibly a desire on the one hand to reduce childhood overweight and obesity and the perceived health implications and costs associated with this and on the other to improve the quality of food served within schools following Jamie Oliver's exposé of the infamous 'turkey twizzler'. This food item – concocted from low grade, mechanically recovered meat, processed, blended, shaped and fried – carried all the symbolic connotations of cheap, disgusting, waste-based junk food, signifying a lack of investment in young people as a concern of the social state. Giroux suggests this is characteristic of a cultural landscape in which children are regarded solely as consumers and 'redefined through what amounts to a culture of cruelty, abandonment, and disposability (Giroux 2009, 42). My suggestion here is that because of the highly dynamic policy context, because of the mobilisation of different rationalities related to young people's food practices and health, because of the involvement of new, emergent assemblages and configurations of stakeholders, a heightened sense of crisis around the health of young people was generated in both a physical and a moral sense. Young people, as both corporeal beings of the future and as individual subjects became a 'problem' that required sustained and urgent action.

Therefore, as I have attempted to argue elsewhere, the significance of school meals as a means to explore both the social context and the policy landscape of childhood and youth cannot be underestimated since concerns over school food and its nutritional quality are emblematic of far wider anxieties around the physical and moral condition of youth (Pike and Colquhoun 2012, Lupton 1996, Gustafsson 2002). Our approach to school food says something about the ways in which we judge contemporary youth and implicitly, the fears we have for their, and consequently, the nation's future. At a time when the issue of school meals was receiving an unprecedented degree of attention from the media, from policy makers and government through successive raft of legislation, local strategies and policies, the issue of school meals became a significant feature of a cultural landscape in which healthy eating was associated with particular types of subjects; subjects who were successful, self-regulating, rational and moral.

### **Governing young people: Bodies and biopolitics**

In attempting to think through the moral and corporeal problem of youth, much of my previous work has been located within the conceptual terrain mapped out by Michel Foucault. I have previously argued that Foucault's various analyses of government provide a useful starting point for thinking about the ways in which young people's eating practices are

structured and how young people are called upon to think of themselves as subjects (Pike 2008). Some of this work has argued that the organisation of physical space within school dining rooms structures individuals' fields of action in a variety of productive ways that fundamentally affect social relationships within the space (Pike 2008, Pike and Colquhoun 2009, Pike 2010). In more recent work with Leahy, I argued that school food has become a vehicle through which parents, or more specifically mothers, have become 'pedagogicalised' through a variety of school based interventions which recruit and/or coerce them into supporting particular governmental imperatives around young people's food practices.

For Foucault, government relates to the variety of ways in which 'the conduct of individuals or groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick ... to govern in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action' (Foucault 1982, 790). In relation to school food, young people's fields of action have been structured, or perhaps even significantly constrained, by legislation which curtails the types of food available to them at school, as is the case in the UK, Australia and for some students in the USA (see Pike and Leahy 2012). Despite differences in approach between and within these neoliberal states, these reforms actively attempt to reduce the presence of, or remove altogether, certain foods and drinks from school canteens based upon the notion that 'healthy kids have healthy canteens' (Pike and Leahy 2012). Such endeavours proceed on the assumption that the introduction of school food standards will enhance the nutritional quality of food available to young people in schools, and contribute to improvements in diet and a reduction in the prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity. Furthermore, in the UK specifically, the practice of locking the school gates at lunchtime in order to physically prevent young people from leaving the school site might also be regarded as an attempt to foreclose particular possibilities for young people. This practice has the specific intention of preventing young people from accessing nearby catering outlets serving 'unhealthy' food items (Pike and Colquhoun 2012). For young people forced to remain on school premises at lunchtime, menus are often tightly regulated and the choices offered to young people dictated centrally by a subcontracted catering company. In one of the schools in my study catering staff explained the limitations that the food standards placed upon them in terms of the kinds of meals they were permitted to prepare for young people.

Cathy [catering manager] showed me the folder of recipes, each recipe in an individual plastic cover and told me that the food has to be prepared exactly as it says in the book. I asked her if there was any room for manoeuvre and she said, none at all. It has to be exactly as written adding, 'my area supervisor would string me up'. (Fieldnotes, Crosby School)

Governmentality, in this context, demonstrates how regimes of government deploy a range of techniques in order to shape the possible fields of action of young people. These techniques also reflect a concern for young people as citizens of the future, and the extent to which they might usefully fulfil their obligations to the state. In this sense such attempts can be understood as essentially, biopolitical. That is to say, they are concerned with the governing of human beings as a biological species. Biopolitics relates to the basic biological features of the human species as an object of political strategy (Foucault, 2009) and repositions life and death “within our ways of thinking about and imagining politics” (Dean 2004, 17). For Foucault, the mechanisms that biopolitics utilises function very differently from disciplinary mechanisms which are enacted at the individual level. Biopolitical mechanisms are designed to intervene at a population level and include epidemiological techniques of forecasting, statistical estimation and overall measures such as mortality rates, birth rates and life expectancy. Within the context of school food in the UK, it is the annual monitoring of young people’s Body Mass Index (BMI) within schools through the national child measurement programme that provides the biopolitical mechanism through which school food interventions are legitimised (see <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/ncmp>).

In his *Our Nation’s Future* speech in 2006, Tony Blair made clear the justification for reforming school meals:

But in respect of obesity, the issues are really quite stark. For Type 2 diabetics, around half of whose condition is attributable to obesity, life expectancy is reduced by as much as 10 years. Amongst children obesity is growing at a rapid, indeed alarming, rate. This is the reason why campaigns like those run by Jamie Oliver on School Dinners are not a passing fad, they are central to the nation’s future health. (Blair, 2006)

While there is considerable debate about whether such agendas might constitute eugenic strategies in the strictest sense (Rose 2007), Blair’s emphatic alignment of young people’s health with the wellbeing of the state suggests that the explicit aim of government is to preserve life, to ‘make live rather than let die’(Foucault 2003, 241). In order to make this association, particular claims are made concerning the potential for school meals to reduce childhood obesity, to impact upon Type 2 diabetes and ultimately to prevent the untimely death of our young people. Thus, discursively at least, Blair makes it difficult for detractors to challenge this noble ambition of government. The positioning of childhood obesity within this discursive framework, and the associated truths which are called upon within this speech, provide a rationale to legitimise a range of interventions designed to encourage subjects to make healthier



lifestyle choices (Burrows 2009, Leahy 2009, Rich 2010, Vander Schee 2009). Nevertheless, one of the outcomes of this discursive manoeuvre is that apparently healthy young people are regarded by the state as “actually asymptotically or pre-symptomatically ill” (Rose 2007, 19). While the discursive construction of childhood obesity as ‘alarming’ an ‘epidemic’ or ‘ticking time bomb’ has been regarded as problematic (Campos 2004, Gard and Wright 2005, Evans 2006) such language contributes to the growing sense of crisis of youth and the problematisation of young bodies as potentially at risk from ill health and disease and fundamentally, a threat to the economic wellbeing of the state.

The emphasis on subjects as biological beings that are always and already at risk has generated new forms of subjectification which are organised around an emergent ‘somatic ethics’ or rather “the values for the conduct of a life – that accords a central place to the corporeal, bodily existence” (Rose 2007, 6). For Rose, these emergent forms of subjectification are aligned with recent developments in biomedicine.

We are increasingly coming to relate to ourselves as ‘somatic’ individuals, that is to say, as beings whose individuality is, in part at least, grounded within our fleshy, corporeal existence, and who experience, articulate, judge, and act upon ourselves in part in the language of biomedicine. (Rose 2007, 25-6)

In relation to young people, school meals and childhood obesity, food itself is increasingly thought of in terms of precise nutritional content and composition and in some senses contemporary dietetics concerns itself with the body on a chemical level as individuals are described in terms of their ‘nutritional status’. However, in relation to overweight and obesity, it is young people’s bodies in their entirety that remain visible on a scale that exceeds the microbiological by some considerable margin and as a result, attract particular types of moral judgments (Campos 2004, Gard and Wright 2005, Evans 2006). It is worth considering how such moral judgements associated with young people’s potential obese, unhealthy bodies and the food choices that they make might influence the construction of the subject. As Dean suggests, any attempt to govern, including the various biopolitical strategies associated with school food, is accompanied by moral imperatives. He states that:

the rational attempt to shape conduct implies another feature of this study of government: it links with moral questions. If morality is understood as the attempt to make oneself accountable for one’s own actions, or as a practice in which human beings take their own conduct to be subject to self-regulation then government is an intensely moral activity... It is a moral enterprise as it presumes to know with varying degrees of

explicitness and using specific forms of knowledge, what constitutes good, virtuous, appropriate, responsible conduct of individuals. (Dean 2010, 19)

It is illuminating to explore the ways in which these moral imperatives are used to shore up school food practices and how young people are rendered accountable for the decisions they make about how, when, where and what they eat.

### **Governing the self: Young people, morality and the formation of the healthy subject**

School food policy and practice provide government with an opportunity to explicitly shape, sculpt, mobilize and work through the food choices, desires and aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of parents, families and children. This might be defined as a process of ‘governmental self formation’ or rather

The ways in which various authorities and agencies seek to shape the conduct, aspirations, needs, desires and capacities of specified political and social categories, to enlist them in particular strategies and to seek definite goals. (Dean 1995, 563)

Rose suggests that such attempts are directed towards the individual’s “sentiments, beliefs and values – in short, by acting upon ethics” and that this new target of government constitutes a kind of ‘ethopolitics’ (2007, 19). In the context of school food, practices emerge that attempt to shape young people’s aspirations in a variety of ways. For some schools in the research, specific health properties of foods were invoked; a teacher at Crosby School notes ‘just mentioning things like eating healthily makes you grow and keep healthy and keep fit and strong and makes your bones grow and all that kind of stuff’. Becoming healthy and strong appears to be a laudable aspiration and one that can be achieved by making ‘the ‘right’ food choices. In other schools, seating young people next to ‘role models’ such as teachers, older students and other staff members, or articulating the healthy food preferences of ‘role models’ were explicit strategies to entice young people to select certain foods and reject others.

“Try it, you might like it. Have you tried that one?” I mean I’ve done it with a lot of children, “Oh, that’s my favourite”. I mean, they used to say they didn’t like rice pudding and I said “Ooh but that’s my favourite, you’ve not tried that before” you know, “Go try it”. I mean, if they try it and then say they don’t like it, that’s different, because at least they’ve tried it. (Lunchtime Supervisor, Lavender Road School)

Young people then can become ‘just like’ the people they are thought to admire by emulating their food preferences and practices. In all four case study schools, a variety of governmental techniques worked to encourage students to select virtuous ‘healthy’ school lunches rather than

‘unhealthy’ packed lunches brought in from home. These included awarding house points, prizes, golden tickets and spaces on the golden table for those young people that ate food items that were deemed healthy, or that converted from packed lunches to school meals. The golden table or top table was elaborately set out with a table cloth and often flowers and special beakers and plates. Students that had behaved particularly well in the dining room by eating all their lunch, trying something new or exhibiting good table manners for example, were able to sit on this special table with their invited guests. As Holt points out these methods can be regarded as disciplinary techniques “that reward children for achieving expected norms of learning or bodily performance” (Holt 2004, 20) and work to reinforce particular moral judgements based upon food and young people’s food choices through shaping young people’s desires and preferences.

In relation to young people’s eating practices it is possible to view the practices of lunchtime supervisors and teachers within the dining room as an attempt to shape young people’s aspirations in relation to food and to train them to develop particular practices of the self. Foucault argues that practices of the self involve more subtle forms of discipline rather than coercive practices and instead constitute:

what one would call an ascetic practice, taking asceticism in a very general sense – in other words, not in the sense of a morality of renunciation but as an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being. (2000, 282)

Mastery of the self or *askesis* involves the subject governing her own conduct through a variety of different techniques of the self. The regulation of appetite, avoiding excess, selecting appropriate food items, following the correct routines during lunchtime can all be regarded as practices of the self that support the attainment of certain modes of being regarded as healthy. The encouragements to eat more/less, to choose vegetables, to choose a school dinner instead of a packed lunch are all invocations to adopt healthy lifestyles in accordance with contemporary nutritional knowledge. The eventual aim is that young people will internalise these practices so that they will no longer require any external imposition but will be applied by the subject to govern herself. Furthermore, such practices also encourage young people to operate a constant state of vigilance, continuously monitoring themselves to ensure they implement their knowledge of healthy eating practices and make the correct choices related to what, where, when and how they eat (Wright 1990). Consequently, despite Foucault’s suggestion that practices of self-government do not reflect ascetics in the sense of ‘a morality

of renunciation', in relation to school food there *are* tangible rewards for those young people demonstrating their moral character through their ability to resist the temptation of pies, burger vans and packed lunches (Leahy and Pike 2014). While some of these practices are related to positive reinforcements and enticements to eat particular kinds of food, the renunciation of other food items are fundamental and these practices are couched in explicitly moral terms.

There are a number of ways in which “the art of self-government is explicitly connected with morality” (Foucault, 2002, 206) and the framing of eating in terms of food ‘choice’ is an example of this. Those that make ‘bad’ food choices are regarded as weak, irrational, ill disciplined and susceptible to temptation whereas those making ‘good’ food choices are regarded as virtuous, disciplined and capable of resisting corporeal pleasures. Dean suggests “morality is understood as the attempt to make oneself accountable for one’s own actions” and when food selection and consumption is understood as a choice, individuals are held accountable for the repercussions of those choices. Thus, the health status of young people, their weight and bodily deportment can be understood as the inevitable consequence of the food choices they have made. The possibility of being overweight, obese, healthy or ill then represents only one potential option in a field of different possibilities for young people’s physical development (Rose 2007). However, such choices are never value neutral. There are right choices and wrong choices and parents are made aware that “eating a healthy school lunch is the best choice for your child. They will be healthier, more alert, focussed and able to concentrate” (School Food Trust 2009). Since good food choices are the only rational choice to make, bad food choices attract moral judgement.

if you’re giving your young children fizzy drinks, you’re an a\*\*\*\*\*, you’re a tosser... Red Bull gives you wings. You may as well give them a line of coke. (Jamie Oliver cited in Bradly, *The Sun*, 08/09/06)

Some of the discursive constructions around bad food choices speak to contemporary constructions of young people as the wasted consumer generation. Drawing on Bauman, Giroux suggests that young people have become commodified in neoliberal societies, their worth assessed only in terms of their capacity to consume; meaning that young people have come to be regarded not as investments for the future but as essentially “redundant and expendable” (2009, 31). The construction of young people as the McDonalds generation, as ubiquitous consumers of junk food connotes a sense of the massification and disposability of young people and signifies the lack of value ascribed to them. In some senses, eating as a practice of consumption is unique in that food represents a “liminal substance bridging nature

and culture, outside inside, there is a sense of eating as incorporating into oneself” (Lupton 1996, 16). Consequently, widely held assumptions about young people as junk food, turkey twizzler eaters or consumers of ‘Pink Slime’ products in the USA. connects with constructions of young people as valueless, superfluous and expendable. On a symbolic level then young people’s food choices constitute their sense of self as conveyed through the old adage, ‘you are what you eat’, and their food practices influence the ways in which different generations regard young people.

**Conclusion: The moral problem of young people’s health and 21<sup>st</sup> Century critical youth studies.**

The start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century bore witness to the ‘school food revolution’ (Morgan and Sonnino 2008) which problematised young people’s bodies in a number of ways. Young people’s bodies were deemed susceptible to a variety of diet related diseases including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, stroke and cancer. Consequently, as citizens of the future young people were positioned both as ‘at risk’ or already pre-symptomatically ill, and simultaneously as ‘potential problems’, imposing excessive burdens in terms of healthcare on an already overstretched state and potentially contributing little to society in terms of economic activity. Such concerns legitimise biopolitical strategies of government directed towards young people’s bodies through a variety of different techniques and strategies, including shaping young people’s eating practices at school. These strategies include curtailing and manipulating young people’s fields of action by banning certain foods in schools, regulating foods that can be served and making it difficult for young people to leave the school premises to find food elsewhere. But more subtle strategies are also employed which encourage individual young people to conduct their own conduct in relation to food choices. Such strategies are almost always accompanied by moral imperatives which valorise particular modes of behaviour and food choices and demonise others and by implication invite judgements about the type of young person that makes those choices. Therefore, young people growing up in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century may be subject to greater levels of accountability and moral judgements than previous generations for their food and other lifestyle choices. Furthermore, as the ‘Battle of Rawmarsh’ shows, parents of 21<sup>st</sup> Century young people are increasingly being asked to align themselves with governmental imperatives that seek to shape young people’s food choices, and their moral and physical development. Thus, the assemblage of technologies and constituent actors seeking to shape young people’s behaviour appears to be forming new alignments and networks. Parents that resist such attempts are regarded as “fat stupid mothers fight[ing] for the right to raise fat

stupid children” (Hattersley, *The Times* 24/09/06) and are deemed to be operating irrationally through their non-compliance with the prevailing orthodoxy around healthy eating. Within this orthodoxy school dinners are considered the *only* means of providing a nutritious meal for children during the school day and women are positioned as irresponsible guardians of future generations with their ineffective mothering practices bound to their embodied status as ‘fat’. For scholars of 21<sup>st</sup> Century critical youth studies, the recruitment of parents into such governmental assemblages may well be highly problematic.

While this chapter attempts to open up a space in which to critique some of the techniques used to govern young people and some of the effects of focusing on young people’s bodies as essentially problematic it is not my intention here to suggest that every attempt to govern should be considered as negative or repressive. Indeed, as Giroux (2009) notes, young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have become subject to increasingly aggressive marketing techniques as multinational food corporations seek to generate brand loyalty among emerging markets of young consumers. Consequently, attempts to inculcate healthy eating behaviours may indeed provide an important counterpoint to enable young people to critically assess how they are recruited and enticed into developing particular eating habits. Further, this may also enable them to ask questions about food safety, food production, ethical sourcing in addition to the health implications of the food that they choose to or are required to consume. However, my contention is that more often than not, the range of techniques and rationalities of government that shape young people’s food aspirations do not open up spaces to facilitate young people’s productive engagement in these sorts of debates. Rather, they foreclose opportunities for critical encounters by positioning young people and parents/carers that refuse to comply with the prevailing orthodoxy around healthy eating as irrational and operating outside of sense.

Following the election of the Coalition government in 2010 the school meals revolution appears to be taking a new direction. Responsibility for school meals is now devolved to head teachers within schools with academy status and at the time of writing, the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove has released the results of a report he commissioned in 2012 into the condition of school meals (Dimpleby and Vincent 2013). This report contains a number of recommendations including the potential for school meals to be provided free of charge to students to ensure that young people are able to access a nutritious meal at least once a day during school term time. Other measures recommend banning packed lunches altogether. While it is not yet known which of these recommendations may be taken up, or indeed which

will be funded by the government it seems likely that young people's food choices will continue to remain controversial and will continue to shed light on the ways in which young people's moral and physical development are regarded. Indeed, the hysteria surrounding the childhood overweight and obesity epidemic appears to show few signs of abating as according to Professor Mitch Blair "This is no longer a ticking obesity timebomb – it has exploded. It is no longer obese adults that should be the sole focus of our concerns." (McDermott *Daily Mail*, 12/06/13). Scholars of 21<sup>st</sup> Century youth studies may well find themselves picking through the aftermath of this particular bombsite to open up spaces for thinking about young people's health and wellbeing in more fruitful and productive ways.

## References

- Ball, Stephen J. 2013. *The Education Debate*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Blair, Tony. 2006. *Our Nation's Future*, July 26. Accessed August 07, 2013.  
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page9921>
- Bradly, Jennifer. 2006. "Jamie: Junk Parents are Tossers" *The Sun*, September 8.
- Burrows, Lisette. 2009. "Pedagogizing families through obesity discourse." In *Biopolitics and the Obesity Epidemic: Governing Bodies*, edited by Jan Wright, and Valerie Harwood, 127-140. Abingdon, Oxfordshire : Routledge.
- Campos, Paul. 2004. *The Obesity Myth: Why America's Obsession with Weight is Hazardous to your Health*. New York: Gotham Books.
- Channel 4, *Jamie's School Dinner*. Accessed August 07, 2013.  
<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/jamies-school-dinners>
- Dean, Mitchell. 1995. "Governing the unemployed self in an active society." *Economy and Society* 24:559-583. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi:10.1080/03085149500000025.
- Dean, Mitchell. 2004. "Four Theses on the Powers of Life and Death" *Contretemps* 5:16-29. Accessed August 07, 2013. <http://sydney.edu.au/contretemps/5december2004/dean.pdf>
- Dean, Mitchell. 2010. *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Sage.
- Department of Health. 2004. *Choosing Health: Making Healthier Choices Easier*. Accessed August 07, 2013.  
[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4094550](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4094550)
- Department of Health. 2008. *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: A Cross Government Strategy For England*, Accessed August 07, 2013.  
[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthimprovement/Obesity/DH\\_082383](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthimprovement/Obesity/DH_082383)
- Dimbleby, Henry., and John Vincent. 2013. *The School Food Plan*. Accessed August 07, 2013.  
[http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wpcontent/uploads/2013/07/School\\_Food\\_Plan\\_2013.pdf](http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wpcontent/uploads/2013/07/School_Food_Plan_2013.pdf)
- Dowle, Jayne. 2006. "Indigestible Realities about The Rawmarsh Mothers" *Yorkshire Post*, September 22.
- Dunleavy, Patrick., and Brendan O'Leary. 1987. *Theories of the State: The Politics of Liberal Democracy*. New York: Meredith Books.



- Evans, Bethan. 2006. "Gluttony or sloth? Critical geographies of bodies and morality in (anti)obesity policy." *Area* 38: 259–67. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi:10.1111/j.1475-4762.2006.00692.x
- Foucault, Michel. 1982. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry*, 8: 777-795 Accessed August 07, 2013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197>
- Foucault, Michel. 2000. "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom." In *Michel Foucault: Essential Works of Foucault 1954- 1984, Volume 1, Ethics* edited by Paul Rabinow, 281 – 302. London: Penguin.
- Foucault, Michel. 2002. "Governmentality" in *Michel Foucault: Essential Works of Foucault 1954- 1984, Volume 3, Power*, edited by James. D. Faubion, 201 – 223. London: Penguin.
- Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Society Must Be Defended* Translated by David Macey. London: Penguin
- Foucault, Michel. 2009. *Security, Territory and Population*. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Picador.
- Gard, Jan., and Michel Wright. 2005. *The Obesity Epidemic: Science, Morality and Ideology*. Oxon: Routledge
- Giroux, Henry A., 2009. *Youth in a Suspect Society*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gustafsson, Ulla. 2002. "School meals policy; the problem with governing children." *Social Policy and Administration* 36: 685-697. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi: 10.1111/1467-9515.00311.
- Hattersley, Giles. 2006. "We Know What Food the Kids Like, and It's Not Polenta" *The Sunday Times*, September 24.
- Hollows, Joanne., and Steve Jones. 2010. "'At Least He's Doing Something': Moral Entrepreneurship and Individual Responsibility in Jamie's Ministry of Food." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 13:307-322. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi: 10.1177/1367549410363197.
- Holt, Louise. 2004. "The 'Voices' of Children: De-centring Empowering Research Relations." *Children's Geographies*, 2:13-27. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi:10.1080/1473328032000168732.
- HM Treasury, 2007. *PSA Delivery Agreement 12: Improve the Health and Wellbeing Of Children And Young People*. London: HMSO. Accessed August 07, 2013. <http://www.commissioningsupport.org.uk/idoc65b9.pdf?docid=b327d882-4eec-46d6-bafb-238542c907f2&version=-1>
- Kelly, Peter., and Lyn Harrison. 2009. *Working in Jamie's Kitchen: Salvation, Passion and Young Workers*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Lawler, Stephanie. 2002. "Mobs and Monsters: Independent Man Meets Paulsgrove Woman." *Feminist Theory* 3: 103-113. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi:10.177/1460012002003001654.
- Lawler, Stephanie. 2005. "Disgusted Subjects: The Making of Middle-Class Identities." *The Sociological Review* 53: 429-446. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.2005.00560.x.
- Leahy, Deana. 2009. 'Disgusting pedagogies.' In *Biopolitics and the Obesity Epidemic: Governing Bodies*, edited by Jan Wright, and Valerie Harwood, 172-182. Abingdon, Oxfordshire : Routledge.
- Leahy, Deana and Jo Pike, 2014. "Just Say No to Pies" in *Food Pedagogies* edited by Rick Flowers and Elaine Swan. Aldershot UK: Ashgate
- Lewis, Tania. 2008. *Smart Living, Lifestyle Media and Popular Expertise*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Lupton, Deborah. 1996. *Food, Body and the Self*. London: Sage.
- McDermott, Nick. 2013. "Childhood Obesity Cases Up Four-Fold in a Decade: Nearly 21,000 Aged Five To 19 Treated in Hospital for Weight-Related Conditions" *The Daily Mail*, June 12.
- Morgan, Kevin., and Roberta Sonnino. 2008. *School Food Revolution, Public Food and the Challenge of Sustainable Development*. London: Earthscan.
- Perrie, Robin. 2006. "Sinner Ladies Sell Kids Junk Food." *The Sun*, September 16.
- Pike, Jo. 2008. "Foucault, Space and Primary School Dining Rooms." *Children's Geographies* 6: 413-422. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi:10.1080/14733280802338114.
- Pike, Jo. 2010. "I Don't Have To Listen To You! You're Just A Dinner Lady!': Power and Resistance at Lunchtimes in Primary Schools." *Children's Geographies* 8:275-289. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi: 10.1080/14733285.2010.494867
- Pike, Jo., and Derek Colquhoun. 2009. "The Relationship Between Policy And Place: The Role of School Meals in Addressing Health Inequalities." *Health Sociology Review*, 18: 50-60
- Pike, Jo., and Derek Colquhoun. 2012. 'Lunchtime Lock In: Territorialisation and UK School Meals Policies.' In *Critical Geographies Of Childhood And Youth: Contemporary Policy And Practice*, edited by Peter Kraftl, John Horton and Faith Tucker, 133-150. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Pike Jo and Peter Kelly. 2014. *Beyond Jamies School Dinners: The Moral Economies and Geographies of Young People and Food*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pike Jo., and Deana Leahy. 2012. "School Food and the Pedagogies of Parenting." *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 52: 434-459.

Rich, Emma. 2010. "Obesity assemblages and surveillance in schools." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 23- 803 – 82. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi: 10.1080/09518398.2010.529474

Rose, Nikolas. 2007. *The Politics of Life Itself*. Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press.

School Food Trust. 2009. *Little Book of Goodness*. Accessed August 07, 2013. <http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/assets/resources/little-book-of-goodness/cftlbgv4pdf>

Skeggs, Bev. 2005. "The Making of Class and Gender through Visualizing Moral Subject Formation." *Sociology* 39: 965 – 982. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi: 10.1177/0038038505058381.

Statutory Instrument 2359, *The Education (Nutritional Standards and Requirements for school food) (England), School Meals and Nutrition Bill, 37 2005*

Vander Schee, Carolyn. 2009. "Fruit, Root Vegetables, Fatness and Foucault: Governing Students and Their Families Through School Health Policy.", *Journal of Education Policy*, 24: 557-574. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi:10.1080/02680930902823047.

Vander Schee, Carolyn., and Michael Gard. 2011. "Politics, Pedagogy and Practice in School Health Policy." *Policy Futures in Education*, 9: 307-314. Accessed August 07, 2013. doi: 10.2304/pfie.2011.9.3.307.

Warde, Alan. 1997. *Consumption, Food and Taste*. London: Sage.

Warin, Megan. 2011. "Foucault's Progeny: Jamie Oliver and the Art of Governing Obesity." *Social Theory & Health* 9: 24–40 Accessed August 07, 2013. doi:10.1057/sth.2010.2.