

## **Taste the Difference: Gender Change and Food Preferences.**

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The thesis aims to evaluate the relationship between food and gender, specifically if and how food is used as a way to perform gender. The research focuses on the relationship between sweetness and the perception of femininity. The method used includes a long-term monitoring of a pool of transgender people during their transition, using personal taste, public and domestic food practices as key parameters.

It has been demonstrated that food and food practices (cooking) are perceived as gendered. Nevertheless, there seem to be no scientific evidence demonstrating that women are more likely to have a sweet tooth, yet they are expected to be the main consumers of sweet products. In confectionery advertisement, men are never portrayed as the final target.

Expectations about gender create expectations about individuals' behaviour. These expectations impact food choices, both those that are strictly personal and those that interfere with the social sphere.

If these assertions or perceptions are true, can we also claim that food is used to perform gender? Can food be considered a social technology used in the creation of gender? In order to answer these questions, the analysis consider gender studies, queer studies as well as food studies. It is important to mention that these bodies of literature do not use transgenderism to study the gender dimension of food (neither food to study the construction of gender in transgender people).

In order to limit the field of enquiry, the research focuses on the identification of sugar with femininity in Western society. Sugar – and other sweeteners – can be used as a filter through which the influence of social expectation on gendered food behaviour can be observed. The research questions how, in the context of Western societies, the

identification (or lack of identification) with sweet food can work as a builder of gender identity.

Empirical data about food consumption are complemented by quantitative data gathered from industry (panel tasting for sweet products) and from neuroscience (is there or not a significant difference between genders in brain reactions to food?). Finally, the study implies interviews and qualitative data.

The results of the analysis provide considerations that are relevant beyond the LGBTIQ community. They examine the evolution of the relationship between gender and food practices, and beyond the single variable attaching sugar to femininity. Transgenders' behaviour mirrors society in the way they feel pressured or not to adopt a food practice to express their gender.

Our current perceptions of roles in provisioning, cooking and consuming food in Western society are shaped around social arrangements that originated in the past and are now evolving. The challenge is to predict how this picture will progress. The results of this research might lead to new approaches in education to food and the way people relate to its preparation and consumption.