Grab Your Fork: A Netnographic Study of a Foodie Blog and its Community.

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Dedication:

To Mike, my friend and mentor, without whom this work would not have been possible.

You are sorely missed.

Abstract

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Colloquially known as foodies (Barr & Levy, 1984), there is a group of people who have a deep interest in food and eating. Such people are often skilled amateurs (Stebbins, 1992), with a high level of knowledge about food and ingredients. Foodies collect food experiences, and visits to celebrated restaurants, much as tourists collect souvenirs (Morgan et al. 2008). Many foodies are well-off people from the middle classes who are also internet users. For them, online consumer reviews have become an important information resource, in particular food blogs which provide amateur restaurant reviews (Zhu & Zhang, 2010; Pantalidis, 2010). Those who do read food blogs prefer their reviews to those of supposedly "professional" reviewers who work for traditional publications, as bloggers are seen as more independent. Such amateur reviews aid in spreading word of mouth attitudes within a community of consumption. The members of these groups furthermore share their knowledge with each other via the medium of the blog.

This thesis is based on two major areas of theory, and applies them to the concepts of foodism and food blogging for the first time. Firstly the thesis critically examines the key themes of foodism and food blogging as a form of Serious Leisure. Helen Yee is a foodie whose intense interest in food and eating is so strong that she writes a blog, called *Grab Your Fork*, with almost daily posts on the food which she has eaten. This "citizen journalism" (Bruns, 2007) takes her blogging into the Serious Leisure arena.

Secondly, Tajfel and Turner's (1979) theory on Social Identity Theory has not previously been applied to either foodie communities or blogging communities. In the case of *Grab Your Fork* the network of individuals who have developed an on-line community are also foodies, so the example was able to be applied to both situations, and was shown to be an

appropriate model to explain such a community. The attachment of emotional involvement to the group and their values and ethos structure as presented within this theory links to the concept of Serious Leisure in that in Social identity Theory, it is the self-confirmation as being an in-group member or out-group member that defines a person's definition of themselves (Shamir, 1992).

KEYWORDS: Serious Leisure, foodies, food blogs, online communities, identity, Social Identity Theory, restaurant marketing, social media

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The internet is a system of interconnected computer networks that serves billions of users worldwide. It was initially developed by American universities in the 1960's as a tool for the United States military, then spread to research uses (Wamala, 2007), but it has subsequently evolved to include widespread business and personal applications (Nieckarz, 2005). By June 2012, it was estimated that 34% of the world's population are connected to the internet (Miniwatts World Marketing Group, 2013). Many internet users are well off people who are likely to eat in restaurants, and therefore potential readers of food blogs (Guadagno et al. 2008; technorati (sic), 2011). Those who do read food blogs prefer their reviews to those of supposedly "professional" reviewers who work for traditional publications, as bloggers are seen as more independent (Ho & Chang Chien, 2010; technorati, 2011).

Prior to the advent of the internet, opinions were broadcast by so-called experts via the traditional media of television, radio and written publications such as newspapers, magazines and books. To have an opinion which was considered valid enough to be heard, it was essential to be an employee of a media organisation with commercial interests. The internet has provided a mechanism for the individual to vocalise their personal opinions on a wide variety of issues ranging from business, politics and world events to personal leisure interests. This so-called democratisation of content creation and criticism (Lichtenberg, 2007) has allowed the skilled amateur (Stebbins, 1992) to develop their leisure activities and to share their opinions with others who have the same interest. Gurak et al. (2005) noted that the internet gives everyone a voice and the ability to be heard when in other circumstances they may not be. The forms of posting on the internet are varied, and include maintaining an individual webpage, being involved in discussion forums, communicating with "friends" via social media such as Facebook, or compiling a web log.

A web log, more commonly referred to as a ***blog*** (Sullivan, 2008), is a content publishing system generally used to create an on-line journal that appears in reverse chronological order (Huang et al. 2007; Guadagno et al. 2007; Dholakia & Zhang, 2004). Blogging software is simple to use (Ho & Chang Chien, 2010; Schmidt, 2007), and privately posted blogs reportedly outnumber corporate sites by a thousand to one (Morris, 2005). This means that virtually anyone with an interest can publish directly onto the internet and have the potential to gain a worldwide audience. Huang et al. (2007) suggest that a blog can serve a plethora of purposes, and reach a multifarious audience depending upon what the author wants to say and to whom they want to say it.

This thesis studies a community which has developed around a Sydney-based food blog called *Grab Your Fork*. The author of the blog, Helen Yee, is a self-proclaimed "foodie" (Barr & Levy, 1984), a term coined in the August 1982 edition of *Harpers & Queen* magazine, in an article entitled 'Cuisine Poseur'. Whereas a gourmet was seen as an older, upper-class gentleman, foodies were described as the product of the explosion in consumerism, usually younger couples from the upwardly mobile sector of society (Barr & Levy, 1984), who pronounced judgement on food they had eaten in a restaurant, and attempted to replicate at home.

A food blog can be seen as an amateur restaurant review (Ho & Chang Chien, 2010) therefore consumers who read blogs, and share what they have read with others, can have a big impact on a restaurant's business. The attitudes of both the dining public and restaurateurs have changed over recent years, with more credibility applied to such blogs in recent times (Johnson & Kaye, 2009; Ho & Chang Chien, 2010). In fact, statistics from technorati's *State of the Blogosphere* report (2011) suggest that almost half of respondents trust traditional media less than they did five years ago, but take blogs more seriously.

1.2 Rationale

Much research on eating-out suggests that it is a social activity first, and that the food itself is of lesser importance (Wood, 1996; Warde & Martens, 1998; Hanefors & Mossberg, 2007). Indeed, The British, for example, would appear to be a gastronomically lazy nation if the sales figures for microwave meals is any measure (Nevin, 2007), and research has shown that six unadventurous dishes account for the most frequent meals eaten in 98 percent of British households (Bennett, 2008). They also spend a lower percentage of their household income on food than any country in Europe (White, 2007). Restaurant reviewer A.A. Gill (2007) goes so far as to suggest that it is socially unacceptable to discuss food because there isn't much about it that is an acceptable discussion topic.

Driver (1982) and Rohrer (2009) both noted however, how the arrival of celebrity chefs such as Marguerite Patten on radio and later television, began to have an impact on the British public's diet. In the early post war period up until the 1960s Elizabeth David, Claudia Roden and Jane Grigson had an impact on the food served by the upper and middle classes (Rohrer 2009). Later the flamboyant Keith Floyd showed Britons that there was more to seafood than cod and chips. The phrase "Delia effect" (after Delia Smith), appeared in a mainstream dictionary in 2001 (Rohrer, 2009). During the 1980s chefs such as Ken Hom, Anton Mossiman and Madhur Jaffery further opened the English-speaking world to "foreign foods". More recently, chef Jamie Oliver with his down-to-earth persona has made good food seem more accessible to ordinary people (Rohrer, 2009).

Erdly and Kesterton-Townes (2003) suggest that the hospitality industry has undergone a transformation in recent years due to globalisation. Furthermore, according to Williams (2006) this trend means that more importance has been attached to a meal that is eaten out of the home: for some consumers this has in fact become a leisure pursuit. This changed consumption behaviour means that these diners are becoming more discerning and demanding (Erdly & Kesterton-Townes, 2003). One group of people has developed for whom the food and the experience are often the major reason to dine in a particular restaurant (Barr & Levy, 1985), rather than a mere physical refuelling. These people will book months in advance or travel long distances (Long, 2006), simply to eat a meal cooked by a particular chef (Carter, 1985; The Independent, 2006), made with certain ingredients, or in a particular location (Ross, 2003). These people are known colloquially as foodies (Barr & Levy, 1984). Carter (1985) pointed out that these authors suggested that foodies should "worship food", and that food is on a level with art. To call one-self a foodie requires no membership, rather it is a free emotional choice, involving symbolic consumer behaviour that the individual uses to create their own experience with the products and services provided for them by the restaurateur. Such people are often skilled amateurs regarding food (Stebbins 1992), with a high level of knowledge about cooking methods and ingredients. Watson et al. (2008) suggest that foodies are interested in amassing the experience from different restaurants in the same way that tourists take photographs of monuments.

Consumer consumption groups meet in real life, but also increasingly over the internet (Kozinets, 2002), and are referred to as "**tribes**" (Maffesoli, 1996; Kozinets, 2006b). The individuals in a tribe possess a common interest and exist in an almost parallel universe, where the tribe has its own myths, values, rituals, vocabulary and pecking order (Cova & Pace, 2006). Such affiliation groups create the value inherent in experiences in a way where reality is socially constructed (Cova & Cova, 2001). This view of the world can be explained through the postmodern perspective. Once considered by many as a fad, postmoderism is a serious contender as a new world view (Venkatesh et al. 1993; Cova, 1996; Firat & Shultz, 1997; Patterson, 1998; Rojek, 1993).

In this point of view, knowledge is acknowledged as being multiple, and reality is contextual (Brown, 1993; Addis & Podesta, 2005). Postmodernism sees truth as constructed, images and symbols as more important than objects, and consumption as more valid than production. Such a viewpoint denies rationality and the meta-narratives of modernism, instead acknowledging fragmentation and multiplicity (Addis & Podesta, 2005;

Goulding, 2003; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Venkatesh et al. 1993), equality and participation (Brown, 1993), and lived experience (Venkatesh et al. 1993). Brown pointed out that a substantial literature concerning marketing and postmodernism existed as early as 1995. Nunes (1995) suggests that if the internet is analysed in the manner of Baudrillard (1988, 1995), then the concept of "navigating" through the non-real time and locations of cyberspace – hyperreality, or the "information superhighway" – is just as valid as what we perceive as "reality". For Baudrillard (1995), the shift from real to hyperreal occurs when representation gives way to simulation – the screen becomes a way of travelling across the simulated world of virtual reality (Nunes, 1995).

Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) suggest that the symbolic meaning of brands and experiences is paramount to postmodern consumers. As a result of this, new ways of understanding these consumers will be required, in particular an understanding of the consumer's self-identity. Venkatesh, Sherry and Firat (1993) point out that in postmodernism, unless you are a consumer, you have no cultural validity. Thus, foodies become consumers of food experiences, not just in the physical sense of eating, rather the importance lies in having purchased a particular experience. They are not just passive diners eating a meal. When a foodie shares their experience with a like-minded audience, a community of consumption is created (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), a tribe (Maffesoli, 1996). Such a community no longer has to exist in one locality; globalisation is facilitated by technologies such as the internet (Nieckarz, 2005), and as a result, the values of many such consumption communities are no longer dictated by "experts" broadcasting via the mass media, but are advocated by "self-appointed" on-line critics (Semenak, 2007; Rayner, 2007).

From a postmodern perspective, this is an example of the "disembedding" of social structure, which is no longer linked to the physical world (Nieckarz 2005). Foodie bloggers can be seen in the role of citizen journalist, or "cit-jos" (Bruns, 2007) as compared to professional food writers and critics (Rayner, 2007). Although blogging is writer-centric (Su et al. 2005), by blogging their findings about a particular restaurant or fare, the blogger is effectively seeking affirmation of their opinions from those in the peer group to which they aspire – other foodies (Schmidt, 2007; Guadagno et al. 2007). Initially this is for their own gratification, which may develop into what Stebbins (1992) identified as a Serious Leisure pursuit.

Serious Leisure is the non-remunerative occupation of time pursuing activities that are of interest to the pursuer which are not related to any form of career other than the pursuit of the activity itself. The individuals may be described as amateurs, hobbyists or volunteers. Many types of leisure-time consumption experiences can be described as Serious Leisure (Stebbins, 1992; 2007) and involve both skilled consumption (Scitovsky, 1976), and the sharing of the experience with a community of like-minded people (Beard & Ragheb, 1983).

There is virtually no literature published on the concept of the postmodern foodie meal experience or the consumer culture of food (Joy & Li, 2012) and this thesis aims to create a contribution to the body of knowledge in the areas of the consumption of food as a "tribal" activity (Maffesoli, 1996), and the development of a community of consumption around the sharing of foodie experiences, in this particular example through the use of food blogging. The example chosen also highlights the blogger's immersion in the world of Serious Leisure (Stebbins, 1992), and adds to the knowledge by providing evidence that both being a foodie and a blogger can be considered Serious Leisure pursuits.

The thesis is a longitudinal study which analyses how one food blogger has developed her Serious Leisure pursuit over a period of nine years, from a personal food diary to an amateur restaurant reviewer to a part-time food writer. Helen Yee's *Grab Your Fork* blog was chosen as it met Kozinets' six criteria for choosing a site to study with the netnographic method. The established theories of Stebbins' (1992) concept of Serious Leisure, and Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity perspective have been applied individually and in combination to novel situations which have not previously been explored. The work involved in the thesis has demonstrated the validity of these theories in a hospitality environment, specifically using the concept of the social media tool of blogging as its basis.

At the beginning of the research, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) was expected to only have a minor involvement in the development of the community around the *Grab Your Fork* blog (See Figure 3.7). The assumption was that the individual would develop an identity as part of a Serious Leisure community, and that would interpret and shape their experiences. As the research evolved, however, it became clear that Social Identity Theory would become one of the major underpinning theories explaining the growth and development of the community centred around the blog studied. Giddens (1991) and Chaffee (2011) suggested that postmodernism has made reflexive identity radicalise; individual self-identity is "depersonalised" (Reicher et al. 1995) and replaced by the development of social structures through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Through the analysis of the data, as well as the expected results related to Serious Leisure, other concepts emerged, such as the Personal Journey, Identity and Community and Helen Yee's Ethno-cultural Identity (See Chapters 5 and 6). Individuals were found to no longer necessarily group themselves into traditional, modernist ways such as class, having instead a multiplicity of selves to suit different situations and occasions. These may indeed include traditional ethnic or social groupings, but just as plausibly may include membership of a community of consumption, or a Serious Leisure tribe.

1.3 Aims & Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to examine critically the key themes of food blogging as a form of Serious Leisure, using Social Identity Theory to explore the mediation of the meanings and understandings of self for the blogger and her followers.

In order to achieve this aim the following objectives were identified:

1. To critically assess the current state of the literature regarding foodie culture, blogging and communities of consumption.

2. To review and assess the concept of Serious Leisure as an explanation of the development of foodie attitudes and behaviour

3. To analyse the posts and readers' comments of a suitable blog in order to identify evidence of a foodie interpretive repertoire

4. To identify and critique the shared system of meanings for the foodie tribe in these patterns

5. To critically evaluate through Social Identity Theory how meaning is used by the individuals to interpret their experiences and construct self-identity.

6. To review and assess how understanding the myths, values, rituals, and vocabulary of the foodie tribe can assist restaurant marketers to better understand their foodie customers

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 provides the context, rationale, aims and objectives, while Chapter 2 discusses the concept of blogging as on-line communities of consumption. The differences between blogs and other forms of computer mediated communications are discussed. Different types of blog communities are explained, and an individual's development as a member of such a community is discussed.

The literature review then moves on to consider the concept of consumer experiences. The differences between utilitarian and hedonic consumption are explored, and it is emphasised that the consumption of leisure purchases involves subjective, emotional states laden with symbolic meaning. Also discussed is the concept of the extraordinary experience, and how it can be related to dining. This chapter introduces the notion of how the motivations for such leisure activities may be a complex mixture of escapism, socialisation and self-actualisation. The six characteristics of Serious Leisure are explained in detail. The chapter then turns to the discussion and explanation of theories of group and self-identity.

Following, Chapter 4 explains the reasons for choosing Netnography, a relatively new, on-line version of ethnography. This methodology has not been used to study foodies or foodie blogs in the past. The chapter further explains the choice of sample, the data collection method and the style of analysis that was used.

Analysis and interpretation of the data is provided in Chapters 5 and 6 Serious Leisure is discussed in terms of blogging as is the concept of the consumer experience. Individual and group identity are introduced in order to illustrate the meanings expressed within the blog posts and comments.

Lastly, a critical reflection of the researcher's journey is provided, with conclusions and recommendations for further study at Chapter 7.

2. Food Blogging as a Leisure Activity

2.1 Who or What is a Foodie?

The first usage of the term "foodie", according to the Oxford English Dictionary, was in a 1980 *New York Times Magazine* article, although its popularity grew when the term was used in a 1982 *Harper's & Queen* article entitled "Cuisine Poseur" (Poole, 2012). One of these authors then went on to co-author the *Official Foodie Handbook* (Barr & Levy, 1984) which was popular at this time, while the first weekly page in a British newspaper to be devoted to food and drink was presented by Christopher Driver in the Guardian also in 1984 (Jaine, 1997).

A foodie is defined as being someone with an almost obsessive interest in food and dining (Barr & Levy, 1984). Santich (2007) suggests that gastronomy can be understood as "reasoned understanding", and therefore that cooking, eating and drinking is more about the consumption, an intellectual activity, than it is about mere refuelling of the body. Richards (2002) comments further that this is a reflexive activity; an unexamined meal is not worth eating (Barr & Levy 1984). De Long (2006) suggests that foodie is a slang term meaning someone with a particular interest in food without necessarily having any expertise in the field. Despite being a term that has grown from a journalistic neologism, the world of the foodie encompasses serious academic areas of study, such as Serious Leisure (Morgan, 2006; Stebbins, 1992) and communities of consumption. In her thesis on Vancouver foodies, Ambrozas suggests that foodies tend to be more socially aware and know how to use this to set themselves above the general consumer (2003).

Weston (2006) says that the term foodie has in fact replaced such words as epicure or gourmet, with their connotations of snobbishness. A recent article in *The Sunday Times* (Atkinson, 2013) suggested that there is a growing foodie culture even within the student lifestyle. On the other hand authors such as Poole (2012) have led a recent backlash against the concept of foodism, describing foodies as "infantile gastromaniacs", and proclaiming "you aren't what you eat" (p. 6). Poole further suggests that foodism is not an eating disorder, rather a societal issue, denying suggestions that food can define our identity, or be spiritual, or an art form. It is further argued by Poole (2012) that dining is in fact less about the food, and more about the people we dine with, stating for example, that philosopher Alain de Botton serves his dinner guests Marks and Spencer ready-meals, supposedly to improve the conversation (2012). However, as Jacques Derrida said "*Il faut bien manger"*- "we have to eat after all" – and according to Still (2010) this refers to learning and giving to eat rather than just subsisting. Poole's view that one "eats to live" is diametrically opposed to the views of foodies; for foodies the experience of eating is the justification for the social interactivity, whereas Poole views eating as nothing more than an essential life need. Neither view is necessarily wrong it depends on one's social identity.

2.2 Computer Mediated Communications

Jaron Lanier coined the term "virtual reality" in the mid nineteen-eighties (Pine & Korn, 2011). By the nineteen-nineties Brenda Laurel saw computers and virtual reality as offering humans the ability to amplify, extend and enrich their own capabilities of thinking feeling and acting (Pine & Korn, 2011).

Much early work on Computer Mediated Communications (CMC) (Hine, 2000) studied text-based, asynchronous discussion forums, which emphasised an apparently socially-impoverished, non-physical context of the online environment (Kozinets, 1999, 2006; Baym 1995). As Internet technology has improved over the years, the user interface has changed dramatically to include better graphics, high resolution photography, audio and video. Such consumer generated media are the fastest growing forms of content on the internet (Gretzel et al. 2008). This has made both the communication and research environments more flexible. The mass adoption of networked personal computing since the mid-1990s, has allowed the development of new cultural formations that are novel due to their online context (Kozinets, 2006). The Internet acts as a platform to facilitate the formation of loosely knit social groups. Despite authors such as Putnam (2001) suggesting that in a postmodern world individualisation will continue to the point where we are "bowling alone", research shows that there is a tendency for communities in cyberspace to not only exist, but to thrive (Hodkinson, 2007).

2.3 Online Communities of Interest

Communities of interest have always existed: in the past their members communicated through special interest magazines and gathered at particular places and events, such as conventions and swap meets (Kozinets, 2001). Now the internet has provided permanent spaces for asynchronous gatherings. Online communities are not related by physical proximity but by social networks (Kollock & Smith, 1999) and interaction (Wilkinson, 1991). By 1999 Wellman and Guilia noted that there were no seriously academic studies of internet communities in the literature, however. This began to be addressed in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Su et al. (2005) define a virtual community as being a geographically widespread group that is connected through information technology. Some groups meet only over the net and have no pre-existing ties, whilst others are extensions of existing organizations (Sproul et al. 2007). Some begin online and later develop offline, as in the case of many food blogging communities. Either way, online communities are not a pale imitation of more traditional forms of community (Kollock & Smith, 1999), although Driskell and Lyon (2002) pointed out that many internet communities would not meet the criteria set by researchers such as MacIver and Page (1949) who were using understandings of an earlier world in their writing. Parrish (2002) however, took the classical social literature and applied it to online communities, establishing that internet groups do in fact have the same longing for interaction as off-line groups, and that the individuals have shared goals and strong social bonds.

In the past, such groups could only be studied by prolonged participant observation. Now their communications and interactions are readily accessible on-line. The literature has highlighted five different types of virtual communities, on the basis of the technical characteristics of the media used, namely bulletin boards, web-rings, email lists, dungeons (for themed role-play) and chat-rooms (Catterall & Maclaren, 2001; Kozinets, 2002; Arnould & Apps, 2006). Bulletin-boards, user-nets and email groups began as asynchronous information-sharing communities, while chat-rooms evolved as separate sites for synchronous exchanges. Email groups serve as a more private and direct alternative to web-based message boards. Web-rings were formed to link sites of similar interests. Today the virtual community is likely to use all of these media together. A typical sports or music fan site will have web pages with news and features provided by an editor, plus a series of message boards for asynchronous discussion under different topic headings, a chat room for "live conversation" and a facility for private messages between members. Members use the site to exchange news, views, photographs, web-links and music files. Some of these sites are provided by commercial web hosts, such as Ezeboards or Sportnetworks, but edited and moderated by amateurs. Others are linked to corporate websites, such as the official website of a football club, or the music artist website run by a recording company. The community members may regularly visit other related sites, including those of rival supporters or unofficial sites, so that news and debate may quickly spread over a number of linked sites. They may also meet physically at matches, concerts, swap meets or other gatherings.

In the fast-evolving world of cyber-communities, such classifications quickly become dated, and we could now include other types of virtual communication in our list, such as blogs, and social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. According to White (2006) the rapid development of blogs has created a new platform for communities.

2.4 Web logs

Web logs, more commonly referred to as blogs**,** are generally web pages that act as a publicly accessible, regularly updated journal of an individual (Mortensen n.d.). The term was coined by Peter Merholz in 1999 (Mack et al. 2008). Merriam-Webster's Dictionary declared 'blog' as the word of the year in 2004 (Taricani, 2007). The typical blog is hosted by a software programme that is easily understood and managed, even by users of low technical competence (Hookway, 2008; Mortensen, 2004), allowing independent publishing (Holzschlag, 2005) with frequent updating and the addition of multi-media components. Frequent content creation defines blogging and separates it from other types of online forums; the development of a community around the blog has developed almost as a side-event (Holzschlag, 2005). Schmidt (2007) described blogs as a hybrid form of asynchronous computer-mediated communication, combining aspects of a personal home page and the ability for other users to make comments. Blogs also allow the posting of multimedia material like photographs, video and audio clips. However, they are not restricted in length or style like Twitter, and are more contained than Facebook.

Many individuals with a serious, but still amateur, interest in food have set up publicly accessible web logs: indeed, a Google search on the term food blogs returns around 1,610,000,000 results (28th March, 2013). Most of these blogs include recipes and photos of the results of the day to day home cooking experiences of the blogger. For the purposes of this thesis these are termed cookery blogs. A smaller number are mostly dedicated to the eating out experiences of the blogger, and could be described as amateur restaurant reviews. This is an area of hospitality research which has been neglected; there is little published in the area of communities of consumption as related to eating out. It is an analysis of the latter type of food blog, the Serious Leisure needs of their authors, and the communities of consumption that develop around them, that this thesis concentrates upon. *Grab Your Fork* (http://grabyourfork.blogspot.com/) is the journal of the food and restaurant purchase and consumption experiences of one woman, Helen Yee, from Sydney, Australia. This is typical of consumer generated content on the internet which is written by consumers who have experienced the product and have no commercial interest in promoting or discrediting it (Gretzel et al. 2008).

Some of the differences between blogging and traditional print media include the lack of an intervening editor between the author and the readers; potentially unrestricted audiences on the World Wide Web; the ability of readers to respond immediately to what they have read; and timeless access (Taricani, 2007). Blogging is writer-centric (Su et al. 2005) in that the author has full control over the content, and may modify comments or restrict access. Furthermore, blogs are link-heavy, in that they contain both inbound and outbound links. A blogger will feature a list of their own favourite blogs in the sidebar of their blog. This is known as a "blogroll" (Sullivan, 2008; Taricani, 2007). The connected world of blogs is referred to as the blogosphere (Schmidt, 2007). Sullivan (2008) comments that what counts in the blogosphere is the "authority" achieved by being linked to other blogs, rather than the total number of readers or page views that an individual blogger may have. In fact, according to Nardi et al. (accessed 15th January, 2009), most blogs are written by ordinary people with a small audience in mind. There are a number of types of blogs in existence. The journal blog of an individual may bring to mind images of a private diary however most blogs are intended to be read by others (Schmidt, 2007). Blogs can also allow for the development of communities of shared interests, or provide a meeting place for sub-cultural identification (Schmidt, 2007; White, 2006).

Bloggers play a variety of roles in today's information society, including roles previously dominated by journalists and other professionals (Singer, 2007; Lefever, 2004; Bruns, 2007), suggesting that many blogs are a Serious Leisure interest for the author. Blogs have become an interesting half-way house for those who prefer their information and analysis to come without the spin or narrow agendas of the usual mainstream sources (Coleman, 2005). According to Johnson and Kaye (2004) the more people go online the more they find the internet credible. Blogs are seen as credible because of their independent nature, despite the authors not being bound by the ethical and professional standards of journalists. Thus, blogs are a form of consumer-generated media, which are produced by consumers to be shared amongst themselves (Gretzel et al. 2008). As blogs often allow comment and discussion to be added to their posts, the traditional dichotomies between message senders and receivers also becomes blurred, giving even more people a voice (Singer, 2000). According to Taricani (2007), blogs play out the postmodern world of expression for us; individuals can find their community, their tribe, and reaffirm their identity through their posts.

2.5 The Structures of Blogs

White (2006) suggests that the term “on-line community” has tended to imply a community who interacted online within a bounded set of technologies. Certainly, the boundaries of early web communities were restricted by the technologies available: communities tended to be private because one had to become a member, involving passwords and so forth. This instantly created in-group and out-group individuals. Blogs do not necessarily require registration, so they are more publicly available.

Owyang (2005) uses the term “forum” to describe on-line communities which are structured conversations, and may be linear or follow threads. They tend to be moderated, have set rules, and varying degrees of control from completely open to invitation only. Such communities are typically bulletin boards, special interest groups, user groups, and newsgroups. On the other hand a blog is published for a small, intentional audience and the author has a greater level of control over what is published (Owyang, 2005).

Forums have tended to cover wide subjects, whereas bloggers are more likely to post within specialist or niche topics. This has led to individuals finding other bloggers who post on the same topic: they comment on each others’ blogs and a network or community develops (White, 2006). This does not mean that blogs have replaced forums. According to Owyang

(2005) neither forums nor blogs are better, but they can take on alternative jobs: blogs are thought to be better at connecting people into new communities, whereas forums are seen to be better at growing an already existing one. The style, manner and frequency of posting are also different on the two. In forums, posters will generally ask direct questions to be answered from within a closed, trusted and acknowledged community; for example, fellow sufferers of an illness (E.g. Health Unocked, 2012). White (2006) suggests that blogs allow the author's more personal side to emerge, as there are usually pictures and reflections posted, whereas forums are simply an information exchange. By combining the individual focus of a personal web page with frequency of update and many of the discussion tools previously associated with group discussion forums, blogs are the best of two worlds (Hodkinson, 2007).

The distinction between a forum and a blog is an important one here. A forum submission is traditionally an offering regarding discussion between individuals with a similar interest or need however there is usually the requirement of a password to be involved. The discussion tends to be of the question and answer type, almost an on-line self-help group, if you will. On the other hand, a blog is more likely to be an individual's opinion, which does not need to be justified, a meld of a private homepage and discussion forum. .

White (2006) suggests that there are three main types of blog communities; the one blog centric community, the boundaried community and the topic centric community. These are not mutually exclusive: they may overlap as shown in Figure 2.1. The different structural types can be defined according to their technology and design, social architecture and the role of content or subject matter.

- **Technology and design**

  The impact of how the blogging tools are deployed affects the community. Is the blog merely textual or are there visual elements? Are visual, audio or video elements an important part of the blog or not.

- **Social Architecture**

  Locus of control and power, identity and interaction processes, including screening comments, and who can participate. The blogger usually allows comments and discussion to be posted, although they do have control over what appears. Furthermore, Schmidt (2007) suggests that individual usage episodes are structured in social action through the structural dimensions of rules, relations, and code. This is referred to as sociological structuration theory.

- **The role of content or subject matter**

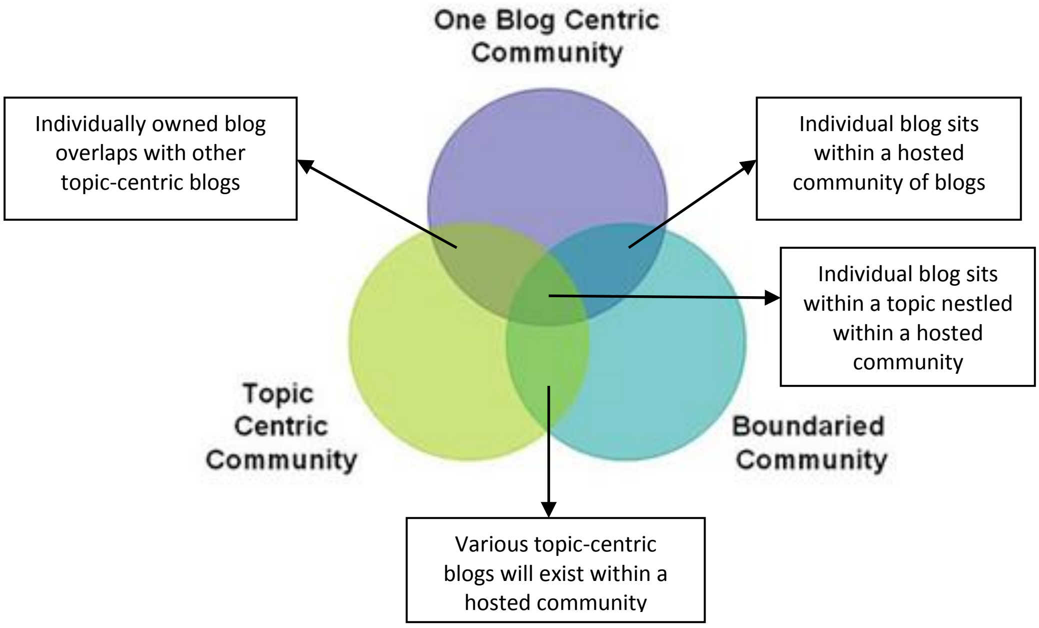
  For example whether the content is a personal journal, or whether it is linked with other blogs to create a community of like minded individuals, such as a blog ring (a group of related blogs linked to each other) (Nelson, 2006), or a blogroll (a list of a blogger's own favourite blogs in a sidebar) (Sullivan, 2008; Taricani, 2007).

- **Other issues such as scalability and lifecycle**

  How regularly the content is updated, who the blog reaches, and whereabouts it is in its lifecycle.

Figure 2.1 shows the three major types of blog community as identified by White: the Single Blog community, the Topic Centric community, and the Boundaried community. These types cannot be mutually exclusive, by virtue of the inescapable fact, that by blogging about food in their own right, an author is encroaching upon the domain of the food-centred blogs. As the site is hosted by a commercial enterprise, they have no exclusivity to the sphere supported by that enterprise, and by that token, those participants in this food-centred sphere are inextricably linked to both the author's blog and to the commercial enterprise supporting them both.

Figure 2.1 Blog-based communities



Source: (Adapted from White, 2006)

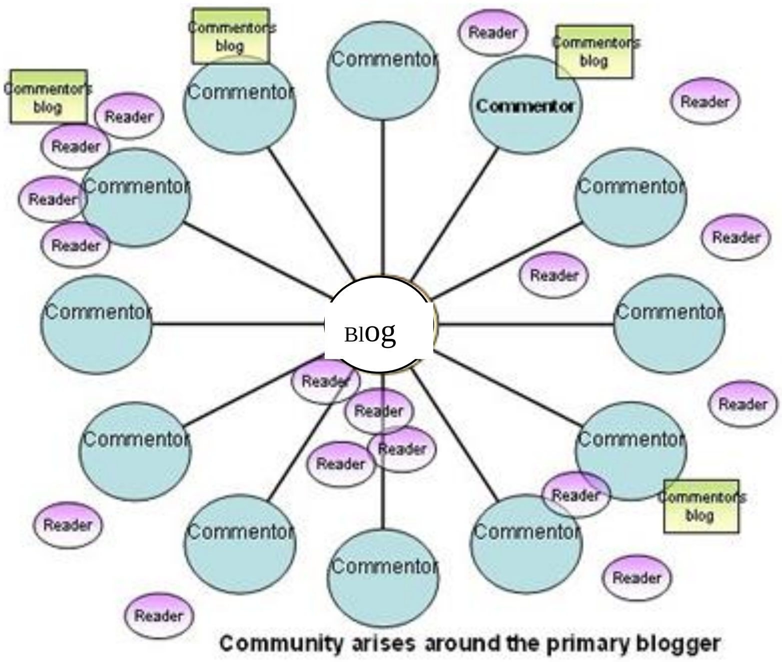
2.5.1 The Single Blog Community

In this case, the single blog is "owned" by an individual (Efimova, 2006), and readers return to the site, make comments, and get to know not only the blogger but the other commenters (White, 2006). Other people may read the blog, but not involve themselves in making comments. In forums these are referred to as "lurkers", a term with negative overtones, but on a blog they are simply known as readers. It is the blog owner who is the central identity here (Efimova, 2006; Wood, 2006; Holzschlag, 2005), although it is possible for commenters' identities to emerge over time. The unique, personal voice (Efimova, 2006) of the author comes through clearly, and is based upon their own personal interests or attitudes. The life of an author-centred blog is heavily tied to its author. A reader will see signs of emotion and identity in the blog posts, and connections to other bloggers may be taken for granted and not explicitly explained (Efimova 2006).

As is evident from Figure 2.2, the power here lies entirely with the blogger, and the community would collapse if the blog were taken down, although a possibility exists for commenters to contact each other via a backchannel such as email, and develop a relationship outside the blog community (White, 2006) in this manner. Hodkinson (2007) suggests that this may in fact not only strengthen ties between individual members but also their mutual attachment to the group.

The blogger may decide which comments are actually posted, and also sets the tone, the rules and the topics of discussion in this type of blog. This restricts the public view of the blog to how the blogger wants it to appear. By using a *nom de plume* the blogger may stay anonymous, for example, any critical comments may not get through the blogger's personal veto.

Figure 2.2 The Single blog/blogger community

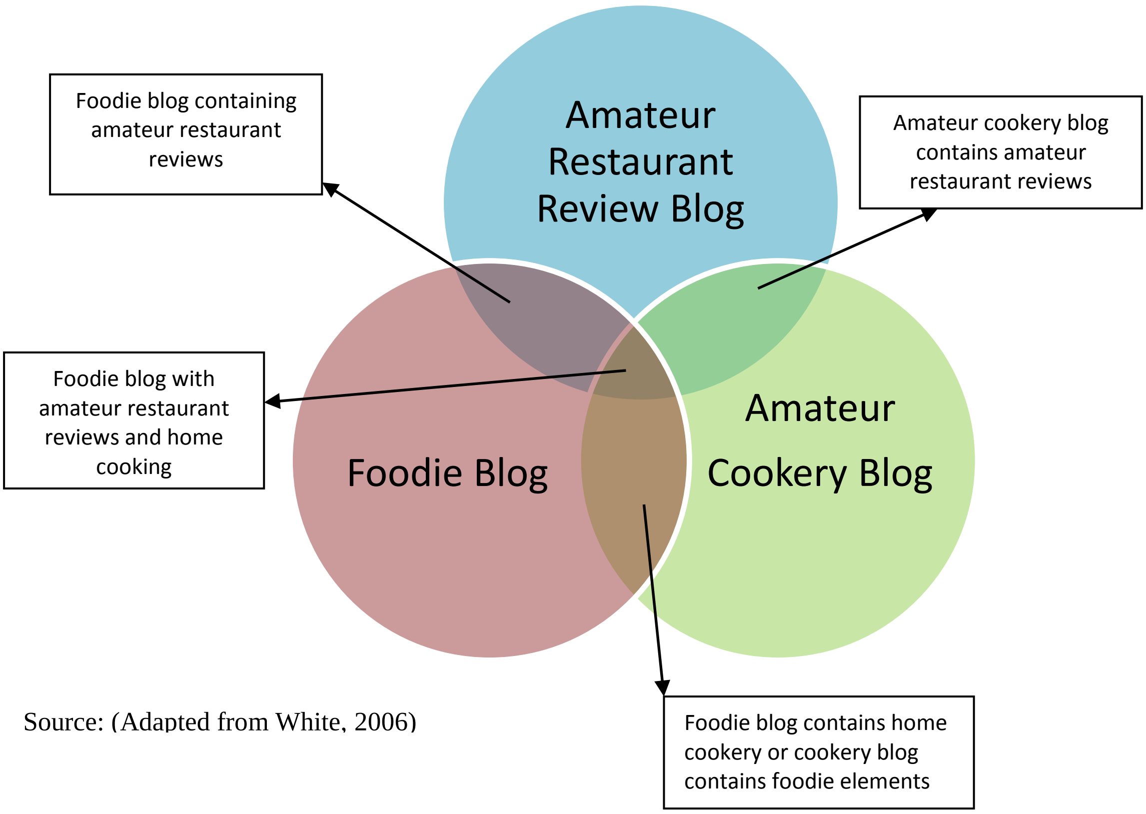


Source: (Adapted from White, 2006)

2.5.2 Central Connecting Topic Community

White (2006) explains that whereas the previously discussed type of blog has a simple hub and spoke structure, the Central Connecting Topic Centric blog community is a network formation which arises when a community develops between blogs which are linked by a topic in common. This structure is shown in Figure 2.3. Here the network boundary concerns not just the subject matter, but also the membership of the community. This is typical of travel blogs and political issue blogs, and many food blogs (White, 2006). It is proposed by White (2006) that individuals coalesce into community groups as they find blogs posting in increasingly more specific topic niches. Topic-centred blogs encourage topic-centred discussion and try to avoid "off-topic" talk. Given that they are topic-centred they are less personality-centred than the single blog type, and lose their feel as a personal web page (Efimova, 2006).

<u>Figure 2.3: Topic Centric Community</u>



Source: (Adapted from White, 2006)

Each blogger uses their own technological platform, and they are linked within the network by hyperlinks, blogrolls, tagging, aggregated feeds (using Really Simple Syndication, or RSS), trackbacks and comments (White, 2006; Holzschlag, 2005). "Pingback" is for web authors (bloggers) to be notified when someone links to one of their articles (Worth pers. comm. 8th April, 2008). It allows them to keep track of who is citing them, or linking to one of their articles. White (2006) points out that a blogroll is a list of recommended sites typically on similar topics or that the blogger reads regularly, and readers can click through to. Bloggers may reciprocate blogroll postings with those of their friends' blogs. RSS is a mechanism which allows readers to subscribe to updated blog posts (Lefever, 2004). Tags are keywords that bloggers add to their articles via social networking tools such as del.icio.us or technorati (Worth pers. comm. 8th April, 2008).

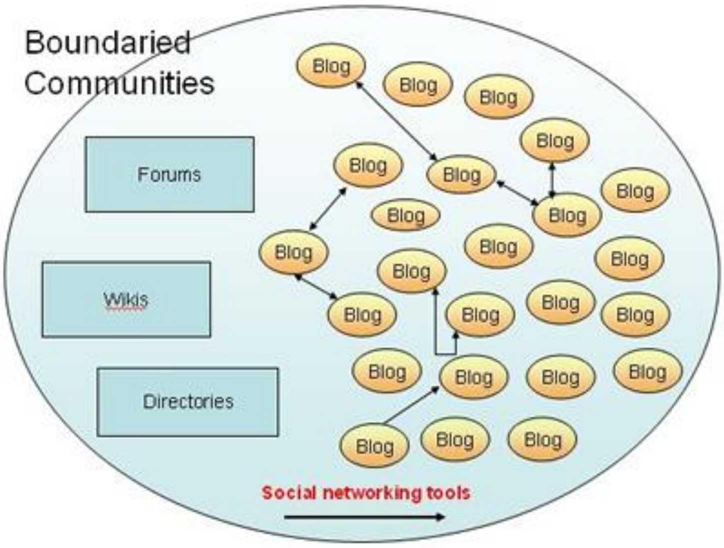
Some of these networks have been formalised, such as with blog rings, which share many characteristics with Boundaried Blog Communities. Blog rings are groups of blogs that have self identified as having a shared topic and then are linked with a piece of code that links one blog to the next in the 'ring'.

2.5.3 Boundaried Communities

Boundaried communities are collections of blogs and blog readers hosted on a single site or platform. Typically members register, join the community and are offered the chance to create a blog. This boundary makes them the closest form to traditional forum based communities. Examples include MySpace.com, Yahoo 360, and Edublogs (White, 2006). The blog studied for this thesis is hosted on Blogspot.com. Figure 2.4 explains this type of blog structure. As shown in Figure 2.4, each individual cell in the overall blog community has its own part to play within the multi-cellular existence of the blog community. Occasionally a cell will mutate and it will develop its own blog community – even diversifying into another sphere of interest as a daughter cell.

Often these communities have other tools such as discussion boards, social networking features, wikis and instant messaging built in. The blogs are part of the overall ecosystem.

Figure 2.4: Boundaried Communities



Source: (White 2006)

2.6 Communities

Howard Rheingold's (1993) seminal definition of a virtual community spoke of social groups that emerge when enough people carry on on-line public discussions over a period of time. These discussions needed to be human and emotional in order for personal relationships to develop in cyberspace. As Kozinets points out (2010a) it is important that these groups are "social aggregations", and that they "emerge from the net" (Rheingold 1993). It is estimated that at least 100 million people worldwide participate in online communities of one sort or another (Kozinets, 2010b). However, as pointed out by Nieckarz (2005) the analysis of the social dynamics of communities which have emerged on the internet is mostly conducted using theory that predates its existence.

Identity and power varies considerably depending on the blog community structure (White, 2006). In a single blog centric community the blogger holds the most power and is the primary identity of the blog. Frequent or valued commenters may build up an identity over time. Then there are the peripheral people (White, 2006) who make up a very important and often overlooked component of all three of these communities. These are people who read, but don't blog themselves. Readers rarely if at all comment, but they represent a powerful part of any community. On web forums these people are referred to as lurkers, but in the world of blogs they have gained a new level of legitimacy (White, 2006) because blogs are expected to be read. Those bloggers concerned with readership will write in a style to attract them; those concerned with community will develop a language that is more attractive to members of the community (White, 2006) by using a socially accepted use of language within a group (Gee, 1999), described as an ***interpretive repertoire***, or discourse by Wetherell and Potter (1988). The term interpretive repertoires was first developed in 1985 by two sociologists of science, Nigel Gilbert and Michael Mulkay, to describe patterns in the discourse of the scientists they were studying (Wetherell, 2006 p.154).

Resulting from most blog communities not being bounded by a technological wall, and having very permeable boundaries, they can grow far beyond the ability of a single individual to keep track of his or her network. They can change within days if a key blog becomes highly referenced in the blogosphere, such as being highlighted as "blog of the day" by technorati (a search engine specifically for blogs), totally changing the community dynamics (White, 2006).

With blogger centric communities, there is a question of what attracts community members, the blogger's personality, or the topic. Blog researcher Efimova (2006) suggests that in such cases the community is more likely to depend on a personal connection with the blogger than the topic. In other words they may have initially read the blog for the content, but it is the relationship developed with the author that keeps them there (Holzschlag, 2005). According to Sullivan (2008) the experience of community over the internet may be a faux intimacy, but readers and commenters come to feel that they know the blogger personally as they share their life with them. The same memories are shared, the same extraordinary experiences felt.

Forums are created to serve an existing community; for blogs community is also like a side-effect, as they came about to represent an individual or small group (Holzschlag, 2005). Comment systems are what turn blogs from purely a publishing mechanism into a community; a community cannot exist without discourse. The blogger has the ability to control, or vet, the comments posted. Blogs tend to be more personality-oriented, and the conversations more bi-directional than in forums, which foster group discussion (Holzschlag, 2005). Similarly, whilst forums tend to remain more internally focussed, blogs aim to push the conversation into the blogosphere (Holzschlag, 2005).

The seminal definition of an on-line community was given by Rheingold in 1993: when sufficient people carry on public discussion on the internet over a significant period of time, and with enough human feeling, webs of relationships will develop. As the community develops, contributors of comments may know more about a particular subject than the blogger does, adding nuance and context to the discussion (Sullivan, 2008). Individuals in the online community develop a social identity, which includes values, attitudes and behavioural intentions from the ways they perceive and interpret each other's thoughts. This social identity becomes more pronounced as the membership and inclusiveness increases (Taricani, 2007). For Schmidt (2007), the sharing of certain routines and the individuals' expectations about such communities of blogging practices defines their group membership, identity, and relationship management. Blanchard (2009) argues that the term virtual community is over used and very broadly applied. The term community implies an emotionally positive effect which creates an intrinsically rewarding reason to continue participation in the group.

The concept of communities in cyberspace however is much debated. Technological advances, especially the Internet, have made the simulation of hyper—reality common (Berthon & Katsikeas, 1998; Rojek, 1993). On-line, the individual is disconnected from their corporeal existence, and within the context of postmodernism, the individual is seen as disembodied and decentred. For some commentators the idea that on the Internet one is “bowling alone” (Putnam, 1995) instead of being part of a community in the true sense of the word overrides the concept of community (Hine, 2000) It has also been suggested that the on-line identity production or identity tourism self (Hookway, 2008; Nakamura, 2002) also raises issues. However, whilst postmodernism rejects the idea of the individual as central (Venkatesh et al. 1993), it does not mean that individuals are not important as consumers. The postmodernist, experiential perspective contends that experience is the “core of consumption” (Addis & Podesta, 2005 p. 405), and thus symbolic consumer behaviour is at the heart of hyper-reality (Fullerton, 1998).

This “new consumer” is different (Constantinides, 2006; Honeywill & Byth, 2001), and they see themselves as having multiple representations of self (Firat & Shultz, 1997) that are in constant flux. Postmodern individualism may be the reason for the so-called “crisis of consumption” identified by many modernist marketers (Cova, 1997). Consumers have become more demanding, individualistic and independent, better informed, better educated and more critical (Constantinides, 2006; Nijs & de Jager, 2007) of both products and producers. Despite organisations paying lip service to the concept of ***consumer sovereignty***, there is an undeniable conflict between their ability to control the marketing mix – a production orientation - whilst claiming to maintain a customer orientation (Grönroos, 1994: Constantinides, 2006; Desmond, 1997). This paradox has led to a “crisis of consumption” (Cova, 1997 p. 302), as markets become saturated and global competition rises. Nijs and de Jager (2007) refer to a “huge gap between today’s consumers and yesterday’s corporations”. It is now the consumer who creates the experience with the products and services provided for them by the producer.

Furthermore, Cova (1996) identifies this aspect of postmodernity not only with a changed, liberated individualism, but with “the time of the tribes”. These societal micro-groups are communities in which members share a common subculture and strong emotional links. Figallo (1998) suggests that virtual communities interact in three ways, which he calls the shrine, theatres and the cafe. These types of community exist on a continuum. The shrine has little community interaction other than sharing the same cyberspace. With the theatre type, members are attracted by a common interest or theme. A cafe community is rather more active. Members have a high level of interaction and are involved in developing the content. *Grab Your Fork* could be described as a cafe-style community. Bressler and Grantham (2000) suggest that the level of collaboration which virtual communities allows information to be exchanged in a ground-breaking way that is analogous to the invention of the printing press. Their argument is that the internet expands the horizons of individuals, and changes their view of time, space and relationships with others.

A sense of community has been the focus for face to face community researchers for some time (E.g. McMillan & Chavis 1986). Four characteristics have been widely adopted, and can be applied to the online arena (McMillan, 1996; Blanchard, 2009):

- Spirit of Sense of Community: feelings of belonging to and identifying with the community, including a setting where we can be ourselves and see ourselves mirrored in the eyes and responses of others.
- Feelings of influence: feelings of having influence on, and being influenced by, the community.
- Integration and fulfilment of needs: feelings of being supported by others in the community while also supporting them.
- Shared emotional connection: feelings of relationships, shared history.

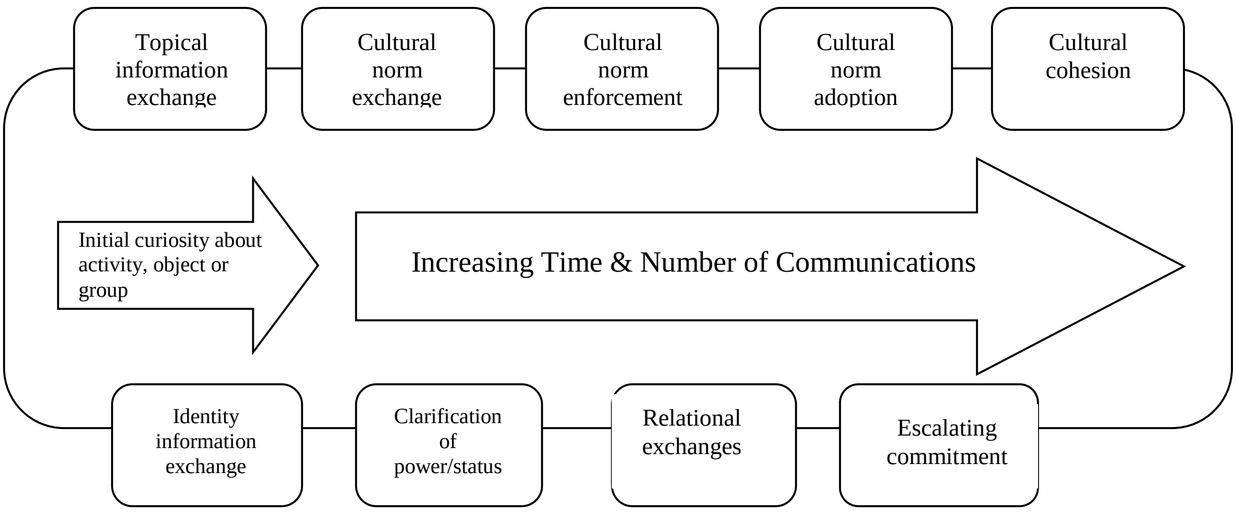
These four characteristics are mirrored within the theory of Serious Leisure (Stebbins, 1992), discussed further in Chapter 3.

2.7 Steps to Becoming a Community Member

Taricani (2007) suggests one view of the phases through which a blogger develops. The first stage is called *Joining*, where a member applies to become a member of a blogging group, or asks permission to post. Then in *Employing* individuals develop their comfort levels over time. Identity is developing as the blogger creates a deposit of related topics, and accumulates on-line contacts (Taricani, 2007). In the *Transforming* stage individuals add value as they contribute to the posts. After a time, members begin to develop a level of community and settle on the rules for contributions. This is called *Setting.* By this stage it is not just the one who posts who is important, but the entire network of community, and their added comments. Such networks strengthen the bonds within the community, and those which connect individuals to their wider social world (Kollock & Smith, 1999). The group then moves on to *Expanding*, where identity moves outside the borders of just one blog to related ones that may be found in the blogroll. It is questionable, however, whether these suggested steps to community membership are accurate, as they seem quite prescriptive. For example, a blog might be set up with a blogroll from the outset, due to the bloggers' personal connections that were established offline.

Kozinets (2010b) offers a different conception of becoming a member of an online community, as outlined in Figure 2.5.

<u>Figure 2.5 Developmental Progression of Participation in Online Communities</u>



Source: (Kozinets, 1999; 2010b)

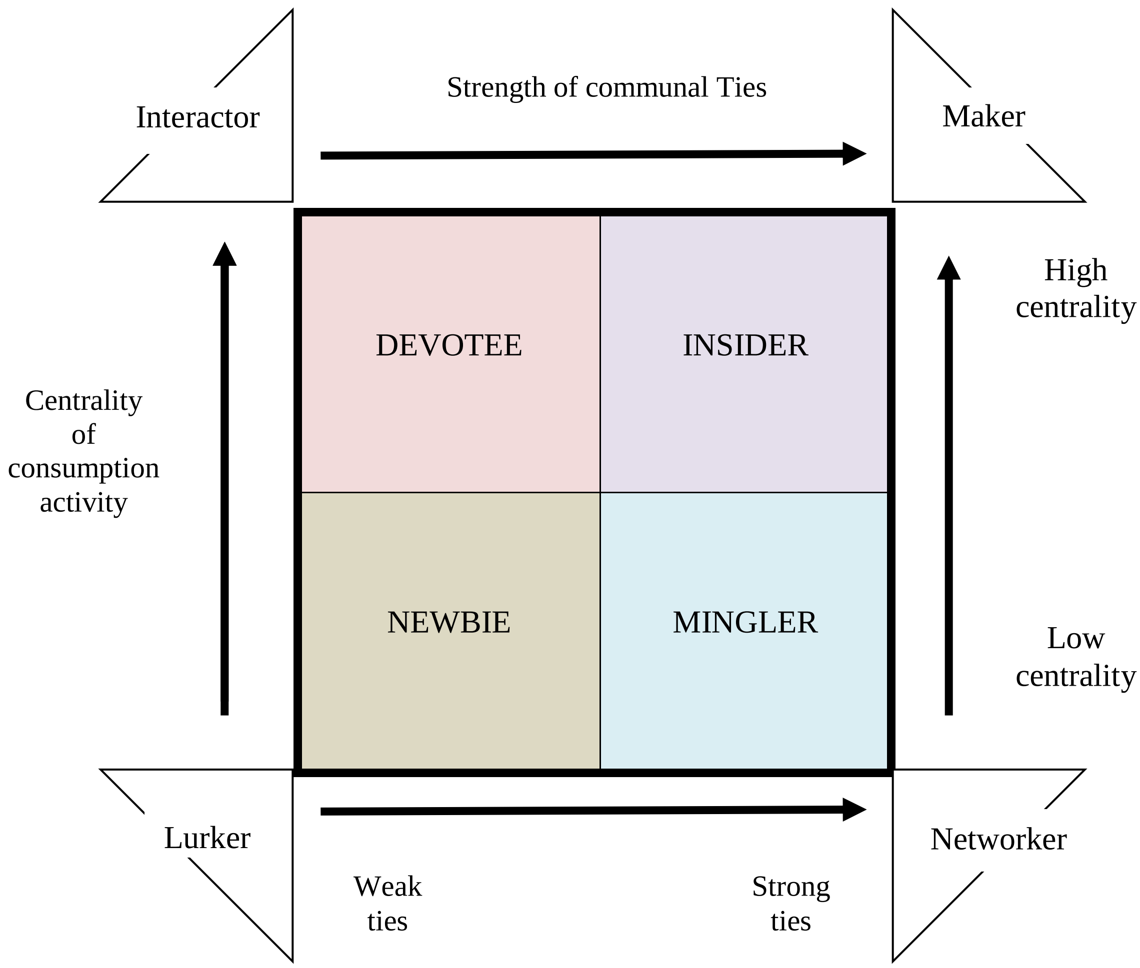
In this model, the pattern of relationship development, according to Kozinets (2010b), is one where task-oriented and goal-directed outcomes are developed alongside social and cultural knowledge. This also leads to social relationships, knowledge of the group's specific language or vocabulary, and understanding of group norms, values and rituals. Other models also exist – for example groups such as social networking communities like Facebook and Twitter are designed specifically for social interaction, and members may not need to exchange abstract pleasantries in getting to know one-another. Over time, the social and cultural knowledge of the group exists in every exchange, and therefore messages or posts become more emotional. Kozinets (2010b) suggests that this highlights the social psychological background to such group interaction.

2.8 Types of Online Community Participation

Simply dividing those involved with online communities into "members" (contributors) and "non-members" (lurkers) is a rather crude distinction and several authors have suggested that there are converging typologies of types of members of online communities (Kozinets, 2010b; de Valck, 2005). A framework created by Kozinets, and more recently updated (1999; 2010b) provides a visual explanation, as in Figure 2.6.

The two basic factors described in the figure are the centrality of the individual's identification with the online group, their expertise with the core activity, and their relations with other members. "Newbies" are the first type; they lack strong social ties and have only a passing interest in the topic or activity at hand. "Minglers" are strong socialisers and have many personal relationships within the group, but like Newbies they have only a minor interest in the consumption activity. "Devotees" are the opposite of this; their interest in the topic is important, but they don't have strong social relationships. "Insiders" do have strong social ties to other members, and also have a deep identification with the group (Kozinets, 1999). Since originally designing the model, Kozinets has added diagonal dimensions of Networker, Maker, Lurker and Interactor (2010b). The "Lurker" is an active viewer who doesn't post; they have the potential to become Newbies over time, and often do. "Makers" have highly developed on-line social skills and are highly connected to others within the group. They are the sort of people who build new online communities. "Interactors" reach out beyond existing offline communities into the online world, such as the *Star Trek* fans clubs which Kozinets has so closely researched (2002). "Networkers" reach into an existing community that may be topically related or unrelated, in order to develop strong social ties, exchange ideas, or even poach members from the other group.

Figure 2.6 Types of Online Community Participation



Source: (Kozinets, 1999; 2010b)

2.9 Who Are Bloggers?

According to a survey conducted by the blog search engine technorati (2011a) bloggers are a varied group, but tend to be affluent and well educated. Bloggers are typically young adults, most likely between 25 and 44 years of age (technorati 2011a), who are from urban or suburban areas (Taricani, 2007; Schmidt, 2007; Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Nowson & Oberlander, 2006.; Mack et al. 2008). In the early days of the internet, there was a large skew towards male bloggers - technorati (2008a) suggested 66% were men – however this seems to have slightly evened out, with the gender split being approximately 60% male, 40% female in 2011 (technorati, 2011a). Personal blogs, however, do seem to be dominated by females (technorati, 2008a), and females also spend more effort blogging than men do (Nowson & Oberlander, 2006; Li & Lin, 2012).

Within the overall group of bloggers, technorati have identified a segment they refer to as "hobbyists", bloggers who could fit into Stebbins' (1992) Serious Leisure categories of amateurs and hobbyists. Hobbyist respondents to the annual technorati *State of the Blogosphere* survey in 2011 made up 60% of all responses. This is a fall from 79% in 2008 (technorati, 2008a), as the number of corporate blogs have grown at the expense of personal sites. Hobbyists are not interested in making a profit from their blogging, and are merely doing it "for fun". Half of hobbyist bloggers respond individually to their on-line correspondents, and their main success metric is personal satisfaction (technorati, 2011b). For over 90% of hobbyist bloggers, theirs is an individual, rather than collective, blog (technorati, 2011c) which is likely to be maintained as a personal journal (Taricani, 2007) or to share personal experiences (Schmidt, 2007; Guadagno et. al. 2007). Monitoring their readership is important to hobbyist bloggers, with 60% using third party analytics, predominantly Google Analytics (60%) (technorati, 2011c). As would be expected, hobbyist blogs have the fewest unique visits per month (technorati 2011c). Lenhart & Fox (2006 p. i) found that 54% of bloggers had never published their writing anywhere prior to commencing to write a blog, although this is rapidly changing (technorati, 2011).

2.9.1 Motivations for Blogging

Lenhart and Fox (2006) identified two groups of personal bloggers. Firstly were those who viewed their blog as a personal but somewhat private hobby. The second, and smaller group consisted of those who saw their blog as more time-consuming, and a more public endeavour. A widely quoted early study of the motivations for blogging was by Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz (2004). Their exploratory study adopted ethnographic interviews and concluded that there were five blogging motivations:

1. to document life experiences
2. to provide commentary and opinions
3. to express deeply felt emotions
4. to articulate ideas through writing
5. to form and maintain community forums.

A more recent study by Li and Lin (2012) identified three underlying motivations for commencing writing a blog:

1. Practicing a new type of diary
2. Curiosity
3. Thoughts on following the crowd.

These are intrinsic motivations, they relate to the blogger's personal needs.

Other studies have considered the links between blogging motivation and behaviour. Huang et al. (2007) hypothesised that blogging behaviour comprised of interaction-oriented behaviour and information-oriented behaviour. Liu, Liao and Zeng (2007) considered expectancy theory for analysing motivations for blogging, and found that rewards played an important part in motivation, with bloggers venting their own feelings and connecting with other people as the two highest ranked rewards. Li and Lin (2012) found that the motivation for maintaining a blog was extrinsic ie. that social connection motivation is positively related to interaction-oriented behaviour - in other words it was the community interaction that the bloggers liked. Baker and Moore (2008) suggest that blogging opens opportunities for positive interaction with other people, and even friendships, which are psychologically advantageous. Both Huang et al. (2007) and Nardi et al. (2004) found that reasons for blogging were not mutually exclusive. Furthermore blogging is not limited to behaviours that can be satisfactorily explained by rationality. Huang et al. (2007) comment that blogging is related to social inclusion in the same way that consumption is. According to Herring et al. (2005) blogging is seen as being socially interactive and community-like by its adherents. Research by Baker and Moore (2008) found that the higher levels of social interaction afforded by blogging about a topic of interest to them gave them a feeling of greater belonging with likeminded individuals. The blog therefore becomes almost an expression of an extended self (Huang et al. 2007), an expression of identity.

Bloggers who started their own blogs reported that they gained momentum when they realized others were reading their posts (Nardi et al. 2004). Despite the figures purporting to show that people kept their blog for personal reasons, Lenhart and Fox (2006) reported that keeping a blog is inherently a public act, a sentiment agreed by Taricani (2007). Huang et al. (2007) suggest that those bloggers who are so motivated are also likely to blog in order to receive feedback from others about themselves. On the other hand, Lenhart and Fox (2006) claim that 64% of bloggers say that they blog to share practical knowledge or skills with others.

Only 13% of the respondents in Lenhart and Fox's (2006) study updated their blog every day, however bloggers with a high level of motivation were found to be willing to spend more time maintaining their blog (Liu et al. 2007). This group of devoted users do say, however, that their blog is a very important part of their lives. This study will endeavour to determine whether such a devotion is, or is not, related to Serious Leisure.

2.9.2 Basic styles of blog content

According to Herring et al. (2005) there are three basic styles of blog content: filters, personal journals and notebooks. Filters provide content that is external to the blogger such as news or world events. The content of a personal journal relates specifically to the author and their life. The candid nature of some online diaries together with the open-endedness of the blog form is perhaps reminiscent of soap operas, making them somewhat addictive to readers (Hookway, 2008), who return on a regular basis to follow the narrative. Notebooks can be either in style, but are usually longer essay-style pieces.

The technorati survey (2011) asked bloggers whether their writing style was:

- sincere
- controversial
- expert
- humorous
- motivational
- journalistic
- confessional
- confrontational
- snarky

Nearly 80% of hobbyist bloggers described their style as "sincere", and nearly 70% as "conversational". This fits with the concept of the blogger being motivated by social interaction with their audience.

2.9.3 Frequency of Posting

According to the 2011 technorati survey, bloggers now post more often than they did when they started their blog. When asked why this was the case, hobbyists responded that they enjoyed the interaction with their audience above any other reason. In Lenhart and Fox's study (2006) the majority of bloggers said they wrote when inspiration struck (70%), with only 22% having a regular schedule for blogging. In 2011, technorati found that the typical hobbyist blogger spent up to three hours per day updating their blog, although some spent up to 40 hours per week doing so. Those bloggers who are on-line for many hours per week could be said to have a "Central Life Interest" (Stebbins, 1996) in blogging. According to Huang et al. (2007) the more intensely a blogger posts, their interaction with other people creates a demand for them to update their blog even more frequently, thus turning their blog into an extended self. Eighty-seven percent allow comments on their blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006), confirming that blogs are more about community than simply being individual journals.

2.9.4 Topics Blogged About

Creative expression and the documentation of personal experiences are the predominant motivations for keeping a blog (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Nardi et al. 2004; Schmidt, 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Guadagno, 2008). More than three quarters of bloggers told Lenhart and Fox (2006) that they had been inspired to post by a personal experience. This has been backed up by technorati's 2008 study: it would appear that blogs which relate to the author's life experiences and lifestyle are the most common.

In the technorati study (2008b), the "personal/lifestyle" category was the most frequently posted, at 54%. In the 2011 survey, the categories had changed, with the closest being "personal musings" at 50%. None of the studies had a category which specifically related to food or dining. Material read on other blogs was a major source of topic for hobbyist bloggers in 2011 (technorati, 2011). Counter intuitively, the technorati survey found that very few hobbyist bloggers posted reviews about brands, services or experiences, although for those bloggers who do so, product reviews were the best received articles by their readers.

2.9.5 Length of Time They Have Been Blogging

The vast majority of bloggers have been posting for more than two years (technorati, 20011a). The greatest percentage of hobbyist bloggers have been involved for between two and four years, the next largest group between four and six years, and the third largest percentage for more than 6 years. Serious Leisure pursuits are usually continued with dogged perseverance over a lengthy period of time, which would seem to suggest that hobbyist blogging is a Serious Leisure pursuit.

2.9.6 Where They Blog From

Eighty-three percent of the respondents in Lenhart and Fox's (2006) research blogged from home. A further 7% blogged from work, whilst 6% split the time between the two. More recent surveys have not asked this question of their respondents, potentially because of the increase of use of mobile platforms such as tablets and smart phones. Blog writers are also enthusiastic blog readers. The more often they update their own blog, the more likely they are to read other people's (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; technorati, 2011).

2.9.7 The Growing Credibility of Blogs

The almost completely global nature of the internet has allowed anyone with access to a computer to publish anything to anyone quickly and inexpensively (Masie 2006). According to Johnson and Kaye (2004) the more people go online the more they find the internet credible. Furthermore, over 60% of hobbyist bloggers who responded to the technorati survey agreed that blogs were being taken more seriously now than in the past (technorati, 2011). Although 2011 was only the second year in which the survey had asked consumers about the credibility of media content, blogs continue to be seen as more reliable than other forms of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, or indeed traditional media (technorati, 2011). Consumers used blogs for ideas and inspiration, as well as entertainment (technorati, 2011). Information found on blogs was more likely to be shared via email or Facebook by consumers, than on other blogs.

As early as 2005, Berne suggested that the former "gentleman's pursuit" of restaurant reviewing was now open to anyone with an opinion and the wherewithal to post it on the internet. Some professional restaurant critics clearly feel that there is a chasm of understanding and knowledge (Rayner, 2007) between the standard of the reviews of amateurs and their own work (Semenak, 2007; Berne, 2005). Other, well-respected professionals, however point out that their own expertise has only come with time and exposure to, and a growing understanding of, food – which could easily apply to foodies as well (Gill, 2007; Rayner, 2007). Jay Rayner, food writer for The Observer newspaper openly admits that the newspaper critics are in the business of firstly selling newspapers, and secondly providing any meaningful discussion about the subject matter (Rayner, 2007). On the other hand, amateur reviewers do not generally have an agenda with regards to what they write, and many readers prefer the fresh and honest opinions of food bloggers (Coleman, 2005).

One would anticipate that restaurateurs would be just as interested in the meal experience of their foodie customers as they are of professional reviewers, however this was not always the case. If, as Semenak (2007) suggests, word of mouth is the best form of promotion, then an online review by an ardent foodie is merely the latest form of this – described contemporaneously as "word of mouse" (Gelb & Sundaram, 2002) or e-WOM (Litvin et al. 2008). Although traditionally newspaper restaurant critics have been the ones with the power to make or break the reputation of a chef, the concept of the democratisation of content gives the skilled amateur foodie a strength that has not been acknowledged in the past. As pointed out by Pantelidis (2010), the development of the internet and social media has offered a new type of e-WOM that has become important to many consumers in making their restaurant patronage decisions. Ho and Chiang Chen's (2010) research found that the level of confidence in a food blog will differ, and therefore impact on the consumers' purchase behaviour based upon three points:

1. The blogger's expertise
2. The level of trustworthiness of the site
3. The higher the attractiveness of the site.

As Voase suggests, a layman with an above average level of expertise in culinary matters, such as a foodie, is less easily convinced by professional critique (2002). Furthermore, the relative anonymity of the on-line environment gives the on-line reviewer a sense of empowerment (Pantelidis 2010). Furthermore, with sufficient experience of internet authoring, an individual can elevate their status from enthusiastic amateur to a semi professional with a valid opinion. This transition from personal opinion to internet following is effectively the rite of passage into the realm of Serious Leisure and beyond. Walker (2009) comments that the author of the food blog www.doshermanos.co.uk was named by *The Evening Standard* as one of the 1,000 most influential people in London, and Pantelidis (2010) concludes that there has been a shift in power from the restaurateur to consumer reviewers who post comments about meals they have eaten.

2.10 Chapter Summary

Marshall McLuhan predicted famously that a participative and inclusive "electric media" would change the world; society would be "retribalized" (McLuhan, 1970) into "clusters of affiliation" (Kozinets, 2010a). Blogs are a type of on-line community often developed around the postings of a single author. Their content is usually on a deliberately specific and narrow topic such as food, health, music and so on. Toffler (1970) took this further, suggesting that one consequence of the accelerating pace of technological change would be that people would soon be collecting experiences as consciously and passionately as they once collected tangible objects. This seems to have been borne out by the rapid growth of the leisure, tourism and hospitality industries since then, which exist to provide consumers with experiences. Furthermore, the word "experience" has not only entered strongly into the everyday parlance of consumption over the past decade, but it has also become of major importance in understanding consumer behaviour (Ahola, 2006). Despite being postmodern, disembedded groups which do not fit with the classic definitions of community in the literature, can - and do - exist on-line; these virtual communities are as real to those participating as off-line communities are to their members (Nieckarz, 2005).

The internet gives people the opportunity to create new worlds of experience as predicted by McLuhan (1970) and Toffler (1970). The following chapter introduces and discusses the literature surrounding the concepts of Serious Leisure (Stebbins, 1992), consumer experience, and individual and group identities. It discusses how personal interaction via the blog enables the individual to develop a specific identity, and through this identity to claim a rung on the Serious Leisure hierarchical ladder. By participating in the group commentary within the blog community, the individual specific identity experiences a metamorphosis into a group identity through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

3 Consumer Experience, Serious Leisure & Identity in a Postmodern World.

3.1.Introduction

Firstly, this chapter will discuss the concept of consumer experiences in general, and specifically in relation to eating out and hospitality. As Pine and Korn (2011) point out, commercial experiences are merely newly identified from an economic point of view, but have been around since ancient times. They highlight Greek plays, travelling troubadours and *commedia dell'arte* performances (Pine & Korn, 2011). Carù and Cova (2003) identify two clear economic strands relating to consumer experiences: a managerial view which sees an experience as a type of product or service offering to be added to merchandise to give an added value offering (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), and a consumer behaviour view which sees an experience as having emotional, symbolic and transformational significance for the individual involved. Tynan and McKechnie (2009) suggest that the two types of experience marketing literature are divided into best-selling books written by and for practitioners, and the academic literature. This chapter will discuss both of these strands however the emphasis will be on the more academic, consumer behaviour view which better fits the philosophy behind the study.

The second section of this chapter will situate consumer experiences within the postmodern world (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995), and discuss the realms of the "***extraordinary experience***" (Abrahams, 1986). The concept of experience is implicit in the development of a consumer's identity (Joy & Li, 2012). These concepts have been developed by authors such as Belk (1989) to discuss how an experience may be so extraordinary that it becomes "sacred" as compared to the everyday or "profane", so that the individual is transformed by the experience. In this manner, sacred experiences add to the individual's personal journey.

The penultimate section will use Stebbins' (1992) concept of Serious Leisure, as a basis to explain aspects of the lives of foodies and how the Serious Leisure lives of foodies impact on the creation of their individual and group identities. The six characteristics of Serious Leisure will be used as a framework to structure the discussion.

Finally, the chapter explores how these concepts converge in the development of individual and group identity. How an individual identifies themselves is of major interest to marketers; in this case the marketers of restaurant eating and the meal experience. Consumer identity assists the producers of consumer experiences to design and stage their product. Throughout this chapter a postmodern viewpoint will be used to explain and critique the concepts discussed.

3.2 The Managerial Perspective: Experiential Marketing

Globalisation (Erdly & Kesterson-Townes, 2003) and information technology (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) have resulted in the commoditisation of many service products, and thus a price-led market. In response, producers have sought a way to create and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage. Pine and Gilmore (1999) suggested that this could be achieved by carefully stage-managing the experience so that the customer received a unique and memorable experience. Until the early twenty-first century there was confusion and disagreement as to what the term “experience” meant in marketing terms (Poulson & Kale, 2004). Pine and Gilmore’s (1998) concept draws on Schechner’s (1988) Performance Theory, and the service-as-drama metaphor of Grove, Fisk and Bitner (1993), who use it to analyse services management as an encounter between actors and an audience in a setting. The implications of this metaphor are increased attention to the impact of staff performance, settings and scripts on the consumer experience and customer satisfaction. It is clear that this view of experience is fixed firmly in the domain of the practitioner (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009).

Pine and Gilmore take this further by using the insights of Schechner's (1988) Performance Theory. Schechner combines anthropological and literary analysis of Greek drama and tribal rituals to identify the key elements of all enactments - drama, scripts, theatre and performance. The drama is the domain of the author, whose idea is then realised through scripts, directions, sets and actors to become the performance experienced by the audience. When applied to the hospitality situation, Morgan et al. (2008) entitled this idea *Drama in the Dining Room.* When applied to a restaurant meal using Pine and Gilmore's (1999) theory, the drama is the restaurant venue, the scripts are the menus, and the performance is the presentation of the meal to the customer. It is the performance that creates the added value, but for it to do so, it must be the focus of the whole establishment.

This has led to the publication of a growing number of management books on how to make the customer experience the centre of the firm's strategic planning, marketing and operations by consultants eager to convince their audience of their own versions of the method (e.g. Schmitt, 1999; Shaw, 2005; Smith & Wheeler, 2002). They argue the need to go beyond product and service orientations as a way of gaining competitive advantage, avoiding the trap of price-led commoditisation, and of meeting the changing aspirations of affluent and well-informed consumers looking for authentic experiences (Erdly & Kesterson-Towns, 2003; Hemmington, 2007). Customer value is designed into the brand experience, which becomes the basis for competitive strategy (Smith & Mulligan, 2002). This approach emphasises that a consistent and valued experience needs to be built into the organisation's structures, systems and culture; what Nijs (2003) calls its "DNA". It is by providing a stage (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) or space (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Morgan, 2006) where symbolic consumption can unfold that an organisation can attract and retain its customers (Morgan, 2006). Such an approach requires new forms of research such as experience mapping (Schmitt, 2003) or theatrical scripting (Harris et al. 2003) of the critical "moments of truth" (Carlzon, 1987). The books and articles written in this genre tend to offer many concrete examples, and be step-by-step "how to" guides, however their worth may be questionable from an academic perspective (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009).

Other authors, (E.g. Holbrook, 2001; Nijs, 2003; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) have criticised the emphasis on staging performances as superficial and product-centred, as being very much a supply-side approach, rather than being consumer-centred. These writers call for a more strategic approach based on shared values, allowing the customer to create their own experiences in a search for personal growth. Bharwant and Jauhari (2013) for example, suggest that hospitality, on a global basis, is moving from being a strongly product-focussed, asset-intensive business to not merely a customer focussed one, but further, to being experience-centric.

Holbrook (2001) refers dismissively to some experiential marketing theories such as those of Schmitt and Pine and Gilmore, as being nothing more than fanciful and optimistic views of consumer culture that will not stand the test of time. Nijs (2003) criticises the Experience Economy approach as too concerned with sensation and too rooted in US "masculine" culture (Hofstede 1980). In more "feminine" European cultures, it is argued, the experience needs to be grounded in the social and environmental values of the company in order to create added emotional value for the customer. ***"Imagineering"*** is Nijs' word for the strategic process of basing the company around the values it shares with its target community.

Whilst some authors have dismissed such consumption experiences as "McDisneyfied banalities" (Thompson, 2000), others suggest that by looking at such consumer experiences through a postmodernist lens, organisations can better understand the meanings ascribed by twenty-first century consumers (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007). Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) suggest that a postmodern view of consumption recognises that consumers make purchase decisions from symbolic meanings. For example, Voase's (2002) research into museum visits found that there was often a gap between what curators assumed that visitors understood about the exhibits they interacted with, and the actual experience consumed. Pine and Gilmore (2008) suggest that consumers are becoming used to staged experiences, and that they are expecting more and more. What is now required is authenticity of the experience. Staged experiences that come across as inauthentic can be described as "virtual/fake", whilst those that hit the mark are "virtual/real" (Boyle, 2003).

A shift in emphasis was recommended by Voase (2002), from an understanding of the exhibits as artefacts, to one where they were seen as a narrative, and the museum gallery as a social space, in order to allow the consumer to best maximise their experience. In a similar manner the foodie can be seen to consume the restaurant meal as an experience, and the sharing of that experience as a narrative.

One of the major weaknesses of the experiential marketing theory is that although immersion is understood as an immediate process which allows consumers to live a different identity and/ or intensify one of their identities (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Firat & Dholakia, 2008; Carừ & Cova, 2006), some consumers will fail to access the experience of the spectacular and thematised setting (Ladwein, 2003). This is because the practitioner approach tends to focus on the experience itself, not the consumer (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009).

The immersion concept literally implies becoming one with the experience and therefore conveys the idea of a total elimination of the distance between consumers and the situation, the former being plunged in a thematised and special spatial enclave where they can let themselves go. Instead of being an immediate process, the immersion into a consumption experience should be seen as progressive (Carừ & Cova, 2006).

Carừ and Cova (2003) note in their paper that in consumer research, an experience is above all a personal occurrence, often with important emotional significance stemming from the consumption of products and services. For Tynan and McKechnie (2009), a marketing experience should be personally relevant to the individual consumer, engage the customer, and offer a novel, surprising experience rather than just be a brand experience. According to Mick and Buhl (1992) the interlinking between consumption experiences and life projects in this manner could include the development of a leisure career through Serious Leisure pursuits.

3.3 The Consumer Experience Perspective

Another strand of thought replaces the notion of the passive consumer with that of the active participant in the experience. The literature in this perspective of experience marketing tends to be more academic, and has existed since the mid nineteen eighties (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009), dating from Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) iconic paper. This view is strongly consumer-centred, and based on the subjective "experiential" aspects of the consumption experience: "fantasies, feelings, and fun" as described by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982).

On the consumer side, a focus on experiences has arisen in response to the limitations of seeing consumer behaviour purely in terms of cognitive information processing. Holbrook and Hirschmann (1982) said that experiences are subjective, emotional states laden with symbolic meaning. Consumption is hedonic not utilitarian, particularly in leisure situations. The utilitarian viewpoint valued a product or service on its use value, whereas this standpoint considers the linking value (Carừ & Cova 2007; Cova & Cova 2001). It is no longer thought that purchasers consume physical products – what they consume is the image or meaning that the product suggests, taking for granted that the core product will perform as expected (Carừ & Cova 2007). The consumer is looking less for the maximisation of benefits as traditional marketing presumes; they are seeking experiential gratification within a social context (Carừ & Cova 2007).

Sheringham and Daruwalla (2007) see this hedonistic state of abandonment as providing a "liminal", temporary, carnivalesque space in which the experience takes place. The term "liminality" comes from the Latin, in this case *limen* or threshold, and suggests a place or state that is on the edge, particularly in cultural terms (Turner, 2004). The individual moves from a known social state through the liminal to another, different state (Ortiz, 2001). It is, if you like, akin to a state of initiation, or movement up a hierarchy.

Turner used the term "liminoid" to describe symbolic action within leisure, recreation and carnivalesque activities in modern or postmodern societies, as opposed to "liminal", which he used when discussing obligatory, sacred transformations, particularly in traditional societies (Turner, 1977; Ortiz, 2001; Schechner, 2013). The suffix "-oid" was intended to convey the meaning that the concept in question is somewhat like ritual liminality, but not identical with it (Ortiz, 2001). The liminoid experience is likely to be collective, as opposed to the individual experience of liminality (Turner, 1977). A meal at the *chef's table*, for example takes the diner well beyond the standard restaurant experience, it is "liminoid", and the celebrity chef represents the "high priest" at the food altar.

When partaking of liminoid leisure activities, the participants may become part of an "existential communitas" (Lugosi, 2008). "Communitas" also comes from the Latin, and was developed by cultural anthropologist Victor Turner to mean the marginal or alien in ourselves. The term, however, has many variations of definition; Turner's widow, Edith (Turner, 2011) explains communitas as "a group's pleasure in sharing common experiences with one's fellows" (p.2.) and "the overlooked moment of memorable experience" (p. xii). Many consumption experiences are collective in nature (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009), however research into transformative consumer research is relatively new (Joy & Li, 2012). When invoking communitas one is looking for profound transformation which can be shared, but is deeper than mere social relationships (Killinger, 2010). It is related to liminality and the concepts of *rites de passage* and pilgrimage (Killinger, 2010); the positions that individuals acquire in group social structures come about because of their movement across a threshold, where they are transformed (Turner, 1969). Victor Turner (1983) also saw that communitas fits with Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow (1975; 1990), where action and awareness are one. When part of the group, however, the individual's skills are not diminished (Turner, 2011), so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

This definition of communitas is rejected, however, by the Italian philosopher Esposito (2010) who argues that community does not exist as a mode of being. Esposito argues that community is an ***obligation*** in the sense that the individual owes something to the group, yet the group owes its very existence to the constituent individuals. Turner's (1983; 2011) standpoint is that the group evolves as a direct result of the input of those participiating within the activity, with the associated synergies. Esposito (2010) argues that the group or community is pre-existing and any individual wishing to join the group will amend their individual behaviours to be complementary to the group as a whole. Comparisons of the works of Turner (1969) and Esposito (2010) support the conclusion that Turner's theory is more applicable to this thesis.

A community of consumption, in the consumer behaviour sense, may develop around dining experiences – a consumption tribe (Maffesoli, 1996). If the diner then blogs about the experience, this is then transformed into something more tangible for the group to share. For Jensen et al. (2003) consumption is both self-expressive and self-defining; products and brands are chosen to tangibilise a given identity. There are four stages which have been identified in this view of consumption:

1. The pre-consumption experience [searching for, planning, day-dreaming about and imagining the experience]
2. The purchasing experience [choosing the item or service, payment, the encounter with the servicescape (Bitner, 1992)]
3. The core consumption experience [sensation, satiety, satisfaction/dissatisfaction, irritation/flow, and transformation]
4. The remembered consumption experience and the nostalgia experience [photographs and memorabilia are used to relive the past experience based on narratives and arguments with friends about the past]

3.4 The Consumer Experience in a Postmodern World

A so-called "crisis of consumption" in marketing has come about because of postmodern individualism, according to some modernist authors (Cova, 1997). Common responses to this have been attempts to create marketing approaches which aim for a closer proximity to the consumer, such as:

1. one-to-one marketing (Peppers & Rogers, 1994)
2. micro-marketing, (Sivadas et al. 1998)
3. database-marketing, (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006)
4. new-marketing,(Honneywill & Blyth, 2001)
5. maxi-marketing, (Woodside, 1996)
6. relationship-marketing (Egan, 2011)
7. customer intimacy (Wiersma, 1998)

All of these methods aim to build, develop and maintain a relationship with the consumer as an individual, rather than as a member of an amorphous segment, however Cova (1996) criticizes these approaches as not being completely in step with postmodern times. In such approaches, there is no attempt to share any emotion with the consumer as emphasised by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982). According to Cova (1996 p. 21) many marketers "confuse proximity with intimacy, and base everything on customer service", for example sending individualised promotional material to regular customers using material held in a data-base.

An alternative lies in understanding that postmodern consumers are no longer the the modernist citizen, who is bounded by rationality and nationality, but is the consumer who Firat et al. (1995 p. 51) describe as "boundaryless, mercurial, hedonic, whimsical, simulation-loving and experience-seeking." Furthermore they are looking for the "linking value" (Cova, 1996) or the hedonistic value (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) in products and services, rather than basic utilitarian value. Furthermore, Cova (1996) suggested that instead of modernist strategies which look to the future, marketers should design experiences which enable individuals to gather together in their tribes (Maffesoli, 1996) and to be able to experience the postmodern diversity of many themes, past and future, not be fixed in any single here and now (Firat & Shultz, 1997). This means that a radical change of paradigm for marketers, a complete reassessment of the way that marketing is not only theorised and researched, but also practiced (Firat et al. 1995; Dholakia, 2009; Rytel, 2010).

3.4.1 A Radical Change of Paradigm for Marketing

Firat et al. (1995) suggest that marketing and postmodernism are so closely intertwined that they cannot in fact be separated; marketing is not an instrumental discipline which merely affects customers and society. Rather it has to become reflexive and should be studied as a process which defines postmodernity. Dholakia (2009) calls this shift in emphasis ***"emotional marketing"*** due to the increasing meaning of symbols for consumers; purchases are defined through both the visual and verbal symbols relating to the product consumed. Emphasis on such emotional attributes allows the ultimate individualisation as required in a postmodern situation (Rytel, 2010). The symbolic construction of meanings through shared experiences leads to the creation of identity (Firat et al.1995; Joy & Li, 2012), and in the postmodern world, that identity is within the tribe (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova & Cova, 2001), not in the traditional segments of marketing. Tribes (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova & Cova, 2001) provide opportunities for marketers to engage in symbiotic relationships with their customers, where the consumer and the producer of the experience work together (Cova, 1996) – in effect, "tribal marketing" which is reciprocal, and postmodern in nature. This requires the participation of the marketer and the consumer together to create the end product (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). It should also revolve around the acknowledgement that personal identity and community are constructed daily by the consumer (Cova, 1996; Featherstone, 2007). This means that marketers who understand the structure and ethos of a postmodern subculture of consumption – a tribe - can better profit from this bringing together of individuals to celebrate their collective consumption experience by creating experiences to enhance the tribal feeling of the group (Cova, 2006).

3.4.2 Postmodern Experiences

The concept of an experience is a special and particular phenomenon, emphasising newness and the social (Cova & Cova, 2003). Experiential consumption is strongly affected by hyper-reality (Baudrillard, 1988), as many consumers now prefer simulation to reality (Carừ & Cova, 2007). The term hyper-reality was coined by Jean Baudrillard to mean signs that magnify or "improve upon" reality, until they seem more real than reality itself (Ward, 2003; Venkatesh et al. 1993; Rojek, 1993). This is because postmodernism sees truth as constructed, images and symbols as more important than objects, consumption as more valid than production and emphasises the lived experience (Venkatesh et al 1993). Tourists visit Las Vegas hotel-casinos such as Caesar's Palace and the Venetian for example, in the full understanding that they are artifice, not authentic reproductions of the originals. Similarly when travelling, although individuals may realise that they are being served "tourist-friendly fare" rather than authentic, traditional local food this does not detract significantly from the overall experience.

Much discussed in relation to postmodernism is the 24/7 world of cyberspace. The individual interacts with the screen, and the screen becomes their way of travelling across this simulated world (Nunes, 1995). Hine (2000 p.114) has commented that rather than the Internet transcending time, it has "multiple temporal and spatial orderings". It is the people who use the Internet to create the "timeless" posts and comments from the community, which can be appended at any later time, that keep the experience "alive". Thus the post can be experienced in the now, in the sequence of a diary, or in the past as history (Hine, 2000). Web pages have temporal markers that put it into a historical context that allows the reader to make sense of it (Hine, 2000). The web can, therefore, be described as "temporal collage" (Hine, 2000) that has contextual meaning for the reader, without which it would be a meaningless jumble. On the Internet the space of flows emphasises connection, as opposed to location or time (Hine, 2000). These combinations of time and space on the Internet allow for an exploration of reality and virtual reality as detailed in the “multiverse” concept of Pine and Korn (2011).

3.4.1 The Eight Realms of Experiences

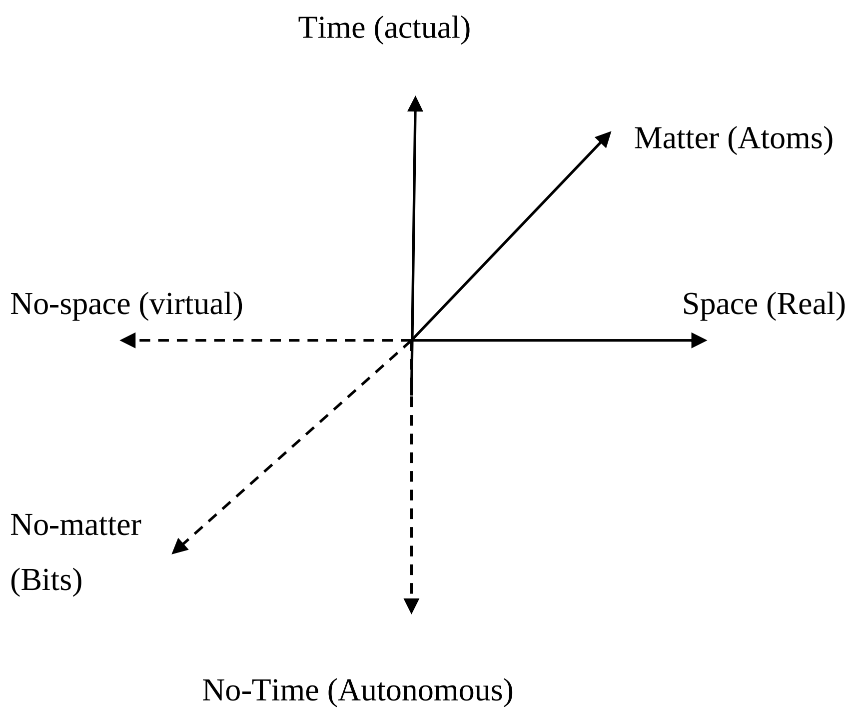
Pine and Korn (2011) suggest that reality consists of one of the following:

- Matter involves physical entities, such as the humans doing the experiencing, and the sensory stimuli experienced.
- Experiences exist in time, which is measurable.
- Space is the background source and context of everything that can be experienced.

Furthermore, they suggest that there is a ***“multiverse”***, which consists of both reality and a corresponding, or opposite, virtual reality, as shown in Figure 3.1. Spatial and temporal orderings help to differentiate places on the Internet, which allow people to create meaningful social contexts which help them to negotiate through the ether of cyberspace (Hine, 2000).

The supposedly normal combination of space, time and matter is “reality”, but other combinations exist as in Table 3.1. Reality could be an experience such as skiing down a mountain, tasting a speciality food or taking a walk through the countryside. Directly opposite this is “virtuality” – “no-time” plus “no-space” plus “no matter” – which are familiar to us as computer games, for example, or social media such as Facebook (Pine & Korn, 2011). The difference here is that the situation is not bound in time or space; virtuality is ethereal. In this view cybernetic “space” replaces the “real” world with a transparent and immediate on-line one – the actual locations of the computers involved is irrelevant, it is the “locations” of web sites and user addresses that matter – a metaphorical topography (Nunes, 1995).

Figure 3.1 The Multiverse of Experience



(Source: Pine & Korn, 2011)

According to Nieckarz (2005) the "***disembedding***" of social structure which takes place in the on-line world if fact questions the concept of on-line groups.

Table 3.1 The Variables and Realms within the Multiverse

VARIABLES			REALM
Time	Space	Matter	Reality
Time	Space	No-Matter	Augmented reality
Time	No-Space	Matter	Physical virtuality
Time	No-Space	No-Matter	Mirrored virtuality
No-Time	Space	Matter	Warped reality
No-Time	Space	No-Matter	Alternate reality
No-Time	No-Space	Matter	Augmented virtuality
No-Time	No-Space	No-Matter	Virtuality

(Source: Pine & Korn, 2011, p.17)

Augmented reality is also familiar, as it is where organisations employ digital technology to enhance customers' experience of the physical world. For example, renowned chef Heston Blumenthal of the three Michelin-starred *The Fat Duck* restaurant in Bray, Berkshire, gives diners an iPod to wear to listen to specially recorded sounds of waves crashing on the beach whilst eating a fish pie dish called appropriately *"Sound of the Sea"*. Interestingly such concepts were discussed by Italian futurist Marinetti in his *Futurist Cookbook* of 1932: he gave the affinity of sound with taste the name "*conrumore*". Marinetti also suggested poetry, music and everyday sounds as "surprise ingredients" (Poole, 2012). At the restaurant of Paul Bocuse in Lyons, diners are given a disposable camera to record their food and their meal experience (Gillespie, 2001). This is not to suggest that Blumenthal or Bocuse have the same motives as Marinetti, who was a staunch fascist, rather that there is an intent to create a total work of art, or *Gesamtkunstwerk* in Wagnerian terms (Poole, 2012). This complexity and combination of tastes, smells, sounds and the experience of eating is an immersion in the consumption experience; the diner "literally … becoming one with the experience" (Carừ & Cova 2006, p. 5). As Lugosi (2008) points out, hospitality is sometimes an emotional experience.

What is relevant in a postmodern world is the concept of "no-matter" (Davis, 1987). In a postmodern world, a pastiche of places and products become spectacles that are based on hype or simulation (Baudrillard, 1995; Eco, 1987; Firat & Shultz, 1997; Rojek, 1993), and the boundaries between reality and simulation become blurred (Patterson, 1998). At restaurants such as Ferran Adria's *El Bulli* or Heston Blumenthal's *The Fat Duck* the flavours and textures are constructed almost like a science experiment rather than a simple combination of ingredients. This "molecular gastronomy" was first christened by Hervé This and the British scientist Nicholas Kurti in 1988 although there is some question as to whether it is now a dead art, given its popularity (Rayner, 2011; Poole, 2012). A Sydney restaurant called The Dark Side of Hyde Park (since closed) served diners their meals in complete darkness, by waiters wearing night vision goggles.

Berthon and Katsikeas (1998) comment that postmodernism has ushered in an era where forward, linear progress does not necessarily exist; where the recycling, reinvention and reuse of themes from the past opens up new a world of experience for consumers. There is a cultural propensity to experience everything in the here and now, including the past and the future: a reality is constructed which is contextual to the culture and time of the individual (Venkatesh et al. 1993). Theme parks and themed restaurants, for example allow consumers to experience nostalgia for the past (e.g. Disney's Main Street USA; Hard Rock Cafe), or live in an imagined, idealised future (The Rainforest Cafe).

Hopkinson and Pujari (1999) believe that hedonic consumption relates very directly, and can then therefore, contribute to ideas highlighted in the emerging postmodern marketing perspective. Postmodern theory questions the relationships between consumption and production. The individual is "consumed by as well as consuming the leisure experience"; that is the creation and consumption of the experience is happening at the same moment. The participant is produced through consumption. The act of consumption itself has an important effect in terms of bringing about change in the values and the outlook of the consumer. Cova (1996) suggests that ordinary people create their own experiential reality from a world of many possible realities. Symbolic consumer behaviour is at the heart of hyper-reality (Fullerton, 1998); it is the consumer who creates the experience with the products and services provided for them by the producer. In this way, no two experiences are ever the same.

The internet is a further incarnation of this postmodern world, where the concepts of simulated presence and the sharing of experiences by people geographically separated is no longer considered to be science fiction (Fullerton, 1998). Baudrillard (1987) suggested that "mass society becomes a society of hyper-reality in which the experience of collectivity is electronically determined and mediated." Consumer groups may develop over the internet. Maffesoli (1996) discusses the breakup of mass culture in a postmodern world, and suggests that affiliation groups, called "tribes" now create value in experiences in quite a different manner than the way value is constructed in the modernist paradigm has been traditional (Covừ & Cova, 2001). Tribes are the basis of everyday life: Maffesoli does not dismiss class, but does relegate it to a less significant position in society (Sheilds, 1996). The growth of lifestyle mini-groups in particular, such as communities of consumption, is a sign of a major paradigm shift in society (Maffesoli, 1996) and therefore in marketing (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Maffesoli (1996 p. 98) further suggests that developing these new lifestyles is like creating “villages within the city”. It is the ability of the product or service to establish and reinforce the bonds between people that have developed as a free emotional choice that becomes the linking value (Cova & Cova, 2001). In some cases the linking value may not have been intentional on the producer’s part (Cova & Cova, 2001; Firat et.al 1995).

Despite being criticised by some as somewhat naïve, there is a growing acceptance amongst consumer researchers (eg. Rojek, 1993; Cova, 1997) that the supposed fragmentation of postmodernism can be turned into a positive experience, and that postmodernism can be seen to liberate the consumer (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Liberatory postmodernism opens new avenues of experience in which individuals can create their own meanings and interpretations of reality.

3.4.2 Creating Consumer Experiences

An alternative lies in understanding that postmodern consumers are looking for the linking value in products and services, rather than *prima facie* basic use value. Cova (1996) suggests that this would lead to marketing as becoming an activity which facilitates a communal gathering of individuals into their tribes – in other words tribal marketing. Such sub-cultures provide opportunities for marketers to engage in symbiotic relationships with consumers (Cova, 1996) allowing them to create suitable experiences.

Carừ and Cova (2007) suggest that there are three main factors to producing an experience:

- Decor, design, and staging [with consideration given to multi-sensorial simulation, which includes provision for the customer to taste, smell and see the food, and to see, hear and feel the restaurant environment]

- Active participation by the consumer [aided by facilitators, but not pre-planned, including the interaction between the diners, and between the diners and the staff]
- The narrative and story which is created, the most important of which is memories for the customer to take home with them [some in their personal memory, some in the way of tangible "souvenirs" such as menu cards or photographs]

An example of the creation of a consumer experience is the Ace Cafe in London. During the late 1950s and early 1960s the cafe became a meeting place for young motorcyclists who identified with the Rocker tribe. Over the years the cafe has become iconic with this group, and now holds various events, has a membership club, and a website (http://www.ace-cafe-london.com/default.aspx), and so forth. The website makes it clear that the Ace Cafe has been devised and designed by members of the tribe, and that it maintains their ethos. The physical evidence of the decor and staging reflects this. Tribe members are actively encouraged to participate in the staging of the Rocker experience, to share photographs of their motorbikes and their visits to the cafe (Ace Cafe London, accessed 26th March 2012).

The consumption experience is spread over four stages across time (Arnould et al. 2002):

1. **<u>The pre-consumption experience</u>**:
   - Planning for, daydreaming about, or imagining the experience
2. **<u>The purchase experience:</u>**
   - Choice, payment, and the encounter with the service environment
3. **<u>The core consumption experience:</u>**
   - The sensation of the experience, satiety, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, the irritation or flow, the transformation

4. **<u>The remembered consumption experience and the nostalgia experience:</u>**
   - Photographs which are used to relive a past experience
   - Stories about the past
   - Classification of memories of the experience

Carừ and Cova (2003) suggest that an “extraordinary” experience will produce emotions in the consumer that trigger personal transformations. If a marketer intends to appeal to consumers using transformational experiences, then they need to use a postmodern approach to marketing. Figure 3.2 outlines the differences between traditional marketing and the postmodern, experiential approach.

Figure 3.2 shows marketing as a juxtaposition of opposites: modernist versus postmodern. Symbolic consumer behaviour is at the heart of hyper-reality (Fullerton, 1998); it is the consumer who creates the experience with the products and services provided for them by the producer. An experiential approach to the study of consumer behaviour, as suggested by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) allows a focus on such symbolic behaviour. Indeed, “symbolic consumption within the (hyper-real) simulation takes on whatever meaning is chosen by the consumer” (Fullerton, 1998 p. 200). One-to-One marketing as posited by Peppers and Rogers (1994) did make some steps towards understanding customers in the changing environment of the early 1990’s, however it did not consider that although customers are individuals, they may define themselves through their position in a group, such as a “tribe” (Maffesoli, 1996). Image marketing is used heavily in hospitality, particularly to retain existing customers (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2003). Creating an image of what the restaurant will look like is only a small part of what is necessary to create an experience as detailed by Carừ and Cova (2007) in their three categories mentioned above. Jenson et al. (2003) suggest that the customer needs to go through stages prior to consumption, such as daydreaming about their meal, for it to be a full experience. Restaurateurs need to create a certain level of expectation within their potential market, and having done so they need to ensure that the reality of the experience matches the

Figure 3.2 Postmodern Marketing as a Juxtaposition of Opposites

One-to-one marketing	**Tribal marketing**
Image marketing	Experience marketing
Use value	Linking value
Transfer of meaning	Co-creation of meaning
Database	Ethnography
Communication	Participation

Source: (Cova 1996 p.22)

expectation generated. Consumers are looking for the linking value in products (Cova, 1996) as the basic value does not provide any emotional link to the product or service for them. In fact, in some cases the linking value may not have even been intentional on the producer's part but created as a side benefit (Cova & Cova, 2001; Firat et al. 1995). This still provides experiential benefits to the consumer, however. The twin concepts of participation in the experience and co-creation of meaning (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Cova, 2006) enhance the experience for the consumer; they feel that they are valued, part of a tribe, and not just another customer.

Traditional database marketing struggles to be effective in a postmodern world. This does not suggest that the use of database technology is redundant, rather that it should be used in a different way to store information about customers, and allow differing direct marketing responses to be made to groups and individuals. In many cases, promotion using mass media outlets such as television and radio, newspapers and magazines, is rapidly becoming irrelevant when many consumers obtain their information on-line (technorati, 2011). Traditional promotional communications will not be adequate for Internet-literate consumers, as producers will need to encourage consumer participation in all aspects of the integrated marketing communications, through word of mouth, testimonials and consumer product reviews. The growth of on-line word-of-mouth sites such as Tripadvisor is an example of this. Furthermore, the use of ethnographic methods to research groups of customers, such as the method used in this study, can provide marketers with a clear window into the postmodern world of their customers (Kozinets, 2010). The clear outcome, as highlighted in Figure 3.2 is that traditional segmentation will no longer work. The approach should be towards the tribe, with linking value replacing use value, and that there must be co-creation of meaning between supplier and consumer.

The proponents of the Experience Economy suggest managing the consumer experience using certain set parameters. In the consumer experience viewpoint, the concept is taken even further, so that it is the consumer themselves who make this decision, and create their own experience which provides them with linking value (Cova) or value in use (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). Firat and Dholakia (1998) further suggest that consumption should be turned into a series of immersions in "extraordinary experiences" for the consumer. According to Carừ and Cova (2007), a consumption experience becomes even more extraordinary with the use of spectacular interior design, unexpected extravagance and ingenious simulations in which the consumer will be immersed.

3.4.3 Extraordinary Experiences

Abrahams (1986) made the distinction between everyday experience and extraordinary experiences, which serve as *rites de passage*, moments of self authentication or of communal celebration. Extraordinariness stems from the anthropology of experience, and analyses how individuals experience events in their consciousness. The notion of an extraordinary experience is attributed to Abrahams (1986), who identified a difference between every day, routine activities and higher or deeper experiences, which he called extraordinary experiences.

In anthropology and ethnography, experiences are seen as the way in which individuals live through their own culture; an intense personal feeling. Carừ and Cova (2003) suggest that consumer behaviour research understands experience is a similar way. When this experience leads to a transformation of the individual, it becomes an extraordinary experience (Arnould & Price, 1993; Carừ & Cova, 2003). Extraordinary experience has been further developed in consumer theory; the experience is always situated in the individual's life world in this view (Joy & Li, 2012). Belk et al. (1989) used it to analyse the role of rituals and the sacred in consumer behaviour; Arnould and Price (1993) used the concept when considering the delivering of extraordinary experiences in river rafting; Celsi et al. (1993) in skydiving; and Belk and Costa (1998) in consumption fantasies. Achrol and Kotler (2011) have argued that consumer experiences have reached a pre-eminence in the digital age.

According to Carừ and Cova (2003) extraordinary experience stems from unusual events and the individual will experience emotional intensity during the experience. Czikszentmihalyi (1975) uses the term ***flow*** to describe an optimal experience, specifically a holistic experience where individuals feel completely absorbed in the activity at hand to the exclusion of external stimuli. According to Rettie (2001) several authors have suggested that this concept can also be used to understand behaviour in computer-mediated environments. ***Peak experience*** was defined by Maslow (1964). Maslow's research involved interviews with hundreds of people, and led to a list of twenty-five features of peak experiences. Some of these include ego-transcendence, self-forgetfulness and feelings of passiveness and receptiveness. Whilst some of the other features are more akin to awe, these listed dovetail into the concept of flow. Denzin (1992) wrote of the concept of an ***epiphanic experience***. This is explained by McDonald (2008) as being a momentary experience of transcendence, however the resultant change in the individual is enduring. For the purposes of this thesis, these terms are taken to be synonymous with an extraordinary experience (Caru & Cova, 2003).

Pearce (2010 p. 163) has coined the term “intersubjective flow” to express an intense group experience where the flow is maintained by communal interaction, such as in the members of an online community.

Furthermore, there is likely to be a transition associated with the experience. Turner (1978) calls these phases preliminal, liminal and postliminal. Liminal states are threshold states where everything is possible and allowed, that is they are states of liberation from the normal constraints of life (Carừ & Cova, 2003). In many cases this may be likened to a pilgrimage: the person leaves their home and becomes separated from their everyday lives; they enter into the “sacred” grounds where they experience a transformation; after this they return to be re-integrated into their community (Turner, 1978; Arnould & Price, 1993).

Also an important aspect of experience is the level of emotional intensity. In a quasi-religious interpretation of an experience, the normal is equated with the profane, the extraordinary or abnormal with the sacred (Graburn, 1989; Hemmington et al. 2005). In such cases, terms like pilgrimage and sacred journey tend to be used (Graburn, 1989; Hennig, 2002; MacCannell, 1976; Hemmington et al. 2005). The social aspect is also a recurring theme. Shared experiences can bring forth initiation protocols (Arnould & Price, 1993) creating close bonds between people. They can be a means of establishing identity (Beard & Ragheb, 1983), gaining recognition (Otto & Ritchie, 1996), and status or kudos (Curtin, 2005), moving up the integration gradient within their tribe or community.

Oldenburg's (1989) concept of the "third space", which is neither home nor workplace, and where a person can interact with others he/she has come to know as members of the same community, has traditionally been experienced through places like pubs and coffee houses. These sorts of places have begun to disappear with the suburbanisation of society, and some people are finding alternative meeting places in cyberspace (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Third spaces can now be a fusion of the real and the virtual, and these offer great opportunities for added value for marketers (Pine & Korn, 2011). The communitas or interpersonal interaction between members of the community of consumption or tribe acts as the trigger for the heightened experience. In order to better study the emotional and communal aspect of the experience an ethnographic approach to consumer behaviour has been used in several well-known studies (e.g. Cova, 1997; Arnould & Price, 1993). As discussed in section 3.4.1 on page 63, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) suggest that marketers should become involved in co-creation of the product with the consumer to create the appropriate experience, thus creating meaning for them. This is a fundamental shift in the basis of marketing which allows consumers to be in control of constructing their world, rather than be passive.

At the far extreme are experiences where consumers are immersed in a hyper-real situation and the firm has taken on a total experiential marketing approach (Carừ & Cova, 2007). At Katoomba in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney, visitors experience the dramatic scenery of canyons, gorges and waterfalls through a visit to *The Edge* IMAX cinema, when the real thing is just a few steps away. Firat and Shultz (1997) suggest that the postmodern consumer seeks experiences that give excitement without difficulties or hardship, in any space/time setting. Whilst the reference here to space/time settings can obviously refer to seeing the Jamison Valley in the Blue Mountains at close range, in perfect weather, at a time to suit, and without having to hike, climb and camp, it could also be relevant in the radically altered, non-linear space/time contours of the internet. Poole (2012) criticizes these as "capital –E Experiences", which he describes as an edited simulacrum, a sanitized version of the "real thing". At a live foodie event, for example, Poole describes how he has just paid £15.00 to see a chef create a meal in front of him, which he cannot smell, or taste: he comments that perhaps Baudrillard would not have been surprised that virtual eating costs more than actually consuming real food at this postmodern foodie event.

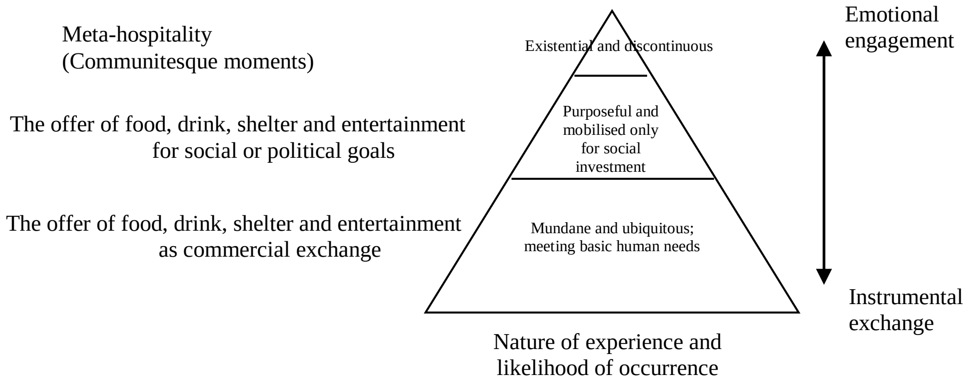
3.5 The Dining Experience

In recent years, there has been increasing academic interest in the concept of dining as a social experience. Hospitality is about more than just the provision of food and drink; it is often an emotional experience (Lugosi, 2008; Lashley et al. 2005). In many cases meals represent *rites de passage* (Gillespie and Morrison, 2001), or are an important social event. A meal can be seen as an important cultural medium that creates or reinforces relationships (Riley, 1994). Indeed, Lashley et al. (2007) see hospitality as a mirror of society, showing the norms and values of various groups.

As shown in Figure 3.3, most hospitality experiences are mundane and occur frequently. The exchange between the host and the guest is an instrumental one. A smaller number will be purposeful experiences; these will be social occasions, such as family celebrations, or meals over which business is transacted. At the top of the pyramid are the existential experiences, which are highly emotional and occur relatively rarely (Lugosi, 2008). These are likely to fit within the bounds of an extraordinary meal experience.

An example of this may be a foodie dining at a renowned three Michelin starred restaurant. Given a postmodern analysis, the need that the producer originally intended to fulfil in the consumer becomes irrelevant; what is important is the experience which the consumer chooses to experience by consuming the product at a certain place and certain time, in a certain manner. The pursuant of a Serious Leisure activity, such as foodism, derives a level of satisfaction from the activity in its own right. Whilst the eating of the food, drinking the wines, the experienced service of the waiters and

Figure 3.3 Dimensions and Manifestations of Hospitality



(Source: Lugosi, 2008)

sommelier, the enjoyment of the decor and ambience are all important in themselves, the overall experience adds up to more than the sum of the parts. For example, Lashley et al. (2005) identified six dimensions of consuming an extraordinary meal:

1. **Occasion**
   - Very often these were family occasions or meals to celebrate rites of passage, and were intensely emotion-filled situations for those involved.

2. **Company**
   - Relating to the first point, those present at the meal had an important emotional impact on the experience, reinforcing social bonds.

3. **Atmosphere**
   - Atmosphere comes from two elements of the meal – those people present, and the "physical evidence" of the surroundings. Tangible elements such as decor, table settings

and lighting all contribute to “tangibilising the intangible” experience.

4. **<u>Food</u>**
   - The food is often taken for granted by diners, and in many instances is of lesser importance than the social occasion itself. Certain dishes, however, may have a particular resonance, such as a family favourite, or traditional foods may be eaten on specific dates and times of the year. Such food may enhance feelings of nostalgia in the diners. For foodies, however, the ingredients, presentation, combination of flavours and textures is all-important.
5. **<u>Service</u>**
   - The respondents of Lashley et al. (2005) were clear that the service staff in a commercial dining situation were an important aspect of whether their experience was extraordinary or not. How the diner is treated by the host and service staff was considered very important, and linked to atmosphere. The staff were expected to manage the emotional experience of the diners, and be at once professional, yet still make their customers feel comfortable.
6. **<u>Setting</u>**
   - The meal, as a social experience, may be experienced in different ways, dependent on the setting. Dining in a commercial outlet such as a restaurant may perhaps suggest the requirement of different behaviours than if the meal was experienced in a private home situation. At the family home, individuals may feel more relaxed and social, for example. Geographical location, such as a restaurant overlooking the water, will also have an impact on the emotional experience of the meal, and may add to the memorability of the occasion.

The individual’s subjective expectations will mean that the meal experience is unique to them. Postmodernism sees pluralism and complexity; the fragmentation of markets renders traditional segmentation invalid (Firat &

Shultz, 1997). The postmodernist, experiential perspective contends that experience is the core of consumption (Addis & Podesta, 2005), and that there is no one right answer to any marketing question or situation. This is for two reasons; firstly the consumer becomes the active, communicating subject, and secondly because consumption and production are inseparable and complementary, particularly with service experiences such as eating out.

Most hospitality research confirms that there are two ways to create a memorable experience which the consumer is likely to tell others about – serve excellent food in a memorable setting, and allow the diners to create their own shared experience with their fellow diners (Pantelidis, 2010).

3.6 Authenticity

For many foodies, although the package of the overall experience is what they seek, there is also a growing interest in seeking an "authentic" experience (Beer, 2008). Exactly what an authentic food experience is constitutes somewhat of a quandary. Not only that, but authors such as Bruner (1994) suggests that if one is taking a postmodern viewpoint, authenticity is not an appropriate point to discuss, as the hyper-real or simulations of the original experience have just as much validity. On the other hand, Tresidder and Hirst (2012) suggest that authenticity relates to the sacredness of the experience, and Boyle (2003) quotes the late Harvard professor of political philosophy, Robert Nozick, as commenting that reality would be longed for even more in a virtual society. Foodies do demand what they see as authentic food: food made to traditional recipes, using traditional or "heritage" ingredients that may be "organic" or "locally grown" (Boyle, 2003; Poole, 2012).

There is little academic agreement, however, as to what the term authenticity actually means (Reisinger & Steiner, 2005; Beer, 2008). Carroll and Wheaten (2009) suggested that there are two different interpretations of authenticity – type authentic and moral authenticity.

Relating this to food, they suggest that type authenticity can be further defined as ***craft authenticity***, where a dish can be defined as authentic if it has a claim to a verifiable origin; a recipe that is accurate in its use of ingredients and cooking method, for example. From moral authenticity Carroll and Wheaten (2009) coin the term ***idiosyncratic authenticity***, which refers to a historically recognised quirkiness of the product, which may vary from place to place. An example of this is the same style of cheese made in a different location, or a grape variety grown in a different *terroir*, producing a product with a different taste.

However, the question arises whether any dish can be described as truly authentic if it is not absolutely original, such as an ethnic meal created in a country where that meal is not indigenous (Leung, 2010). Furthermore, Poole (2012) comments how American TV chef Julia Child congratulated herself for having discovered the "real" recipe for a French dish, whilst at the same time contradicting an indigenous Frenchwoman's version. Is it actually possible for there to be one single true version of any dish? Authentic experiences and places retain the essence of what is held to be sacred, in contrast to staged authenticity which has lost its "real meaning" and become "commercialised" (Boorstin, 1972; MacCannell, 1976; Ritzer & Stillman, 2001; Lewis & Bridger, 2000).

Food is an important example of the demarcation of social status (Poole, 2012) and national pride. It has been argued by Blythman (2006) that in Britain, good food is tied to the eater being "posh". Henley (2011) commented that in British society, those who are well off are more likely to eat fresh, nutritious and unprocessed foods, prepared more healthily. In recent times, however, what foodies have come to see as authentic food are dishes that were traditionally eaten by the working man. The French have a term which they apply to what foodies would idealise as "peasant food": *nostalgie de la boue* – literally nostalgia for mud. What seems to have happened around the world is that upmarket restaurants take traditional foods and serve up dishes at a price which the ordinary man in the street could never afford. An example is chef Fergus Henderson, whose Michelin-starred London restaurant, St. John, specialises in serving offal (St. John

Restaurant 2013) – cuts of meat that would traditionally be eaten by the poor, but here are served up as exclusive and expensive meals. Similarly, the recent use of the term "kitchen" to describe an upmarket restaurant or gastropub suggests a return to the traditional and simple, although it usually is nothing of the sort (Poole, 2012). Examples include *Tom's Kitchen Chelsea*, operated by chef Tom Aikens, which (although more relaxed than his main restaurant just up the road) is still rather expensive. A macaroni cheese starter is £12.00, or £17.00 with truffle added. For main course, the eight ounce fillet steak, served with chips, is £29.50 (Tom's Kitchen, 2013). In the home, the eating of brown bread has come to signify higher social class, whereas in the past it was only the rich who could afford white bread (Poole, 2012). The addition of the term "gourmet" is often added to ordinary fare in order to reassure the foodie that this will be a worthwhile experience; the *Gourmet Burger Kitchen* chain uses both terms (Poole, 2012).

Poole (2012) suggests that the language used to discuss the authenticity of food is emotional, and impacts upon foodies' understandings of what they are eating: "heritage" or "heirloom" foods, such as varieties of fruit which have disappeared from supermarket shelves suggest nostalgia for a bucolic past time, for example. Not only that, but "heritage" can also suggest that what is being consumed is a part of one's national heritage, either in their own country, or when eating such food in another country where it is considered "ethnic" fare. Poole (2012) contends that "historic foodism" allows a kind of mental time-travelling which is at the same time visceral. He further argues, however, that this apparent visitation of the past is only an illusion as our cultural expectations of the food we eat are completely different to those of people in the past. We eat very differently on a day to day basis; international foods and fusion foods are a regular part of our diets. As Tresidder and Hirst (2012) have pointed out, although food has traditionally related to culture and geography, *fusion* food relates to a more postmodern, global definition of culture.

In a post-modern society distinctions between real, staged and perceived authenticity may be less important, as authenticity is a subjective term and part of the negotiation of the meanings of the experience (Uriely, 2005). Not only that but the authenticity of the food and the experience can be different matters.

Individuals therefore construct their own lives in a woven matrix of life and consumption, and the goods and services which are valued are mainly those which, through their linking value, permit and support social interaction of the communal type (Cova, 1997). Firat et al. (1995), go further and suggest that consumption can no longer be performed instinctively, rather that under postmodernism it requires the development of special skills of the kind highlighted by Stebbins (1992) when discussing Serious Leisure. This suggests that a foodie needs to have a deep understanding of food, ingredients and cooking methods in order to actively be involved in foodism at a Serious Leisure level.

3.7 Serious Leisure

The term Serious Leisure was coined in 1992 by Stebbins. It is the non-remunerative occupation of time pursuing activities that are of interest to the pursuer which are not related to any form of career other than the pursuit of the activity itself. The individuals may be described as amateurs, hobbyists or volunteers. Many types of leisure-time consumption experiences can be described as Serious Leisure (Stebbins, 1992; 2007) and involve both skilled consumption (Scitovsky, 1976), and the sharing of the experience with a community of like-minded people (Beard & Ragheb, 1983). The motivation for such leisure activities is a complex mixture of escapism, socialisation and self-actualisation (Ryan, 1997; Jones, 2000). The desired effect may be the state of absorption in the activity that Csikszentmihalyi (1975) calls flow. According to Stebbins (1992), Serious Leisure and Casual Leisure are types of activity that individuals may engage in during their discretionary time, and which exist at the opposite ends of the leisure spectrum.

An interest in food and beverages would fit under the category of Liberal Arts Hobbies according to Stebbins (2010b), as shown in Figure 3.4. The Liberal Arts are one of five types of hobbies (Stebbins, 1996b). Such hobbyists see the knowledge, skills, vocabulary and understanding which they gain as a part of the Serious Leisure participation as primary ends in themselves not just as a background understanding. Knowledge and skills may be gained or improved through instructional courses and videos, cultural tourism or lectures (Stebbins, 2010b). Although Stebbins does argue that it is unlikely for a sense of flow to stem from such activities, there is an argument to suggest that the perseverance required suggests that it does.

3.7.1 Six Characteristics of Serious Leisure

Six characteristics of serious leisure activity have been identified which differentiate Serious from Casual Leisure (Stebbins, 2007):

1. Perseverance through adversity [having to keep going, day after day or week after week]
2. The existence of a leisure career, or development, in a participant's involvement in their leisure activity; [gaining knowledge & skills]
3. Significant personal effort based on the need to gain skills, knowledge or training. [combines 1+ 2]
4. Ten durable benefits to the individual:

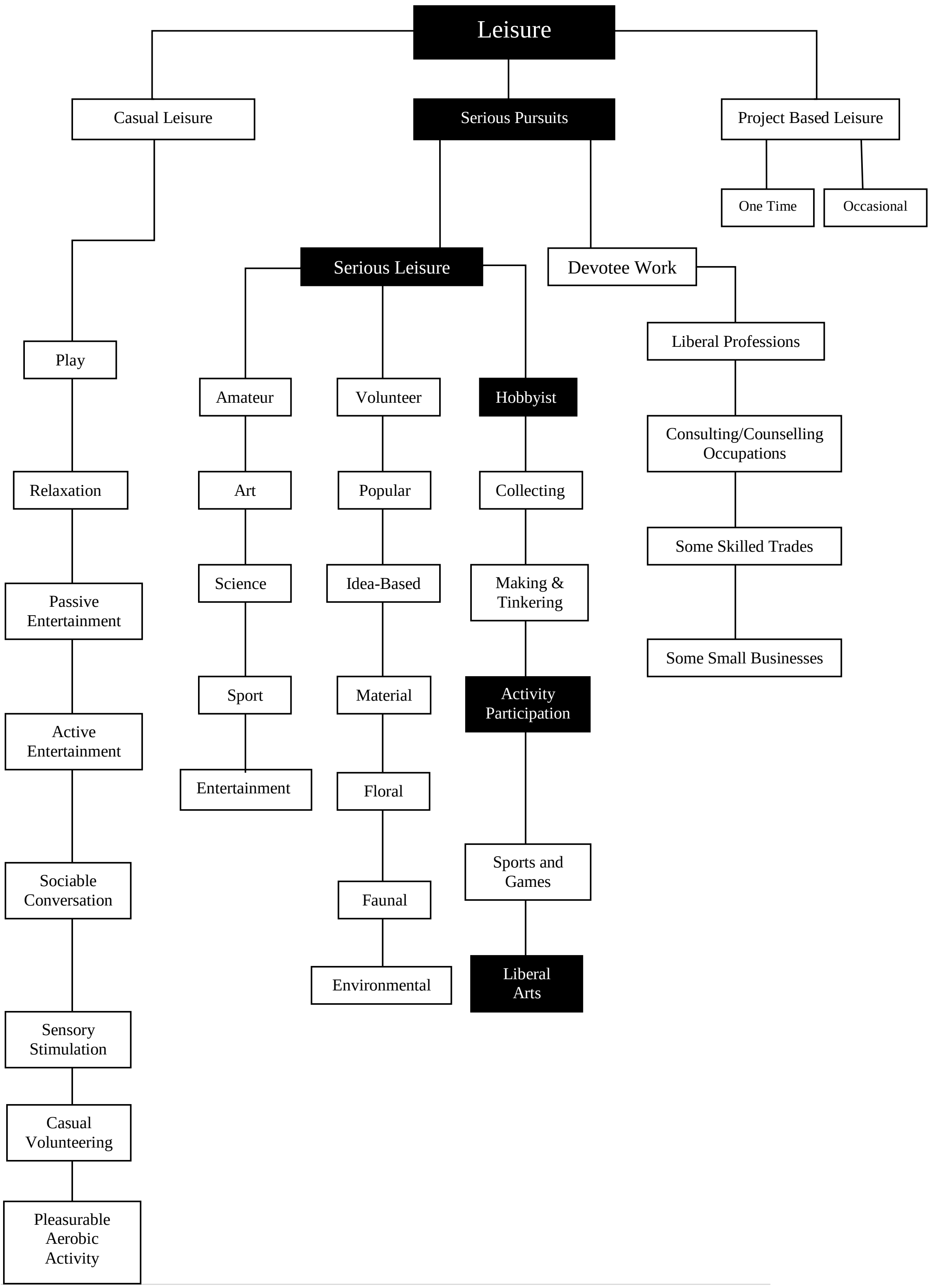
Personal rewards:

i. Enrichment (cherished experiences)
ii. Self-actualisation (developing skills, abilities, knowledge)
iii. Self-expression (expressing skills, abilities, knowledge already developed)
iv. Self-image enhancement (acknowledged by others as a SL participant)
v. Self-gratification (combination of superficial enjoyment and deep satisfaction – fun, flow)

vi. Re-creation (re-generation) of oneself through SL after a day's work

vii. and in some cases, financial return.

Figure 3.4 The Serious Leisure Perspective



Source: (Stebbins & Hartel 2011)

Social Rewards:

i: Social attraction (associating with other SL participants and participating in the social world of the activity)

ii: Group accomplishment (group effort in accomplishing a SL project: senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic)

iii: Contribution to the maintenance and development of the group (including senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic in the contribution)

4. The development of a unique ethos within a sub-culture;
5. Strong identification by participants with this sub-culture (Rojek, 2005; Jones, 2000).
6. The importance of group membership (Jones, 2000) [in-groups & out-groups]

Jones (2000; 2006) takes Stebbins' argument further, by suggesting that those individuals who engage in Serious Leisure activities do so for the social identity benefits that are obtained. If this is the case, then a close scrutiny of these leisure activities will show that the participants will develop relationships with others undertaking the same activity, and these relationships will allow them to move up the Serious Leisure Career Ladder (Stebbins, 1992).

3.7.2 Amateurs & Hobbyists

Although the general public may see an amateur as someone lacking in experience or competence, it is clear that Stebbins uses the word in the sense of devotees to their particular activity (1992). In the twenty-first century, amateurs have access to extensive leisure time; they also have the time, money and ability to develop the knowledge and techniques necessary to become skilled, as compared to those Stebbins describes as dilettantes or dabblers (1992). Foodie bloggers can also be seen in the role of citizen journalist (or "citjo's") (Bruns, 2007) as compared to professional food writers and critics (Rayner, 2007).

3.8 The Six Characteristics in detail

3.8.1 Perseverance

Involvement in a Serious Leisure activity requires the commitment of time, even in the face of adversity. Stebbins (2006) discusses the concept of discretionary time commitment, which is the time people set aside to devote to their activity. The time commitments people make around their work and leisure activities creates their lifestyle. Serious Leisure requires more time than Casual or Project-based Leisure. This may be due to the fact that it tends to continue over a longer period of time, and requires the learning of specialist skills and knowledge. In some cases, individuals commit themselves to more time and money than they can actually afford in pursuit of their Serious Leisure activity (Stebbins, 2006).

Optimal Leisure Lifestyles tend to be pursued by most people – in other words they organise their work, Serious Leisure, Casual and Project-based Leisure activities to give the best outcome. The allocation of time to various activities will depend on what is being pursued. For example, belonging to a sporting team may entail attending week night training sessions throughout the season, as well as a match on the weekend. Other activities may be conducted from home whenever there is some spare time, such as collecting hobbies. There may also be a difference between the time that an individual intends to spend on their activity, and the time they are actually able to spend. Constraints such as time, family and money may get in the way (Jackson & Scott, 1999).

Stebbins has also raised the issue that those pursuing Serious Leisure activities may become psychologically addicted to their interest (Stebbins, 2010a). Here the so-called addiction is that the absence of the desired psychological state of flow may produce negative emotions, or withdrawal symptoms (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 1990). Stebbins (2010b) has used Csikszentmihalyi's list of eight components of experience to analyse flow within Serious Leisure activities. These are:

1. Sense of competence in executing the activity
2. Requirement of concentration
3. Clarity of goals of the activity
4. Sense of deep focussed involvement in the activity
5. Sense of control in completing the activity
6. Loss of self-consciousness during the activity
7. Sense of time is truncated in the activity

A Serious Leisure participant experiences not merely a feeling of being in control rather it is the sense of exercising control (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This gives them the ability to persevere with their chosen activity, even in difficult circumstances such as fatigue, injury, and embarrassment (Gould et al. 2008). Stebbins (2010b) has identified flow as existing in a variety of Serious Leisure activities, from quilting to barbershop quartet singing, amateur acting to coaching amateur sport, white-water kayaking to snowboarding. Whether flow does in fact exist in the more cerebral type of activity, such as playing chess is questionable, although in what Stebbins refers to as the collecting hobbies, the combination of competence and control required suggests it does.

3.8.2 The Leisure Career

The concept of a career can be found in any substantial and enduring role, according to Stebbins (2004), not just work. A Leisure Career is the progression through stages of achievement or involvement in a leisure activity (Jones, 2006; Tsaur & Liang, 2008) that involves the collection of sub-cultural capital either through intangible capital such as knowledge or understanding, or tangible capital such as products or mementoes (Jones, 2006). Sub-cultural capital can be likened to a membership card identifying the holder as a full member of the club, the level of which varies with the gaining of knowledge within the sphere of the activity (Green & Jones, 2005). The career development takes the amateur or hobbyist into and through the leisure role – sometimes they continue on to take their interest into a work role in the same area (Stebbins, 2004). An example is Mat Follas the 2009 winner of B.B.C. 2's *Masterchef* programme who opened his own restaurant in Beaminster, Dorset (The Wild Garlic Restaurant accessed 26th March 2012). The Leisure Career may in fact bridge several organisations in cases where the career is more about skill and knowledge.

There are a number of stages in the career ladder - beginning, development, establishment, maintenance, and decline (Stebbins, 2004) – although the boundaries are rather imprecise. Interest in the activity takes root during the beginning stage. Development has occurred when the interest is established and its pursuit has become more or less routine. When learning the basics has been covered, the establishment stage has been reached, and maintenance occurs when the leisure career can be described as being in "full bloom". This is the peak of the career, and the point at which most enjoyment is usually had. Not all of those who follow a leisure pursuit will find their career goes into decline. Serious Leisure participants often find that their interest brings with it a recognisable place in a leisure community (Stebbins, 2004).

3.8.3 Significant Personal Effort

Significant personal effort in a Serious Leisure activity is linked to Perseverance and the Serious Leisure Career. The Serious Leisure participant expends time, money and energy on achieving improved skills, knowledge and abilities so that they can move up the ladder (Gould et al. 2008). This may involve reading, active researching, attending lectures or master classes (Stebbins, 1996). In the case of a foodie this may involve attending a specialist cooking class in order to better understand a specific cuisine, or style of cooking.

3.8.4 Durable Outcomes

Durable outcomes are derived from the explorations of the costs and benefits associated with Serious Leisure lifestyles. Costs may include disappointments, dislikes and interpersonal tensions. There are ten personal outcomes (Stebbins, 2007; Jones, 2006; Tsaur & Liang, 2008), which are further divided into personal and social rewards. Each of these categories has overlaps within the six characteristics of Serious Leisure, for example the three social rewards relate to both the unique ethos of the participants in the activity, and the group identity of members. The Durable Outcomes are outlined in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Durable Outcomes of a Serious Leisure (SL) Lifestyle

Personal rewards	Social rewards
Enrichment - cherished experiences	**Social attraction** - associating with other SL participants & participating in the social world of the activity
Self-actualisation - developing skills, abilities, knowledge	**Group accomplishment** - group effort in accomplishing an SL project: senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic
Self-expression - expressing skills, abilities, knowledge already developed	**Contribution to the maintenance and development of the group** - including senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic in the contribution
Self-image enhancement - acknowledged by others as an SL participant	
Self-gratification - combination of superficial enjoyment and deep satisfaction – fun, flow	
Re-creation - (re-generation) of oneself through SL after a day's work.	
In some cases, financial reward	

(Source: Stebbins 2007: Jones 2006; Tsaur & Liang 2008)

3.8.5 Unique Ethos

Serious Leisure participants have a propensity to evolve cliques with like minded people based upon their mutual beliefs, values, principles and standards (Tsaur & Liang, 2008). This is the unique ethos of the activity, a separation based upon the special skills, knowledge and attributions required to participate, such as specialist terminology, that reinforce this marginality from the mainstream (Jones, 2006; Stebbins, 1996). Unique ethos is related to identifying strongly with the activity, where participants can be expected to vocalise animatedly about their interest to anybody who will listen about their serious leisure activity (Tsaur & Liang, 2008). Stebbins (1992) also found that those involved in Serious Leisure pursuits tended to speak proudly and frequently to other people regarding their leisure activity, and even to introduce themselves to new acquaintances in terms of their activity. This has an echo in Barr and Levy's original (1984) definition of a foodie. Green and Jones (2005) point out that such behaviour provides a clear distinguishing line between in-group members and non-members, particularly in the absence of more obvious markers. Use of specific terminologies is part of the symbolic capital (Bordieu, 1984) of members of a community, and is known in discourse analysis as an interpretative repertoire (Wetherell & Potter, 1988; Hjørland, 2006). Such language adds to the social understandings of such a group, and aids in creating meaning.

3.8.6 Group Identity

Arnould and Thompson (1995) stated that consumer researchers had identified four domains to explain consumers. One of these is consumer identity. In keeping with this, Urry (1994) suggests that postmodern consumers no longer see identity in work rather they do so through consumption and leisure activities. Individuals who pursue their Serious Leisure activity develop contacts and friendships with others who have the same interest. As their interest deepens, the network of contacts broadens (Stebbins, 2009). Social rewards come through involvement with the social world of the activity (Gould et al. 2008). This identification with the pursuit is a strong characteristic of Serious Leisure which differentiates it from Casual Leisure (Gould et al. 2008). Identifying as part of the tribe is an important part of both self-identity and group identity (Gillespie et al. 2002). This social identification is based on the combination of the other five characteristics of Serious Leisure (Stebbins, 2007).

3.9 Developing a Serious Leisure Identity

Developing a Serious Leisure identity involves four steps (Jones, 2006):

1. Pre-socialisation
2. Recruitment
3. Socialisation
4. Identity Confirmation

The initial stage is pre-socialisation, during which the individual acquires the knowledge about the leisure activity in question: initial values and attitudes are formed about the activity and the identity associated with it (Jones 2006). Recruitment is the second stage. This involves entry into the social world of the group, and development of a social identity (Jones 2006). As noted by Shamir (1992), social identity links clearly to Serious Leisure: the individual's self esteem is tied to successful achievement in their chosen activity, and this requires the involvement of the six characteristics of Serious Leisure. The individual will persevere through difficulties, make concerted efforts to learn new skills and gain knowledge and improvement. As Taricani (2007) notes, the more involved the individual in their group membership, the stronger the social identity becomes. The third stage is the socialization stage, which is an ongoing process in which knowledge is gained regarding the roles, norms and values associated with a Serious Leisure activity (Jones, 2006). It is during this stage that the individual learns about the unique ethos (Stebbins, 1992) of the group, including appropriate behaviours and terminology (Jones, 2006). For a foodie, for example, food is more than just sustenance. They use and understand terms about specific ingredients and cooking methods. Identity confirmation is less of a final fourth stage than a continual process where there is interaction with the other members of the group (Jones, 2006).

The value of the experience for the consumer, therefore, is created by the meaning it is given by the participant and their social group, or tribe. It is the consumer who decides what is what: they know consumption is a game, and they play it with skill. Cova (1996) suggests that Western society has entered a so-called time of the individual and the time of the tribes, and that postmodern individuals who have liberated themselves from the constraints of modernity are likely to join societal micro-groups in which people share a common subculture. Indeed, in one sense it is only when this tribal meaning is found that the flow of sensations, thoughts and emotions around a particular set of events becomes an experience. The meaning rounds it into the unity of a significant whole (Gadamer, 1975).

An experience is lived in real time, but it must be reflected upon in the past tense in order to be processed and understood (Van Manen, 1990). Past experience has an influence on personality and identity. This moulds future expectations and determines the future experiences the individual actively seeks regarding food. The remainder of this chapter introduces and discusses the concept of identity. It compares and delineates between Identity Theory (Stryker, 1980) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), with a particular focus on Serious Leisure and foodism.

3.10 Theories of Identity

Identity is about meaning, and is constructed from a particular point of view (Jenkins, 1996). Jenkins (1996) further suggests that individuals, at least initially, construct an identity which is embodied. This is even the case of on-line identities, as he argues that selves without bodies don't make sense.

The interpretive literature has examined the deep relationships that consumers develop with their purchases and possessions, and the buying of services such as restaurant meals can be seen as instrumental to both the expression of identity and its transformation (Mittal, 2006; Zukin &

Maguire, 2004; Ahuvia et al. 2005). The concept that consumers' identities can be defined through product purchase and use is not new (e.g. Tucker 1957). Sirgy (1982) also discussed the idea that such purchases have symbolic meanings. The consumer research has long shown that experiential subcultures havd used consumption as a *raison d'être* for fostering consumption (Joy & Li, 2012); sometimes this is expressed through displays of cultural capital, and through highlighting the symbolic resources and skills shared by members of the group (Kozinets, 2001).

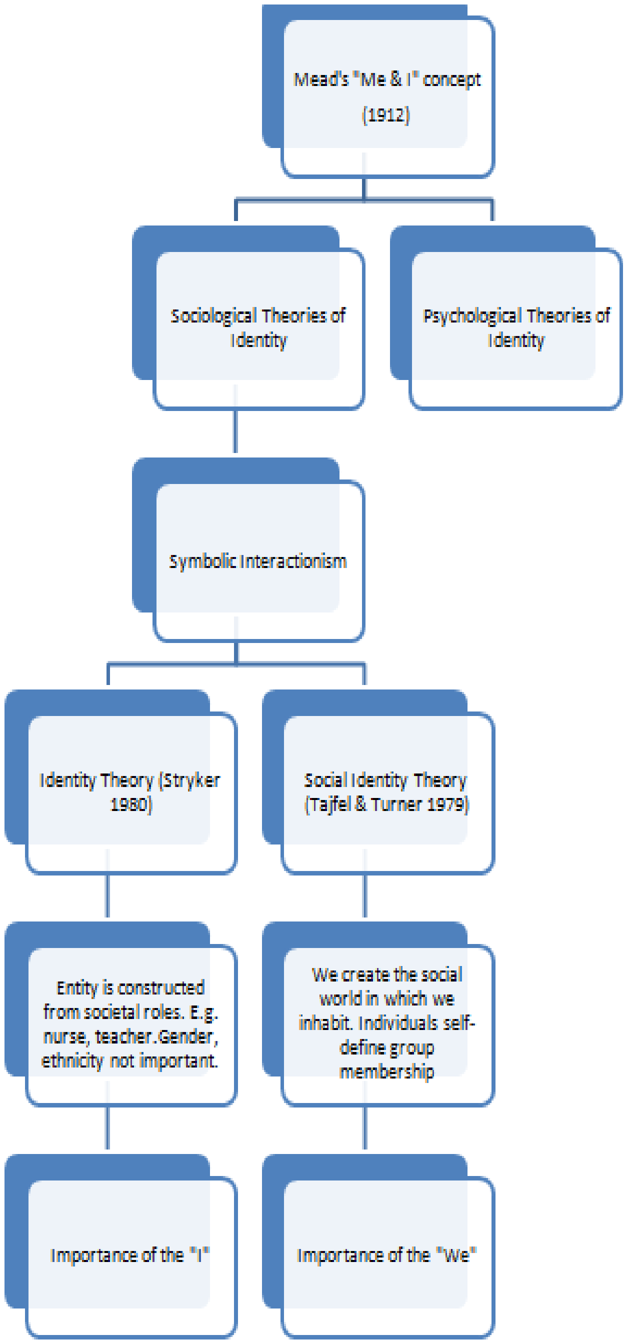
Self-concept is seen as a collection of self-images: it is a perspective which acknowledges the fact that in a postmodern society, individuals will adopt a number of important identities, which will come to the fore at different times. Leisure identities become important for many people in this context (Jones, 2006). According to Mittal (2006) identity is defined and lived out through the purchase and consumption of products and services. As originally identified by Bordieu (1984) individuals classify themselves by their classification of consumer goods (Zukin & Maguire, 2004). Consumers play out their identities as though they were a performance on the stage of life; the purchases they make become the props and the script comes from the culture or subculture within which the consumer lives (Ahuvia et al. 2005).

Theories of identity have been proposed and are presented at Figure 3.5 where similarities and differences are identified.

3.10.1 The Self-image Conception of Identity

The Self-image concept is a psychological theory which suggests that to be aware of oneself is to have a concept of oneself (Baumeister, 1999). Kuhn (1960) devised a test to explore the self—image by asking twenty questions. From this viewpoint, there are four 'selves' (Solomon, 2013):

Figure 3.5 Comparison of Theories of Identity



(Source: Adapted from Mead 1912; Stryker 1980; Tajfel & Turner 1979)

1. the *actual self* refers to how a person perceives themselves;
2. the *ideal self* refers to how a person would like to perceive themselves, perhaps in comparison to a member of their aspiration group;
3. the *looking-glass self* is how one feels others see them (Higgins 1987).
4. The *social self* refers to how a person presents themselves to others.

Global self-attitude (e.g., self-esteem or self-satisfaction) has been treated as a conscious judgment regarding the relationship of one's actual self to the ideal or social self.

When referring to the individual these concepts may have their place in the construction of an individual consumer profile, but don't go far enough to be useful in accurately predicting the consumer behaviour of groups to which they may be members. This viewpoint is a positivist one that lends itself to quantitative measurement. Mittal (2006) criticises it as being superficial, and ignoring a deeper understanding of the self which would provide an explanation of why or how a purchase explains the consumer's identity.

Tajfel and Turner (1979), on the other hand proposed that the groups to which we belong give us a sense of belonging to a social world. According to Pietrykowski (2004) individuals send messages to others via their choice of purchases, and the items consumed, and in fact change these purchases as a response to how others receive them. Individuals seek positive affirmation from their peer group, and will fine tune their consumer behaviour until such affirmation is achieved. For example, a foodie who admitted to having eaten at a fast-food outlet could leave themselves open to censure by their in-group. This section will now expand upon the development of the social interactionist theories of identity, in particular Social Identity Theory, which is one of the two fundamental tenets of this study, the other being Serious Leisure.

3.10.2 Mead's Concept of "I" and "Me".

George Mead was a Social Behaviourist who discussed the individual's social conduct with other humans, and how this informs our understanding of self (Mead & Morris 1972; Mead 1912). Using the development of the child as an example, he suggested that first the child understands the existence of others, then begins to recognise parts of themselves, before finally acknowledging themselves as a whole – "me". Modern psychologists and psychiatrists refer to this resultant as becoming "self aware". The objective "me" is the result of imported stimuli from the external world used to make sense of inner experiences, such as sensations. On the other hand, the "I" is beyond this close range of experience; it cannot exist as an object in the individual's consciousness. It develops as an innate, subconscious amalgam of those items that constitute the formation of the individual parts of the "me". As Mead suggests, the "I" is "behind the scenes" (1912 p. 406), and subjective. Neither can exist without the other (Mead, 1913). It is the experiences gained in the formation of the "I" that dictate the capacity for social interaction (Mead, 1972). The reflecting "me" is critical or approving of decisions that the "me" has made (Mead, 1913). Mead (1972) posits that it is in the memory that the "I" experiences itself. Furthermore he describes the self as being dramatic and social, as though the individual is appearing on a stage.

Mead's postulation on personal identity (1912) – the "I" and "me" – was the philosophical underpinning for later theories of identity; the early psychology within the thinking has been expanded upon by later theorists, and has been developed as psychological and sociological understanding developed, spawning other Symbolic Interactionist theories of identity (Turner, 2013), such as Stryker's (1980) Identity Theory.

3.10.3 Identity Theory versus Social identity Theory

Hogg et al. (1995) describe Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory as being similar in that they both are based on the concept of the socially constructed self, yet inhabiting "parallel universes". Burke and Stets (Accessed 23rd February, 2013) however, feel that a unified theory is possible, given the similarities of the two approaches, and suggest that the differences are merely ones of degree. The two theories use surprisingly similar language, but often the terms have markedly different meanings. Identity Theory attempts to explain individual behaviour and roles within society, whereas Social Identity Theory is a social psychological theory which explains intergroup behaviour and relationships (Hogg et al. 1995; Burke & Stets Accessed 23rd February, 2013).

Identity Theory was originally devised by Stryker (1980), is grounded in symbolic interactionism (Burke & Stets Accessed 23rd February, 2013.), and is micro-sociological (Hogg et al. 1995). The self is not seen as an individual psychological being, but rather as an entity constructed from societal roles. Social interaction embeds these identities so they acquire self-meaning, thus social identity theorists focus on how people self-define. They do not consider aspects such as gender or ethnicity to be of major importance in self-definition, because these are seen to override the individual role identities which people ascribe to themselves (Hogg et al. 1995). Identity Theory suggests that the individual self is a collection of identities which are derived from the various role positions which people define for themselves (Hogg et al. 1995; Burke & Stets Accessed 23rd February, 2013.). Such roles suggest shared expectations by people within a society – that others will understand the identity an individual takes. People understand what is "expected" of them, and so they behave in a particular manner (Burke & Stets Accessed 23rd February, 2013). These differing identities are located in a "salience hierarchy", and those higher up the ladder will be evoked rather than those lower down (Hogg et al. 1995; Burke & Stets Accessed 23rd February, 2013). An important aspect of Stryker's theory is the concept of "commitment", which explains the individual's level of dependency on other people, and how likely they are to conform to certain behaviours associated with their role.

3.10.4 The Social Identity Perspective

The Social Identity Perspective contends that the groups to which we belong are the strongest influence on our behaviour; together we create the social world which we inhabit (Haslam et al. 2012). Social Identity Theory was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and originally developed from the growth of a distinct European social psychology movement in opposition to the theories of the North American social psychologists (Hogg et al. 1995). Social identity is the individual's knowledge that he or she belongs to particular social groupings, plus the emotional significance and values attached to this (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Deaux et al. 2000). In other words it is the understanding of self as a group member, and the experience of being an in-group member rather than out of the group, which is what sets Social Identity Theory apart from other theories of individuals in groups (Abrams et al. 1990), such as Le Bon's late nineteenth century theories of intergroup activity (Haslem et al. 2012) or Stryker's Identity Theory (Hogg et al. 1995).

Social identity theory as originally defined by Tajfel and Turner (1979) and further discussed by Christian et al. (2011) has three basic components.

1. self awareness of membership [conformity to a cognitive representation of an in-group norm]
2. feelings of belonging to the group [affective or emotional]
3. self-appraised value/importance to the group [evaluative]

Thus the theory provides for an analysis of individuals within a group situation (Brown & Capozza, 2000; Deaux 2000; Haslem et al. 2012). It is the individual themselves who defines the groups to which they belong, and in terms of group characteristics ("we" rather than "I") (Tajfel, 1972; Abrams et al. 1990; Shipway & Jones, 2007; Deaux et al. 2000 Haslem et al. 2012). Examples of such groups might be political affiliation, sports team or nationality (Hogg et al. 1995). In the context of this thesis, an individual may identity themselves as “I am a foodie”, or “I am a blogger”, for example. This “depersonalisation” means that individual characteristics are of less importance than how the group members are similar to each other (Reicher et al. 1995). This does not constitute a negative meaning, however; the individual has been subsumed into the group and gains group identity. Individuals may have a number of separate category memberships within their self-concept, some of which will be more important than others (Hogg et al. 1995).

Social Identity Theory was further developed by broadening the concept into Self-categorisation Theory, which also has three major aspects (Haslem et al. 2012):

1. Social identity is what allows group behaviour to occur in the first place
2. The self system reflects a context-specific categorisation process, where people see themselves in terms of the shared identity, or not
3. Shared social identity is the basis for mutual social influence (Turner, 1991)

Although Turner made it clear that Social Identity Theory and Self-categorisation are different theories (Turner, 1999), his disciples often refer to the two together as the Social Identity Approach (e.g. Reicher et al. 1995), contending that the theories are linked in their concern for individuals defining themselves as part of a social group.

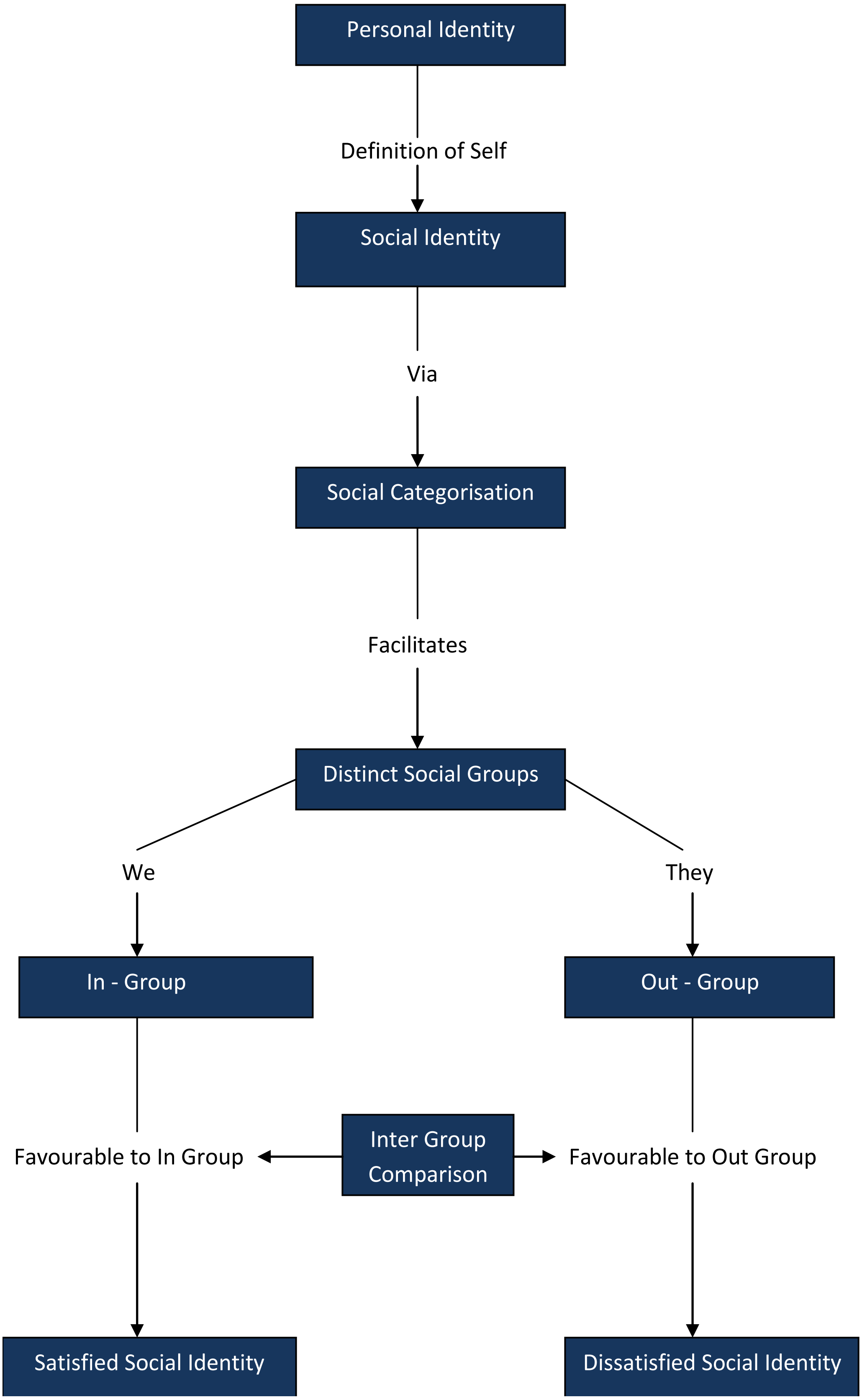
Social identities come about when the individuals categorise themselves into social groupings, no matter how tenuous the link (Shipway & Jones, 2008). If the social identity is salient, the individual acts as a group member, within group norms; if personal identity is salient then they don’t (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Abrams et al. 1990). The research of Abrams et al. (1990) found that in-groups, when identified by self-categorisation were more likely to lead to individuals feeling a part of the group. People are bound together by their sense of belonging to the same social category (Reicher et al. 1995), and this defines how group members will think, feel and act

(Hogg et al. 1995). Jenkins (1996) posits that a collective social identity can be located in space or place and time, even if this is on the internet and there is not an actual physical location and the time is asynchronous. This collection of embodied individuals meeting in an online space-time location can still have social order and relationships.

However, different group members may act differently depending on their perception of their location within the group (Abrams, 1990). Both individual selves and gender can be thought of as the primary social identities of group members (Jenkins, 1996; Burkitt, 1999). Individuals do however, negotiate their social identities within the community (Emler & Hopkins, 1990), which leads to the development of a reputation amongst group members. Bloggers who earn reputations as experts come to be seen almost as celebrities in the blogosphere. These groups, or tribes (Maffesoli, 1996), exist only within the social reality of their members, and some are more influential than others (Abrams et al.1990). This then becomes the individual's frame of reference for viewing the world. Figure 3.5 shows the steps to social identity.

According to Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998), the development of the individual self-identity cannot be separated from collective social identity. As can be seen from Figure 3.6, an individual's identity develops first then their social identity develops. This is mediated via Social Categorisation, and eventually the individual sees themselves as belonging to a social group. The ease of entry to the group will depend on "barriers to entry" which are specific to that particular group (Haslem et al. 2012). The social group has norms, behaviours, values and a vocabulary which is used and understood by the group members, and defines the in-group members from out-group members. When attempting to join such a social group, firstly, "categorisation" shows the potential group member the boundaries of in-group behaviour by highlighting stereotypical behaviour and acceptance (Hogg et al. 1995).

Figure 3.6: Social Identity Theory



(Source: Adapted from Tajfel & Turner 1979)

Next "self-enhancement" is a matter of seeing oneself in a positive light in terms of the group's characteristics, which then may cause the individual to define their in-group as positively significant in comparison to out-group (Hogg et al. 1995; Haslem et al. 2012).

Specific behaviours are adopted by group members, which are influenced by subjective belief structures regarding the group's values (Hogg et al. 1995). The understanding of the individual that they belong to a certain group includes strong emotions and value ties to the group. Only then will individuals feel that they have become true group members. This fits well with the description of Serious Leisure identities, with their Unique Ethos, importance of Group Membership, and social hierarchies such as the Serious Leisure Career Ladder (Stebbins, 1992; Shamir, 1992).

The strong social identity achieved through the commitment required in a Serious Leisure activity further ties the individual to the activity given the expectations of other members of the group (Shamir, 1992; Jones, 2006). As social identification with the group becomes stronger, things that are important to the group become more important to the self (Christian et al. 2011). Communal experiences of rituals confirm each others' attitudes and understandings, which enables the group to collectively construct their shared identity. Group members strive to achieve consensus (Reicher et al. 1995). This collective identity is central to sub-cultural membership (Jones, 2003), and agrees with the findings of Taricani (2007) when discussing the communities which develop around blogs.

Membership of the group is affirmed, and status acquired by, the collection of social capital that is valued by the group. The norms and values of the group will dictate these collections. Shipway and Jones (2008) write of runners collecting t-shirts from the various races they have competed in; a Finnish hospitality academic collects *Hard Rock Cafe* t-shirts on his travels (Edelheim *pers.comm.* 21st December, 2012*)*; Morgan et al. (2008) speak of foodies "collecting" visits to famous restaurants. According to Deaux (2000), one explanation for individuals opting for a particular social identity is that it reduces uncertainty to belong to a self- defined group. Uncertainty only arises when disagreement occurs a group member expects to agree with another person who is part of their group. Turner describes this as the "vehicle of influence" being social identification (Haslem et al 2012).

Individuals self-stereotype and seek to conform to the group stereotype (Reicher et al. 1995). Although it has been claimed that this means that in group settings, affect over-rides reason, the definition of the term "reason" is itself subjectively defined by the group (Reicher et al. 1995). Eating an elaborate meal at a Michelin-starred restaurant may seem extravagant to the average person, but not to a foodie, for example.

The self image gained from the success of a Serious Leisure activity as experienced by the participant moulds the individual into a particular self perception. The participant identifies with the activity, the experience or the participation, and from that identification creates their own identity within the sphere. The strong social identity achieved through the commitment required in a Serious Leisure activity further ties the individual to the activity given the expectations of other members of the group (Shamir, 1992; Jones, 2006).

3.10.5 Reflexive Identities

According to Giddens (1991), postmodernity threatens the individual with a number of dilemmas which highlight personal meaninglessness and a lack of power. In response to this, people attempt to construct an identity through consumption, and seek meaning in the symbolic meaning of their purchases (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

Reflexive identity is postmodern: consumers use products for their own purposes, as much in an effort to define themselves and express their identities within society as for the functional offerings of the products themselves (Bocock, 1992; Chaffee, 2011). Reflexivity refers to the bi-directional relationship between two concepts, and thus when discussing identity, the suggestion refers to self-reflection. In the past, consumer practices reflected already existing social identities; now consumer identity is continually being recreated (Sweetman, 2003). This may involve a free-will choice of which car they drive, what they eat, which sporting team they support, or following a particular lifestyle leisure activity (Sweetman, 2003; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Giddens (1991) refers to this state of being remade continually as a “plastic” state, and comments that reflexive self-identity is about knowing - either consciously or subconsciously - the acceptance of one’s actions, and the reasons for the actions. Thompson (1995) suggests that the postmodern self is a “symbolic project”, always in a state of change.

It is also suggested (Giddens, 1991; Chaffee, 2011) that postmodernism has made reflexive identity radicalise – no longer does it simply assist in individual self-identity, rather that it is involved in the development of social structures. Thus the symbolism of purchase decisions manifests itself in two ways: “social-symbolism” is outward facing and involves creating an identity in the social world; “self-symbolism” is inward facing and regards the construction of self-identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998). Furthermore, individuals rely on the trust of others in defining their social identity. This truth is seen as a collective reality which is constructed, not a set, objective one. In this point Giddens’ view of identity departs from that of some other postmodernists such as Baudrillard, who sees reality as non-existent (Han, 2011).

Traditions are disappearing and being replaced by renegotiated identities which challenge concepts such as social status (Chaffee, 2011). Such changes include the decline of traditional forms of organisation typical of postmodernism, and the rise of individualised patterns of consumption (Sweetman, 2003). Holt (1997a) suggests that cultural fragmentation and the transgression of cultural boundaries typical of postmodern social life needs further explanation. There has been much debate in this area: some postmodernists suggest that consumption is no longer necessarily tied to concepts such as class or nationality, as individuals develop identities autonomous from their membership of such traditional groupings (e.g. Sweetman, 2003; Zukin & Maguire, 2004). Giddens (1991) and McNay (1999), however, have argued that this contradicts Bourdieu’s concept of habitus. For Bourdieu (1984), habitus is a set of structures based around the values, expectations and lifestyle of a particular social group, including for example, social class. Bourdieu's (1984) theories of social stratification are based on the concept of aesthetic taste: how one displays one's self and possessions depict their social class as compared to others. He suggests that such beliefs are instilled at an early age. Social capital is the concept that social networks have a value and that individuals gain resources based on their group memberships. Cultural capital is non-financial social assets that promote social mobility, such as the knowledge, education and skills which allow success.

Sweetman (2003), however, argues that habitus does not preclude reflexive forms of identity, due to various social and cultural shifts, since Bourdieu coined the term. The world-wide access to the internet and associated social media has de-localised experience exponentially over the intervening years, making people readily aware of available forms of entertainment and knowledge beyond their immediate environment. This has led to a commensurate increase in the level of expectations and aspirations with respect to available options in career opportunities and consumer areas.

Reflexivity allows for the re-embedding of social practices in this globalised, changed world: everyday experiences are more diverse, for example (Giddens, 1991; Chaffee, 2011). The term "ontological security" (Giddens, 1991; Han, 2011) is a development from Kierkegaard and other existentialist scholars, and refers to an underlying sense of comfort with an individual's self-identity afforded by the groups to which they belong.

Appadurai (1990), in discussing the impact of globalisation on consumption, suggested that the "imagined communities" of the nation-state were being replaced by "diaspora public spheres". Taking this concept further, Barhi et al. (2012) identified the "***global nomadic consumer***" which counters earlier thought that possessions and purchases are used to anchor the consumer's identity in space. These economic, social and cultural shifts, including changing forms of community affect purchasing decisions (Featherstone, 1991; Sweetman, 2003; Zukin & Maguire, 2004), and involve a *“**de-territorialisation**”* (Joy & Li, 2012). The individual’s identity crosses boundaries and is more closely aligned to their tribe. Such “tribal” affiliations are not to be considered necessarily as temporary or superficial (Hetherington, 1998). The adoption of a particular lifestyle, such as identifying as a foodie, is dependent on reflexive engagement with the various purchase options available (Sweetman, 2003). Featherstone (2007) highlights those he sees as being at the forefront of consumer culture, and points out they create their lifestyle around their purchases or collection of experiences, goods, and applications to their physical bodies. Such practices are becoming increasingly centred around the body and activities that affect the body, including leisure activities such as eating out: these are a core part of the reflexive project of self-identity. This reverses the march of modernity; the self is becoming more public, rather than the cloistered object it once was. In fact the body begins to change from an object to a subject (Burkitt, 1999).

3.11 Identity and the Internet

Identity play on the internet has been well documented (Hine, 2000). In an environment such as a blog which is mostly text-based, it is difficult to know if the author is who they claim to be: male or female, whether their online name is a pseudonym or not. The internet is a perfect space in which people can deliberately play with their identities; it offers visual anonymity, and there is no guarantee that the identities performed in the on-line world echo those of offline settings (Hine, 2000). Identity play is particularly the case in game-playing environments such as multi-user domains (MUDs), although it is less common on bulletin boards, forums and blogs (Hine 2000).

Zwick and Dholakia (2004) argue that in cyberspace there are new forms of empowerment given that individuals are no longer constrained by the body as an identity marker. Nakamura (2002) refers to this as “identity tourism”. This provides the individual with the opportunity to act out different roles at different spaces. Identity tourism is a symptom of wider postmodern cultural shifts such as fragmentation of the self and decentring of the subject (Hine 2000). Virtual selves may be also seen as "liquid identities" (Cova, 1997). Su et al. (2005) conducted a world-wide study of bloggers and found that the global blogging community is dominated by an internet culture rather than an ethnic one. The one exception was the fact that Japanese prefer to conceal their identity.

Contributors to message boards and blogs can use pseudonyms and give no detail of their identity, age or gender or indeed the on-line name they give themselves may be part of an alternative identity that exists only on-line (Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2002). However, this can also be seen as an advantage. As Langer and Beckman (2005) say, the opportunity to masquerade and to cover their identities allows contributors to express attitudes, opinions, and experiences freely.

Bloggers remain relatively unselfconscious about what they write if they do so anonymously (Hookway, 2008). This enables researchers to study these messages in order to gain deeper insights into consumption motives, concerns, and experiences. While informants may be withholding their identity and presenting a controlled self-image, Kozinets argues that it is the "game" (the act, type and content of the posting) that is the relevant data.

3.11.1 Use of Pseudonyms

The use of on-line pseudonyms is very common. A number of studies have researched this phenomenon however the results are rather varied. Froelich and Herdrick (n.d.) say that 65% of bloggers use a pseudonym at least some of the time. Lenhart and Fox (2006) found 55% using a pseudonym. On the other hand Herring et al. (2004) claim that 31.4% use their full name, 36.2% their first name only, and just 28.7% use a pseudonym.

Nick Yee (2010) suggests that online identities, or "avatars", can provide a way for one to transform into another personality, and that individuals are more likely to behave on-line as though they were that avatar. It is likely that individuals prefer to use an on-line avatar as a mechanism to hide behind. They can therefore say what they really think without fear of denigration by their peer group.

3.11.2 Ethnic Identities

Ethnic identities are often other factors that are revealed. According to Deaux (2000) national and ethnic identities provide excellent opportunities to analyse social identification. They provide elements of rich associations with history, culture, political positions and movements. What becomes interesting is the self-definition with a particular ethnic group by the individual. Place of birth, and parents' place of birth, were shown by Rumbaut (2002; 2005) to be clear indicators of ethnic self-definition. Where children are born of mixed marriages or they are the children of immigrants, such variables assist the individual to define their ethnic identity (Rumbaut, 2005). Although many people do choose to identify with a physically obvious label that is chosen by society, such as social presentations like black, Jewish or Chinese, many others choose to minimise the importance of such labels and self-identify with another group (Deaux, 2000).

According to Rumbaud (2005) ethnic identities are complex, and are generated by an individual's continued effort to understand and respond to the world in which they find themselves, given the social, cultural and historical background of themselves and those external factors. Much consumption behaviour has been assumed to relate to underlying ethnic cultural norms. Membership of social or ethnic groups is fundamental to both the social and self concept of individuals.

People moving to a different cultural environment initiate a process of consumption acculturation (Rumbaut, 2005). This may involve retention of their original values, a complete adoption of the new culture's ways, or alternatively a selective adoption or selective acculturation (Lee & Tse 2004; Rumbaut, 2005). Consumers tend to buy and consume as a means of identifying and preserving their cultural heritage (Lee & Tse, 1994).

Lee and Tse (1994) suggest that cultural occasions such as religious festivals and New Year celebrations tend to bring out the ethnic cultural content in an individual's life, since such events are often used to represent and preserve the group's culture. Lee and Tse (1994) however also noted that immigrants seemed to celebrate Chinese New Year less and less the more they became acculturated into the new society, and the more they spoke the local language. Indeed Rumbaut (2005) suggests that ethnic identity starts to become more confused in second and third generation immigrants, but whether research supports this or not is a moot point.

The long-running *Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS)* in the United States followed youth and young adults who were second-generation immigrants during the 1990s and early 2000s. The Chinese in this group were more likely to report that they adhered to no religion (over 60%), they were more likely to be college graduates, single, and to prefer to speak English over their parents' language. Other US research (eg (Alba et al. 2002) has also suggested that speaking English in the home tends to be the norm by the second generation, and that this was especially high amongst Asian immigrants in general. Speaking the local language was assumed by many researchers to indicate acculturation (Rumbaut, 2005) and therefore loss of ethnic identity. However, by the early years of the twenty-first century, it was becoming clear in the CILS that there was a trend towards "reactive ethnicity" (Rumbaut, 2002), as second generation immigrants were *more* likely than their parents to re-assert their ethnic identity and heritage through behaviours such as consumption, or how they labelled themselves (E.g. Chinese-American) (Rumbaut, 2002; 2005).

Research conducted for the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (D.I.M.I.A.) (Khoo et al. 2002) also considered second-generation immigrants. For that study "Second-generation" was defined as persons born in Australia with either one or both parents born in another country. Given the different waves of immigration to Australia over the years, most of the people in the study were of Asian immigrants who had arrived after 1975. According to the 1996 Census, there were 3.4 million second-generation Australians, making up approximately twenty percent of the population. Interestingly, the ability to speak fluent English by the time they are school age, regardless of their parents' ability, is typical of the younger members of this group. The study found that Chinese immigrants are highly likely to speak a language other than English at home, and that 40% of the original immigrants did not speak English well (Khoo et al. 2002). Those second-generation individuals from a Chinese background were also found to be more likely to have university qualifications, work in managerial or professional occupations, and therefore have a higher than average income.

This then introduces the potential for a cultural dichotomy – the individual could identify as a Chinese-Australian or an Australian-born Chinese depending on their immediate environmental context and could switch between the two readily. This potential for cultural dichotomy is explored further in section 6.2.9.

3.11.3 Inherited Nostalgia

The novelist Salman Rushdie wrote a now classic essay called *Imaginary Homelands* in which he warned against transforming nostalgia for one's homeland into an idealisation of the past (Mannur, 2007). In an academic journal article, Maghbouleh (2010) similarly contends that nostalgia has come to mean an almost poetic longing for a place which exists in the mind, if not necessarily in reality. According to both Rushdie and Maghbouleh, it may be that this is a harking back to a seemingly better time, or for immigrants it may be the memory of their homeland as it was when they left it, rather than the true reality of today. This understanding of nostalgia has an important meaning for the self-identity of immigrants and their children (Maghbouleh, 2010). Indeed, Maghbouleh (2010) suggests that second-generation immigrants may create a reified, fictional, nostalgic image of their parents' homeland, and hark back to a presumed halcyon time, a phenomenon which she refers to as "inherited nostalgia".

Many earlier theorists saw nostalgia amongst immigrant groups as a negative. Nietzsche (1957) saw historical remembering by immigrants as a “historical fever”. In the early twentieth century, however, authors such as Hansen (1996) and Margaret Mead (1996) suggested that second-generation Americans worked hard to avoid being associated with their parents’ immigrant background, which they rejected. Assimilation was seen as being something to strive for. In current times, however, countries such as the United States and Australia actively celebrate being multicultural. The Australian Federal Government department associated with immigration is in fact called the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. As identified by Rumbaut (2002; 2005) many current second-generation immigrants strongly identify with their parents’ culture.

Wolf’s research into second-generation Filipinos in the United States stressed the importance of the family unit, and partaking of cultural events with the extended family. Such experiences added to the keeping alive of old traditions. She concluded that although the parents of the Filipino-Americans in her study had chosen to emigrate, they were still culturally, psychologically and socially back in the “old country”; they lived in an “imagined community”. For Maghbouleh (2010) it is the selective cultural transmission of elements of their parents’ home language and culture which results in second-generation immigrants feelings of “inherited nostalgia” in the diaspora. Other authors have used the term “cultural nostalgia”, for example Maira’s (2002) study on the interest of second-generation Indian students in New York in Indian fashion and music. The second-generation may experience psychic travel and indeed homesickness for a “homeland” to which they have never been, or which they have only visited as a tourist (Maghbouleh, 2010). It is a call to cultural authenticity, and a display of emotion, even if the idealised “homeland” no longer exists in the way remembered by their parents, for example pre-Revolutionary Iran, or pre-war Vietnam.

For some immigrants and second-generation family members, the way to continue to feel a contact with the “old country” is to open a restaurant.

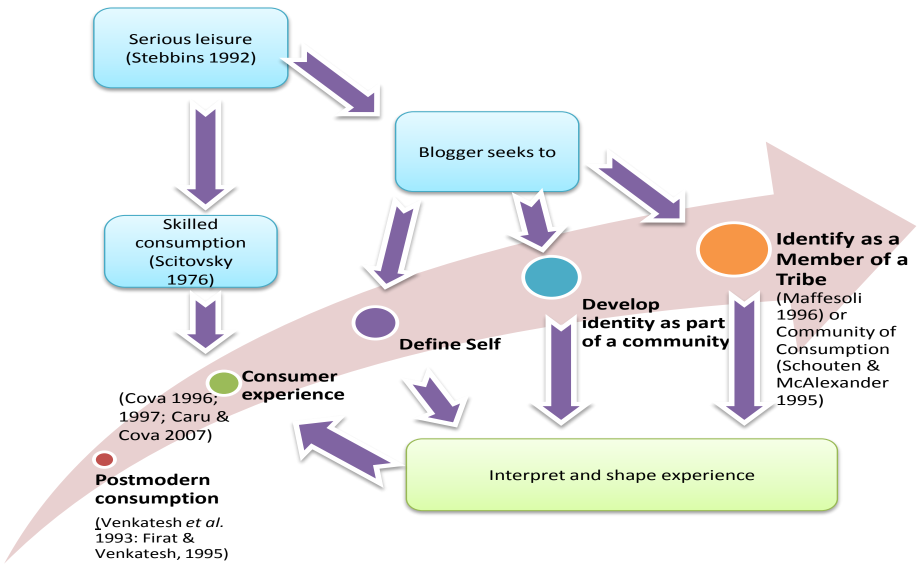
Well-known Sydney restaurateur Stefano Manfredi, for example, arrived in Australia in 1961 at the age of 6 and was plunged into a world of bland, foreign, British-style food (Duruz, 1999).

3.12 The Food Blog and Community Conceptual Framework

Figure 3.7 shows the apparent relationship between the main factors under research in this study as a result of the literature review, but prior to the analysis stage. The initial premise of the research was the interrelationship between the self-perception of personal improvement and belonging as a result of participation in a Serious Leisure activity (Stebbins, 1992), foodism (Barr & Levy, 1984) and on-line interpersonal relationship development facilitated by blogging. As a result of the effort put into initial participation, and the rewards from it, the activity becomes a self-perpetuating Central Life Activity (Stebbins, 2010a).

The interconnections of the various premises and how they combine to develop the individual's outcomes are shown by the arrow – as the individual's Serious Leisure activity impacts upon their consumption practices, the experience shapes their understanding of these practices, and through the understanding, the practices evolve. As these practices evolve, the participant becomes aware of other like minded individuals, and as the interaction between these individuals develops, so does the sense of community. Through this evolution, the individual identifies as a member of a community of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) or a tribe (Maffesoli, 1996).

Figure 3.7 Conceptual Framework



3.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has considered the literature regarding Serious Leisure (Stebbins, 1992), the Consumer Experience, and individual and group identity. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) was highlighted, as the theoretical underpinning for debate and analysis. The identity of the participant is a variable and is a product of the experience and environment in which the participants find themselves. Individuals no longer necessarily group themselves in traditional, modernist ways such as class, but will have a multiplicity of selves to suit different situations. These may include traditional ethnic or social groupings, but just as plausibly may include membership of a community of consumption, or a Serious Leisure tribe.

The ethnicity of the individual may have a part to play in their purchase decisions. This is as demonstrable in food preference as it is in any other area of consumption. Later generation offspring of immigrants display a level of inherited nostalgia (Maghbouleh, 2010) for the traditional foods of their parents homeland, even though they may not have actually been there themselves.

Within the boundaries of Serious Leisure activities, the greater the level of participation, the higher the self identity as an authority on the subject, and thus the level of expectation is heightened. The experience perceived from the participation can be enhanced or diminished dependent upon the self image perception of the experience, and so the experience and the image of the participant are symbiotic. The three concepts are thus self perpetuating and self fuelling.

If the group's ideals and values are closely matched to the individual's, the individual will feel a sense of belonging, of group identity and a place within the Unique Ethos of the group as a whole. This is the basic tenet of Social Identity Theory. Within the Serious Leisure communities, as the personal and social rewards increase, so does the justification for the activity itself. Rewards are an individual thing, and can range from a feeling of altruism, through belonging, up to the status of a core member of the in – group. The potential ascending of the Serious Leisure Career Ladder (Stebbins, 1992) in some people justifies the activity, whereas in others the ascending of the ladder is an acceptable side effect of the activity.

The following chapter discusses the methodology used in the study, and introduces the relatively new method of "netnography" (Kozinets, 1997). Netnography is a type of online ethnography gaining currency in consumer behaviour research. A justification for the use of this qualitative methodology is made, highlighting the issues which may arise with the traditional methods used in consumer behaviour research. Validity and ethics are also discussed.

4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

As the role of culture in buying behaviour has come to be seen as more important over the last two decades, there has been a growing acceptance of qualitative research methods within marketing and consumer behaviour (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Goulding, 2005; Zaltman, 1997; Levy, 2005; Chung & Alagaratnam, 2001; Szmigin & Foxall, 2000; Shankar & Goulding, 2001; Denzin, 2001; Goulding, 2005; Gummesson, 2005). If a service experience is inherently interpretative, subjective and affective, then this suggests using an approach that considers consumers as participants in a socially connected, emotional world of their own construction. This chapter explains the qualitative research approach used in this study and the methodology used.

4.2 Quantitative vs. Qualitative

Whilst marketing as an academic discipline plays lip service to consumer sovereignty (Constantinides, 2006; Firat et. al. 1995), it has also felt the need to "legitimise" itself by attempting to become more "scientific" (Brown, 1993). This has in turn led to a heavy reliance on quantitative research (Addis & Podesta, 2005; Taylor, 2002; Venkatesh et al. 1993). Such an approach has led to attempts to measure consumer emotions, for example, by classifying them as objects that can be rationalised (Bagozzi et. al. 1999). The concentration on quantitative research has emphasised production at the expense of the consumer (Firat et. al. 1995; Penaloza & Venkatesh, 2006), who is often reduced to a mere number (Zaltman 1997; Addis & Podesta, 2005).

In 1994 Denzin noted that whereas, from a modernist perspective, "science" was usually seen as statistics and experimental designs, more and more researchers were beginning to open up the methodology of ethnography to unstructured approaches. Qualitative research is not new, in fact dating back to the early twentieth century (Lindlof ,1995), however there has often been an assumption on the behalf of quantitative researchers that unless statistics are involved in a study then the results achieved are “soft” (Joniak, n.d.) Whilst modernist consumer behaviour is based on assumptions of rationality and consistency by the consumer, Firat et al. (1995) argue that this has never, in fact, been the case. Their argument is that the traditional variables of consumer behaviour, such as values, attitudes, (brand) preferences, class, demographics and psychographics assume the stability of modernism, and that this is no longer relevant.

Morgan and Watson (2007a) have highlighted that the need for new methods to research the consumer experience in hospitality has been a theme of the literature since Hirschmann and Holbrook (1982) first drew attention to the emotional drives, subjective meanings and dynamic evolving processes involved in such leisure activities. Furthermore, if a service experience such as a restaurant meal is inherently interpretative, subjective and affective, then this suggests a qualitative approach is required to understand it (Andereck et al. 2005; Bonnemaison et al. 2007).

4.2.1 The Approach Taken in this Study

Qualitative research is most often considered as interpretive in its approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and heterogeneous in its methods (Silverman, 2000). Such flexible analysis and explanation methods allow the researcher to be sensitive to the needs of the people under study, and the contexts in which they are studied. In other words the research is focussed on the actions, interpretations and meanings of the human actors, and the observed social situations in which they interact with each other or the researcher.

Vasilachis de Gialdino (2009) noted that the presence of a basic system of ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological assumptions with which researchers approach their research is widely accepted in both the pure sciences and social science. The methodology chosen should, therefore, be informed by the ontological, epistemological and axiological position taken (Given, 2008). Durant-Law (2012) refers to these three concepts as the ***Philosophical Trinity***. The questions which a researcher must ask themselves, therefore, are:

1. What exists?
2. How do I know? And
3. What is valuable?

Ontology refers to the philosophical belief stance of the social world taken by the researcher; what reality is comprised of, and the nature of the world – the "weltanshauung" of reality (Durant-Law, 2012). This affects what is considered to be knowable and what is "real" (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009; Given, 2008). Vasilachis de Gialdino (2009) defines epistemology as the study of knowledge; however this is positioned within particular social, cultural and historical contexts and biases. The researcher must consider how reality can be known and the relationship between the knower and the known (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009).

Together, the ontological and epistemological position taken by the researcher forms the philosophical foundation of the research, in turn affecting the methodology chosen, the questions asked and indeed the overall research design (Given, 2008). The research questions that guided this study can be found at Section 4.3, and show how this has been applied. Examples include:

- What are the social and cultural conditions from which these texts emerged? [What exists? What is the "truth" of the world under study as compared to the researcher's understandings?]
- What does the text reveal about the author? [Helen Yee's personal and group identity as revealed by the blog, compared to who she claims to be]
- Who and what are viewed as legitimate, normal, natural and common sense? What alternative readings might be made by different social groupings? [What is the "truth" of the world under study and how do individuals and groups give meaning to events, things, places and people?]

- Is the virtual experienced as radically different from and separate from "the real"? Is there a boundary between on-line and off-line? [How does the "existence" of the individuals in cyberspace and the multiverse affect their interaction and "reality"?]

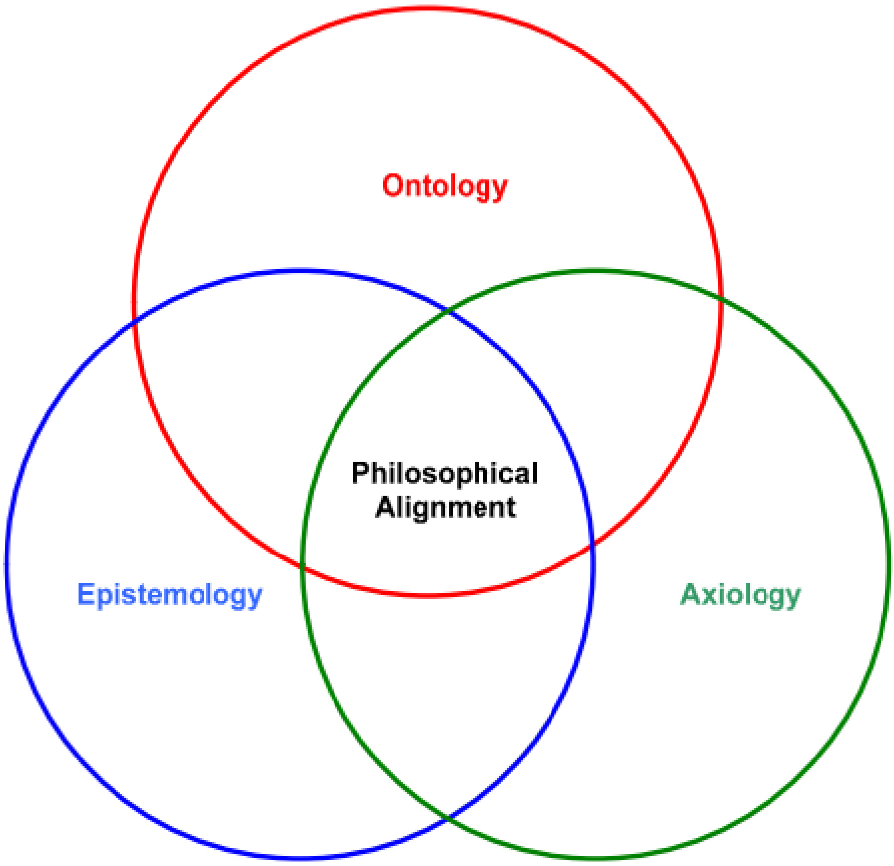
Whilst ontology and epistemology deal with "truth", axiology is the term used to cover the philosophy of values, and relates to qualitative research in the sense that it defines the ethical context of the research (Hiles, 2008; Durant-Law, 2012). A distinction may be made between intrinsic and extrinsic value – in other words between that which is valuable for its own sake and as an end in itself, or that which is valuable in conjunction with something else and is used as a means to inform, transform or enable positive change (Hiles, 2008; Durant-Law, 2012). The results of this study inform us regarding the impact of food blogging on both individual foodies and the hospitality industry, and how on-line communities form.

The researcher seeks to maximise the overlap between the ontological, epistemological and axiological positions in order to align their belief system, the research paradigm and the research methodology. Guba and Lincoln (1998) suggest that the seminal question regarding methodology is for the researcher to ask how they can discover what they believe to be known. In this case, the researcher needed to use a methodology which was suitable to enquire into an on-line community and to delve deeply into the interactions between the blogger and members of that community.

In the case of this study, a postmodernist viewpoint has been chosen as the philosophical framework for the research. The basic conditions of postmodernism are (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Firat & Shultz, 1997; van Raaij, 1993; Brown, 1993):

1. **Hyperreality** [constitution of social reality through hype or simulation that is powerfully signified and represented]
2. **Fragmentation** [omnipresence of disjoined and disconnected moments and experiences in life and sense of self]

Figure 4.1 The Philosophical Alignment



(Source: Durant-Law 2012)

3. **The reversal of consumption and production** [cultural acknowledgement that value is created not in production but in consumption, and the subsequent growth of attention and importance given to consumption]
4. **The decentring of the subject** [Removal of the human being from the central iomportance imparted by modern culture]
5. **Paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites** [Cultural propensity to juxtapose anything with anything else, including oppositional, contradictory and essentially unrelated elements]
6. **Pluralism as the dominant approach to all relationships**
7. **Openness/tolerance** [Acceptance of difference – different styles, different ways of living – without prejudice or evaluations of superiority or inferiority]

8. **Readiness for a perpetual present** [cultural propensity to experience everything in the "here and now"; and
9. **Emphasis on form and style** [Growing influence of form and style in determining meaning and life]

A community which exists in the ***multiverse*** (Pine & Korn, 2011) created by cyberspace shows many of the facets of postmodernism as outlined above. All social experience is founded upon a narrative (Firat & Shultz, 1997) where the social group constructs a story about its life and reality. Under postmodernism, there is no single "truth", or "reality". Truth is constructed, contextual and knowledge is multiple (Brown, 1993; Addis & Podesta, 2005; Given, 2008). Furthermore, in a postmodern world view, individuals undergo a "disembedding" of social structure, where they are no longer linked to the physical world (Niecharz, 2005). The hyper-reality of immersive reading of a food blog is a "simulated reality" (Baudrillard, 1983) of the experience of the meal rather than an extant reality. The fragmentation in every day experiences results in **"*bricolage*"** markets where consumers do not present a united, centred self, rather they have a collage of multiple selves (Firat & Shultz, 1997). The world-wide following of a Sydney-based food blog is an example of a paradoxical juxtaposition; many of Helen Yee's far flung readers will never be able to visit the restaurants and eat the meals she blogs about. Furthermore, given a postmodern analysis, a product is independent of the reason the producer created it; the consumer acquires the product – this case eats a meal – for the image that it represents (Firat & Shultz, 1997). This image may not relate to the functional purpose of eating to fuel the body's needs. The consumer is defined by the experience acquired through consumption, in both senses of the word.

Williams (2000) argued that many of the features which distinguish postmodernism are applicable to the contemporary hospitality environment, thus making such a philosophical alignment appropriate.

Brown (2006) and Cova et al. (2013) suggest that consumer research has been completely deconstructed and reconstructed by using postmodern methodologies, epistemologies, axiologies and ontologies. This has allowed researchers to approach the consumption experience from the perspective of the lived experience of the research co-participant, rather than an external, objective position. Such a perspective fits well with the concept of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) being investigated in this study

Postmodern qualitative methods include textual analysis and historical studies. For the researcher taking such a qualitative standpoint, this is an implicit critique of traditional methods (Denzin, 1994). The porous boundaries and interdisciplinary nature of postmodernism (Addis & Podesta, 2005; Goulding, 2003), which allow the researcher to cross theoretical boundaries and to study the consumer within the context of their culture (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979), offers a way to bring the consumer back into focus, by emphasising their experiences, as opposed to typical modernist methods which objectify the human experience. Furthermore, an experiential approach to the study of consumer behaviour, as suggested by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) allows a focus on symbolic behaviour.

Unlike the modernist position, with its meta-narratives, a postmodernist approach provides an opportunity for the researcher to bring to the reader a richly textured story of an individual consumption experience, using qualitative methods. According to Firat and Shultz (1997) all social experience is founded on a narrative in which the community involved with that story believes. Due to this, no narrative ought to have a privileged status over another – every narrative has value, there is no right or wrong example. Therefore, a postmodernist methodology such as consumer ethnography can be used to highlight those elements of a narrative which cannot be seen when taken individually, but become discernible when an experience takes place (Bonnemaison et al. 2007).

More recent consumer research approaches (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989; Belk 1995 in Catteral & Maclaren 2001; Bonnemaison, Cova & Louyot, 2007) move away from the traditional view of customers as rational, cognitive information processors towards a more appropriate understanding of them as participants in a socially connected, emotional world of their own construction. However, the methodologies typically used to research experiences have a number of drawbacks, including respondent inhibition (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Hill 2003; Bonnemaison, Cova & Louyot, 2007), researcher influence (Curtin, 2005), and biases of self-censorship (Arrnould & Epp, 2006). If this is the case, a methodology which delves deeper into the postmodern consumer's world is required.

4.3 Aims & Objectives of the Study

Colloquially known as foodies (Barr & Levy, 1984), there is a group of people who have a deep interest in food and eating. Such people are often "skilled amateurs" within Stebbins' (1992) use of the term, and have a high level of knowledge about food and ingredients. Foodies collect food experiences, and visits to celebrated restaurants, much as tourists collect souvenirs (Mogan et al. 2008). The aim of this thesis is to examine critically the key themes of food blogging as a form of Serious Leisure, and to explore using Social Identity Theory, the mediation of meanings and understandings of self for the blogger and her followers, who are themselves foodies.

The web log of Helen Yee *(Grab Your Fork),* was analysed. (See 4.7 on page 126 for further details regarding the rationale for the choice of this particular web log.) Yee is a foodie whose intense interest in food and eating out takes her activity into the Serious Leisure (Stebbins, 1992) arena. The sample comprised archived posts from the blog's commencement in April 2004, then newly added posts until 31st December, 2012, which was an arbitrarily chosen cut-off point.) The blogs detail the authors' restaurant experiences which she shares with other foodies throughout the on-line foodie culture. As far as foodism is concerned she is a skilled amateur, with knowledge that approaches that of the professionals she seeks to emulate (Stebbins, 1992). When it comes to blogging she is a citizen journalist (Bruns, 2007), or in Serious Leisure terms, a hobbyist (Stebbins, 1992). The longitudinal aspect of this study produces rich data, with the full, in-depth analysis of one blog sufficing for this type of methodology (Holloway & Brown, 2012).

The objectives of this thesis have been matched with research questions in order to guide the analysis. The intention of this is to force the researcher to look beyond the surface impressions given by the text and photographs to reveal deeper insights (Muncie, 2006). Therefore to fulfil the aim the following objectives have been identified, with research questions to guide.

1. <u>To critically assess the current state of the literature regarding foodie culture, blogging and communities of consumption.</u>

2. <u>To review and assess the concept of Serious Leisure as an explanation of the development of foodie attitudes and behaviour.</u>
    - What is the experience of being a foodie?
    - What are the social and cultural conditions from which these texts emerged?
    - What does the text reveal about the author?
    - What is the evidence of Serious Leisure in the blog posts and comments?
    - Who and what are viewed as legitimate, normal, natural and common sense? What alternative readings might be made by different social groups?

3. <u>To analyse the posts and readers' comments of a suitable blog in order to identify evidence of a foodie interpretive repertoire</u>.
    - How do foodies represent their experiences of restaurants through language, and symbols in blogs?
    - How is the experience discussed/analysed within foodie culture?
    - Are there any gaps, silences or absent presences?

4. <u>To identify and critique the shared system of meanings for the foodie tribe in these patterns.</u>
    - Who are assumed to be the primary readers of the text?
    - What assumptions are being made about the audience?

- Is the virtual experienced as radically different from and separate from "the real"? Is there a boundary between on-line and offline?

5. <u>To critically evaluate through Social Identity Theory how meaning is used by the individuals to interpret their experiences and construct self-identity</u>
   - What are the likely social effects of the text?

6. <u>To review and assess how understanding the myths, values, rituals, and vocabulary of the foodie tribe can assist restaurant marketers to better understand their foodie customers</u>

4.4 Drawbacks of Traditional Approaches

A growing number of authors feel that service experiences require qualitative approaches to understand and analyse them (Arnould & Price, 1993; Catterall & Maclaren, 2001). The implication is that only after in-depth interviews, continuous studies or participant observation can the researcher gain access to the stories which reveal the true meaning and value of an experience (Andereck et al. 2005).

This has three major drawbacks which limit its use in applied research. The first problem is respondent inhibition, by which is meant that that people are often reluctant to talk freely about their experiences (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Hill, 2003) and may not actually do what they said they would. Second is the researcher influence - researchers may unintentionally influence the discussion by the kind of questions they use or simply by their presence (Curtin, 2005). In a participant observation study of wildlife tours, Curtin found that revealing herself as a researcher led to the tourists being reluctant to talk to her, and being cautious about how they expressed themselves.

Social scientists have used respondent self-recorded diaries as a data collection technique, especially when the topic concerns day to day events (Hookway, 2008). Even in this case, however, biases of acquiescence, self-censorship, and social desirability are inherent (Arnould & Epp, 2006; Hookway, 2008). This study uses blog posts, which are considered by many bloggers to be a type of personal diary on a particular topic, in this case recording their eating out (Nardi et al. 2004; Li & Lin, 2012). In fact, on the Internet, individuals often use pseudonyms known as “avatars” (Yee, 2010) to hide their off-line identitites. This allows them to become an “identity tourist” (Hookway, 2008; Nakamura, 2002), and say things which they may not say in person, off-line. Although Helen Yee was approached by the researcher for permission to use *Grab Your Fork* in this study, there was no noticeable difference between the archived blog posts and subsequent posts. Furthermore, Kozinets (2010) suggests that when studying a blog, the researcher need not be actively involved in the discussion of the community, as their messages may well be disruptive to the normal flow of discussion.

4.5 Why Ethnography?

Ethnography has its roots in anthropology and covers a wide variety of styles of research, which vary across different disciplines (Taylor, 2002; Goulding, 2005; Dominguez et al. 2007). What they do have in common is that ethnographic researchers aim to study people, their social worlds, how they live their lives (Taylor, 2002) and how they understand themselves (Baym, 2009). In its basic form, ethnography consists of an extended period of immersion in a field setting, allowing the researcher to understand the activities and relationships of a culture or sub-culture from an emic perspective (Hine, 2000; Goulding, 2005; Denzin, 1997). Hine (2000) comments that the ethnographer inhabits somewhat of a strange no-man’s land: stranger in a strange land, but trying to live as a native. As Holloway and Brown (2012) point out, however, qualitative methods such as ethnography are always subjective, as the researcher becomes deeply immersed in the community under study.

There is support for the argument that ethnography is more suitable than quantitative methods to study social worlds such as that of consumers, on two counts (Taylor, 2002; O'Reilly, 2005; Goulding, 2005). Firstly, ethnography gives an insider's (or emic) perspective, rather than a rational outside view. This provides the researcher with situated knowledge, rather than "universal truth" (Taylor, 2002). As consumers are socially-connected beings (Catterall & Maclaren, 2001), ethnographic study of groups of consumers can provide useful insights for consumer marketers. By being inside the group, the researcher can experience the dynamic process of consumption and gain a deep understanding of the roles, narratives and meanings that are involved. The word *ethnography* comes from the Greek "ethnos" (nation) and "graphein" (writing), and literally means *the writing of culture* (Holloway & Brown, 2012).

4.5.1 Types of Ethnographic Methodologies

Elliot and Jankel-Elliot (2003) suggest that there have traditionally been four basic types of ethnographic methodologies available to a researcher. The first is participant observation, which itself has four possible modes:

1. complete participation
2. the participant-as-observer
3. the observer-as-participant
4. the complete observer.

The method chosen will depend upon the study in question. Participant observation as a method of ethnographic and anthropological research is well established but it has only recently been applied to consumer research (Belk, 1995; Catterall & Maclaren, 2001; Arnould & Epps, 2006). Secondly, the researcher may choose non-participant observation, particularly in cases where the presence of the researcher would be intrusive (Langer & Beckman, 2005) or may affect the results. Ethnographic interviews are a third commonly used method, but consumers do not always do what they say they do (Elliot and Jankel-Elliot, 2003). Finally, informal interviews and casual conversations may be used.

4.5.2 A Fifth Methodology: Netnography

As Denzin (1997) points out, ethnography has had to change with changes in society, particularly since the widespread use of the internet, the diaspora of ethnic cultures, and the democratisation of the media. Kozinets (2006) argues that the mass adoption of networked personal computing since the mid-1990s has seen the development of new cultural formations that are novel due to their online context, and so consequently require new research methodologies. There are some researchers who consider that virtual ethnography is a distinctive methodological approach, whilst yet others feel that researching the internet ethnographically causes reflection on fundamental assumptions, but not to the extent that it is a distinctive form of ethnography (Dominguez et al. 2007). However, it is hard to disagree with Denzin (1997) that ethnography can claim to be the discourse of the postmodern world. It is certainly true that in the postmodern environment the ethnographer will discover multiple truths, as truth and facts are socially constructed (Denzin 1997). The global, postmodern world is one where national boundaries and identities become blurred to the point where everyone is a tourist, immigrant or guest worker, and a new global cultural economy is heavily shaped by technology and on-line media (Denzin, 1997).

Having said that, one then must consider what is meant by ethnography (Denzin, 1997) particularly an ethnography conducted using the internet. A number of terms have emerged in the literature, including digital ethnography, ethnography on/of/through the internet, connective ethnography, networked ethnography, hyper-media ethnography, digital ethno, and cyber-ethnography (Hine, 2000; Langmann & Becker, 2005; Dominguez et al. 2007; Bengry-Howell et al. 2011, Maslen & Plowman, 2003). The term netnography has gained usage as the term referring to a virtual, or internet ethnography, in a consumer context (Kozinets, 2002; Hair & Clark, 2003; Beckmann & Langer, 2005; Bengry-Howell at al. 2011). Netnography can be defined as a qualitative, interpretative research methodology, based on ethnography, which studies on-line cultures and communities formed through computer-mediated communications

(Kozinets, 2006a). Bengry-Howell at al. (2011) describe netnography as being an exemplar method for this type of research.

Netnography has a number of advantages: it is less obtrusive than traditional face to face survey methods, is unelicited and therefore more naturalistic (Paccagnella, 1997), and provides the researcher with ongoing, fresh material which records everyday experiences (Hookway, 2008). The information is bottom-up generated material, which can provide background into the symbolism, meanings and consumption patterns of consumer groups (Kozinets, 2002). Digital ethnographies are ideally suited to situations which are fluid, such as the study of online communities (Maslen & Plowman, 2003).

Traditional forms of ethnography required the researcher to physically move into the field in order to become immersed in the culture (Hobbs, 2006), but virtual ethnography can provide unprecedented access to the previously unobservable behaviour of groups that interact on-line (Kozinets, 2006a). It provides a window into the cultural realities, practices and rituals, interpretative repertoires and membership life cycles of the group (Kozinets, 2002). The researcher is now able to access a greater variety of fields, from their own desk (Lyman & Wakeford, 1999; Schneider & Foot, 2004; Ruhleder, 2000), as individuals and groups put their lives on display on the internet (Maslen & Plowman, 2003). This display may be textual, visual or both, and is available to be viewed in real-time (Maslen & Plowman, 2003), or as archived material.

Netnography aims to understand, rather than measure (Lugosi et al. 2012), so can be a useful research method where traditional methods are inappropriate. The world of on-line communities is one of significance to their members, where there are norms, customs and rules, shared value systems, and a private language with conversational conventions, in-jokes and linguistic shortcuts (Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2002). It is the job of the researcher to interpret this complex world (Kozinets, 2002).

Internet-based methods can provide an attractive source of material for the study of consumer experiences. There are a rapidly growing number of sites where people with a common interest can go to share their news and reviews and to contribute to discussions on the topic of their enthusiasm. The interactive nature of the medium means that a loose community of people can quickly form, and as quickly dissolve. These communities are sometimes termed neo-tribes, interlinked and held together by a shared passion but otherwise hetereogeneous in their demographic, economic and geographic characteristics (Cova & Cova 2001). What unites them is a shared experience of reality, expressed through the values and interpretations they place on certain objects, events and spaces. Such communities have always existed. In the past they communicated through special interest magazines and gathered at particular places and events, such as workshops and swap-meets. Now the internet has provided permanent spaces for asynchronous gatherings. In the past, the tribe could only be studied by prolonged participant observation. Now their communications and interactions are readily accessible for observation on-line.

Online interactions are often automatically archived, and become part of permanent records which can be accessed by researchers as they occur, or at a later time (Hine, 2000; Hookway, 2008). The blog used for this study is *Grab Your Fork* which has an archive dating back to April 2004. The site is available to be searched and this ease of access means that the researcher can easily return to the original, verbatim data at any time (O'Reilly et al. 2007).

Netnography was originally developed by Kozinets (1997; 2002) as a tool for marketing and consumer behaviour study, yet increasingly, it has found a place in hospitality research (Lugosi et al. 2012; Watson et al. 2008).

4.5.3 Netnography and Online Communities

Whilst there is some debate as to whether conducting virtual research is in fact an entirely new way of researching, or simply the adoption of existing methods to a new medium (eg. Hine, 2000, 2005; Jankowski & van Selm, 2005; Dominguez et al. 2007), a number of issues arise due to the differences between virtual interaction and community formation, and their real life, or face-to-face counterparts (Kozinets, 2006).

In traditional ethnography, analysis is mostly conducted from the researcher's field notes (Hobbs, 2006). Field notes record the observations and experiences of the researcher, and may be reflexive. This data is then used to develop a thick description or richly written text of social behaviour within the context of the group under observation (Geertz, 1973; Paccagnella, 1997; O'Reilly, 2005). According to Kozinets (2006), whilst the netnographer may well continue to record traditional reflective field notes, data observed, copied or downloaded directly from the Computer Mediated Communications of the online community being studied becomes the major data-source.

Hine (2000) queries whether cyberspace can in fact be an ethnographic setting, when the researcher cannot live in the online setting 24/7. She also questions whether analysing archived material without participating in the community can indeed be called ethnography. On the other hand, Kozinets (2010) states that a netnography of a blog is, and should be, different to the methodology which would be used with other forms of on-line communities, such as bulletin boards. Bulletin boards are targeted at specific groups, and often require formal membership, whilst blogs generally have a more open opportunity to enter what he refers to as a "cultural lifestream". A blog offers the advantages of being able to conduct a longitudinal study, which provides rich data concerning the consumption practices of individuals and the group. Their values, beliefs and meanings also are more accessible. The decision in choosing which blog to study would be made by choosing a site that has authority within the particular sector of the blogosphere under study (Kozinets 2010b). (See section 4.7 for a detailed explanation of how this was achieved in this study.

Much early work on computer mediated communications studied text-based, asynchronous discussion forums, which emphasised an apparently socially-impoverished, non-physical context of the online environment (Kozinets, 1999, 2006; Baym, 1995; Hine, 2000) which was criticised for being cold compared to face to face communication. On the internet sometimes the best that can be done to show emotion is a choice of words or the use of an emoticon, a typed symbol showing a resemblance to facial expressions such as smiling or frowning (eg.☺). There is the possibility that netnography could also lack this richness, that is so important to ethnography. As internet technology has improved over the years, however, the user interface has changed dramatically to include better graphics, high resolution photography, audio and video. Consequently, this has made both the communication and research environments more flexible.

According to Goulding, (2005) the analysis of ethnographic data is the search for patterns, and ideas which will explain those patterns, providing situated or grounded knowledge. This makes ethnography and netnography in particular, a most suitable methodology to use to study postmodern consumers in the context of their social worlds.

Another advantage of netnography is that the source material is quite specific to the topic under discussion. According to Kozinets, netnography has strengths due to its close ties to online consumer groups and the depth of their online communications (2002). He posits that provided the posts in question are descriptively rich, and the interpretation is done with sufficient analytical depth, interesting conclusions may be drawn from a relatively small sample (Kozinets, 2002), particularly an authoritative blog (Kozinets, 2010b).

4.6 Why Blogs?

Some ethnographers question the types of sources for study, suggesting that they are not worthy of analysis because they are part of popular culture (Denzin, 1997). Kozinets however posits that the technique of netnography can be easily adapted to study blogs, either purely as an observational method or involving the participation of the researcher (2006b; 2006c). Choosing to analyse a specific thread or topic as in the case of this study allows the researcher to concentrate in detail, without being overwhelmed by the sheer mass of text produced by posters (Hine, 2000). A netnography of a blog may be less time-consuming and less costly than traditional techniques, less obtrusive, and provides a natural window into a context which is not fabricated by the researcher (Kozinets, 2002, 2006b; Arnould & Epps, 2006). Kozinets (2006c) also describes blogs as being deeply personal to the author. As a result, many individuals with a serious, but still amateur, interest in food have set up publicly accessible web logs. It is an analysis of amateur restaurant reviews, and the communities of consumption that develop around them, that this research has concentrated on.

In some cases writers of blogs (bloggers) are examples of Stebbings' (1992) Serious Leisure, Scitovsky's (1976) skilled consumption, and Bruns' (1997) citizen journalism. They become self-aware participants in their chosen activity and develop the ability to articulate their emotions and express their opinions. The majority of blogs and posts are made in retrospect and so only reveal the dynamic and evolving nature of the experience through the high and low points that the blogger chooses in telling the story.

It is in the analysis of meaning, though, that netnographic approaches can make their most significant contribution to experience research. Blogs that describe a visit to a restaurant are examples of narratives which weave a complex stream of events into a coherent story. The blogger plays a role - that of the discerning foodie. The audience is the community and the communication will be in the shared language of the tribe, full of nicknames, acronyms and in-jokes. Arnould and Epps (2006) note that netnographic data is at its most useful when it contains contextual richness, and when the analysis uncovers metaphors and symbolic interpretations, rather than mere classification of content analysis.

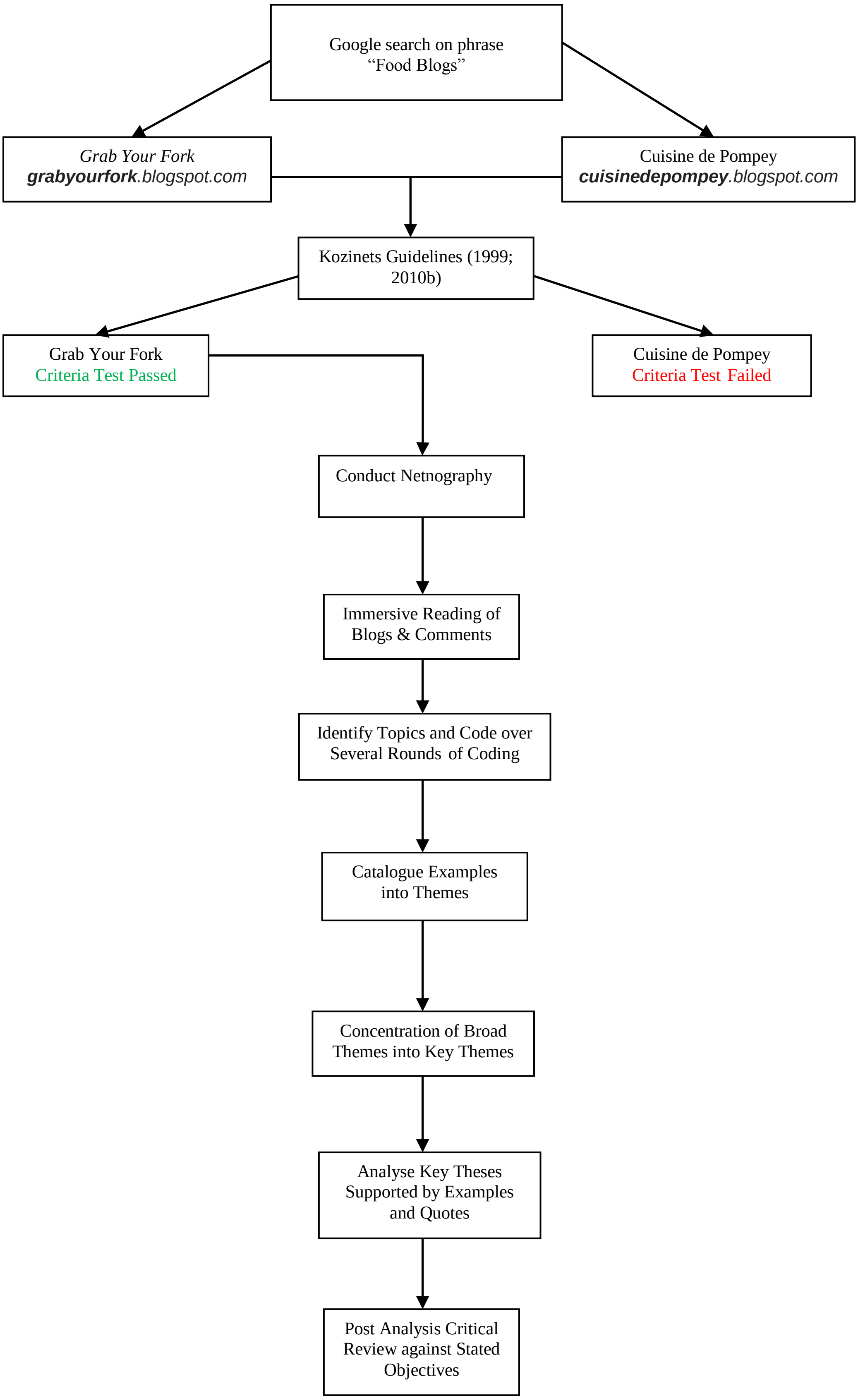
4.7 Data Collection & Analysis

In an ethnographic study, the sample is a small and judgemental one, opportunistically chosen in order to achieve rich data (Elliot & Jankel-Elliot, 2003; Woodside et al. 2007; Fielding, 2008). The sample does not have to be representative of all other populations (Brown et al. 2003). When using netnography, Kozinets (2010a) gives recommendations for how to choose the sample. His six criteria for choosing sites to study are that they should be:

1. relevant to the research focus and questions
2. active, with recent and regular communications
3. interactive, having flows of communication between participants
4. substantial, in terms of numbers of users
5. heterogeneous, involving different participants
6. data-rich.

An initial Google search on the term "food blogs" brought several hundred million replies. The parameters set for choosing a blog to study were that it had to fit with Kozinets' guidelines, and also be mostly devoted to amateur restaurant reviews, rather than simply being a journal of home cooking. The fourth entry on the first page of hits was *Grab Your Fork*, (http://grabyourfork.blogspot.com/) an Australian site. Another site on the first page was also considered; *Cuisine de Pompey* (http://cuisinedepompey.blogspot.com/) based in Portsmouth, England. Kozinets' (1999; 2010b) criteria for choosing a suitable sample was applied to both blogs. The British site, however, had limited postings compared to the Australian blog; in 2006 only 52 posts compared to 250 and in 2007 only 46 as compared to 205 for example. *Grab Your Fork* also had many more comments to the blog posts, and the author had a large blogroll. This particular blog therefore was chosen as it was substantial in the total number of posts, relevant to the research questions, active in both posts and comments, heterogeneous in that it involved many people, and potentially would provide rich data. The decision and analysis procedure is outlined in Figure 4.1. Once the choice of sample blog was made, an immersive reading of the blog and attendant comments was made, during which initial broad topics were identified. The blog posts and comments were read and re-read, allowing these topics to be further refined into codes, which became the themes discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, where they are supported by direct quotes from *Grab Your Fork*. Once the analysis was completed, the outcomes were checked against the aim and objectives.

Figure 4.2 Decision Making & Analysis Process



Although Yee is Sydney-based, she blogs about restaurants she has visited from all over the world, and the contributors to the discussions on the blog are also world-wide. She responds to each comment individually. *Grab Your Fork* won a worldwide Best Restaurant Review Blog award in 2006, and was a finalist in 2004, 2005, 2007 and 2008 in various categories for food blogs. In addition, it was listed fourth in a worldwide top 10 food blogs by *The Times* of London in 2008.

Grab Your Fork's author, Helen Yee, is a middle class, well educated, second generation immigrant to Australia, living in the country's largest and most diverse city. Although postmodernism suggests that modernist tags such as "class", "ethnicity" and "citizenship" would be irrelevant in the analysis, the researcher kept an open mind as to whether Yee's ethnic and cultural background has had an impact on not her eating out choices, and with whom she shares those experiences.

This study adopted a passive or observational form of online research, where the researcher acted purely as a reader of the site, reading the blogs and comments, but not making any comment. This approach was taken so as not to influence the conversations in any way, for them to be as natural as possible (Paccagnella, 1997; Kozinets, 2010). For the same reason it was decided to use archived posts, although comments could, and did, continue to be added throughout the research period, and these were included in the sample.

4.7.1 Thematic Analysis

The starting point for the analysis was Helen Yee, the individual. The study traced her eating out experiences, and her interactions and relationships with other foodies and other food bloggers, which emanated from the blog. According to Reissman (1993) humans make sense of their experiences by casting them into narrative form. As pointed out by Denzin (1997), such narratives are often messy texts based on epiphanal or extraordinary experiences in people's lives. This is certainly the case regarding the posts that Helen Yee has listed as "memorable feeds". One advantage of using blogs is that the author has already written the story in their own words, so there is no need for interviewing and transcribing the text on the researcher's part, reducing the margin for error or bias.

Where stories, accounts, tales or descriptions are the main source of data (Holloway, 2005; Shankar & Goulding, 2001; Earthy & Cronin, 2008), and the objective of the investigation is to understand the meaning of the story itself (Reissman, 1993), elements of narrative analysis can be used. It is suited to studies of subjectivity and identity (Reissman, 1993), and can be single cases (Holloway, 2005). As pointed out by Boellstorff et al. (2012) images can be used to supplement participant observation by illustrating the key points, although a complete consideration may overwhelm the intended analysis. In this case, in addition to the text, the analysis considered the inclusion of photographs and the blogroll and links appended to the blog, and how these enhanced the written word. Therefore, whilst some aspects of narrative analysis were used, the overall form is a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.7.2 The Development of Themes from the Narrative

Thematic analysis is a foundational method of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although sometimes suggested as an internal method within major methodologies, such as grounded theory, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that it is a stand-alone analysis that is used to identify, analyse and report patterns within the data, which are termed "themes". According to DeSantis and Ugarizza (2000) the exact definition of the term theme within qualitative research is unclear. The general meaning, however, is that the data are grouped around one or more central meanings or issues, and that these emerge from the data during analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006), however, argue that this is too passive a role for the researcher, who should work to identify themes and actively report them to their reader in an interesting way. In this case thematic analysis is used as a method to reflect the reality of the participants under study, and also to unravel or unpack that reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Most themes tend to be implicit rather than explicit, and are inferred from behaviour, or symbolic language. Themes capture the meaning of the experience undergone by the person or group under study (DeSantis & Ugarizza, 2000). According to Reissman (1993) the remembered narrative of an experience does not relate to a "real world", rather it is a personal, constructed and rhetorical story of reality, complete with assumptions. This makes a narrative-type approach well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity, such as this.

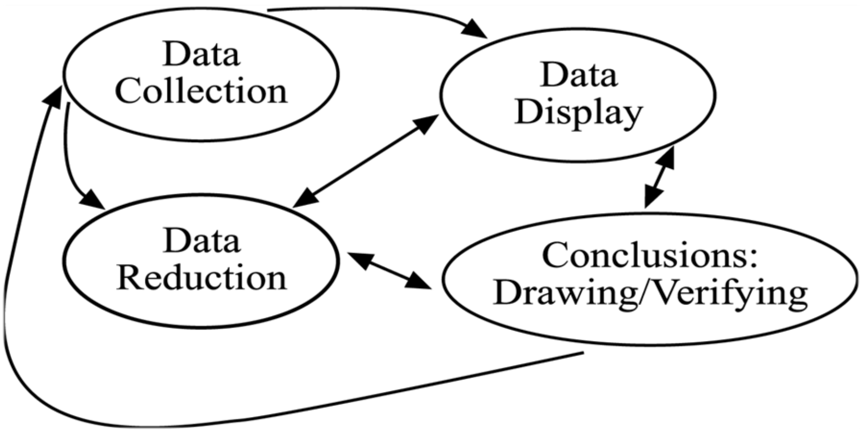
Leininger (1985) suggested a method of thematic analysis, using simple steps as follows:

1. Identify and list patterns of observations and experiences within the data [coding]
2. Combine related patterns into larger meaningful units known as themes
3. Synthesize several smaller themes into broad, comprehensive and holistic views of the data
4. Formulate theme statements to test against objectives

A version of Leininger's (1985) method has been used to analyse the data in this study. This can be described diagrammatically by the data analysis framework suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) as shown in Figure 4.2. Each part of the analysis interacts with the others; it is an iterative process with internal justification for the steps taken.

The search was for patterned data within the blog posts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis can consider the data set in one of two ways: firstly a rich descriptive analysis of the entire data set, or alternatively a more detailed emphasis on a group of themes within the data. Following step 1, not merely the content, but the way the story was told in the blog posts was queried in order to seek out reasons for the style or the use of particular language, as individuals structure the telling of their experiences in order to achieve particular purposes (Reissman, 1993).

Figure 4.3 Data Analysis Framework for Qualitative Research Methods



(Source: Miles & Huberman 1994)

Blogs are at heart a written medium, and it was the conversations between Yee and her community which formed the basis for the research. *Grab Your Fork* also uses photography to supplement the written message conveyed by the blog posts, and this was also considered in conjunction with the wording, where relevant. The quality and quantity of the photography improved over the period of the blog as Yee's skills improved. Photographs can, however, easily be altered with modern software. An in-depth analysis of each photograph was beyond the limits of this study, but provides opportunity for further research.

4.7.3 Coding

In qualitative research, a code is a word or phrase which captures the essence of a piece of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2009); in other words the codes are derived from interpretation of the data, rather than using preconceived codes as in quantitative research (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). In the case of this study, the data consisted of blog posts by Helen Yee over the period April 2004 until 31st December, 2012, plus accompanying photographs and comments in response to these posts made by members of the blog community. Posts and comments for 2004, 2005 and early 2006 were read in retrospect from the archive. Later posts were monitored on a daily basis.

In order to apply this method, the data were read in date order numerous times, for the researcher to be immersed in the data. Coding is conducted over several cycles, to develop themes. During the first reading of the blog posts, a number of interesting codes emerged, and were noted on print outs of the blog post. Consideration was given to using nVivo to assist with data storage and coding, however after some initial trials it was decided to use a manual method. Qualitative research requires the researcher to be completely immersed in the data. Boellstorff et al. (2012) suggest that coding requires actually reading, rather than doing word searches, as the language used in the source data may not match set criteria. Using a computer to sort the material felt as though an artificial wall had been erected around the data, and that the required depth of immersion was not being achieved. Instead, sections of the text were marked with different colour highlighter pens, and comments and basic codes were written directly onto the print outs. On the second and subsequent readings, these original codes were further developed, and then distilled into major themes.

In Helen Yee's description of her visit to Sydney's famous *Tetsuya's* restaurant (Yee 6th April, 2005), the style evokes a pilgrimage to a shrine of gastronomy. This is intended to lead foodies into the world of an extraordinary experience as they read. Denzin (1997) suggests that texts not only have multiple audiences, but that the author may in fact write a particular text as a different aspect of their identity. The language used is hagiographic – worshipful or idealising - and the structure involves a build up of excitement even before the food is discussed. In other restaurant reviews, where the experience is simply a quick meal before a show, or a Sunday lunch with friends, the style and language varies accordingly. The narratives of the blogs not only inform the readers of an experience, but are a way of creating self by the author.

Saldana (2009) commented that in large data sets many of the same codes will be used repeatedly throughout the analysis. On the second cycle of coding, the researcher looks more carefully for patterns. In fact, finding patterns of meaning within the posts, photographs and comments was one of the objectives of this research. According to Hatch (2002), patterns can be characterised by:

1. similarity (things which happen the same way)
2. difference (things which happen in predictably different ways)
3. frequency of occurrence
4. sequence of order
5. correspondence to other events
6. causation

As this was a longitudinal study, the researcher was specifically looking for the reappearance of similar codes over time, their frequency, and how the posts changed. Saldana (2009) comments that with experience codes seem to almost identify themselves, and in the case of *Grab Your Fork*, a number of broad codes, then themes began to emerge.

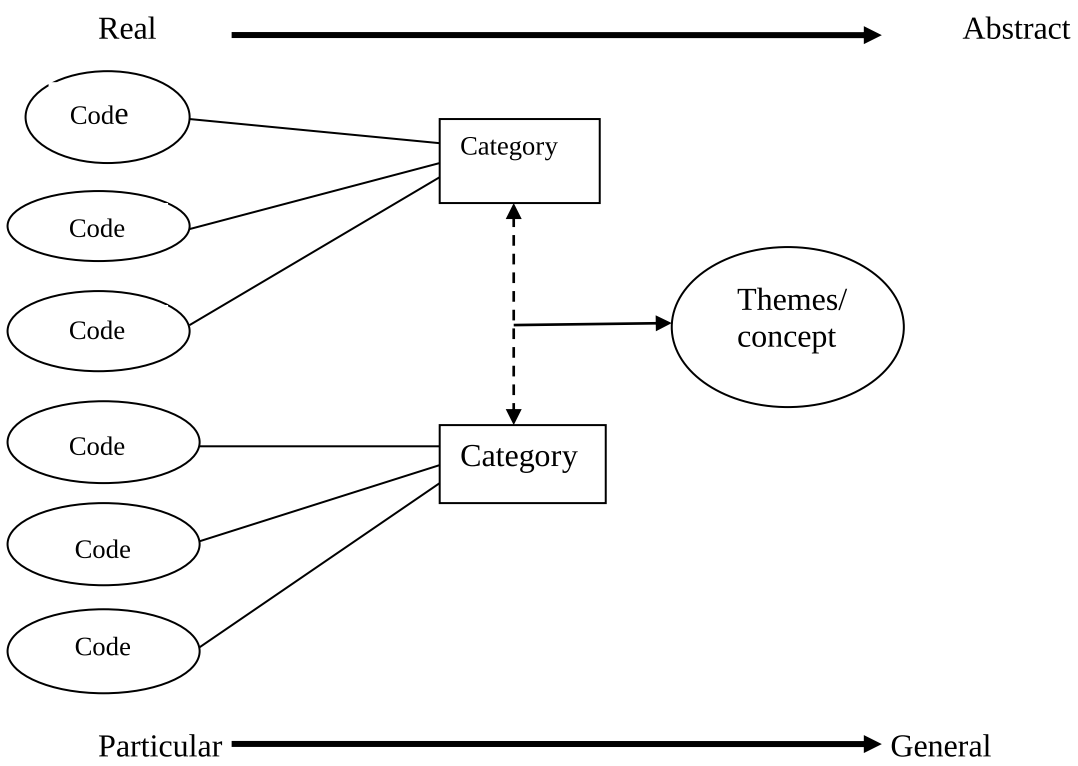
Each post was considered in light of the research questions appended to the objectives, in order to delve deeper, and question the codes and themes emerging. The analysis and coding was circular, not linear (Saldana, 2009), as various items of data were compared, they brought to mind other examples, initiated re-reading, and continual re-definition of the codes and themes. Similarities and differences were identified. Figure 4.3 shows the route map for the coding process.

Data such as words or phrases are used as codes, and these are taken further towards the abstract level where they are categorised, then themes are identified. Depending on the type of research being conducted, the researcher then may go on to create new theory, or may highlight the use of the themes in understanding a text. An example of the coding of one post (Tetsuya's 6th April, 2005) appears as Appendix 2. Words and phrases used as codes included:

- pilgrimage → sacred/profane
- "collecting a trophy" /souvenir → badging
- Hedonic consumption

- Extraordinary experience
- Insiders/outsiders → acceptance by group
- Perserverance (Serious Leisure) → rewarded by peers
- Yee seen as an expert by peers → S.L. Career Ladder
- Unique Ethos → S.L.
- Blogging
- Foodies
- Use of poetic language
- Skilled consumption
- Community shares knowledge
- Knowledge of methods & ingredients
- Interpretative repertoire
- Expectations → normal or mundane or extraordinary?
- Social Identity Theory → socialisation of new group members

Figure 4.4 Codes-to-theory Model for Qualitative Research



(Source: Adapted from Saldana 2009)

For both O'Reilly (2005) and Braun and Clarke (2006), analysis is tangled up with every stage of thematic analysis, to the point where it is difficult to talk of an analysis phase – there is little difference between writing down and writing up. This is referred to as an *iterative-inductive ethnographic method*. In this study, this is exemplified by the fact that notes were made of which posts related to which code, then theme, and then during writing up the analysis, certain posts continually brought to mind other posts or comments on the same theme. These were then added to the emerging story about Helen, her friends, and their foodie experiences, layer by layer

4.8 The Reliability of the Method

When using qualitative methods some qualitative researchers completely reject the framework of validity as being too positivist. On the other hand, many positivist researchers question the trustworthiness of qualitative research methods due to their apparent lack of validity and reliability (Shenton, 2004).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed four alternative criteria for measuring whether qualitative research was sound or not, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Alternative Criteria for Judging Qualitative Research

Traditional Criteria for Judging Quantitative Research	**Alternative Criteria for Judging Qualitative Research**
Internal validity	Credibility
External validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Confirmability

Source: (Guba & Lincoln 1989)

4.8.1 Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility in research is crucial to establish. A variety of terms may be used, including validity, trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility (Holloway & Brown, 2012). Credibility means that the findings accurately represent the participant's perspective, or their "reality" (Shenton, 2004). Reissman (1993) uses the term coherence, rather than credibility; there should be local coherence (ie. coherence within the narrative of the blog itself), and global coherence (context). Themal coherence involves content which is repeated.

Shenton (2004) suggests that one of the most important ways to establish credibility is to adopt a research method which is well established. In the case of this thesis, although netnography is a relatively recent development (Kozinets, 1997), it has grown from the century-long field of ethnography, which is well accepted. The data collection method relies on material which is already mostly in written form, thus reducing the potential for transcription errors. Shenton (2004) also suggests developing an early rapport with the community under study. In this case, the researcher began reading the archives of the *Grab Your Fork* blog in September 2006, in addition to reading the new posts as they were added, and continued reading until 31st December, 2012. Prolonged engagement with the data is recommended, and this was achieved (Trochim, 2006; Shenton, 2004): in this case the study is longitudinal over a period of 9 years. Kozinets (2002) claims that long-term immersion in a community assists in verification of the observations made by the researcher, and that for online research this can equate to the member check in normal ethnography.

Triangulation is also recommended (Holloway & Brown, 2012; Shenton 2004). In this case, the researcher read accounts of particular meals or events that had been blogged about by other bloggers who were on Helen Yee's blogroll. Another of Shenton's suggestions for improved credibility is to ensure honesty from informants (2004). This was established by following Kozinets' suggestion that when a blog is the subject of a netnography that the researcher should conduct the research purely as a passive observer (2010).

The researcher will usually provide a reflective commentary, or reflexive section in their finished piece of writing, which explores the use of the methodology, and the research journey, highlighting any flaws, issues or negative instances (Holloway & Brown, 2012; Trochim, 2006; Shendon 2004). They may act as a “devil’s advocate” in this situation. Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that such a commentary can provide the researcher with a “progressive subjectivity” on the development of their own research skills. Chapter 8 of this thesis provides such a commentary.

4.8.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to whether the findings can be generalised or transferred to other settings or contexts (Trochim, 2006; O’Reilly, 2005). With ethnography this is rather difficult, as it tends to be pluralistic rather than generalisable (Goulding, 2005). The compensation for this lack of generalisability is the depth of understanding gained in one setting (Fielding, 2008). The researcher should make sure that their research context is well described, as are any assumptions made. This will assist future researchers who may wish to attempt to replicate the study (Trochim, 2006). However the subjectivity of the researcher here may come into question: what may be considered by them an unimportant issue may be considered an important detail by another researcher attempting to recreate the study conditions (Shenton, 2004).

Some authors have suggested (eg. O’Reilly, 2005; Shenton, 2004) that whilst ethnographic research is not representative in the sense that statistical analysis should be, it can be transferrable in the sense that what is learned can have meaning for other situations, either by explaining broad patterns (macro theory) or concentrating on small-scale explanations which are relevant in certain cases (micro theory).

4.8.3 Dependability

Reliability as used in quantitative research is the assumption that the study can be replicated, and the same results would be achieved twice (Shenton, 2004). Dependability means that the qualitative researcher accounts for changing contexts. Given that qualitative research involves human subjects, it is impossible to be able to repeat things exactly. A qualitative researcher needs to account for the fact that the setting and context will continually change (Trochim, 2006). Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Hair and Clarke (2003) suggest that credibility and dependability are closely linked, and that by ensuring credibility that dependability can be demonstrated.

4.8.4 Confirmability

With qualitative research, every researcher brings their own particular perspective to the study (Trochim, 2006), unlike the hard sciences where non-human, objective instruments are used (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability concerns whether another researcher could corroborate the results or not. This could be conducted in a number of ways. Miles and Huberman (1994), for example, recommend that the researcher admit to their own preconceptions at the time of beginning the research.

There should also be an appropriate, followable, audit trail from the researcher's raw data through to the finished writing up (Trochim, 2006; Shenton, 2004). A data audit could be carried out to highlight any potential bias (Trochim, 2006). Triangulation of information should be carried out where possible (Holloway & Brown, 2012).

4.9 Ethical Considerations

It is unclear whether the internet creates public or private spaces, or indeed some sort of hybrid, particularly in relation to those spaces which involve social interaction (Kozinets, 2006a; 2006c; Hine, 2000; Sudweeks & Rafaeli, 1995; Catteral & Maclaren, 2001). This aspect, in particular, creates potential ethical difficulties for the researcher, such as informed consent and disclosure.

As Kozinets (2010b) points out, netnography leaves trails leading to other people. Internet Research Ethics (IRE) is an emerging field, and a number of organisations have been involved in the development of ethical guidelines for researchers to use. These organisations include the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the Association of Internet Researchers, and the American Psychological Association (Kozinets 2010b). In Europe, similar organisations exist such as the Swedish Research Council, and similar organisations in other countries (Sveningsson Elm, 2009). Although all academic research has ethical considerations, the online environment introduces issues such as liability for negligence, damage to reputation, and the right to privacy to the normal mix of research issues such as informed consent (Kozinets, 2010b).

4.9.1 Public or Private?

In internet research, one of the major questions which arises is whether computer-mediated communications, such as blog posts, should be treated as they were taking place in a public or private arena. Bassett and O'Riordan (2002) suggest that applying the sort of ethics normally applied by researchers to human subjects is inappropriate when using internet sources. Their argument is that defining the internet as a virtual space through which humans act, and can be observed doing so, is flawed, although this is the model postulated by the AAAS. Use of the internet can be categorised by form and content, for example. Kozinets (2010b) also argues that different types of material can fit into either the public or private categories – that the internet is not just one "space".

If the internet is viewed more as a publishing medium (Bassett and O'Riordan, 2002; Kozinets, 2010b), then it is clear that those who publish material on the internet are aware that this will be publicly viewed. Blogs are intended to be publicly read, as opposed to closed sites or bulletin boards which require explicit membership and password entry, so it would seem appropriate to classify them as public documents.

4.9.2 Disclosure

Some authors believe that whilst providing advantages, using netnography as a research method can in fact also create ethical dilemmas (Kozinets, 2001; Hine, 2000, 2005), particularly as the concept of informed consent becomes less clear than in a traditional in-person ethnography (Kozinets, 2006c; Paccagnella, 1997). A major question for the researcher then becomes whether he or she should disclose their presence to the community being observed.

A cautious approach is recommended by some authors (e.g. Denzin, 1997; Kozinets, 2002) with full researcher disclosure, explanation of the research, and an offer of anonymity and confidentiality to the participants, especially if the researcher intends to become immersed in the community themselves (e.g. Shipway & Jones, 2007). Contributors to an online community may not expect that their contributions will be read by others outside of the community, and may react negatively if and when they find out they have (Kozinets, 2010b). In fact, some critics (eg. Shils, 1982) have thought of covert research methods as a violation of an individual's right to not be studied. Denzin's (1997) approach, on the other hand, is to allow the participants in the study to feel that they are in fact co-authors as a way of avoiding confrontation and negativity. Beaven and Laws (2006) followed an interpretation in their work into online music fan communities that stressed that sensitive or personal matters should be handled with particular care, which fits with the "ethics of care" suggested by Noddings (2003 p.2).

It should not be assumed, however, that the use of research strategies such as participant observation deliberately sets out to deceive those under observation in all cases (Lugosi, 2006). There is not a clear and precise divide between the two, and it is not a simple matter of declaring which level of disclosure is "ethical" or "unethical" (Lugosi, 2006). In on-line research, it can be argued that this decision depends on whether access to the site is restricted or not: communities which require passwords are obviously intended to be private, whereas many message boards and blogs are publicly available to any member of the general public. For public communications media similar ethical procedures could be followed as in the content analysis of readers' letters in newspapers.

Lugosi (2006) suggests that instead of using terms such as “overt” and “covert”, with their tendency to have certain implications attached to them, that the relationships which ethnographers develop and the context of the fieldwork should determine the level of concealment or disclosure used. Langer and Beckman (2005) for example, thought that an overt approach would inhibit participant responses in their particular study. Lugosi (2006) continually negotiated levels of disclosure in his study of a bar with both gay and straight patrons. In other words, a certain level of “covert” research, despite being contentious, may offer researchers access to material which would otherwise not be available (Lugosi, 2006).

When there is an archive of material available online, basing the study on existing material that cannot be influenced by the researcher is one possible way of avoiding such difficulties, as is the case with the earlier posts of *Grab Your Fork.* Similarly, the vast majority of commenters use pseudonyms when they post to the blog anyway. Consent will be discussed in the following section.

4.9.3 Consent in Cyberspace

Obtaining informed consent of those to be researched is a cornerstone of research ethics. Some authors have argued that this should apply to online research such as netnography (King, 1996; Sharf, 1999), however given the high level of the use of pseudonyms online, contacting the corporeal person behind the avatar may be logistically difficult (Frankel & Siang, 1999). As Kozinets (2010b) points out, the raw data in the case of internet research is not material which has been gleaned specifically, and in confidence, from the respondent. It is arguable, therefore, that research which analyses archived messages does not in fact constitute social research involving humans, as discussed above (Bassett and O'Riordan, 2002; Kozinets, 2010b), and does not necessitate consent. Kozinets suggests that in many cases "implied consent" may be appropriate, where the potential participant clicks a button, or responds by sending the requested material to the researcher.

4.9.4 Anonymity

Kozinets (2010b) strongly believes that online pseudonyms should be treated in the same way as "real", offline names. In an online community an individual will develop a persona and a history using that particular name or avatar, which may include a part of their actual legal name. "Maximum cloaked security" is where a researcher does not name either the site or the members of the online community: all names, even pseudonyms, are changed during the writing up. Material will not be directly quoted from the posts, everything will be rephrased (Kozinets, 2010b). A lower level of security is provided to respondents when the researcher uses a "medium cloaked identity" situation. The options here vary, but, for example, the researcher may care to use the actual name of the community, but change the identities of the members. "Minimum cloaked security" gives the name of the site or community, but ways of directly identifying members, such as pseudonyms, are changed for their privacy. Despite this, the researcher will most likely use verbatim quotes.

On the other hand, merely changing the name used by bloggers or commenters may not be sufficient to hide their identity (Beaven and Laws, 2006). Lipinski (2006) recommends not using anything which could identify individuals. The difficulty is that a verbatim quote, and the person who made that comment, can be easily identified by typing the quote into a search engine (Kozinets, 2010b). Beaven and Laws (2006), however, were concerned that avoiding using verbatim quotations from on-line sources would be especially difficult for discourse-based research. This thesis uses the online pseudonyms as used in *Grab Your Fork* by the members of the community, under the assumption that the blog is publicly available to be read by anyone with an internet connection. The only individual personally identified is the blogger herself, Helen Yee. This is referred to as providing "uncloaked" respondents (Kozinets, 2010b). Although in the early stages of the blog Yee used the pseudonym "Augustus Gloop", she quickly identifies herself by her full name. Permission for this research was sought and approved by Helen Yee (email 18th July, 2008).

4.9.5 Legal Considerations

Lipinski (2006) suggests that netnographers intending to use online data as their source material should favour a more observational methodology than an actively participative one, and to report using standard academic methods. The reason for this advice is to avoid the potential of being accused of negligence or other legal issues, such as invasion of privacy. Kozinets (2010b) feels, however, that this is perhaps rather too restrictive and that the public nature of many parts of the internet mean that netnographers can avoid this problem.

A further consideration is copyright. Helen Yee's *Grab Your Fork* is registered as "Some Rights Reserved" with Creative Commons (CC) (http://creativecommons.org/) an organisation which itself is an on-line community. Placing a CC logo on one's website does not override legal copyright, rather it is a suggested etiquette amongst Internet users. Yee has given permission for other internet users to share, copy, distribute and transmit her work, provided they comply with the stipulations outlined in Table 4.2 (Creative Commons, 2007). Given that *Grab Your Fork* is a publicly available blog, with links to many other blogs, blog directories and websites, it is unlikely that permission would be refused. It would however, be polite to ask. It is also arguable that many bloggers prefer their work to be cited in the same manner as any other author (Kozinets, 2010b), so the direct quotations used in the analysis are referenced in this manner.

Table 4.2 "Some Rights Reserved" Etiquette

Attribution	You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
Noncommercial	You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
No Derivative Works	You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work. For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do this is with a link to this web page. Any of the above conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder. Nothing in this license impairs or restricts the author's moral rights.

Source: (Creative Commons 2007)

4.10 Chapter Summary

Much ethnography has concentrated on the everyday experience (Catterall & Maclaren, 2001), however Serious Leisure participants are often seeking a transcendent experience (Belk et al. 1989) that involves personal growth and fulfilment (Arnould & Price 1993) leading to transformation (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). This study is a netnography (Kozinets, 1997), or virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000), of the community of foodies who have developed around a blog called *Grab Your Fork*. It considers the use of language, rituals, myths, nicknames and meaning by both the group and the blogger in her twin roles as foodie (Barr & Levy, 1984) and citizen journalist (Bruns, 2007). It does this by using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to uncover key themes (DeSantis & Ugarizza, 2000), which are then further explored using the research questions, and comparing the data with the objectives as outlined in Section 4.3.

The methodology of a virtual ethnography has supported the premise that identity is a function of environment and experience. It has also shown that identity is an evolving concept in as far as any one individual may have several identities dependent upon the groups or circumstances in which they find themselves.

The following chapters are structured by key theme, and examine and analyse the bases of identity and how they are generated or amended as a resultant of the participation in Serious Leisure activities and the interaction between like minded participants within those activities. The discussion then considers the growing interest in foodies of the concept of authenticity of food, and whether under postmodernism there is room for such a concept. Finally the analysis moves on to consider interpretative repertoires (Wetherell & Potter, 1988), or the in-group language of the tribe, and how it is used to convey meaning.

5. Blogging, Food & Consumer Experience as Serious Leisure

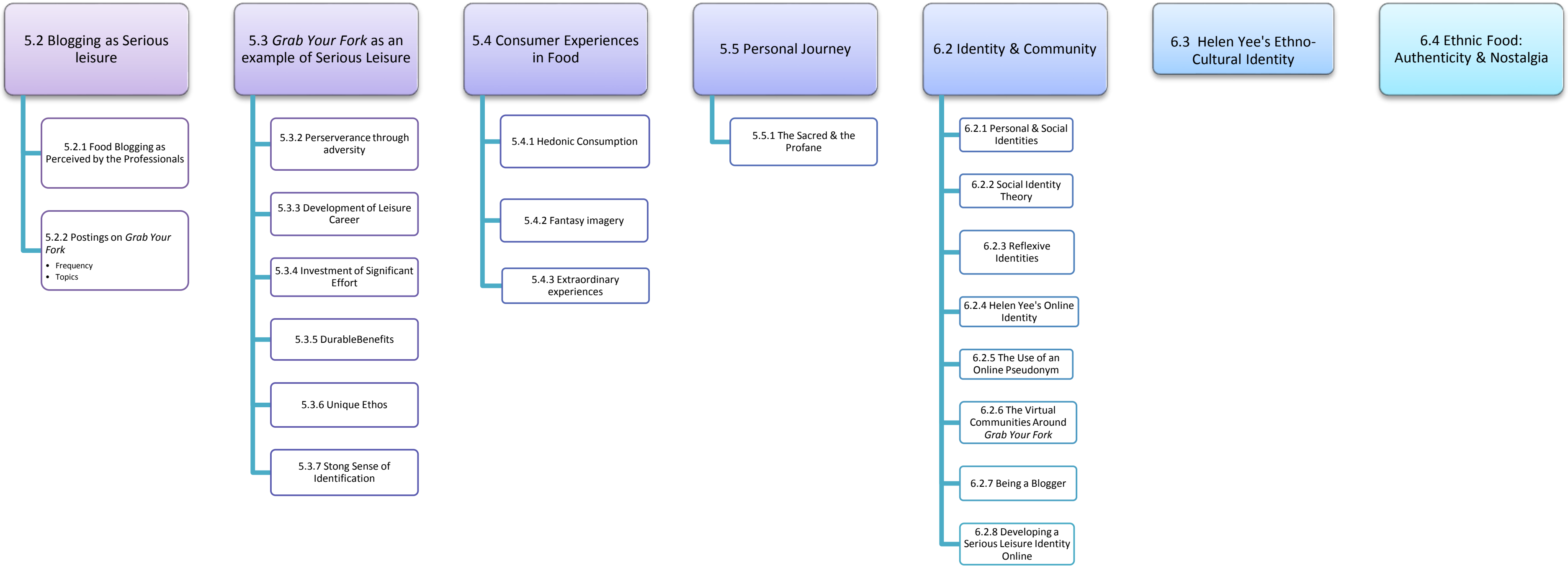
5.1 Introduction

Food is a significant element of culture, and the consumption of food (in both the physical and economic senses) is an important part of the creation of our individual and group identity. Representations of the restaurant, dining room or meal give life to social and cultural experiences (Tresidder & Hirst, 2012). This chapter is the first of two which report the findings of the research, and discuss the key themes that have emerged from the analysis of the data concerning food consumption experiences. These seven themes and their sub-themes are outlined in Figure 5.1, and explained over the following chapters.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section applies the concept of Serious Leisure to Helen Yee's blogging, and gives examples to show how she is indeed a Serious Leisure participant. The second section discusses the concept of the consumer experience as related to food in the blog posts and accompanying reader comments in *Grab Your Fork.* An analysis will also be made of the interpretative repertoires used by the blogger and the community of commenters.

Chapter 6 will discuss individual and group identity and authenticity as revealed in *Grab Your Fork*.

Figure 5.1: Food Consumption Experiences – Key Themes



5.2 Blogging as Serious Leisure

5.2.1 Food Blogging as Perceived by the Professionals

Consumers seek out quality information before making purchase decisions, and with the growth of the Internet, online consumer reviews have become an important resource (Zhu & Zhang, 2010; Pantalidis, 2010). Such amateur reviews aid in spreading word of mouth attitudes within a community. Whilst there has been much question as to the impact of food blogs on consumer decision making, many industry professionals, in food and journalism, treat blogs as unimportant (Yee 19th August 2007; Meryment 2011).

Yee points out that when she attended one of her first industry events, *Restaurant 2007*, a discussion entitled "Point of Review: How Important is a Review and How do you Manage the Fallout?" focused almost entirely on the print media. Eventually, a question from the floor asked what the panellists thought about the rise of food blogs. An American member of the panel acknowledged that in the United States online review websites were treated very seriously by restaurants. A British member of the panel was not so generous:

> *"What we have to remember is that just because you like food, it doesn't mean you know anything about food."*
>
> *(Anon in Yee 19th August 2007)*

The consensus of the panel was that food blogs, and the reviews they contained, were much like mystery shopper surveys – interesting but not really useful or important to their business. Many of these industry people feel that food has become a "spectator sport", and dining "food porn" (Low 2010). Some restaurateurs are particularly annoyed at food bloggers' habit of photographing their meals prior to eating, whilst others, for example Richard Corrigan of Corrigan's Mayfair in London, see food blogging as a powerful medium of communication with potential customers (Low 2010). The mood is slowly changing, although Scott (2011) suggests that only twenty to thirty percent of PR and marketing people read blogs, assuming that the content will be frivolous and without value when compared with magazine or newspaper content.

In journalism the author undertakes research or perhaps conducts interviews with knowledgeable sources. Experts and data support the arguments presented. Journalists who write food columns and restaurant reviews have traditionally been the power brokers in hospitality. Their power could, at the stroke of a pen, make or break a restaurant's business. Blogs, however, are different; they are written by lay people with an interest in the topic, in this case food (Scott, 2011). The Weekend Australian magazine ran an article in June 2011 entitled *Everyone's a Critic* (Meryment, 2011), which criticised food blogs. Meryment claimed that the typical blogger was a failed journalist. Yee responded to her audience by making her own motivations for writing *Grab Your Fork* clear:

> *I worked in corporate communications and public relations, took off overseas, backpacked around Europe and returned to Australia when I had a chance encounter with a food blog one day and decided to start my own ... it always strikes me as odd that print journalists presume all foodbloggers are attempting to usurp their role. Food blogs, in my opinion, operate on a very different dynamic – they are, by their very nature, personal and diary-like, and written from a layperson's view.*
> *(Yee 20th June 2011)*

The post caused such a huge number of comments that Yee felt the need to add further clarifying comments on two occasions. She ends with the point that:

> *Comparing bloggers to journalists misses the whole point of the blogging phenomenon – people read blogs because they're not written by journalists, nor in a traditional newspaper format or style.*
> *(Yee 20th June 2011)*

This suggests her amateur or hobbyist status in Stebbins's (1992) sense of the word, and the term coined by Bruns (2007) for bloggers, *citizen journalists.* Sixty percent of bloggers are hobbyists (technorati, 2011). Furthermore, statistics from technorati's *State of the Blogosphere* report (2011) suggest that 46% of people trust traditional media less than they did five years ago; that 35% believe that blogs are taken more seriously than they previously were, and that 19% believe that blogs are better written than traditional sources. Seventy-two percent of bloggers speak their minds, and their main success metric is personal satisfaction (technorati, 2011). This suggests that, at least initially, the aim of food bloggers is not to become a powerful influencer of consumer choice, rather it is an internal motivation.

From a postmodern perspective, the ratios as shown above support the view that citizen journalists' opinions are just as relevant as those of paid reviewers. Indeed, from the figures it can be interpreted that there is an 81% shift towards acceptance of blogging as being a true representation of the subject being reviewed. This is indication that there is no one view that is accepted as "the" opinion, and no one source is definitive. Readers interpret the presented information in blogs from a different mindset to that they employ when reading the traditional media. Those who read them are looking for a different experience than they would from a printed, professional, food review. It is the linking value of an experience that is sought (Cova, 1996).

> *I don't think professional journalists should feel threatened by our presence, nor should they be dismissive of it - however they should understand that blogs connect with 'ordinary people' on a much more personal level than some high and mighty newspaper critic, which is one of the reasons for their popularity.*
>
> *(Lola [Figs and Brie] in Yee 20th June 2011)*

On 27th January, 2010 Yee posted a blog regarding the creation of a *Best Australian Food Blog Award* in the biennial *Australian Food Media Awards*, which is run by the Australian Association of Food Professionals (AAFP). The president of the AAFP reiterated the point that Yee herself has made over the years regarding food blogging; most food bloggers have full time jobs that are unrelated to food or media, and their blogs are works of great passion and intensity. The food blog in essence both feeds and feeds from the personal rewards of self-actualisation, self-expression and re-creation, in Serious Leisure terms (Stebbins, 1992). It could be concluded that it is self-perpetuating on that basis. These points combine to support the premise and perception that the blogger is sharing their experience of the whole meal event for which they have settled the bill themselves, rather than an opinion posted by someone without any financial interest in the cost of the meal and therefore lacking in true consumer interest.

These points above illustrate that the posted opinions of bloggers are beginning to carry more weight when a consumer is making a restaurant decision, than that of the professional critic. To a foodie the electronic word of mouth as conveyed via a blog is a much more credible review. The amateur blogger has no allegiance to anybody but themselves and the followers of their blog; the professional food critic has to appease the restaurateurs and their editors, which has the potential to dilute or embellish the report of the experience. In some cases this is done to reduce the chance of being sued (see Coco Roco Restaurant v. Matthew Evans 2007) (McMahon, 2007). The amateur blogger has no fears of such repercussions, particularly if they blog under a pseudonym.

5.2.2 Posting on *Grab Your Fork*

Frequency

Helen Yee adds to her blog on a regular basis. Although this is not a quantitative study, it is worth examining some basic numerical data as illustration of the evolution of the blog. Table 5.1 shows the details of blog posts for the period April 2004 to December 2012 inclusive. Figure 5.2 shows a graphical representation of trends with respect to the quantities of posts over time. Not all raw data has been represented graphically, as it is illustrative and to do so would make the figure unnecessarily cluttered.

The blog was founded in April 2004, and thus statistically 2004 is not a valid data comparator because it does not encompass a whole year. However, it is a valid start point as there were no earlier posts.

The numerical representations as tabulated show the fluidity of subjects of interest with *Grab Your Fork*, and how these have both been introduced and been expanded upon since the inception. It is recognised that the sample population as shown in the table is included for illustration and is not intended to form the basis of any statistical analysis. A full quantitative analysis of the data is beyond the scope of this thesis.

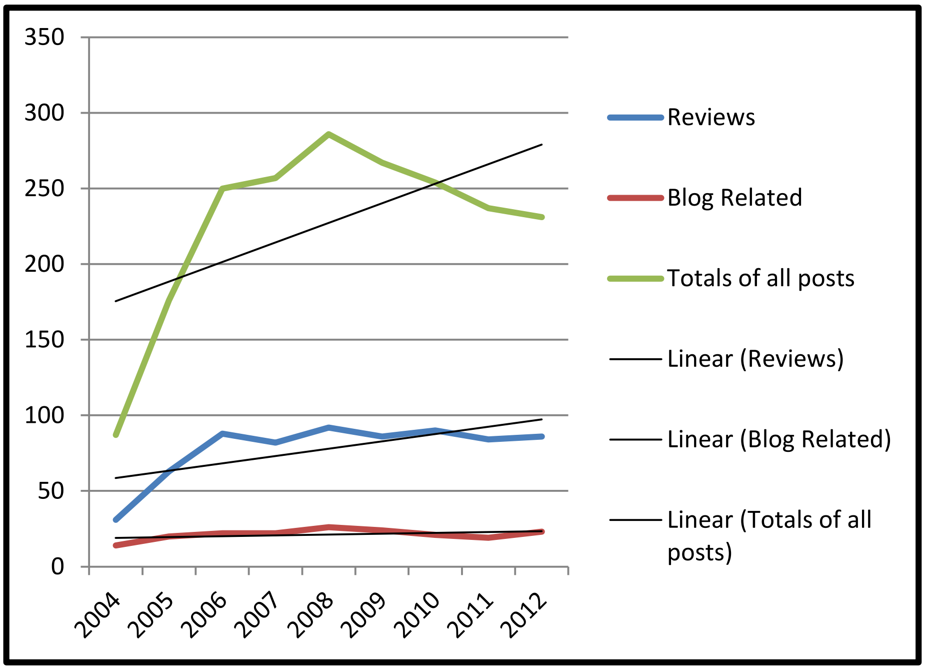
Table 5.1 Frequency of Blog Posts by Topic

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Reviews	31	63	88	82	92	86	90	84	86
Food Shops	7	9	20	18	24	22	16	16	17
Recipes	4	16	20	21	28	30	28	22	16
Home Cooking	2	2	12	14	21	14	16	11	10
Travel Reviews	0	0	4	4	6	4	5	3	4
Travel Food and Wine	0	8	0	6	5	0	1	3	2
Travel General	2	0	10	12	13	6	3	3	2
Food Exhibition	13	25	1	16	14	10	9	11	8
Markets	8	19	30	20	18	24	21	22	23
Blog Related	14	20	22	22	26	24	21	19	23
General	6	12	22	22	20	26	20	22	21
Food Festivals	0	0	16	18	18	20	24	20	19
Celebrity Demonstration	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Food Books	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Equipment	0	0	3	2	0	1	0	0	0
Totals	87	176	250	257	286	267	254	237	231

Clearly, restaurant reviews are the most common type of posts to the blog, over the entire period under study. Considering reviews, a growth in posts is evident up until 2006, at which point the quantity year on year levels out. From inception to final data point in 2012 a similar, but less marked upward trend is evident. What can be concluded from the raw data in table 5.1 and the selective graphical representation in figure 5.2 is that whilst the total posts per year has declined the reviews have remained relatively constant. This would suggest that Yee's emphasis as the blog matured shifted towards being more review – centric.

The discussions about blogging and food blogging in particular have a flat trend line as seen in Figure 5.2.taking into consideration that 2004 consisted only of the months April to December. This was an unexpected outcome.

Figure 5.2 Trends of Posts Over Time



It was anticipated from the literature review that as public interest in blogging increased over the study period, the numbers of posts regarding blogs and blogging would similarly increase. This was shown to be not the case for *Grab Your Fork* despite overall posts increasing. There are several possible explanations for this. It is possible that Yee has decided that she will be selective about the topics she blogs about, given her limited time, and as *Grab Your Fork* is basically an amateur restaurant review site, that she has concentrated her efforts on these topics.

As Helen Yee became more widely accepted by industry professionals they provided her with merchandise to be offered to her readership as competition prizes. These competitions were held on Fridays, and thus Friday became known within the blog as “Freebie Friday”. Fridays subsequently became the day on which comments regarding blogging and blogs were posted. The introduction of the "Freebie Friday" posts in 2010 may have caused all discussion of blog-related topics to be limited to those posts.

As can be seen from Table 5.1 and Figure 5.2, the total number of overall posts is initially trending upwards quite dramatically until 2006, peaking at 2008, then settles at a plateau. A possible reason for this is the novelty value of authoring the blog and sharing her experiences with an audience. Between 2008 and 2012, the post rate slows down markedly. Helen Yee herself admits that as she has become more recognised as a blogger and food writer, she has less time to spend on *Grab Your Fork*, and in recent years has deliberately limited her blogging.

> *Since I wrote this article some things have changed. I don't publish posts five times a week anymore – I'm trying to find a balance between work, blog and play. And oh yes, sleep. It's a difficult equation.*
>
> *(Yee 15th April 2011)*

The trend in overall posts between inception and the last data point in 2012 is, however still upwards.

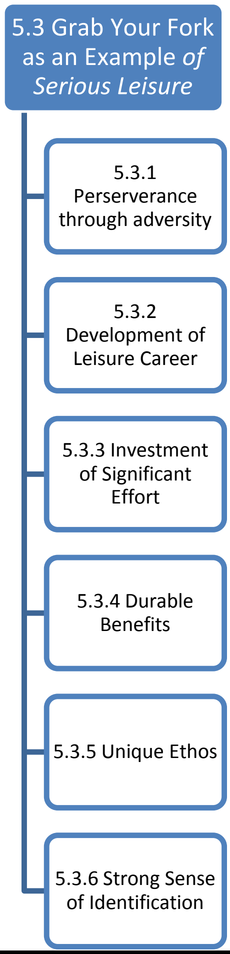
Topics

Grab Your Fork is an example of a thematic blog, albeit one centred on a single blogger (White, 2006). It is about food, but rather than being a way of simply showcasing her own cooking, as many food blogs do, it mostly concentrates on reviews of restaurants and food-related events. As can be seen from Table 5.1, the topics are dominated by restaurant reviews, but also include visits to specialist food shops and markets, food festivals, celebrity chef demonstrations, food exhibitions, home cooking by both Helen and her friends, food books and cooking equipment, and travel-related food and wine posts. In the early years there is no discussion about food festivals, for example, but once Yee starts visiting them in 2006 they become a regular topic of posts.

5.3 *Grab Your Fork* as an Example of Serious Leisure

There are six characteristics of Serious Leisure as previously identified in section 3.5.1. Each of these will now be discussed with examples from the blog posts and comments. It is important to understand that the characteristics overlap to a great extent. Stebbins (2004) describes the term "serious" in Serious Leisure as a folk term – it appeared many times in the interviews he conducted in his original research, and as used by those engaged in the Serious Leisure activity, it involves qualities of importance, sincerity, earnestness and carefulness.

Figure 5.3 The Six Characteristics of Serious Leisure



5.3.1 Perseverance through adversity

The first of the Serious Leisure Characteristics is perseverance through adversity (Stebbins, 1992). In their 2006 report, Lenhart and Fox found that eighty-three percent of bloggers wrote from their home. As corporate blogs have grown in number, the percentage of hobbyist bloggers has now fallen to 60%, but of a bigger total number of people (technorati, 2011; Mershon, 2011). Helen is one of these hobby bloggers - she posts at night after work and on weekends, on a regular basis, and even on vacation, which shows that she is part of a culture of commitment (Gillespie et al. 2002). When asked if she works in the hospitality industry or as journalist, Yee comments that she is not either professionally – she works in an office (Yee 23rd July, 2006).

> *I can't believe the amount of food you go out and eat. Do you do all of this out of interest? Or are you somehow involved in the food industry?*
>
> *(thahn7580 in Yee 23rd July 2006)*

> *Most food bloggers (myself included) have full-time jobs that are unrelated to media or food. Blogs are* ***genuine works of passion*** *pursued after work hours, written by people who have no deadlines, who have no editorial policy, who have free will to write when and if they please. And yet we continue to do so with* ***bewildering intensity,*** *because we are driven by* ***a sense of community****, of an* ***eagerness*** *to share, and* ***an unabated love and appreciation of food****.*
>
> *(Yee 2010)*

> *Grab Your Fork receives about 140,000 hits per month but I've yet to find a way to make it pay for my mortgage. By day I work full-time in an office. At night I come home, switch on the computer and blog until the wee hours.*
>
> *(Yee 2011)*

Note the language used: Yee speaks of *genuine works of passion, bewildering intensity, eagerness to share, unabated love*. Her blog is about more than just discussing food, it is an important part of her life which she does for love, not money (Burgin, 2010). This use of strongly descriptive language is discussed further in Chapter 6, as is the sense of community.

Perseverance is a key component of a Serious Leisure lifestyle. For example, a visit to a particular restaurant may be a badge of honour, reinforced by the planning, advance effort and perseverance that it sometimes takes to actually visit and "collect" an experience.

> *It's taken us a while to get to Alice's.* ***On our first attempt*** *(after about a year of intent) we'd arrived to find it closed ...after a forty-minute drive* ***on our second attempt,*** *we arrived to find it open, but soon discovered they were* ***operating without electricity*** *due to the power failures from the storms buffeting Sydney. Thank goodness Alice was cooking with gas! ... There's a large window looking onto the street (just as well since the lights aren't working today.)*
>
> *(Yee 2007 17th June 2007)*

In order to eat at Australia's top restaurant, *Tetsuya's*, bookings must be made far in advance, and the facts accepted: this will be a meal experience. The time spent patiently waiting until the date of the reservation again shows the perseverance required.

> *From the moment we made our booking way* ***back in December last year*** *(bookings for Saturday nights allegedly fill up to 3 months in advance), I would walk past the gates of Tetsuya's on Kent Street* ***with increasing anticipatory drool.***
>
> *(Yee 6th April 2005)*

The planning for the visit to the restaurant, the daydreaming about what the experience might be like form an important part of the overall meal experience (Jensen et al. 2003). Given the status of dining at this establishment within the foodie community, this is not just a badge to wear, but perhaps a trophy to place prominently on display for other foodies to see. The foodie can say they have withstood the long wait between making a reservation and finally getting to eat their meal. They have shown that they have the stamina to endure the wait.

> *congrats! You made it there!! Can't believe you waited 3 long months!*
>
> *(pinkcoca in Yee 6th April 2005)*

Not only that, but the meal itself is a feat of endurance, not just dinner; a long evening with a 10 course *degustation menu* which will be expensive, even by Australian foodie standards. Overseas readers of the blog are keen to point out, however, that they expect to pay the same or more for a good restaurant meal, and that in fact the food and the experience at *Tetsuya's* is world class and good value.

> *On the cost thing - £250 per head is seriously amazing value. I expect to pay twice that for a similar (but not quite as high) quality meal in Europe (England and France at least). I urge anyone even half-interested to* ***take the plunge - you will not regret it!*** *On the world class thing - the only restaurant I have eaten at that has matched Tetsuya's for quality of cooking and interesting options on the menu is El Bulli.*
>
> *(Homesick Foodie in Yee 6th April 2005)*

Yee even blogs when on vacation or weekends away. A vacation may be time away from work, but there is never time away from her Serious Leisure activity.

> *My first meal in New York was at Tom's Restaurant, immortalised first in "Tom's Diner" by Suzanne Vega, but probably more popularly known as the diner hangout for the characters in Seinfeld.*
>
> *(Yee 19th December 2005)*

In a series of 2007 posts headlined *Grab Your Chopsticks*, Helen gives great detail about her vacation to Japan:

> *OSAKA: Hurrah I am back in Japan! We flew over with Jetstar ... the highlight was our lunch – I elected for the obento box from 3 choices – which was probably the tastiest airline meal I've ever had.*
>
> *(Yee 8th May 2007)*

Basic posts and some photographs are added daily during her travels, so that readers can follow the narrative of her trip on a "live" basis. Additional photographs and edits are inserted into the blogs at a later time, perhaps on return to Sydney. For example, the blog post of Sunday 13th May, 2007 entitled *Tokyo to Takayama* has a note saying "NB: photos and edits in purple added 26/06/07".

> *Hey! Welcome back, i didn't realise you were updating while on vacation. I look forward to reading all about your adventures*
>
> *(Deborah in Yee 9th January 2006)*

Yee even apologises when she isn't able to keep up frequent posts, as in this case when her computer broke down.

> *The home computer is currently suffering from indigestion (quiet shriek) so apologies for the lack of posts lately.*
>
> *(Yee 24th January 2006)*

Helen and her friend, fellow food blogger *Veruca Salt*, got up early one June morning to go to the Sydney Fish markets in order to buy the freshest fish. The fish markets open to the public at 7.00am, so they had to make an early start on a winter morning and queue in the cold. They then spent the rest of the day creating delicate Japanese sushi for a dinner with friends. Again there is evidence of significant personal effort required in their purchasing of the ingredients and the preparation of the meal.

> *After **five hours** of **intensive** prep and **frantic** rolling, our final Sushi **Spectacular** menu included sashimi, nigiri…*
>
> *(Yee 25th June 2006)*

Furthermore, preparing this meal as described would require expert knowledge and specialist equipment that would not be in a typical home kitchen.

As Stebbins (2009) has pointed out, in many Serious Leisure activities the greatest fulfilment sometimes comes at the end of the activity, after a great deal of effort has gone into making it a reality. These examples all reinforce the perseverance Helen displays towards her chosen Serious Leisure activity.

5.3.2 Development of a Leisure Career

Individuals involved in Serious Leisure pursuits seek to increase their knowledge, skills and kudos within the community by moving up the Serious Leisure Career Ladder. For each activity, this ladder will have its own levels of achievement, involvement and turning points (Stebbins, 2009). Foodies "collect" food experiences, and visits to celebrated restaurants, much as tourists collect souvenirs (Watson et al. 2008). Collecting badges or trophy meals is used as a way to move up the foodie hierarchy. On a general level, Stebbins (2004) breaks the ladder into the stages of beginning, development, establishment, maintenance, and decline. For committed foodies who treat their interest as a Serious Leisure activity, there is the need to progress up this hierarchy. Helen Yee's progression can be evidenced through her blog in a number of ways.

1. **<u>Beginning:</u>**

Grab Your Fork began in April 2004 although the post entitled *About Grab Your Fork* was not published until 10th October, 2005. In this post, Yee talks about herself in the third person.

> *Grab Your Fork is written by Helen Yee, a born-and-bred Sydneysider who loves to eat. Even when she's eating, she's already planning her next meal. Her belief that food tastes better when it's shared with friends is one of the primary factors that prompted her to start this food blog.*

In the introduction to herself and the blog, Yee (10th October 2005) insists that:

> *Rather than consider this a restaurant review website, Helen likes to think of it as a personal photo album of gastronomic memories.*

Earlier posts were much shorter, the photographs less clear, making the food look less appetising. The post regarding her visit to *Prime at GPO* (the restaurant is housed in the former General Post Office) on 23rd April, 2004 for example has merely 12 lines of narrative, one photograph, and no comments. Yee also posted infrequently during the beginning stage. During July 2004, for example, she only posted reviews on 8th and 31st.

2. **<u>Development:</u>**

By the time Yee visits Wellington, New Zealand in August 2007 her meal at *Sweet Mother's Kitchen* includes a narrative of 55 lines, seven photographs (each with captions), and five comments, each individually answered by Helen. The posts are also more frequent. During July 2007 for example Helen posts 17 blogs, and in addition she adds photographs and more detail to her original posts in May when she was in Japan. This shows clear development of Yee's commitment to the blog.

The comment that the blog is about personal gastronomic memories may have been true initially, but over time *Grab Your Fork* begins to develop a community around it who clearly see Helen Yee as a source of knowledge, a font of information for new followers, not just about the food, but all aspects of the dining experience, such as in this example where the person is more concerned with the social aspects of the restaurant in question, rather than the food.

> *My friends and I have discussed going to Tetsuya's, but none of us have ever gone to such a fancy place so there's a bit of a worry. How formal does one have to dress? I don't want to look too formal, or not formal enough... is there anything else one must be prepare for/think about before going to a place like this?*
>
> *(Konigsberg in Yee 6th April 2005)*

Yee provides her with a friendly answer to her query.

> *It's a lovely evening out but I wouldn't worry too much about the dress code. Smart casual is fine or dark classic evening wear. Just dress comfortably as your meal will take about 4.5 hours!*
>
> *(Yee 6th April 2005)*

3. **Establishment:**

As the blog develops further, the posts become more and more detailed, the quality and quantity of photographs develops. By 2009 *Grab Your Fork* had been in existence for five years. In July 2009 Helen makes twenty-two posts, and from 20th to 31st these are literally daily. The content of the posts has also started to change and includes more than just restaurant reviews; lists of other food blogs, industry events which she has been invited to, food markets and festivals. The language becomes more intense.

> *Glass shelves of wine glasses **almost form a sculpture** in themself. Miniature blue lamp shades dot the length of one wall, and in one corner of the room, a waist-high urn filled **with soft and lush black ostrich feathers adds a touch of whimsy to this European-style saloon.***
>
> *(Yee 18th May 2009)*

> *We don't have to wait long for a stool, parking ourselves at a* ***rickety table*** *and waiting for the laksa chef to assemble our bowls. The noodles and vegetables are placed in a bowl, and then the assam laksa soup, a* ***thick slurry that is an ominous orangey-brown,*** *is poured in, drained, poured, drained and continued until the chef is confident that the noodles are now sufficiently warmed by the hot soup.*
>
> *(Yee 4th January 2011)*

In her 11th May, 2011 post about her meal at the Chef's Table at *Bécasse* there are forty seven photographs and 144 lines of the restaurant review, followed by forty-one comments, each individually answered. Rich descriptions draw her readers into the foodie experience she shares with them online.

> *The* ***amuse bouche*** *is presented in a curved glass bowl set on a imprinted stone. The* ***glossy dollop of duck liver*** *custard is so* ***satin smooth*** *I have to* ***pause and catch my breath.*** *It's* ***enhanced*** *by a* ***delicately wobbly pear jelly*** *but it's the puffed buckwheat I love most, crunchy nuggets*[1] *of cereal that make me think of chocolate crackles.*
>
> *(Yee 11th May 2011)*

As the blog runs for a longer period, the author remembers previous restaurant visits and is able to compare individual dishes or entire meals.*The third course is* ***a new addition the menu****, a confit cube of ocean trout sheathed with a ruby red layer of pomegranate jelly ... I'd tried* ***an earlier version of*** **<u>this dish last year</u>***, but it's clearly* ***evolved*** *since then. An assembly of purple congo potatoes, sweet potatoes, turnips and white radishes are carefully placed in a circle with tweezers.*

(Yee 11th May 2011)

That *Grab Your Fork* is well established can be ascertained from the metrics shown on the home page. As at 28th March, 2013 there had been 4,931,725 unique visitors to the blog since it started in 2004. Yee also has 5004 followers to her Twitter posts.

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[1] Chocolate crackles are an Australian sweet made from Rice Bubbles (ie. Rice Crispies), chocolate & cocoa.

4. **Maintenance:**

In order to maintain interest amongst her readership, Yee has introduced new sections to the blog, updated her memorable meals and so forth. Other topics have been added to the bar on the right hand side of the blog, as listed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 *Grab Your Fork* Highlights

What's Hot	**Out and About**
Highlights	**She Cooks, She Shops**
Latest Posts	**News and Comps**
Favourite feeds	**Latest Comments**
Memorable meals	**Archives**
Food made with love	**Useful References**
Ten questions with	**Sydney Outdoor Markets**
Sydney Eats	**Published Works**
Other Australian Eats	**Press and Media**
International Eats	**Awards**
Delicious Adventures Around the World	**Australian Food Bloggers**
Special Eats	**Subscribe**

(Source: Yee Accessed 10th April 2013)

One example of this is the post of 5th September, 2009, entitled *Top 10 Sydney Eats for Tourists*.

> *Each week Grab Your Fork receives emails from overseas visitors looking for a personalised list of the best eats in Sydney. To this end, I've compiled a list of my recommended eats for the fleeting visitor to our sunny shores. My Top 10 are mostly located within the Sydney city area and should be easily accessible for the visitor on a whirlwind schedule.*
>
> *(Yee 5th September 2009)*

> *Thanks for this post GYF! I have to say, on my first visit to Sydney I did find myself armed with a list of your posts as references. I've since cultivated a few of my own favourites, which I hope to visit again soon! Must make it to your recommendations which are further afield next time :)*
>
> *(Juji in Yee 5th September 2009)*

Although Stebbins' (2004) Serious Leisure Career Ladder assumes that the next stage will be decline, the data in this study suggests, however, that there may be an additional step on the ladder, or even a branching out into two possible endings for the ladder. The first of these new steps could be described as semi-professionalism. This may fit well with Stebbins and Hartel's (2011) category of Devotee Work.

5. Semi –Professionalism

Helen Yee has become established as a recognised food writer, and has been invited to write professional reviews for magazines such as *Time Out Sydney*, and has contributed to publications like *To Japan with Love* (Heiter, 1999); *Food Lovers' Guide to Chinatown & Haymarket* (2010); *The Foodies Guide to Sydney 2011* (Meryment et al. 2010), she has acted as co-editor of *Eating and Drinking Sydney 2012 (*Meryment et al. 2011*)* along with her contribution to *Voracious: The Best New Australian Food Writing* (Yee, 2011). All of these are printed publications, not online. Yee continues to do her normal day job, and takes these writing commissions on top of her regular blogging: she has started the crossover from blogger, through citizen journalist towards being a semi-professional journalist.

As *Grab Your Fork* has developed it has become more publicly acceptable, and Yee is increasingly invited to hospitality industry events.

> *I was recently asked by Tourism Victoria to visit King Valley on a famil*[2] *... It has been interesting to note how food bloggers have recently been incorporated into client campaigns by public relations consultancies. When I first started blogging in 2004, few people knew what a food blog was -- It's a food and drink website, I would explain to blank and confused faces -- and it's only been in the last couple of years that the perceived "value" of food blog exposure has recently started to gain traction.*
>
> *(Yee 27th June 2011)*

Helen Yee remains, however, a confirmed food blogger, and proudly tells her readers that *Grab Your Fork* has been listed at number eleven in the New Statesman's worldwide Top 15 food blogs list (Yee 27th June 2011; Bonner, 2011). There is potential for the amateur or hobbyist Serious Leisure practitioner to go even further, and become a professional in their chosen field.

6. **Professionalism**

A blogger who finds that they are receiving more and more offers of commission has to decide whether their hobby will become a full-time career or not. This will mean that they have achieved the top of the Career Ladder, and moved up to become professionals.

> *Promo freebies ... Invites to exclusive events ... Hanging out with the who's who of Sydney's food scene ...* ***When is someone going to give you a job in food media so you can do this full time? That's where you belong Helen.*** *Loving your posts ... Great work.*
>
> (*Noodleboy in Yee 3rd September 2009)*

> *Wow Helen, I think you can count yourself as one of Sydney's food-eratti ... it can only be a matter of time before you cross over to joining those other paid professionals.*
>
> *(Divemummy in Yee 3rd September 2009)*

Stebbins (2004) has identified a core identity where workers obtain more than the usual pleasure from their work which he has named "occupational devotion". The core activity in which they are involved realises for the

[2] Famil is short for familiarisation trip, typically extended to travel agents and journalists.

occupational devotees strong cultural values, such as achievement, success, and individualism. A hobbyist who eventually turns to professionalism in their core interest is likely to fit into this category. Whilst their job is most definitely work, not leisure, it gives them many of the satisfactions of their previous Serious Leisure activity. In fact they may achieve the psychological state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Stebbins, 2004). It is possible that Helen Yee has reached the top of the Serious Leisure Career Ladder, and has progressed to a semi-professional state as described above.

7. **Decline:**

There are many reasons why a Serious Leisure pursuit may be discontinued. Firstly, there may be no more trophies to "collect" once the pinnacle of the leisure pursuit has been reached. The foodie who has decided to eat a meal in every Michelin starred restaurant in the United Kingdom may have satisfied his hunger for such a consumption experience (Gary Tuffy *pers. comm.* 2010).

A second reason is that life constraints may impact on their Serious Leisure pursuit. Most hobbyist bloggers are young, with the vast majority within the 25 to 44 age group (technorati, 2011), so they may get married, buy a home, start a family, and find their leisure time and available financing significantly altered because of their change in life circumstances and responsibilities. Alternatively they may get a promotion into a more responsible job where they spend longer hours in the office or undertake more business travel.

A third reason could be that the ability for hobbyists to continue with their Serious Leisure pursuit is becoming limited because of external factors. In the microcosm of restaurants in a specific geographical location, it is inevitable that over time the quantities of un-reviewed restaurants will decline on an inverse ratio to those already reviewed. It is therefore inescapable that the frequency of blogging will reduce pro-rata as the available source material reduces, despite new restaurants or re-branded existing restaurants opening up.

Helen Yee's involvement in her Serious Leisure activities local to Sydney regarding foodism and citizen journalism has not yet reached its apogee, although she does admit to having reduced the amount of time she spends blogging. One such reason she offers in her blog is that she is spending increasing amounts of time travelling. Yee's Serious Leisure activity has evolved from being restricted to a specific locale to having a more global perspective as she combines her travels with her hobbyist activity. This inevitably leads to comparisons and comments regarding authenticity between the local Sydney ethnic restaurants' fare and the "genuine article".

5.3.3 Significant Personal Effort

Significant personal effort (Stebbins, 1992) in a Serious Leisure activity is linked to Perseverance and the Serious Leisure Career Ladder. It is where the Serious Leisure participant spends time, money and energy on achieving improved skills, knowledge and abilities so that they can move up the Career Ladder (Gould et al. 2008). This may involve reading, active researching, travelling, attending lectures or master classes for example (Stebbins, 1996). An example of this in *Grab Your Fork* is when, in order to find out more about Vietnamese cuisine, Helen Yee joined a food tour of Sydney's "little Vietnam" in the suburb of Cabramatta, led by TV chef Luke Nguyen (Yee 14th October 2009). Prior to the tour she read *Secrets of the Red Lantern* by Nguyen's sister Pauline (Yee 23rd October 2009) in order to have background information on the Nguyen family, their restaurant, and the place of traditional Vietnamese food in their lives.

The blog and comments made by the network of foodies show a deep investment in their interest particularly where they attempt to recreate meals they have had in restaurants (Barr & Levy, 1984) or for special occasions. Helen Yee blogs about the many food festivals she attends in Sydney, although Chinese New Year has a special place in her heart, and her post again highlights the intense effort put into creating the food for the event.

> *Veruca had been* ***planning this feast*** *[Chinese New Year]* ***for weeks****. There was a tentative menu brainstormed over a month before, discussions, deliberations and* ***days of dedicated research*** *before preparations began in earnest.*
>
> *(Yee 2nd February 2006)*

Yee had attended a cooking demonstration given in a Sydney department store's food hall by a celebrity chef, and was motivated to try the recipe herself. This shows a second side to her identity as a foodie, not just as a consumer of restaurant meals, but also as a home cook with a higher level of expertise than the average person.

> *Inspired by the easy peasy look of Tetsuya's salmon sushi demonstration at David Jones' yesterday, I couldn't resist having a go myself.*
>
> *(Yee 11th February 2005)*

She also attends specialist cooking classes in order to better understand a specific cuisine, or style of cooking, such as her attendance at a class to learn more about the Japanese art of *kaiseki:*

> *It's one thing to appreciate the delicious art of kaiseki. It's another thing completely to get into the kitchen and help make it ... you cannot help but slowly savour each mouthful with a new sense of enlightenment.*
>
> *(Yee 22nd July 2007)*

As a foodie, it is important to not only actually do the activity, but be seen to overtly express that you do. Preparing *Crispy Skin Chicken* for the Chinese New Year feast was described as:

> *...a* ***mammoth task*** *involving marinating, simmering, drying, glazing, more drying and finally deep frying.*
>
> *(Yee 2nd February 2006)*

Helen even plans her vacations around the best potential experiences and opportunities to learn.

> *We've* ***mapped our itinerary*** *around Japan to take in as many festivals as possible and we're* ***ecstatic*** *to discover that we could coincide our visit with the famous Kanda Matsuri festival in Tokyo.*
>
> *(Yee 12th May 2007)*

According to Nowson and Oberlander (2006), females spend more effort blogging than do men (although there are more male bloggers than female ones (technorati, 2011). Approximately thirty percent of hobbyist bloggers spend one to three hours per week on their site, whilst approximately eighteen percent spend three to five hours. Another twelve percent spend up to ten hours on their blog (technorati, 2011). These are indeed long periods of time to spend on a hobby week after week, outside normal working hours, such as evenings and weekends.

These examples show the individuals deeply involved in their Serious Leisure activities, which they share with other foodies, both at the time of actually eating the meal and later through the blog posts. They are exhibiting their skilled consumption (Scitovsky, 1976). The time and effort expended allow them to move up their Serious Leisure career ladder (Stebbins, 1992) in the eyes of their community of consumption. This is evidenced not only by Yee's regular eating out at restaurants, but by the fact that she shops at farmers' markets and speciality food stores.

5.3.4 Durable Benefits

The Durable Benefits include personal rewards and social rewards. In the case of Helen Yee, her actions as described in "Significant Personal Effort" all contribute to the "Durable Benefits" she achieves from her Serious Leisure participation. The acquired knowledge further enhances future meal experiences, both as a diner and as a cook, and allows her to move up the Serious Leisure Career Ladder. The participant is rewarded with cherished experiences, improved skills and abilities, in addition to spending social time with other Serious Leisure participants. The personal growth and renewal of the individual's motivation, and indeed their standing within the group is highlighted (Hopkinson & Pujari, 1999).

An example of this type of significant personal effort is Yee's first visit to *Ocean Room* at Circular Quay, where chef Raita Noda showed his expertise to foodies who then were able to partake of the food that he had prepared.

> ***As Noda is sitting next to me (yes! I know!),*** *I ask him about the Mediterranean influences in his dishes. Asians have a certain way with seafood, he agrees, commonly using the steaming method and ingredients like ginger, shallot, salt and pepper. However he appreciates the way in which Mediterranean dishes bring out another side of seafood and thinks the two approaches complement each other in the Ocean Room menu.*
>
> *(Yee 10th October 2006)*

Here, the gleaning of information about fusion cooking adds to Helen's skilled knowledge of food. Similarly Tetsuya Wakuda shares his expertise in a masterclass:

> *He's not shy in sharing his secrets, telling us that the best way to beat eggs is to lift strands up high in the air with a fork, rather than create bubbles by beating them furiously within the bowl. He also reckons a small dollop of creamed corn creates a lighter texture.*
>
> *(Yee 8th March 2010)*

Helen is learning new cooking techniques which enable her to both be a better cook herself, but to also better understand and critique the professionally prepared meals she eats from a basis of knowledge rather than intelligent ignorance. The later sharing of the experience in blog posts may lead to self-image enhancement, personal reaffirmation of her community status and positive affirmation from her peer group, potentially leading to further development of the community as a unit (Schmidt, 2007; Guadagno et. al. 2007).

This personal development has led to an embryonic career as a paid critic/reviewer. This progression has resulted in a reduction in the Serious Leisure activity and an increase in the professional activity which was a neutral investment of significant effort. For a given unit of time spent writing about food, there is a dynamic equilibrium between her personal gratification and self-worth, and financial gain.

5.3.5 Unique Ethos

Serious Leisure participants tend to develop communities with like-minded people (Tsaur & Liang, 2008). This so-called unique ethos is the spirit of the community of practice (Stebbins, 2009) and is manifested in shared values and goals, camaraderie and communitas (Turner, 1979). Furthermore, the unique ethos of the activity reinforces the differences between the in-group and non-members, and is expressed in ways such as norms, performance standards, a distinct interpretative repertoire, and specialist skills.

> *The rilletes were particularly tasty and the sweet brioche was a surprisingly pleasant enhancement to the duck and pistachio pate.*
>
> *(Yee 20th July 2005)*

> *We each had to slice our own **hiramsa kingfish sashimi**, carefully draping these against a **shiso leaf** backdrop. A tumble of **daikon shreds** was teased into a modest tower, **a smidge of wasabi** placed to the side.*
>
> *(Yee 22nd July 2007)*

> *I like **congee**,*
> *I like **char siu**,*
> *I like **chendol** and many other things too...*
>
> *(The Ninja in Yee 31st October 2009)*

> *Braised organic **wagyu pithivier** is like a cross between a really good meat pie and a buttery sausage roll.*
>
> *(Yee 20th August 2009)*

The uses of technical culinary terms, ingredients and dishes are not explained: it is assumed that these words will be a part of the vocabulary of the reading audience. This is their interpretative repertoire, which is discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.3.6 Strong Identification

In any Serious Leisure pursuit there is a "Strong Identification" within and between the members of the community. This is their identity (Stebbins, 2009), and is evident in both the foodie community and the blogger community. In-group members of the foodie tribe understand that the investment in both money and time required to “collect” top restaurant visits is worthwhile – outsiders don’t.

> *For non-foodies, their look of bewilderment is genuine. "$175 for a meal?" they bleat. "And it costs $75 on top of that for matching wines?" Their pupils dilate in disbelief. But they don't understand.* ***This is not just "a meal". This is art. This is ten courses of culinary genius. This is the inner temple of gastronomy. This is Tetsuya's ... Was it worth it? Absolutely.***
>
> *(Yee 6th April 2005)*

> *Hi AG, the food looks delicious, but I highly doubt that I’d go out for a $175 per head meal. When I saw the name, I thought this would be a Japanese restaurant complete with tatami mats, but do you think it’s more fusion?*
>
> *(Reid in Yee 6th April 2005)*

> ***It's an experience. It's Disneyland for adults who love food and the passion to create a great experience. Something you need to do once in your life***
>
> *(Oscar Trimboli in Yee 6th April 2005)*

At the most basic level bloggers provide links to other blogs on their posts; this is referred to as the blogroll. Bloggers are often commenters on the blogs of other bloggers too, and in fact are the backbone of the community which develops around a leisure blog. Their blogger status is often revealed by their profile name; bloggers have a strong identity however they rarely use their own name. This could be for a variety of reasons. The Internet allows fantasies to be experienced, and individuals to play with their identity, portray an image which is not necessarily in keeping with their everyday persona. Sometimes it becomes clear that although the commenter has used a logon name, Helen knows them personally and uses their non virtual name in response, or vice versa. For example, a comment on 6th July, 2006 regarding Helen’s post about a trip to the Sydney suburb of Auburn has the logon name of *deborah*. Yee responds:

> *Hi Saffron, with the sporadic cold weather, I am also wondering whether I should head back for some salep powder.*
>
> *(Yee 3rd July 2006)*

It is clear that although Helen knows Deborah personally, in the context of the blogosphere it is appropriate to use her *nom de plume*, Saffron. The online names used by regular commenters on *Grab Your Fork* tend to relate to food and eating. Some, like Helen Yee's pseudonym of *Augustus Gloop*, suggest that the individual has an obsession with food, or over indulges. *Veruca Salt* is also a greedy character from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Names such as *fooDcrazEE* and *Miss Piggy* fit into this type. Others suggest specific interests of the blogger, such as *cafedave* and *noodleboy*. A selection of these online pseudonyms is listed in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Examples of Virtual Identities of those who comment on *Grab Your Fork*

PiCkLes	***Gourmet Getaway***
fooDcrazEE	***Fouad @The Food Blog***
Lady Lunchalot	***Miss Piggy***
divemummy	***Veruca Salt***
billy@tablefortwo	***Dressed and Eaten***
noodleboy	***Gastronomy Gal***
cafedave	***Vegemite***
Food Chick	***pinkcocoa***
Chocolate Suze	

The researchof Lenhart and Fox (2006) supports the premise that people are more comfortable expressing their thoughts from behind the mask of an avatar. As their confidence and progression through the hierarchy of the group grows, they are less likely to need to hide behind a soubriquet. In the case of Helen Yee herself, she has advanced beyond the point of no return in as far as she is now a known name in the field and it is therefore pointless to revert to a *nom de plume*. Indeed if she were to do so she would undermine her own credibility.

5.4 Consumer Experiences in Food

A postmodern perspective assumes that an element of meaning is removed from consumer experiences, and thus the individual consumer must mediate their own experiences, and create their own understanding (Tresidder & Hirst, 2012). It can be argued that in a post-industrialised world a rootless and alienated consumer craves wants and desires that can never be achieved, such as the "perfect meal". In *Grab Your Fork* Helen Yee records a variety of meals, from the most memorable to the most mundane.

5.4.1 Hedonic Consumption

In a consumer society such as exists in the West, consumers purchase "positional" goods and services in order to create their identity and mark their position in society (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2002). Memories of purchasing and consuming a product become part of our extended selves (Belk, 1988; Mittal, 2006). This can particularly be the case if the purchase is a hedonistic one such as a leisure experience like a restaurant meal (Hopkinson & Pujari, 1999). Although Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) seminal conclusions regarding hedonic consumption are over thirty years old, the concept is still valid, even in a postmodern world. They found that consumers do not make logical decisions, rather that they are affective, experiential and subjective.

As defined by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), hedonistic consumption is those facets of consumer behaviour relating to the affective aspects of the product usage experience. This may relate to a service or event just as much as the purchase of the product. The overall experience is what the consumer gets in return for their money and the "festive" or hedonic value is reflected in the potential entertainment and emotional aspects obtained (Babin et al. 1994). In particular, they highlight the multisensory and fantasy aspects, which relate well to the consumption of a dining experience. There is the ambience of the restaurant, the decor, the smell, taste and texture of the food, the company, all of which add to the experience.

> ***The aesthetics of the restaurant have all been carefully considered.*** *Outside in the dining room, the tables are all covered with* ***ostrich leather.*** *Our bread plates and the bowls for salt have been designed by Blue Mountains ceramicist Simon Reece who uses inspiration from nature to create his works. His recent collection included an Iced Earth series, and the salt bowls make us think of profiteroles, biscuits or honeycomb covered in chocolate.*
>
> *(Yee 11th May 2011)*

It is therefore likely that the decision, especially for a foodie, to dine at a particular restaurant is often the result of the hedonic, symbolic elements analysed by the consumer, rather than tangible features. The experiential view of consumption emphasises thinking which pursues immediate gratification and pleasure, looking for emotions such as fun, amusement, fantasy, enjoyment and sensory stimulation (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Fischer & Arnold, 1990). The purchase and physical consumption of a restaurant meal occur at the same time and are therefore highly experiential, and the hedonic value comes as the climax of the experience (Babin et al. 1994). This clearly can be evidenced by the posts and comments in *Grab Your Fork*. Here Helen Yee is at a multi course feast:

> ***We like pig.*** *Oh yes we do. Our pigs head is decimated, stripped bare by cackling hyenas of the porcine-loving kind ... I'm morbidly fascinated, touching the molars to see how sharp they are.* ***I end up eating both pigs eye sockets*** *because no one wanted them, the flesh soft and fatty although I pass on the eyeball which usually tends to be quite chalky (if fish eyes are any reference).*
>
> *(Yee 5th March 2012)*

When discussing repeat hedonic consumption as an extraordinary experience, Cristel and Levy (2011) highlight the novel sensations, the emotional luxury of delight and even the intellectual insights. This shows that hedonic consumption is not merely habitual.

A restaurant meal should appeal to all the senses and Helen blogs about arriving at a spring themed dinner thus:

> *As I approach the doorway to Bécasse, I hesitate, for in my way is a shallow bed of grassy turf. It's cut to a doormat-size, but positioned sideways so it runs like a small hall-runner. A little voice inside me shouts "KEEP OFF THE GRASS" but there's no other way around and that's when* ***I realise we're meant to walk on the grass****, a tongue-in-cheek start to Bécasse's* ***celebration of spring*** *dinner in collaboration with the Champagne Bureau.*
>
> *(Yee 3rd September 2009)*

In this case the imagery of the green turf and its fragrance when walked upon add to the entire servicescape (Bitner, 1992) even before the menu is sighted. The fresh, grassy smell that is generated when she steps onto the turf is symbolic of spring, and sets the scene for what is to follow. This is a hyper-real experience; reality has collapsed and image, illusion and simulation have taken over. It is actually "more real than real", in a state where signs and images are more important than what they represent (Williams, 2006).

> *The parade of champagnes are each served in a different shaped glass, an amazing collection of vintages that thrill and entertain the palate. There's a* ***wonderful sense of celebratory whimsy*** *when drinking champagne, its* ***lightness and fizz adding a skipping step to each bite of your meal***
>
> *(Yee 3rd September 2009)*

Champagne is the ultimate hedonistic drink. It tends to be drunk on special occasions, it is celebratory. The bubbling drink served in a range of different glasses creates an atmosphere of decadence at this event.

Cartesian Dualism is the concept, originally postulated by Descartes, that there are two fundamentally different realms of existence; mind and matter, thought and emotion (Burkitt, 1999; Hawthorne, 2006). Descartes argued that people experience themselves firstly as bodies occupying a specific place in time and space, and secondly as thinking selves (Burkitt, 1999). A food blog creates a space which is entirely antithetical to Cartesian Dualism. The online "space" occupied is a virtual space in non-time (Pine & Korn, 2011). Furthermore, sensual pictures and descriptions are deliberately shared with other like-minded individuals, such as the examples below.

*Three of us had [the schweinshaxn **pork knuckle**], and none of us regretted it one bit. I dreaded carving into a pork knuckle which was dry and stringy, but cooking on the bone is a wonderful thing. The meat was dark, almost gamey and compact with moisture. **The crackling... oh the crackling**, it was a skirt to be lifted with utmost reverence. The crackling was thick, salty and satisfyingly crunchy .... Tender pork, noisy crackling, smooth mashed potato, dark rich gravy, tangy sauerkraut and not nearly enough life-giving salad.*

(Yee 23rd July 2006)

Here Yee's written description of the food even outdoes what is conveyed by the accompanying photograph. The reader can almost taste the pork, feel their lips moistening in anticipation of the first bite. The response is not purely an emotional one as Descartes postulations would have us believe. Burkitt (1999) points out that Descartes claims that we cannot know our own selves through bodily sensation such as this; yet this is exactly the experience the writer is trying to elicit in the foodie reading the description in the blog.

*The Menya soba is **satisfying firm and al-dente. Two plump sheets** of abura-age deep-fried tofu are **soft, juicy and sweet**, two rehydrated shiitake mushrooms are filled with flavour. The tempura flakes are like deep-fried rice bubble puffs, cleansed easily by the cooked seaweed, chopped scallions and sprinkle of toasted sesame seeds.*

(Yee 16th September 2006)

The descriptions are mouth watering and appeal directly to the reader's physical senses. However, authors such as Poole (2012) caution that reacting to food in this manner, writing about it in such an emotive way, and providing close up photographs of the dishes before they are consumed, is tantamount to "gastroporn", creating a temple of food gluttony pornography.

As mentioned earlier, Hopkinson and Pujari (1999) suggest that there is an important similarity between addiction to hedonic experience and the creation of identity, as it relates to the avoidance of negative self images. Meaning in consumption arises from personal growth; consumption is used to create identities and a sense of belonging (Williams, 2006;

O'Shaunghnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2002). Individuals look for self-congruence in their purchases. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.4.2 Fantasy Imagery

Hirschman & Holbrook (1982) suggested that internal, multisensory images can be of two types; ***historic imagery*** which involves an event which has actually occurred, such as a visit to a particular location or the last time you ate in a specific restaurant, and ***fantasy imagery*** which occurs when the consumer creates a multisensory image which is not drawn from previous experience: it is purely a mental phenomenon.

Choosing a particular restaurant to celebrate a special occasion may confer a special meaning to the event for the participants, and recalls historic imagery.

> *Ever since the* ***old Marigold*** *closed down (about five years ago now, and still fondly remembered) most of* ***our family special occasion dinners in town tend to take place at East Ocean in Sydney's Chinatown.*** *There's* ***a certain affection*** *in having an automatic standby venue for family dinners. No thought is required, just: "I'll go make a booking."*
>
> *(Yee 19th April 2006)*

Emotive responses to these images are both physiological and psychological in nature and generate altered states of body and mind. When using a hedonic consumption model, the products or experiences consumed are not seen as objective entities, rather they are seen as subjective symbols that are invested with meaning for the consumer (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). This can be evidenced in a comment from a reader in response to Helen's blog about her first visit to Australia's number one restaurant, *Tetsuya's.*

> *Let me just* ***wipe the drool off the keyboard****....well done AG....I think I would still be too busy days later,* ***rolling my eyes in gastronomic delight, to be able to speak and articulate the experience.*** *I'll have to start saving my pennies.*
>
> *(DiveMummy in Yee 6th April 2005)*

> *Hi DiveMummy - Ahh but* ***articulating the experience allows you to relive each mouthful as you search for just the right adjective or metaphor.*** *Glad you enjoyed the post. Save the pennies and relish the extravagant experience.*
>
> *(Yee 6th April 2005)*

DiveMummy's comment relates to the physiological and emotional responses she has when reading the blog post; Helen's narrative and photographs are so intense that she speaks of "wip(ing) the drool off the keyboard" and "rolling her eyes in gastronomic delight". For DiveMummy this is fantasy imagery, for Helen it is historic imagery, as she relives her experience; "relive each mouthful as you search for just the right adjective or metaphor" (Yee 6th April 2005). This textual representation of the physical experience induces in the reader the feeling that they have experienced it for themselves, invoking in some cases the physiological reactions that would be present if the reader was to actually experience the sensation. This phenomenon, referred to as "expressive embodiment" (Pile & Keith, 1997) is a common feature of the blog.

> *Sorry I meant "yee sang" in my earlier comment. It's a bit hard to type and drool at the same times as you know.*
>
> *(Oslofoodie in Yee 2nd February 2006)*

> *Oh what a feast! Yummers ... to everything except the whole suckling pig. I don't know what it is but I always have the heebies jeebies (sic) when I see one of those. I adore the rest of the menu though and am salivating just looking at the photos.*
>
> *(MM in Yee 2nd February 2006)*

Fantasy imagery can be further broken down into sub-themes: a meal may be an escape from reality or it may involve temporal or spatial liminality. Turner's (1977) concept of the liminoid can be used to describe the collective liminal experience. In some hedonic consumption experiences, emotional desires override utilitarian motives. Jenkins (2011) calls this escape from reality "fanciful imagining"; for example, Helen Yee imagines her future visit to the famed *Tetsuya's* as a pleasurable hyper-real dining experience based on hedonic and affective thoughts, which would be almost impossible in the real world (Tresidder & Hirst, 2012).

> *What* ***gastronomic treasures*** *lay beyond in this* ***hidden fortress****? I would wonder as I dawdled past. I felt like Charlie Bucket peering through the gates of Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, as I* ***daydreamed*** *about the* ***delicious treats*** *housed within.*
>
> *(Yee 6th April 2005)*

She is brought back to reality by the comment of OsloFoodie who provides the mundane thought:

> *Sigh and sigh again. That's all I could manage while reading this post. Whatever I eat for dinner tonight will taste* ***bland, bland, bland****.*
>
> *(OsloFoodie in Yee 6th April 2005)*

In reality, this is just a meal, but for foodies it takes on a symbolic significance. Another escape from reality is the *TOYS Collective Issue 9#: Blood, Bones and Butter Dinner* (Yee 5th March 2012). This is a food event inspired by the book of the same name by American chef Gabrielle Harrison, and gives young and inspirational chefs the opportunity to create dishes which veer from playful to extreme. At $160.00 per head, this food-as-adventure event (Tresidder & Hirst, 2012) is never-the-less a sell-out. The adventurous ambience is partly created by the table setting, which leads to anticipation as to what the meal itself may involve.

> *We arrive at Otto Ristorante at Woolloomooloo to find two rows of tables decked out* ***with moss, edible flowers, bunches of baby radishes and a series of pig heads****, roasted until the skin had turned into cracking and their ears had become all kinds of crispy. Shin bones act as little pots for* ***bone marrow butter.*** *The table setting is an impressive spectacle, elegant but bad-ass, and ultimately still all about the food.*
>
> *(Yee 5th March 2012)*

Guests are seated at communal tables, with pigs' heads as the centrepieces. Yee reports that they are good conversation starters. When the first course of food arrives, it does not disappoint, nor does the service.

> *A length of hollowed out bone holds a trio titled* ***fungus, claw and brain****. The spectacle becomes even more eerie when the waitresses suddenly break out into opera, as though we really are in the scene of a horror film.*
>
> *(Yee 5th March 2012)*

*A chopping board of "**lamb bits**" tips our dinner into Roman-style gluttony, covered in lamb cutlets, lamb shank, tongue and bone marrow. The blood-themed side salad combines blood vein sorrel and **baby beetroot with blood sauce** and a black pudding, olive and chocolate crumb.*

(Yee 5th March 2012)

Poole (2012), however, suggests that this glorification in outlandish food, even further from everyday fare than what he calls "mainstream gastroporn", is akin to a fetish.

Another example of an adventurous meal can involve the actual ingredients themselves. Some of Yee's most unusual meals have been in foreign countries where she has not even known what she was eating at the time. The first of these examples is from the Philippines, the second from Japan. Much of the enjoyment is in the anticipation of the meal (Tresidder & Hirst, 2012).

"I ordered a few special things for dinner," our host in the Philippines said with a knowing wink ... our host asks if we can guess its contents. I admit I was stumped by this one, not really twigging that the hard shell I was tapping was from a cooked turtle.

(Yee 2nd December 2010)

We feasted on 10 courses of seasonally selected dishes for 8,400 yen. We started with an amazing mouthful that was white and creamy and fatty. This was fish stomach, we later discovered. It was so very good.

(Yee 10th May 2007)

These examples explain immersive experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), where the individual becomes either physically or virtually part of the experience. Helen Yee has physically experienced the situation, and her readers experience it virtually from her retelling.

*That looks so damn cute and those desserts look amazing! I have to thank you for taking me there with your prose☺ Now if you'll excuse me, it's back to **hallucinating food in my tummy** – hooray!*

(Margaret Tran in Yee 8th July 2010)

Hedonic consumption can also be tied to imaginative constructions of reality – not what the consumer knows to be true, but what they desire reality to be (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Here the consumer may see themselves acting out a role, or doing something they never thought possible.

> *One by one we pass around a glass jar that barely manages to contain a hefty Black Perigord truffle and a handful of the aromatic soil from which it came. Just opening the lid releases* ***an intense heady smell of truffle****, a musky mushroomy smell that wafts enticingly. And that's the moment I woke up from my dream.* ***Except I'm not dreaming, and I am at Bécasse****, and I'm about to lunch on fresh truffles.*
>
> *(Yee 20th August 2009)*

The above extract from the blog is clear indication that Yee is immersed in the whole experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). To the reader, it is an absorbing narrative – one can almost tangibly experience what Yee is describing. Thus the blogger is immersed and the reader is absorbed – almost saturated - by the experience.

5.4.3 Extraordinary Experiences

Raghunathan and Irwin (2001) found that consumers are always walking on what they referred to as a "hedonic treadmill", trying to make the next experience more pleasurable than the previous one. In many cases, foodies set goals of eating in particular restaurants, such as those with Michelin stars, or a high reputation. In attempting to reach these goals, some meals will be identified as extraordinary experiences (Morgan & Watson, 2007a).

Memorable Meals

Dining out may involve experiences of escape, authenticity, ambience, adventure or excitement (Tresidder & Hirst, 2012). For a foodie, it is the experience of memorable meals that further enhances their identity. Whether that is a gastronomic restaurant meal, an authentic ethnic meal, a meal eaten in an unusual location, eaten in an unusual manner or involving unusual ingredients it identifies them as a foodie and allows them to move up the "Career Ladder" of those with a Serious Leisure interest in food.

A number of the posts in *Grab Your Fork* are described by the author as "memorable meals", including a visit to Australia's number one restaurant, *Tetsuya's*. The style of the blog describing this visit (Yee 6th April 2005) is clearly different to the standard meal reviews experienced by Helen Yee throughout the year, verging on the hagiographic: Tetsuya Wakuda is revered and esteemed to a great extent.

> ***This is not just "a meal". This is art. This is ten courses of culinary genius. This is the inner temple of gastronomy. This is Tetsuya's.***
>
> *(Yee 6th April 2005)*

Comments continued for over four years on this post further pointing to its importance as a foodie icon, a restaurant visit to be "collected". Visits to such restaurants are an important part of the Serious Leisure career ladder, where the individual can show off their level of experience to other foodies, and confirm their own foodie identity. Other foodies have added comments to the blog about their memories of a visit to *Tetsuya's*. This displays their foodie credentials to Helen and other readers, in addition to reinforcing their own "collection" of another top rated restaurant.

> *Noticed that you wondered about the 'confit' part of the confit ocean trout – Tetsuya's signature dish. I had the same question when we celebrated our 10 year anniversary there last week, and the waiter explained that it is 'cooked' for either 4 or 6 hours (can't recall) in warm (not hot) oil so that it looks like it is raw, but technically isn't. If 'confit' means long n slow, this certainly qualifies, but even after the explanation, I'm still amazed!*
>
> *(Schmendrick in Yee 6th April 2005)*

> *It looks spectacular! I'm looking forward to when I can make it up to Sydney to go there. I'm still planning to write an entry about my degustation menu a few weeks ago at Ezard at Adelphi, which also cost in the stratosphere ($115 for 8 courses), but was certainly a food highlight of my life so far...!*
>
> *(Niki in Yee 6th April 2005)*

Another memorable experience was Yee's meal at *The Dark Side of Hyde Park*, a restaurant where the diners are kept, literally, in the dark as they eat their meal; the waiters wear night-vision goggles, unlike similar establishments in Europe which employ blind waiters. Being foodies, Yee and her guest chose the Mystery Menu, three courses of the chef's choosing. This meal was an experience in adventure.

> *We are eating blind. Literally and metaphorically.... it is black. Pitch black ... Plates are silently eased before us. I pat cautiously until I feel the plate. We instinctively plunge in with our fingers ... Cuisine is being dismantled by curious fingers, sniffed cautiously, tasted with suspicion. It startles me how hard it is to recognise foods by taste alone.* ***The brain is furiously trying to unscramble a code comprised of texture, smell and taste****. It is frustratingly difficult, and a wake-up call to my supposedly-refined tastebuds.*
>
> *(Yee 15th January 2005)*

This meal calls into question Yee's expertise regarding food; unable to see what she is eating she is found left wanting as a foodie. To give her readers a feeling of the experience, the "photographs" of the plates of food were simply blacked out spaces on the blog.

However, not all leisure experiences are extraordinary, nor do the participants always wish them to be. Carù and Cova (2003) argue that there has been an over-emphasis on the extraordinary at the expense of the quiet pleasures of daily life. Quan & Wang (2004) say that within a total experience there are peak elements which are extraordinary, in contrast to everyday life, and supporting elements where familiarity may be valued. Food may play either of these roles, as a peak or a supporting experience depending on the context. For example, during *Good Food Week* in October 2006, Helen visits *Bécasse*, which had just been announced Restaurant of the Year by the *Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide.*

> *At the first mouthful of the steamed Namoi River Murray Cod, I know I have reached the likely highlight of my meal. The cod is beautifully cooked, and* ***I take drawn-out delight in slowly eating each forkful layer by melting layer.***
>
> *(Yee 4th October 2006)*

Here this particular course, just one of a six-course degustation menu, is obviously the peak experience, the highlight of the meal.

In some cases, the extraordinary experience comes from the ingredients or the dishes served. The examples given previously of turtle hotpot and fish stomach fit this category, as does the following post:

> *If there's one dish you must order at Izakaya Fujiyama, it's the tuna jaw. This* ***behemoth of bones, fin, gills and cartilage is one of life's pleasures*** *– a testament that good eating can be found in the most unlikeliest of places, and that foraging for your own food provides endless fun.*
>
> *(Yee 21st November 2011)*

Not all memorable meals are necessarily expensive, gastronomic experiences like a visit to *Tetsuya's*, or exotic fare. At other times there is joy in plain, old-fashioned food, cooked well.

> *The meat pie is an Australian institution. Hot, meaty and holdable in one hand (the other's for your stubbie*[3]*), the meat pie is the brickie's breakfast, the football fan's belly warmer, and the best lunch a bloke could hope for ... to the snickers of my fellow lunchers I lift the lid to reveal the innards of my humble meat pie ... all in all, top nosh ... winter comfort food doesn't get better than this.*
>
> *(Yee 14th July 2006)*

Similarly simple, Helen's visit to *The Oceanic Cafe*: Sydney's oldest intact cafe has original decor, furnishings and menu from the 1920s. The following quotes are all from Yee (1st July 2007).

> *A general sense of dilapidation pervades the air, from the peeling paint on the walls, to the sagging ceiling near the entrance, to the olden booth seating that flanks the dining room.*

> *Our presence in the cafe has caused some consternation to the lady who shuffles over to take our order. 'You might want to go up the road. They've got more things on the menu there' she tells us nervously when she says that there are no rissoles available today. 'I've got sausages, chops and lamb's fry. The rissoles are frozen. They ain't (sic) cooked yet. You can have sausages instead.'*

[3] A stubbie is a small beer bottle.

> *I'm keen to try the lamb's fry. 'Lamb's fry? That's liver you know'. I nod again.*

> *It's a funny flashback ... to be eating a meal that threatens to slide off the plate with every jab of your fork. The novelty of a small, round-lipped bistro dish is instantly apparent, a marked contrast to the usual expanse of never-ending white in a trendy square shape. It's like a step back in time in this living history museum. It's a memorable meal not just for the food, but for the characters, the atmosphere, the stories the walls wishes it could tell.*

Here the diners have retreated into a world of the past, an ambience where everything from the home-style menu to the old fashioned crockery to the scratched Laminex table tops present the experience. Helen and her friends step out of the real world of fast-paced twenty first century Sydney into a place and time that exist in a time warp. Through their imaginations they are experiencing nostalgia for a situation they have never personally experienced (Tresidder & Hirst, 2012), something akin to the inherited nostalgia as defined by Maghbouleh (2010):

> ***The place is a time warp, and all of us who enter do so recognising this. The past is a strange place; they do things differently there. All of us who celebrate the Oceanic know this and honour those rules. With gratitude, with nostalgia and with the somewhat shocked realisation that the Oceanic has defied everything and remains, please, at least until I get the chance to return.***
>
> *(artandrew in Yee 1st July 2007)*

This is an example of liminality: an indeterminate position between two places or times (Ortiz, 2001). This temporal and spatial liminality releases the individual from the imposed norms of everyday life, and provides an extraordinary experience with high levels of emotional intensity (Tresidder and Hirst, 2012).

In her description of the extraordinary meal experience she had at *Tetsuya's,* Yee's writing becomes highly descriptive. She uses literary language borrowed from professional restaurant reviewers, including many adjectives, and sensuous language to describe the tastes and textures of the food (Watson et al. 2008). The following quotes all relate to Yee's review of Tetsuya's Restaurant (Yee 6th April 2005).

> *Freshly baked, warm, fluffy, crust and slathered in black truffle salsa butter.*
>
> *The trevally sang with lemon.*
>
> *As you bit into each shiny firm globule, the trout roe burst their briney goodness all over your dancing tongue.*
>
> *. . . the highlight for me was the basil ice cream and cold corn soup. Cold, salty and exploding with basil flavour...*

Writing the blog post is more than just a remembrance of the meal; Yee gives attention to every mouthful so as to describe it in great detail, suggesting that she is thinking about her review as she eats. The restaurant reviews in *Grab Your Fork*, especially those of extraordinary food experiences, are often written in a similar style to that of the famous British food writer A.A. Gill, who is a regular contributor to *Australian Gourmet Traveller*, long considered the Australian "foodie bible". As pointed out by Watson et al. (2008), the introduction to the *Tetsuya's* review bears great similarity to A.A. Gill's typical long, narrative introductions. A narrative style suggests that the intention is to be entertaining in addition to providing a critique of the food. Yee uses the first person so as to draw the reader into her sense of anticipation and excitement of her visit to the renowned establishment.

In other instances, the language describes the delights of eating the food:

> *The avocado bomb. .. it's **a hand-grenade of gluttonous excess**, the creamy avocado retaining its shape despite the baptism in hot oil.*
>
> *(Yee 23rd April 2012)*

> *Suckling pig. Two words which **trigger salivary overdrive** for many a gluttonous foodie.*
>
> *(Yee 25th November 2004)*

> *The crab course is a cloud of hand-picked mud crab doused in a silky macadamia milk spiked with toasted macadamias and carefully placed* ***chamomile flowers****. It's a revelation for the tastebuds.* ***Macadamia and crab****? 'Why didn't anyone think of this sooner?' we collectively cry. It's a glorious match, the buttery macadamia nut enhancing the sweet notes of crab in a way that is unaffected yet exquisitely beautiful. It's my highlight dish of my day.*
>
> *(Yee 18th June 2012)*

> *"Spices are to the tongue as colour is to the eyes!" she pronounces, and clasps her hands together for emphasis as her eyes twinkle in delight.*
>
> *(Florence Tan in Yee 8th June 2011)*

There is an evident symbiosis between the experience in the restaurant and the act of relating the experience into the blog. It is clear from the writing style that the activities of eating and writing are mutually supportive – the experiences of eating and writing would not be as intense in isolation. Is the blogging the motivation to eat, or is eating the reason to blog? In Yee's "About" page, she comments that the blog is personal to her and it is not a restaurant critique. As is evident as the blog matures, it metamorphoses through enthusiastic reporting of a personal experience to its latest incarnation of reviewing the food from a perspective of personal recommendation rather than personal opinion.

5.5 Personal Journey

5.5.1 The Sacred and the Profane

In their seminal consumer behaviour paper, Belk et al. (1989) discussed "highly charged encounters suffused with meaning". Contemporary consumers treat these revelatory incidents, or extraordinary experiences, as set apart from normal life, and they can become the basis for a transcendent experience (Belk et al. 1989). Belk et al. (1989) explored the qualities of sacredness in these ***consumption transformations***, which they likened to religious experiences. The sacred then is the opposite of the profane experience, which belongs to everyday life. For the consumer, entering into this extraordinary world of sacred experience is a quest to find individual meaning. It may be argued that the increasing secularization of society has left a void which becomes filled with extraordinary places, spaces and events or pleasure zones (Fantasia, 1995). Turner (1977; 2004) argues that communitas is characteristic of those who experience liminality together, and that moving through this transitional phase creates sacredness, which in turn allows individuals to move up in the esteem of the group.

According to Belk et al. (1989) potentially sacred consumption occurs within six categories:

1. Places
2. Times
3. Tangible things
4. Intangible things
5. Persons
6. Experiences

The special significance which hedonic consumption occupies in the lives of foodies such as Helen Yee is highlighted by descriptions of sacred and magical meal experiences (Hopkinson & Pujari, 1999), and these may fall into a number of the above categories.

1. <u>Places</u>

The actual location of the meal may be seen as sacred, or the journey to get there may be seen as a sacred pilgrimage. On a visit to Japan, for example, Helen notes that going to see the famous Tsukiji Fish Markets in Tokyo is an important foodie experience. Note the language used by Yee in her post – the journey is so important that it is described as a pilgrimage.

> *We make the* ***essential pilgrimage*** *to the Tsukiji Fish Markets for a wander through row upon row of fishmongers selling all types of seafood. We see giant oysters, sacs of salmon roe, live eels, barrels of baby eel-looking creatures assorted sea snails and plenty more.*
>
> *(Yee 31st May 2007)*

Doyle's Seafood Restaurant on the pier at Watson's Bay in Sydney is an example of the location being more important and desirable as a reason to visit than the food available. There are two tariffs for the same traditional fish and chips meal, dependent on whether you order inside the restaurant or at the takeaway counter. According to Yee (11th December 2008), the indoor sit-down version of the meal, overlooking Sydney Harbour, costs three times the price of the same food when bought on a take-away basis from the same restaurant. Such is the reputation and allure of Doyle's that tourists travel thousands of miles just so that they can say they have been there. Doyle's illustrates perfectly the concept that the venue can be more of a draw than the food.

2. Times

The meal itself may take on the sacred due to its timing, or the impression of a time which it evokes. Here the reader tells Yee and the community of a restaurant which is their own sacred place, as it relates to "the old days", a cultural experience from a time out of time which no longer exists:

> *Super Bowl is one of my foodie sacred places in Sydney, I think the seediness adds to its attraction and **harkens back to the old days** when Chinatown was a really dodgey place to be, my favourite congee is the salty pork and century egg combo but yes, the white pepper and the fried dough really makes it!*
>
> *(YaYa in Yee 14th May 2009)*

3. Tangible Things

The objects consumed may be the reason for the sacredness of a purchase. A visit to a shop famous for its macarons is also a foodie experience to collect before they depart Japan:

> *A visit to Pierre Herme to **worship at his temple** of macarons ... almost **tremor with excitement** when we are greeted by the gleaming glass cabinets beholding cream sandwiched yo-yos in a palate (sic) of pastels.*
>
> *(Yee 31st May 2007)*

Quasi-religious language is used here again – "worship at his temple", and "tremor with excitement". This is not just food for sustenance, it is more important than that.

4. Persons

The almost hagiographic reverence accorded to some chefs in the blogs could be described as bordering on sacredness, with almost anything being forgiven.

> *Marco Pierre White's reputation precedes him ... at age 33 he became the youngest chef to be awarded three Michelin stars ... chefs who have passed through his kitchen include Heston Blumenthal, Gordon Ramsay ... Antony Worrall-Thompson was quoted as saying "he's without equal in cooking. On the other hand he's an arsehole, but he knows that."*
>
> *(Yee 25th May 2011)*

5. Experiences

The sacred may take the individual's experience well outside of the normal (Belk et al. 1989). Yee describes her experience here as being liminal – she crosses over from being merely a diner to being in the "inner sanctum".

> ***Dining at a Chef's Table has always been my idea of bliss.** I'd much rather forgo the silver service of a dining room and be a fly on the wall of a restaurant's kitchen. It's here, in **the inner sanctum, that the true heart and soul of a restaurant** can be found ... this isn't just a glimpse of the kitchen, but **an intimate inclusion** in a live dinner service.*
>
> *(Yee 11th May 2011)*

This meal at the chef's table at *Bécasse* encouraged a post with forty-eight photographs and much description of each course of the degustation menu. It clearly created meaning for the blog's readers, as they discussed the food, the decor, the experience.

> *Every dish looks like it comes **straight out of a fairytale**. So beautiful.*
>
> *(Jen in Yee 11th May 2011)*

> *I'm just speechless after finishing reading this epic post. It's art on a plate and the attention to detail in **creating this dining escape is just out of this world.***
>
> *(Gianna@TheEmptyFridge in Yee 11th May 2011)*

Belk et al. (1989) suggest that consumption may involve a transcendent experience for the consumer involved. The language used in the blog post suggests an ecstatic state, akin to a religious experience. Furthermore, myths may surround the sacred, which are used to socialise new members of the community (Belk et al 1989).

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown how Helen Yee's blog *Grab Your Fork* provides evidence of both foodism and blogging as Serious Leisure pursuits. It has combined two pursuits which on face value would appear to be mutually exclusive. The Serious Leisure pursuits of foodism and blogging have been amalgamated to the point where the blogging activity drives the leisure pursuit of foodism and vice versa. The two activities co-exist, but would not have the same level of intensity or importance on the Serious Leisure scale without each other. They are in fact symbiotic. Helen's blog is about more than just discussing food, it is an important part of her life which she does for love, not money (Burgin, 2010) and she describes her *passion, eagerness to share, intensity* in her hobby.

The chapter has also discussed how the six characteristics of Serious Leisure can be demonstrated by the blog. Hedonic consumption has been discussed as a major element in a foodie's lifestyle, giving evidence of both historic and fantasy imagery as evidenced in the blog posts and comments. Examples of a number of extraordinary meal experiences have been given. Finally the chapter considered the concept of the Serious Leisure participant moving up the Career Ladder as part of a sacred, personal journey which gains momentum as the blog evolves. The personal journey was considered in terms of the six categories of Belk et al.'s (1989) theory of the sacred and the profane.

Chapter 6 catalogues and tracks the evolution of the identities of Helen Yee from fledgling blogger to community "high priestess". Her numerous identities as a Serious Leisure foodie, Serious Leisure blogger, and citizen journalist generate a level of change within her identity which will be discussed in detail, as well as Helen's ethno-cultural identity. The group identity of the *Grab Your Fork* virtual community will also be analysed and discussed in terms of Social Identity Theory. The significance of authenticity and whether it is actually achievable is also discussed at length, and the concept of the intertwining of authenticity and nostalgia is analysed.

Chapter 6: Identity, Authenticity and Language

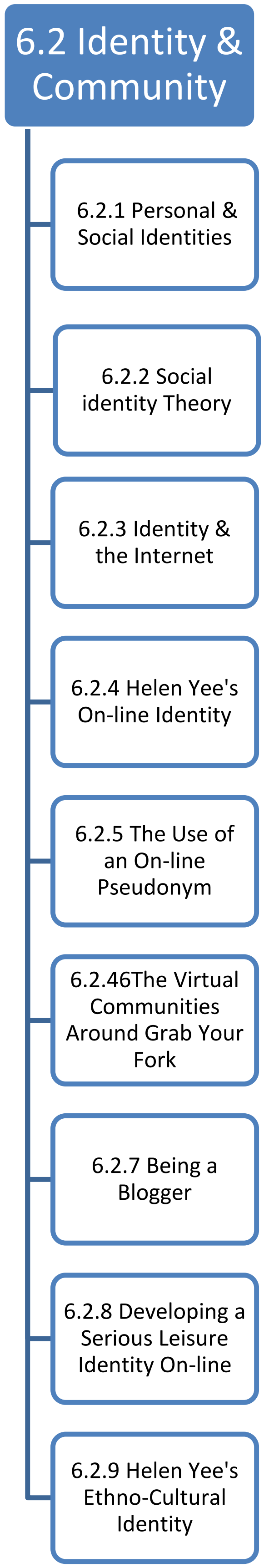
6.1 Introduction

Identity is defined and lived out through the purchase and consumption of products and services (Mittal, 2006). The concepts of identity and consumption converge in the systems of practices by which individuals classify themselves according to their consumption of purchases (Bourdieu, 1984), and whether such consumption is seen as more or less acceptable (Zukin & Maguire, 2004). Consumers have multiple identities. Mittal (2006) believes that the concept of self is under-explored in the consumer behaviour literature. There is also evidence to suggest that there is ambiguity and confusion on the precise conceptualization of self-concept in the literature (Sirgy, 1982). This second chapter of analysis will discuss various definitions of individual and group identity and self-concept, and analyse how these are revealed in the *Grab Your Fork* blog posts and comments.

6.2 Identity & Community

Under modernism, the concept of Cartesian Dualism assumes that we see ourselves as a separate body and mind. Burkitt (1999) draws the relevance of such a point of view into question however, suggesting that thought is merely an embodied social activity. This fits with the postmodern view that social relations may be fragmentary and disparate. Consumers play out their identities as a kind of performance, using the goods and services they purchase to enact their cultural scripts (Ahuvia et al. 2005), and constantly rate their potential purchases by asking themselves "Is this product *me*? (Mittal, 2006). Figure 6.1 outlines the themes to be discussed in this section.

Figure 6.1 Identity & Community



6.2. 1 Personal & Social Identities

The philosophical underpinning for distinguishing two types of identity - personal identities and social identity – lies with Mead (1912), but has been developed throughout the twentieth century (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Stryker, 1980). Personal identities are culturally recognised categories of humanity to which individuals see themselves belonging. A social identity comes about when other members of that category recognise the individual as a member of their group.

According to Stebbins (2009), this becomes relevant to consumption when people see themselves as a "competitive social consumer" or as having a "group consumer identity". Within the foodie community a level of kudos is afforded to a member whom has had a unique gastronomic experience that by its uniqueness precludes others within the group from the same experience. The more individual unique experiences a foodie collects, the greater the level of kudos afforded and the greater the associated elevation of status within the foodie community.

> *A limited-edition menu item? A gastronomic exclusive? **The competitive foodie in me emerges with salivary glands in overdrive**..... It quickly became clear that this soup, tonkotsu ramen, must be mine. The fact that its availability at Ichi Ban Bochi is limited makes me want it even more.*
>
> *(Yee 13th August 2005)*

The above quotation illustrates both the strict hierarchies within the foodie community and the mechanism by which foodies acquire an elevated status therein. This further supports the premise offered by Stebbins (1992) that the Serious Leisure activity provides both personal and social Durable Outcomes to the individual such as self-gratification, improvement of self-esteem, and the acquisition of a level of authority within the group. This may be however a double-edged sword, as it has the potential to alienate the individual enjoying the unique experiences from those within the community that are not as fortunate, possibly even leading to resentment.

As Jones (2000) makes clear, an individual's sense of identity is based strongly upon their Serious Leisure activities. Individuals who identify with being a foodie will make food purchase decisions in accordance with that identity (Ambrozas, 2003).

> *Thanks for bringing back some great memories of one of my best meals ever. Yes, I totally agree - non-foodies dont understand and cant imagine spending that much money on whats to them "just a meal". But boy oh boy, what a taste-fest! Each course was sublime, subtle.*
>
> *(runawaymind in Yee 6th April 2005)*

Ambrozas (2003) claims that the amateurs she interviewed did not see themselves as part of the foodie community; those who saw themselves as professionals, such as chefs, did. On the other hand, Helen Yee and her fellow food bloggers definitely self-identify as foodies.

> *... the great thing about meeting other foodbloggers. You know that these are* ***kindred spirits, foodie friends who just get it.***
>
> *(Yee 22nd October 2006)*

> *As a bit of a foodie and an avid traveller this [Helen's trip to Japan] was of keen interest to me as I am heading to Osaka/Kyoto/Tokyo with some American friends in the spring next year.*
>
> *(Amaya in Yee 22nd May 2007)*

6.2.2 Social Identity Theory

The traditional positivist, modernist conceptions of self in the consumer behaviour literature assume that we want to hide ourselves in private, behind the closed doors of modernist era thinking. A number of such theories of identity exist, but tend to be supported by quantitative research anchored in surface characteristics and the personality (Mittal, 2006). In other words it is a superficial view of images of self that does not provide for deeper understanding of why or how a purchase explains the consumer's identity.

Some elements identified by the consumer behaviour typical analysis include self-esteem and self-satisfaction. Whilst these have been identified by Stebbins (1992) as durable benefits that accrue as a result of participation in a Serious Leisure activity, this phenomenon may also be explained by other views of identity. The interpretivist literature, for example, has examined the deep relationships that consumers develop with their purchases, and possessions and the buying of experiences such as restaurant meals can be seen as instrumental to expressions of their identity and the transformation of such (Zukin & Maguire, 2004; Ahuvia et al. 2005; Mittal, 2006). According to Pietrykowski (2004) consumers adapt their product choices in response to the way others see them.

The Social Identity Perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is a social psychological theory that postulates that social identity is the individual's understanding that he or she belongs to a particular social group. The emotional significance and values attached to this understanding of self as a group member is what sets this theory apart from other theories of individuals in groups (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). This links to the concept of Serious Leisure in that in Social identity Theory, it is the self-confirmation as being an in-group member or out-group member that defines a person's definition of themelves (Shamir, 1992).

The community of consumption which has developed around *Grab Your Fork* is made up of self-defined foodies and self-defined food bloggers. They share values, beliefs, myths, understandings and language. This collective social identity can be located in space or place or time, even in the virtual reality of cyberspace. This collection of embodied individuals meeting in an online space-time location can still have social order and relationships (Jenkins, 1995). For example Helen and her friends have an unofficial dining group which they refer to as *Stomachs Eleven*, a pun on the 2001 comedy-crime caper movie "Oceans Eleven". Like the gang of thieves, Helen's foodie friends share a Serious Leisure interest.

> *Today's [weekend lunch] was a Stomachs Eleven meet-up, a group of food-loving friends who each take turns to host a dinner or lunch. Today we headed to the home of Silvrlily and Super Mario ... do I need to tell you we ate ourselves into a stupor?*
>
> *(Yee 18th February 2011)*

I adore reading these Stomachs Eleven eat-ins of yours – I'm always blown away by how much effort you guys put in for the art of food and eating. The terrine is stunning.

(Margaret Tran in Yee 18th February 2011)

Oh my goodness Helen, these lunches and dinners are becoming famous and deserve a blog by themselves with all the recipes. I'd be so nervous to host a lunch as the food standard is so high and the pressure to make something amazing would be so great.

(thanh7580 in Yee 18th February 2011)

Mr & Mrs Pig Flyin' recently invited the Stomachs Eleven crew to join them in one giant tuna extravaganza. We didn't need to be asked twice ... Pig Flyin' is apologetic about his sushi-making skills, but we can barely hear his protests over our collective cries of gastronomic joy.

(Yee 20th August 2012)

In keeping with her foodie identity, Yee prepares herself for a visit to a restaurant by looking to see if they have a website, and especially looking for a current menu to consider the food in advance.

I had already known what I was ordering before arriving at the restaurant. Intense scrutiny of their online website menu had me mentally ordering the rillettes and the seared veal liver without question.

(Yee 31st March 2006)

Foodie tribes (Mafesoli 1996) based around skilled amateur reviews illustrate the democratisation of content creation and criticism (Lichtenberg, 2007). For example, compare Helen's reflections on how she thought about classic French food as a child, and how she now sees multi-cultural Australian eating.

As a child I remember thinking about French food as being ***exotic, sophisticated and only for rich people****. French food, I was sure, came with crisp white starched tablecloths, heavy with silver cutlery, and food cooked in heavy rich sauces, with, ewww, wine.*

(Yee 2006)

Nietzsche (1957) discusses the concepts of precept and percept in regards to class distinctions. The precept is that "you are what you eat", and thus the consumption of esoteric or sophisticated food conveys the projected image of a particular class level. The percept is that people who consume the esoteric or sophisticated foods are *ipso facto* of a commensurate class. Bourdieu (1984) argued that what matters is not *what* one eats, but the aesthetic disposition used to approach food. Cairns et al. (2010) suggest that foodies are from a relatively privileged class of food consumers and therefore approach food in a particular way. That she was able to eat in French restaurants, even as a child suggests that Helen Yee comes from a relatively wealthy background, even though she suggests that French food is only for "rich people", and presumably she does not include herself in this category. This highlights the importance of class and habitus in shaping people's behaviour (Bourdieu, 1984). Holt (1997b), however, suggests that the differences are not so much between "upper" and "lower" classes; rather it is a matter of the cultivation of tastes within a social milieu, and the understanding of those differences, which is clearly explained in Yee's childhood understanding of French cusine.

Even though Yee appears to be criticising bourgeois French food in the above quote, she is revealing her level of cultural capital, which even at that age told her that French dining had certain defining elements, such as white linen, silver cutlery and heavy wine-based sauces; she may not have enjoyed eating such food, but she was aware of it's existence. Her comments below, from the same post however, discuss how eating in Sydney for people of her class has changed since her childhood. Multiculturalism has brought the concept of a fresher, lighter fusion cuisine to Australia. Sushi and fish and chips are discussed in the same sentence. Fish and chips is no longer seen as the newspaper-wrapped Friday night staple of the lower classes as it was in the 1960s and 1970s of this author's childhood. This is further supported by the allure of the upmarket Doyle's Restaurant, which specialises in fish and chips.

> *The Sydney Fish Markets have always been a favourite foodie haunt of mine ... fresh salmon or live sea urchin for home-made sushi, or perhaps some tentacle friends for sticky chilli baby octopus ... watch the oyster shuckers prise open dozen-upon-dozen of reluctant molluscs ... when hunting down lunch I find it hard to resist good ol' fish and chips.*
>
> *(Yee 20th August 2005)*

Cultural capital is infused into family members by parents in those areas in which that form of taste is deemed to be important. If food consumption and eating habits are seen as important within the social group in which the family moves, then this taste will be passed on (Holt, 1997b).

6.2.3 Identity and the Internet

Identity play on the Internet has been well documented (Hine, 2000). In an environment such as a blog which is mostly text-based, it is difficult to know if the author is who they claim to be: male or female, whether their online name is a pseudonym or not. The Internet is a perfect space in which people can deliberately play with their identities; it offers visual anonymity, and there is no guarantee that the identities performed in the online world echo those of offline settings (Hine, 2000). Hine also comments that whether the identities she encountered in her research were "authentic" or not, they were sustained (Hine, 2000). Zwick and Dholakia (2004) argue that cyberspace creates new forms of empowerment for an individual, freeing them from the confines of the physical body. Nakamura (2002) refers to this as "identity tourism". This provides the individual with the opportunity to act out different roles at different spaces and times. An online pseudonym or persona allows the contributor to portray the image that they wish others to believe of them, yet to have the freedom to consume a meal which could be described as being at the opposite end of the spectrum to that about which he is blogging without fear of ridicule by the group. It is acceptable to eat a bag of chips when no-body knows who you purport to be. Identity tourism is a symptom of wider postmodern cultural shifts such as fragmentation of the self and decentring of the subject (Hine, 2000). Virtual selves may be also seen as "liquid identities" (Cova, 1997 p. 304). Su et al. (2005) conducted a world-wide study of bloggers and found that the global blogging community is dominated by an Internet culture.

Contributors to message boards and blogs can use pseudonyms and give no detail of their identity, age or gender and indeed the online name they give themselves may be part of an alternative identity that exists only online (Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2002). However, this can also be seen as an advantage. As Langer and Beckman (2005) say, the opportunity to masquerade and to cover their identities allows contributors to express attitudes, opinions, and experiences freely. This enables researchers to study these messages in order to gain deeper insights into consumption motives, concerns, and experiences. While informants may be withholding their identity and presenting a controlled self-image, Kozinets argues that it is the "game" (the act, type and content of the posting) that is the relevant data.

6.2.4 Helen Yee's Online Identity

When her blog was initially set up, Helen Yee tended to refer to herself as *Augustus Gloop* (or AG for short). This explained in her post of 9th October 2005 entitled *Would the real AG please stand up?* Her online pseudonym is a greedy, male character from Roald Dahl's book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. She is close friends with another Sydney food blogger who has taken the pseudonym *Veruca Salt*, also a character from the novel. As she explains:

> *Augustus Gloop was a taunt we used at the dinner table for anyone starting on the third helping at dinner. Augustus Gloop's love of food (well chocolate really) seemed like the perfect alias for a food blogger.*
>
> *(Yee 9th October 2005)*

To have grown up with an English-language book such as this as a child rather belies Helen's "Asianness" - and Veruca's background is *Vietnamese-Australian* (Yee 11th March 2011).[4]

> *I adore a homemade family feast. Large communal eating gatherings are a strong part of "ethnic" cultures ... celebratory feasts with the family of Veruca Salt are all this and more ... soon we were feasting on a series of tasty Vietnamese dishes.*
>
> *(Yee 22nd July 2006)*

[4] In Vietnam Chinese New Year is also celebrated, but is known as the Tet Festival.

Interestingly, Helen Yee has never shown her full face on the blog. There is a photo of her on the blog's *About Grab Your Fork* page (Yee 10th October 2005) but it only shows the lower half of her face. It is even unclear from the photograph which racial background she comes from- whether she is indeed Australian-born Chinese as she claims to be.

Figure 6.2 The Real AG

Source: (Yee 10th October 2005)

Here is another foodie identity for Helen – the little child with a smorgasbord of treats to choose from. As time has gone on, however, AG has retreated into the background and Helen herself has come more to the fore. In this case she is using her normal adult foodie identity. Sometimes she cooks, sometimes she eats out. Helen has developed her writing to the point where she writes regularly for food publications on a freelance basis. Indeed, an alternative way of considering blog writing is to see them as a form of citizen journalism (Bruns, 2007), which is typical of web 2.0 user generated content. According to Lenhart and Fox (2006) thirty-four percent of bloggers self-define as journalists; the remainder do not. Of these journalistic-type activities, most time was spent by bloggers verifying facts and including links to their source material. Helen goes to great detail to amend errors and to notify readers when a review relates to a shop or restaurant which has since closed or moved premises. This shows her identity developing from an amateur blogger, or citizen journalist (Bruns, 2007) into a professional writer in some areas of her life. She does still, however, maintain a full-time job outside these spheres, and continues to blog as a Serious Leisure pursuit.

For Helen, her devotion to her Serious Leisure activity is a Central Life Interest (Stebbins, 1996) that forms another part of her personal and communal identity. When asked if she works in the hospitality industry or as journalist, Yee comments that she is not either professionally – she works in an office (Yee, 2006c).

> *I blog purely out of interest (my tastebuds, my digestion, my insatiable greed) and have no connection to the food industry, except of course, as a gluttonous customer.*
>
> *(Yee 2006)*

This then is another identity – the business professional. As she now mostly has reverted to using her own name, this shows that she is clearly female. Presumably when she uses the term AG she now is suggesting that she is more than usually gluttonous, or that she wants to hide behind the identity of the pseudonym for some reason.

6.2.5 The Use of an Online Pseudonym

The use of a pseudonym, not showing what she actually looks like, and self-objectification are potentially the effects of late modernism on the blogger. Although blogging is indeed a postmodern leisure activity, Helen Yee still wishes some aspects of her identity to be kept private. This is typical of the disciplined and concealed body that Western culture has become used to since the Renaissance (Burkitt, 1999). In attempting to reconcile her private self with the sensually laden descriptions and photographs in her blog, Yee hides behind the persona of Augustus Gloop, only emerging into the full light of day as Helen in later posts when she is more comfortable with her role as a blogger. A number of the readers comment on the use of the pseudonym, and how it has altered their assumptions about who Yee is, and about how they relate to her blog posts.

> *Wow, for some reason I totally thought that you were a guy, hook, line and sinker. I have no idea why. Maybe it was the alias.*
>
> *(Kris in Yee 9th October 2005)*

> *Well I was fooled. What a great revelation. (And how cool is it that one of your readers is Veruca Salt?)*
>
> *(cookiecrumb in Yee 9th October 2005)*

> *Hi cookiecrumb. Heh – glad you enjoyed the post. Veruca is actually a good friend of mine. A perfect foodie partner-in-crime.*
>
> *(Yee 9th October 2005)*

6.2.6 The Virtual Community around Grab Your Fork

For Helen Yee her identity is not just about being a blogger, but being part of a wider foodie community; the interaction with other bloggers and readers, the fact that there is a foodie tribe which shares her Serious Leisure interest.

> *What's so great about food blogging?*
>
> ***The community aspect** of food blogging provides me with **infinite rewards.** I enjoy generating content but the **real joy is what happens after you post it online.** The food blogging community is a tight-knit group of people who are supportive and friendly, and have provided me with **a network of like-minded enthusiasts**, many of whom have now become my closest friends. And then there's **the engagement with readers** – many of whom have been following Grab Your Fork for several years. The blogosphere has been likened to an international water cooler; **a place for food lovers to meet and discuss** last night's dinner, share tips and secrets, **and revel in the fact that there are people out there just as food- obsessed as we are!***
>
> *(Yee 15th April 2011)*

Other foodies, who may not be bloggers, also share their expertise in the form of comments to Yee's posts. In some instances these may be

Suggestions for a recipe, or a particular restaurant. The following exchange occurred whilst Yee was travelling in Japan:

> *Not sure if you'll be in Kyoto during your trip, but I heartily recommend Tagoto (*http://www.kyoto-tagoto.jp/index-e.html*) for a reasonably priced kaiseki. I'm living in Tokyo at the moment.*
>
> *(Cass in Yee 5th August 2007)*

> *We treated ourselves to a kaiseki dinner at Tagoto Meigetsuan, a restaurant kindly recommended by Cass yesterday (thanks! That was perfect timing!)*
>
> *(Yee 5th August 2007)*

A second important aspect of virtual community life is lending emotional support through empathising with other members. When a print article in the *Saturday Daily Telegraph* in Sydney entitled *The Secret World of Culinary Bloggers* sparked outrage in the food blogger community Yee posted a copy of the article, and asked her readers to comment.

> *…a somewhat odd title given the very public sphere in which we publish the minutiae of our lives and meals.*
>
> *(Yee 24th January 2011)*

She was inundated with responses – fifty-one responses in just one day, and eighty within two weeks. The responses were mixed, but mostly supportive of food blogs and gave their reasons for reading them, in particular *Grab Your Fork*. Many of the responses were from people who were not regular posters, and the comments were generally long, thoughtful and detailed.

Online communities tend to be self governing; some types of community post rules of etiquette for example. Blogs have two types of formal control as well as informal, or unwritten rules, such as not "flaming" the author or other commenters. As blogs are set up as an individual website on an existing platform, there are site administrators who will remove or censor such items as offensive language or pornographic material. The blog author also has the opportunity to remove comments that are inappropriate. In response to Yee's post regarding the *Saturday Daily Telegraph* article, the administrator removed two comments by anonymous readers, and a comment by Alwaysozmatt, who is a blogger himself, was removed by

Helen. A second comment however, was allowed to stand. These are the first reader comments ever deleted from *Grab Your Fork.*

> *Dear all, There has been plenty of heated discussion on this post, and after some consideration I have elected to delete comments that I think are inappropriate in this forum. Discussion and debate is critical, but so too is upholding our own standards of professionalism and respect.*
>
> *(Yee 24th January 2011)*

> *I read all sorts of blogs, including food ones. Why? The* ***individual voice, the quirky style, the interesting take,*** *the fantastic photos,* ***the flexibility of it all*** *... There is an* ***immediacy and freshness*** *to blogging. Most of the time there are NO ADs. You could say there is an element of voyeurism too - what are OTHER people doing/eating/reading? Where do I fit in the picture? And* ***I feel I connect - that is paramount. It's not called social media for nothing.***
>
> *(Kate in Yee 24th January 2011)*

> *... a lot of the blogs I read (and which I myself write) ... are about* ***the person, the personality, and the community*** *behind the bare bones assessment of food ... your travel posts are* ***wonderful escapism*** *for me, the recipes are fun, the Sydney posts encourage me to visit...*
>
> *(Hannah in Yee 24th January 2011)*

It is clear from the above two quotes that the social interaction is at least as important as the food aspects of the blog for many readers. For many members of the community *Grab Your Fork* is an information exchange:

> *Have you been to Windows Cafe on Chapel St South at Bankstown yet? ...best ca phe sua da outside Vietnam and great sticky rice.*
>
> *(Ana in Yee 22nd November 2010)*

For some readers *Grab Your Fork* is an important source of information regarding their restaurant choices.

> *I would say that around* ***90% of the restaurants I go to are chosen after hearing about them on a food blog such as yours,*** *Helen. I'm not very well-travelled within Sydney even though it has been my home for more than 10 years, and as such* ***I pick restaurants through word-of-mouth or after learning of them through the food blogosphere grapevine****. In fact, I've come to depend on food blogs to the point where I won't try out a restaurant without researching it first by looking at food blog reviews.*
>
> *(Anonymous in Yee 24th January 2011)*

Kozinets et al. (2010a) note that as the Internet's accessibility, reach and transparency have increased electronic word of mouth has become an important source of promotion for all types of businesses. Whereas traditional word of mouth transmission was seen as organic, and person to person, messages now do not flow uni-directionally but are exchanged within the consumer network. Furthermore, consumers who search for online restaurant reviews are also likely to check to see if the restaurant itself has a website, and look for a menu, pictures and potentially even videos which will give them an anticipatory guide to the experience offered by the establishment (Pantelidis, 2010).

> *Everyday I receive about 30 email press releases. I probably get invited to a dozen events every week. Increasingly I find myself more and more selective about which events I choose to attend, particularly as I hold down a full-time job and also undertake freelance writing assignments ... I am likely to only accept invitations from events that I am genuinely interested in ... what I won't do is regurgitate press releases as cheap copy, or wax lyrical about something I don't believe in.*
>
> *(Yee 27th June 2011)*

Two years earlier, this very question had been raised by a commenter:

> *I don't want to sound too negative but surely as a guest of Bécasse* ***your objectivity is compromised?*** *I enjoy your blog but you almost never seem to have a bad word to say to about any restaurant and being a non paying guest must surely take the cake for dulling your "critic" senses. I love Bécasse, it's a great restaurant and I've never had a bad dish there, let alone a bad meal but ... you get my drift I'm sure. So do you aim to be a food writer rather than a critic? You have posted about another Bécasse dinner fairly recently as well -* ***are you in danger of becoming their tame foodie blogger do you think?***
>
> *(Stuart in Yee 3rd September 2009)*

These posts highlight the potential for the blogger's integrity and personal objectivity to be compromised and perhaps even blurred should they review a corporate promotion, leaving them open to attack and loss of status within the community.

Helen Yee's response was to point Stuart to the "About" page of her blog (10th October, 2005), wherein she states that her posts are personal and subjective; she doesn't claim to be a restaurant reviewer. Considering subsequent developments within the blog and indeed her paid publishing activities between 2005 and 2012, Yee's "About" page is misrepresentative, as it can longer be simply described as a personal journal. As Yee has climbed the Serious Leisure career ladder, her claims seem somewhat disingenuous given the large following *Grab Your Fork* has attracted, and comments from community members such as the anonymous commenter above who claims that up to ninety percent of his or her eating out choices are made with reference to the blog.

> *Hi Stuart ... I do believe in full disclosure so i make an effort to always provide details of free meals. I'm interested in food writing in general – if I were to adequately perform the role of a food critic, I think multiple visits would be mandatory, something which I can't afford at the moment ... I like to think my posts act as a catalyst for others to explore restaurants, cuisines or areas of town new to people. Because really its all about sharing food with good mates.*
>
> *(Yee 3rd September 2009)*

Virtual communities evangelise for members in the same way that religions do – by sharing the "good news". *Grab Your Fork*, like virtually all blogs, contains a blogroll, a list of other blogs that the author admires, or are written by friends. On the information panel on the right hand side of the *Grab Your Fork* page Yee lists a complete list of Sydney food blogs, and favourite food blogs by region – Australia, Asia, Europe, Canada and America, and specialist photography food blogs. She also belongs to the Australian Foodbloggers Ring, where a reader can skip from site to site within a larger community of blogs on the same theme.

Food bloggers may also be involved in trying to get the population to try new cuisines, although in the case of Yee's readers this is probably preaching to the converted. An example of such a promotion was *Malaysia Kitchen*, a three day *al fresco* food fair which was part of a global marketing campaign, with events already held in London and New York.

> *It will cost you ten dollars to enter, but then you simply head straight through for a hawker-inspired meal, supplied by some of Sydney's best Malaysian restaurants. The collage of luscious food photos, plastered all down the corridor, will undoubtedly whet your appetite. The media preview event on Tuesday night showcased plenty of authentic dishes, starting with roving canapes that included kueh pie tee, otak otak and satay.*
>
> *(Yee 16th February 2011)*

Several issues are raised by posts such as this. Helen Yee is keen to promote Malaysian cuisine, and her post gives links to reviews of various Malaysian restaurants she has previously visited. However she has accepted a free invitation to the media night of the event, where things apparently work out perfectly. The celebrity diners are also treated to a traditional Malaysian dessert which will not be available to the paying guests. Things did not work out so well for some of her readers.

> ***I was soooooo disappointed with this****. I stood in line for over 45 mins only for security to put a rope across the line 5 people ahead of me. That's it, all over. No point staying in line anymore cause* ***they arent going to accept any more people.*** *You'd think after being in New York and London, that this would be better managed. But sorely, no.*
>
> *(Anonymous in Yee 16th February 2011)*

Another aspect of online community culture is deploying rationales generally for devoting such time and effort to the topic in question. This can be broken up into two areas. Firstly Yee and her food blogger friends justify their involvement in their Serious Leisure activity of being citizen journalists specialising in foodism. These situations can be understood by applying the Six Characteristics of Serious Leisure to them. Devoting considerable time and effort to writing a blog is exemplified in Perseverance Through Adversity, and Significant Personal Effort. These two elements then lead the individual to the personal and social rewards of Durable Benefits (Stebbins, 1992). On the other hand the readers of the blogs justify their interest that makes them foodies through the concepts of the Importance of Group Membership, and the Unique Ethos within the foodie sub-culture (Stebbins, 1992).

As previously discussed, foodies feel the need to justify to those outside of the community spending a large amount of money on a meal, booking far in advance, or travelling out of the way for the meal experience. They also seem to need to justify to each other that they have made the effort to find the "authentic" foodie option, or the most prestigious.

> *We had much more fun that night back at Phuket,* ***bypassing the tourist trap restaurants and collecting our own makeshift dinner from the food stalls on the street.***
> *(Yee 18th May 2011)*

> *What an amazing experience. Did you happen to finish with coffee? They're serving the incredible Bin 35 Mountain Top estate Australian bean.*
> http://www.facebook.com/singleoriginroasters
> *(Nick in Yee 11th May 2011)*

Another example of the virtual community's engagement is recognising variance within the community. Not all members will like the same cuisines for example. Helen Yee, being an *Australian-Born Chinese* has been brought up with different foods that she accepts as quite normal.

> *If there are three particular idiosyncrasies about Asian palates it's our love of* **bones, skin and fat**. *(her emphasis)*
> *(Yee 2nd February 2006)*

> ***....is congee not the cure for all evils****? The Chinese version of chicken soup for when you're sick or under the weather? Or perhaps sad because you've missed out on late night roti?*
> *(Yee 14th May 2009)*

A fellow Australian of British or Italian heritage will have a food background at variance to this. Their social identity as a foodie is based on sharing myths, values, an interpretative repertoire, and behaviours which cross ethnic boundaries. Of course, personal taste comes into the equation too, but within the foodie community no-one is derided for their tastes. Individuals may express an opinion, a preference, dislike or perhaps recommend new tastes to others, but the variance and diversity within this community is well accepted. They will not be censured for those offerings, although a joking comment may be made as below.

> *Hi Reid, You don't like onions? Mondieu! The onions are essential to this dish. They add sweetness to the potatoes which is irresistible. I don't know how I'd live without caramelised onions!*
>
> *(Yee 25th June 2005)*

Reid has previously been identified as on the periphery of the foodie community by his rejection of the *Tetsuya's* experience as not being worth the money, but Yee does not reject him outright. Sometimes there is banter between Yee and those who comment on her posts.

> *We only had eyes for one thing though: Good pho. We were hungry. And we needed it now.*
>
> *(Yee 23rd June 2005)*
>
> *noooo you should have had the 5 spice goat noodle soup! *sigh**
>
> *(Clare Eats in Yee 23rd June 2005)*

Communities celebrate seminal events, and often translate those milestones into symbols, which is known as "badging", particularly in on-line communities (Antin & Churchill, 2011). When awarded by your peers, badging is the ultimate recognition of status and standing in the peer group. This provides the individual with a sense of competence in executing the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990; Stebbins, 2010), which can have the effect of elevating the recipient from mere contributor to mentor, both in their own perceptions, and those of the group. Badges can also help identify a group with similar interests (Antin & Churchill, 2011).

Events may be obvious milestones like the one thousandth post of *Grab Your Fork*:

Congratulations dear reader, you are officially reading the 1000th post by Grab Your Fork. It's been five years and what a delicious ride it's been.

Happy Australia Day,
Happy Chinese New Year,
and Happy 1,000 Posts for all Grab Your Fork readers!

(Yee 26th January 2009)

Others may be self-actualising as in this case. The occasion of her birthday has given Helen a reason and opportunity to make a post of a specifically personal nature:

Let there be pig. It was my birthday last week and I couldn't think of a better way to celebrate than with a whole porchetta ... I can't think of a better way to celebrate a birthday than with dear friends and good food ... "The pig's head is for the birthday girl!" staff declare. What they don't realise is that everyone is keen for some pig head action, with an ear broken off here, and a cheek scooped out there.

(Yee 22nd November 2010)

The badging and recognition therefrom is not necessarily restricted to the recipient's own immediate social group. Peter G @ Souvlaki is also a food blogger but not one of Helen Yee's intimates. Recognition from outside of one's immediate circle may carry more weight and with it more kudos than similar recognition from within.

Happy birthday "doyenne" of the food blogging community.
(Peter G @ Souvlaki for the Soul in Yee 22nd November 2010)

This author is aware of a foodie whose greatest desire is to eat at every Michelin starred restaurant in the UK, and is ticking them off in his Red Guide (Gary Tuffy *pers. comm.* 2010) as a personal form of badging. On the other hand, it can be as simple as sharing a new and untried food combination or ingredient.

If life is marked by epiphanies, then this is one of mine. The deep-fried pickle. Oh god yes. It's the glorious combination of crunchy batter wrapped around a pickled gherkin. Ingenious.

(Yee 23rd April 2012)

Community engagement with the narrative, and documenting it, is anchored by and peppered with milestones. Participation within the blogosphere can extend and diversify the interest into areas which although strictly speaking are not directly food-related are pertinent by association, such as the history of a contemporary venue:

> *Just googled 312 Elizabeth St and came up with this link to a soldiers WW1 Records. Turns out he was the cook at the Oceanic in 1916 when he joined the AIF and went off to the war in Europe. I am trying to track down more records and hopefully will get a copy to the present owners* http://www.aif.adfa.edu.au:8080/showPerson?pid=211509
>
> *(Peter in Yee 1st July 2007)*

> *Hi Peter - Wow, what a great bit of research. Now the name starts to make sense (and increase its sentimentality!). Do keep me posted on any further info you find. All this trivia endears the cafe to me even more!*
>
> *(Yee 1st July 2007)*

In this example, although Peter's post is not directly related to food, it displays a level of local community interest that has been kindled by a sideline in one of Yee's earlier posts. The sociological interest raised here may entice readers to visit the *Oceanic Cafe* for historical interest reasons, and sample the food as a secondary activity.

6.2.7 Being a Blogger

Most published research on bloggers is from the United States (e.g. Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Su et al. 2005). There are some surveys that are worldwide, such as the technorati research (2008, 2011). This research suggests that whilst bloggers are a varied group, they tend to be affluent and well educated. Some blogs are personal diaries, some an opportunity to give voice to political or ideological beliefs, or to share within a community (Huang et al. 2007). The typical characteristic is that a blog is about ideas.

Yee's interaction with other food bloggers has taken the leap from being a virtual community to meeting up for special foodie events, whether locally in Sydney or when she is travelling.

One of the best things about having a food blog is meeting other food bloggers. People who are similarly ***passionate about what they consume, who showcase amazing feats of culinary creativity****, and who share it all so* ***willingly and with such dedication*** *for the* ***visual hedonistic enjoyment of passing strangers.***

(Yee 3rd July 2005)

Last week a couple of us hosted our second Sydney foodbloggers yum cha[5]*. Our first one had been held in February, only six months ago, but that's like, almost a lifetime in the blogosphere! Sydney foodbloggers now number a hefty ten although I'm sure there are more I'm about to discover.*

Me: *I'm really tired. I don't think I can be bothered to take photos.*
Pinkcocoa: *Me too. I'm tired.*
Saffron: *I'm only going to take photos of the dishes I don't already have photos of.*

Me: *(As I remove my camera from my bag) Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. I mean, I've already posted on East Ocean's yum cha before.*
Pinkcocoa: *(as she snaps a quick photo) I took all the photos last time.*
Me: *(as I take a photo) It's too much effort.*
Saffron: *(as she rotates dish for a better camera angle) Yeah, i know.*
Me: *(as I rotate the dish again) let me just take another quick photo. I won't be long I promise.*

sigh
Once a foodblogger always a foodblogger.

(Yee 27th August 2005)

On her visit to New York in 2005 Helen meets up with another food blogger:

Meeting up with other food bloggers is always fun ... you know you will have tooooooonnnes in common: there'll be restaurant gossip, foodie musings, unashamed dessert pinings, and whenever there's food, there'll be a simultaneous reach for the camera. I met Robyn today for the first time, a New York City food blogger whose foodie adventures I've been following for some time.

(Yee 16th December 2005)

[5] Yum Cha is known as Dim Sum in the UK.

At a meet up of Sydney food bloggers at a food festival, one of the attendees exclaims:

> *This is just so fantastic. It's like … **I've finally found my tribe**, you know?*
>
> *(Julia in Yee 22nd October 2006)*

For Julia, membership of the group of bloggers is her Central Life Interest (Stebbins, 1994), a tribe (Maffesoli, 1996) where she feels understood. The bloggers take photos of their meals and the festival stalls, but not of important aspects of the event or each other. Taracaini (2007) explains how this postmodern act relates to blogs: given fragmentation and pluralism, the world is seen as being in flux, transient. Blogs therefore create new forms of expression, and the blog brings a focus to the individual's identity – a community and cultural experiences within that community which reaffirm their identity. Yee points out that most food bloggers pursue their "passion" out of work hours, with "bewildering intensity" because they are

> *...**driven by a sense of community, of an eagerness to share, and an unabated love and appreciation of food.***
>
> *(Yee 27th January 2010)*

This confirms her hobbyist status in Stebbins's (1992) sense of the term, as highlighted in her perseverance in the activity and unique ethos displayed.

For many of the interviewees in Ambrozas's (2003) research, international travel had impacted on their interest in food. This is certainly true in Helen's case. She had studied the Japanese language at school and has made several visits to Japan, blogging daily about the sights she has seen, but mostly about the food (September, 2004; May, 2007; and February, 2010). For most of us a vacation would be an opportunity to take time away from normal daily activities and relax. For Helen, however, the food aspect of her vacation is paramount and she feels compelled to blog about it, even whilst she is travelling.

6.3 Developing a Serious Leisure Identity Online

Schau et al. (2009) suggest that virtual communities provide a number of benefits to their members, such as welcoming new members, empathising with each other, governing etiquette within the community, evangelising for new members, justifying their own existence, documenting community engagement, and marking milestones. Serious Leisure develops over four distinct phases (Stebbins, 1992; Jones, 2006) as discussed in depth in section 3.9.

- Pre-socialisation
- Recruitment
- Socialisation
- Identity Confirmation

In the Pre-Socialisation phase, the participant is gathering information about the pursuit as an individual without, necessarily, direct interaction with other people. During this phase, the participant formulates opinions and values about the pursuit that are founded on their own experiences (Jones, 2006). These experiences could be attained by physical activity, such as attending a foodie event, or by lurking on a blog and attaining them vicariously as *Lillaflicka* does until she posts as in the quote below.

> *Have been reading the blog for a while but this is my first post.*
> *One of my favourite sites ☺*
> *(Lillaflicka in Yee 2nd March 2007)*

In the Recruitment phase, the participant takes their knowledge and ventures into the realm of the group to which they aspire to become members; by associating with the group, albeit peripherally at first, they assume a social identity that develops over time (Jones, 2006). They may even be invited to join the group; as more people become involved, the small group evolves into a larger community. In *Grab Your Fork*, if a commenter mentions that this is their first post, sometimes after many months of lurking, Helen personally welcomes them to the community. *Lillaflicka* is rewarded for taking the step of commenting, for entering the social world of the on-line community of *Grab Your Fork.* This is the beginning of the socialisation of a "newbie" (Nieckarz, 2005; Kozinets, 2010b). Yee is kind and patient with new members, as in here, where she welcomes the newbie.

> *Hi Lillaflicka ... thanks for posting your first comment! It only gets easier!*
>
> *(Yee 2nd March 2007)*

Helen Yee knows that a Serious Leisure pursuit takes time and perseverance (Stebbins, 1992), however, she is easing the newbie through the recruitment phase with encouragement.

The third stage is the socialization stage, which is an ongoing process in which knowledge is gained regarding the roles, norms and values associated with a Serious Leisure activity (Jones, 2006). When the Socialisation phase is activated, increased participation in discussions, the offering of opinions and personal knowledge becomes a vehicle towards acceptance by other, more established members of the community. The newbie soon starts to contribute their own knowledge to the discussion about food outlets:

> *Janny's Cakes relocated to Ashfield. I had only recenltly discovered them when they shut down, and had been regularly venturing there for fried combination dumplings (mmmmmm), red bean dumplings and cocktail buns (which I had decided were the best in Chinatown). Might have to make the effort to get to Ashfield :)*
>
> *(lillaflicka in Yee 5th July 2007)*

Lillaflicka became a regular commenter over the next few years.

When Blogger, the boundaried blog community (White, 2006) on which *Grab Your Fork* is hosted, chose Yee's site as their "blog of the day", the number of viewers clicking through to her blog increased by a huge number. In addition, some of these new readers stayed to become regular members of the community.

Whoah. Grab Your Fork is today's Blog of Note compiled by the team at Blogger. No wonder my hit rate has just quintupled. Thanks Blogger! You guys rock! New here? Welcome. Hope you stick around ☺

(Yee 30th May 2007)

Acceptance is a pre-requisite for self actualisation and progression up the Serious Leisure career ladder (Stebbins, 1992). As Taricani (2007) notes the more involved the individual in their group membership, the stronger the social identity becomes. Once members have made tentative footsteps into community engagement, they are encouraged and beckoned into the fold both by Yee and her readers.

Hi Butters - Welcome to the world of food blogging! It's a tasty journey. Bon Appetit!

(Yee 30th May 2007)

This community socialization is an important part in being accepted into the community. *Suzie* in fact became a food blogger herself.

Thanks for the inspiration you give to newbie bloggers like me.

(Suzie in Yee 26th January 2009)

Hi Suzie, Ahh as the tortoise and the hare ... slowly but surely. Great to see more food bloggers joining the ranks. We can always do with more!

(Yee 26th January 2009)

Yee recognised the commenter below at a function, as she is the well-known Australian television personality Indira Naidoo. Ms Naidoo also has a hobby food blog. Helen welcomes her to the community.

Hi Miss Grab Your Fork, It was lovely meeting you at the Becasse dinner after following your blog for most of the year. You really are an inspiring blogger. Such wonderful imagery, evocative writing ... all done with passion and integrity. Happy eating until our paths next cross!

(dearIndira in Yee 3rd September 2009)

Hi Indira - It was such a pleasure meeting you too, and thank you so much for your very kind words. You make me blush! Am looking forward to seeing you on Celebrity Masterchef and I'll be cheering for you all the way!

(Yee 3rd September 2009)

This is illustrative that traditional media celebrity and the associated fame does not necessarily confer automatic status or authority within the blogosphere. Indira Naidoo being welcomed by Helen Yee in this manner reaffirms that Yee has a more senior hierarchical position and is even perhaps more authoritative within the microcosm of the foodie community and the blogger community.

The socialisation phase is on-going and long-term, and is where individuals learn the unique ethos (Stebbins, 1992) of the group: their role within the group, the norms, values, appropriate behaviours and terminology of used (Jones, 2006). To a foodie, food is more than just re-fuelling: it provides meaning in a social situation. Language is also important, and has two primary functions in human life: it is a framework upon which we hang the performance of our social activities, and how we regulate our cultural and social relationships (Gee, 1999). The words we choose to use when speaking or writing show our particular perspective of the world, reflecting our membership of particular communities, and their specific understanding of those terms. As we create sentences we also create context.

The terminology or language-in-use (Gee, 1999) of a group can also be referred to as their interpretative repertoire (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1985). According to Hall (2001) nothing which is meaningful exists outside a discourse. It is clear that the community of consumption around *Grab Your Fork* are familiar with the discourse of culinary terms in Helen Yee's blog. For example in the quote below there is an assumption that the reader will be familiar with the term "Nyonya cuisine", which is a spicy style of cooking introduced to Malaysia by Chinese immigrants in the 15th century.

> *Florence is one of Malaysia's most well known chefs, particularly recognised for her expertise in* ***Nyonya cuisine***
> *(Yee 8th June, 2011)*

On a trip to Japan, Yee gives a restaurant review that discusses a locally traditional dish. Here again, it is assumed that the reader will be aware of not only the Japanese name for the dish, but that it is a typical dish from the Osaka region:

> *Dinner in Osaka?* ***It has to be okonomiyaki****...often called Japanese pizza...condiment of sancho pepper, ground seaweed and* ***bonito flakes*** *are added as you please.*
>
> *(Yee 10th March 2010)*

This "social language" (Gee, 1999) has special meanings for its users, and put together with other aspects of a community, such as actions, values, beliefs adds to the creation of identity (Burkitt, 1999). For example, foodism only exists meaningfully within the discourse of food. There are statements about foodism which provide the boundaries of its rules, and the subjects who personify foodism are foodies. The post on 25th March, 2006 mentions "a true French *galette*" without a need to explain the term to the audience. The Tetsuya's post (Yee 6th April, 2005) contains terms like confit, konbu, wagu beef, quenelle none of which are explained, and assume a certain level of knowledge by the reader.

The fourth stage of identity confirmation is also a long-term and on-going one (Jones, 2006). As discussed in section 3.9, the value of the experience is meaning created by both the individual and their tribe. The members of the foodie community use their experiences, as posted on blogs, to construct their self-identity. The members of the foodie community discuss the rituals of food and cooking, and confirm each others' attitudes, with their experiences at the heart of it. Having progressed within the community the self – identification of group membership is reaffirmed by other established members. This enables them to collectively construct their shared identity. According to Jones (2006) such a collective identity is important to the individual's membership of a sub-culture. The positioning of the individual within the interdependencies of the social group is highlighted using the system of socially created signs, symbols and discourse (Cova & Cova, 2001; Burkitt, 1999). As noted by Shamir (1992), social identity links clearly to Serious Leisure; the individual's self esteem is tied to successful achievement in their chosen activity, and this requires effort, persistence and growth in their skills and knowledge.

> *Before I started food blogging I drove my friends crazy with my ongoing babbling about food, but **now I have a community who are just as food-obsessed as I am.***
> *(Ellie in Yee 22nd October 2006)*

The fragmentary nature of social relations in the postmodern world means that group members require continual reaffirmation of their membership (Schmidt, 2007; Guadagno et. al. 2007) through the use of values, rituals, myths, an interpretative repertoire and a hierarchy (Cova & Pace, 2006; Burkitt, 1999). The members of the community discuss the rituals of food and cooking, and confirm each others' attitudes, with their experiences at the heart of it. This enables them to collectively construct their shared identity within the community of consumption.

> *Tonight it's the post-dessert coffee I'm looking forward to most. Hazchem has come prepared - a self-confessed coffee nut and coffee judger, he doesn't go anywhere without his **coffee cupping spoon**, a deep-bowled spoon that helps tasters amplify the nuances of coffee brews. **His spoon even has its own protective pouch,** sewn for him by his craft-clever sister, and whilst he doesn't end up using it this evening, I remain fascinated by its weight, shine and purpose.*
> *(Yee 27th July 2010)*

The members of the *Grab Your Fork* community reaffirm their own membership by commenting on Helen's blog posts or others' comments, and providing information to further the community's knowledge (Schmidt, 2007; Guadagno et. al. 2007).. This reaffirmation may provide Durable Benefits, as outlined in the Serious Leisure theory. By adding to the community's knowledge, MCAT a member of the community, in the quotation below, is reaping the benefits of self-actualisation, self-expression, self-image enhancement and contribution to the development of the group. It is through such activities that what Turner (1974) called a sense of communitas with other participants or enthusiasts is created. This sense of helping, being needed or being altruistic in the contribution to the maintenance and development of the *Grab Your Fork* community reaffirms the individual's membership of the group, and their Unique Ethos.

> *Hi Helen, the first fish dish is probably Hamo rather than Suzuki. Hamo is famous in Kyoto where there is no sea nearby but Hamo was tough enough to be delivered alive by foot back when Kyoto was the capitol (sic). Hamo is an eel like fish in appearance with lots of bones and it takes an experienced good chef to cut the little bones a couple of millimetres apart to make its texture smooth. All the cutting makes the flesh look frilled or brain like as you put it.*
>
> *(MCAT in Yee 2007)*

> ***How do you say Löwenbräu?*** *Did you know the correct pronunciation is ~~loov-en-brauloov-en-broy~~ lurvin-broy [ack. I still got it wrong. Corrected now thanks to anon and Rissole below]? Yes, all this time I've been saying it wrong! Low-en-brau be gone, it's lurvin-broy ~~with a rolling r~~ from now on. Musical Germanic accent entirely optional.*[6]
>
> (*Yee 12th July 2010)*

Notwithstanding this, problems can arise when the meaning and significance are not shared by the consumers, or the experience disappoints.

> *Alright I did a Tets and I'm rather disappointed. Found out that I really don't like French cuisine (First time going to a French restaurant.) It's alright but I certainly won't be forking out $185 again.*
>
> *(unablogger in Yee 6th April 2005)*

> *Hi unablogger, I think media hype can lead to disappointment, although I wouldn't call Tetsuya's typical French cuisine. It's supposed to be different, unusual, and a challenge to the senses.*
>
> *(Yee 6th April 2005)*

This clearly shows the difference between community insiders and outsiders. Genuine foodies with a Serious Leisure interest in the subject would understand Helen's comments above without needing to be told. In Social Identity theory, it is the individual's understanding of themselves as an in-group member which defines the salience of their group membership

[6] The striking out appears in the original blog as Yee updates her understanding of the German pronunciation.

(Abrams et al. 1990). The above two posts demonstrate the power that someone like Yee holds and the weight that their opinions carry.

The commenter "unablogger" is clearly dissatisfied with the whole experience and the cost of the meal after having their expectations – perhaps unreasonably - raised by Yee's original post about *Tetsuya's* (Yee 6th April 2005). It is also possible, however, that the comment posted was deliberately provocative, as the reader's avatar "unablogger" calls to mind the pseudonym of the mathematician turned terrorist Theodore Kaczynski known as the "Unabomber" (bio. Accessed 8th October, 2013). Kaczynski became a recluse after his inability to fit into society despite his high level of intellect. He is also known for his dismissal of the use of technology in daily life. Perhaps *"unablogger"* is similarly expressing a negative attitude to accepted foodie values and beliefs by criticising *Tetsuya's*, a restaurant seen by Australian foodies as the pinnacle of gastronomic ideals, and thus their intention of being seen as an "outsider". Helen Yee has responded in an informative yet defensive rebuttal, which clearly shows that she considers herself to be the authority and doesn't appreciate an "outsider" to the community questioning her status and opinion. This is another example of the perils of being viewed as an expert whilst still an amateur.

6.4 Helen Yee's Ethno-Cultural Identity

As previously discussed, whilst many individuals choose to identify with an ethnic or religious group that is labelled by society, such as Chinese or Jewish, many others prefer to self-identify with another group (Deaux 2000). Ethnic identity has impact on the content of Helen Yee's *Grab Your Fork* blog. She identifies as an "ABC" – Australian-born Chinese – which is a colloquial term widely used to describe second generation Chinese immigrants to Australia (Yee 16th May 2011). The use of the hyphenated term reflects the "reactive ethnicity" identified by the CILS study in the United States (Rumbaut, 2002). In an essay about growing up as an *ABC*, posted online and published in a book, Helen discusses her divided loyalties:

> *I spoke with an Aussie accent, but I didn't look 'Australian'. I didn't want to look different. I wanted to be Aussie, like all the popular kids at school. I longed for sun-kissed blonde hair, not boring jet-black, and freckles weren't blemishes but badges of true-blue honour I desperately wanted.*
>
> *(Yee 2011)*

> *I felt an awkward sense of alienation growing up – not quite Australian, not quite Chinese. I looked Chinese but I could barely speak the language.*
>
> *(Yee 2011)*

Some meal events are particularly important because of her heritage, and she sees attending events such as a Chinese New Year dinner as a part of her tradition. This does not mean that all she eats is Chinese foods, rather that Chinese foods have a special place in her eating choices.

> *My Chinese background has meant that good food has always been sought out and appreciated, a food-centric culture...*
>
> *(Yee 2011)*

> *Meat came from animals and it was always drummed into us that we should always eat and appreciate the entire beast from head to tail. Fish was eaten whole: steamed and served with a splash of soy and a sizzle of ginger and shallots. Mum would usually end up with the abandoned fish head, but we soon realised the best part of the fish was actually in the cheek. Chicken necks went into soup, pork liver was stir-fried with onions, and a steamer basket of chickens' feet was a yum cha favourite.*
>
> *(Yee 16th May 2011)*

> *My favourite bit of the roast chicken is the thigh followed by the wing. I am sooo Asian.*
>
> *(Yee 26th January 2006)*

This is supported by the literature. Lee and Tse (1994) suggest that cultural occasions such as festivals and New Year celebrations bring out the ethnic cultural content in an individual's life, since such events are often used to represent and preserve the group's culture. The blog posts emphasise rituals of cooking and eating within the Chinese community, and particularly as celebrated by Helen Yee's family and friends. There is a sense of inherited nostalgia - she feels at home with traditions which her parents brought from their homeland with them (Maghbouleh, 2010).

> *Yee sang (raw fish) salad: This salad is traditionally eaten on New Year's Eve, or on the seventh day of the Chinese New Year. All guests toss the salad at the same time, using chopsticks to toss it higher and higher as they call out good luck wishes to bring prosperity.*
>
> *(Yee 2nd February 2006)*

> *Before we could eat, we had to pay our respects to our elders, courteously asking them each in turn to "please eat", descending in order of seniority. Only when all of the adults had commenced eating could all of the younger generation touch their chopsticks.*
>
> *(Yee 16th May 2011)*

Particular references to sago pudding appear numerous times during the period studied:

> *Unlike Western versions of sago pudding, Chinese sago pudding is rich and eggy. After cooking the sago pearls in water, they are then mixed into a sweet coconut milk and custard mixture before baking in the oven until golden brown on top.*
>
> *(Yee 25th August 2005)*

On 6th March, 2006 Yee cooks it at home and discusses this in her blog, along with providing the recipe. The next mention is a family event at a Chinatown restaurant on 19th April, 2006 where the sago pudding has had to be ordered in advance, and is considered a family tradition for such special events; and again at a restaurant on 27th May, 2006, where it has also been pre-ordered. At another yum cha meal (Yee 18th January 2009) sago pudding is one of the desserts ordered. Yee never blogs about eating sago in any posts except for those specifically relating to ethnic Chinese celebrations or family events. This is evidence of her desire to acknowledge and celebrate her genetic lineage and to proclaim it proudly through her blog. Here the food forms part of her ethnic self identity. In other posts where Chinese traditional foods are not a feature of the meal her passions migrate towards her enjoyment of and participation in the food culture of contemporary Australia and its wide variety of cuisines.

Each year Helen methodically photographs and blogs about the Chinese New Year celebrations in Sydney. She visits the Chinatown area in Haymarket and covers not just the food but the entire event. It is obvious that this is an important part of her year, and a strong reflection of her heritage.

> *We joined the free Chinatown History Tour conducted by the City of Sydney Council as part of Chinese New Year Celebrations.... Chinese immigrants from different villages set up 'home streets' in Chinatown providing support for new immigrants and a promise to send their bones home to be buried ... this explains the steadfast loyalty of some older Chinese to particular streets or businesses for their roast duck or soya sauce chicken!*
>
> *(Yee 10th February 2005)*

Some research, particularly during the twentieth century, found that ethnic identity starts to become more confused in second and third generation immigrants (E.g. Rumbaut, 2005). Research in the United States has found that speaking English in the home tends to be the norm by the second generation, and that this was especially high amongst Asian immigrants (Alba et al. 2002). Speaking the local language was assumed to be a strong sign of acculturation (Rumbaut, 2005). Helen admits her own lack of knowledge of Chinese language and culture on occasions:

> *What does it mean to be an ABC, an Australian-born Chinese? And how do I reconcile my heritage with my nationality on my passport? When shopkeepers speak to me in Chinese and I can only smile weakly in reply, why do I feel like an imposter, and why do I feel so guilty about it?*
>
> *(Yee16th May 2011)*

> *My background is Chinese but I'm pretty much a banana – yellow on the outside and white on the inside.*
>
> *(Yee 9th October 2005)*

However, in more recent research, Rumbaut (2002; 2005) found that second generation immigrants were *more* likely than their parents to assert their ethnic identity and heritage through behaviours such as consumption. Helen recounts her feelings of nostalgia for both Australia and Chinese culture when she was living overseas.

It wasn't until I left home that I realised I was more Australian than I realised. On a working holiday in the UK, alone and 16,000 km from home, I found myself drawn to other Aussies ....and yet in moments of homesickness, Chinatown offered the most comfort, a swarm of barely understandable Chinese that was bewildering yet familiar.

(Yee 2011)

Helen's Australian identity is almost as strong as her Chinese one, however:

....food was a tangible reminder of home, and soon I was hunting down jars of Vegemite, boxes of Barbecue Shapes and packets of Burger Rings and Twisties at the shop for ex-pat Aussies. I baked lamingtons and ANZAC biscuits ... my family sent me care packages from home: a bounty of Tim Tams, Minties, Violet Crumbles and cans of pumpkin soup.

(Yee 2011)

Yee is an ethnic and culinary chameleon as the circumstances dictate. However, paradoxically, whichever ethnic identity is appropriate at the time induces within Yee a yearning to revert to the other identity.

Lee and Tse (1994) noted that immigrants seemed to celebrate Chinese New Year less and less the more they became acculturated into the new society, and the more they spoke the local language.

We don't make such a big deal about Chinese New Year at our place, but luckily dear friend Veruca Salt's does. Oh my dear food-loving friends. What would I do without them?

(Yee 20th February 2007)

I had the good luck to be invited to dine with Veruca Salt and her family on Chinese New Year's Eve, a night which traditionally involves a reunion dinner for celebratory feasting. The Chinese New Year mandate for excessive eating provided the perfect excuse for Veruca to order a whole suckling pig. And who was I to argue?

(Yee 4th February 2006)

Helen has several overlapping foodie identities – being an *ABC* is only one of them. It can be suggested that ethnicity is not an important variable in individuals' lives. In a postmodern global world one could sit down to a full English breakfast, followed by a quick sushi lunch, before sitting down to a bowl of pasta for dinner. The consumption of this ethnically divergent fare is not dependent upon the ethnicity of the consumer. Much postmodernist theory would suggest that ethnicity does not dictate what we eat or on what occasion, although it is clear from *Grab Your Fork* that for Yee and many in her virtual community, authenticity in food does matter. Yee's relationship with identity and food is one thing, but more important is how food mediates her identities and how she uses these blog posts to somehow examine her notions of self – food mediated public reflexivity.

6.5 Ethnic Food: Authenticity & Nostalgia

As Stiles et al. (2011, p 228) suggest, the experience of eating food is to experience the cultural power of the "ghosts of place" which relate to food. Helen Yee and her community discuss the authenticity of food frequently, especially in relation to "ethnic food". This section will analyse how ethnic foods are discussed in *Grab Your Fork*, and in particular the connections to the community members' heritage and the nostalgia they have for food from "home".

In 2008 Beer commented that there had been little discussion in the hospitality literature regarding authenticity. This, however, seems to have been addressed more recently. Stiles et al., for example, discuss how authenticity is a part of food politics – the cultural granting of authenticity comes from food narratives relating to people and environments, conjuring up what they call "ghosts of taste" (2011, p. 225). What they mean by this term is the symbolic connection that people make with food in order to claim its authenticity. Stiles et al. (2011) also point out that "ghosts of taste" can be related to local and global places or to people.

This leaves open to debate whether food that is served in a restaurant in any other country but Thailand could be described as authentic Thai Cuisine, for example. Similarly, ingredients sourced locally highlight the issue of authenticity. Under French wine laws, sparkling wine cannot be called Champagne unless it is produced in the Champagne district, centered on Epernay in the north of France (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2012).

Presumably then a sparkling wine produced from the same grapes using the same fermentation process anywhere else in the world may be an "*authentic reproduction"* (Norfolk Archaeology Society, 1974), but is not champagne. According to Stiles et al. (2011), all food has ghosts – emotions, memories, anticipations and expectations of social relations. Certainly when it comes to ethnic foods, there is a cultural bias – those persons familiar with the fare offered in a particular country can discriminate between what is served overseas but called by the same name – Chow Mein sold in the UK or Australia is totally different to Chow Mein served in Hong Kong, yet it is sold under that name in "Chinese" restaurants all over the world. The major differentiating factor with respect to the differences between cuisine prepared in the country of origin and the locality in which it is being served is ethnic, cultural, demographic and geographic bias.

Leung's (2010) research found "authenticity" to be an important factor in diner's choices, however the English palate is not attuned to spicy Indian cuisine, so Indian foods prepared and sold in the UK are modified in order to appeal to the target audience, as are many other ethnic cuisines around the world. Helen Yee found this, to her dismay, with Thai restaurants in Sydney.

> *I had abandoned Thai cuisine recently, sick of insipid same-old same-old dishes sweetened to Western palates. But after a* green papaya epiphany, *Thai-yerd became en-Thai-sing once again.*
>
> *(Yee 22nd November 2005)*

Despite Williams (2000) claiming that there has been a growing demand for authentic foods cooked on traditional equipment, Leung (2010) found that in the UK, ethnic foods were most popular with young adults and those from higher socio-economic groups. These are two groups of diners likely to be seen as more adventurous, and also to have travelled more widely. Higher socio-economic groups were also more likely to eat Japanese food. Australians live much closer to Asia and are more likely to travel long haul to destinations where the cuisine is significantly different to home, and this is obvious in the restaurants visited in *Grab Your Fork*, and in Yee's own travels.

It is arguable then, that with respect to authenticity of foods, there is no such thing as an authentic Thai, Chinese, Italian, Indian, or any other cuisine for that matter unless it is prepared, served and eaten in the eponymous country of origin, irrespective of the race, creed or nationality of those preparing and serving it. Furthermore, ingredients grown in different soils, in areas with different climates, will produce ingredients which taste differently to each other, and have different textures. For individuals who come from the place of origin of a particular food or recipe, there will be strong "ghosts of taste" (Stiles et al. 2011) which will affect their expectations not only of taste, but preparation, ingredients and method of serving. This is reflected in contributions to *Grab Your Fork:*

> *Do you know that I've lived in Malaysia for ten years and haven't seen Roti Canai being made by someone who is not of Malaysian-Indian descent. That's quite an unusual sight for me. I've never seen a Chinese-Malaysian and Malay-Malaysian make this before.*
>
> *(Anonymous in Yee 16th February2011)*

Not only that, but there will be regional and familial variations. A good example is that there is not one "Chinese" cuisine but many regional and ethnic variations from around mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. For example on 7th October, 2007 Helen blogs about her visit to *Silk Road,* a Sydney restaurant which serves Uighur cuisine from Xinjiang Province in far western China. Here the menu will not contain any of the typical Cantonese favourites that Westerners associate with "Chinese" food. Indeed, a recipe that has emigrated around the world with the Chinese Diaspora will have picked up local elements as evidenced in the blog and subsequent posts.

> *What a feast! The Yee Sang is different from Malaysia though. Take a look at here [hyperlink] for a post of Malaysian Yee Sang.*
>
> *(fooDcrazEE in Yee 2nd February 2006)*

On a visit to Malaysia, Yee discovers that the face of street food is changing, as children no longer follow their parents into the family food business, but want to go on to further education instead.

> *The ... team talk about the new influx of migrants from Indonesia and Bangladesh, and how street food may continue through these workers but with a slight cultural twist.*
>
> *(Yee 30th May 2011)*

Individuals may perceive a particular taste or quality which they relate to a certain place or person. Several readers responded to Helen's post (Yee 6th March 2006) about trying to find an authentic recipe for the sago pudding that she is used to from family visits to yum cha restaurants in Sydney, commenting on what is "authentic" for them. Note that for each reader, what is "authentic" is different.

> *Being malaysian, i can't bring myself to eat it in any other way than the way i have been brought up with. lots of gula melaka and coconut milk! even better when it's warm.. mmm..*
>
> *(Min Ai in Yee 6th March2006)*

> *Just before baking, I sandwich in some lotus seed paste (canned, "Golden Rooster" brand from China) in between layers of sago. I also sprinkle a bit of caster sugar on top before baking, so to get a caramelised effect.*
>
> *(Louie in Yee 6th March 2006)*

What is important to both Min Ai and Louie is less the actual physical food, rather it is the meaning of the food (Stiles et al. 2011), the memories of their home country, and memories of social events in the past where this dish has been eaten. Min Ai makes it clear that she identifies as being Malaysian in her post, and that she "can't bring (her)self to eat it any other way."

A clear statement of a "ghost of taste" (Stiles et al. 2011) that relates to a specified individual is when we say a food is *just like Mum used to make,* or *just like I used to eat when I was a child.* When either Helen or the contributors to the *Grab Your Fork* community make comments or add their expertise as to whether a dish does indeed seem "authentic" or not, they often mention how family members cooked a favourite dish.

*I crave my Mum's mee rebus sometimes, esp (sic) now as the weather is getting colder. I shall have to locate this place, for *research* purposes, of course ;-)*

(Nora B in Yee 26th April 2007)

Today I don't know how to make half of the dishes from my childhood, many of them consigned to distant memory. Google has helped me recreate some, but ***they never taste the same as when Grandma used to make them.*** *Has a little part of my family history dies (sic), and should I have done more to prevent it?*

(Yee 16th May 2011)

For Helen's readers and contributors "authenticity" is a major issue, especially as far as it concerns ethnic dishes from the homelands of the so-called "new Australians". Mannur (2007) suggests that many emigrants experience a resurgence of interest in the food of their homelands, as it provides an emotional anchor in a foreign place. Potentially, however, what is seen as an authentic recipe by emigrants, or members of an ethnic Diaspora may in fact be coloured by the nostalgia an individual feels (Mannur, 2007; Maghbouleh, 2010). It may in fact be the emotional and symbolic memories of home and family which add to the apparent taste of the food, making it "authentic" – the "ghosts of taste" suggested by Stiles et al. (2011). It is the discussion around food, and the emotions which it evokes that are valued most, giving individuals a "culinary citizenship" – in other words, membership of an ethnic group that provides them with an important part of their identity. Furthermore, Mannur (2007) suggests that ethnic cookbooks, such as *An Initiation to Indian Cooking* by Madhur Jaffrey use culinary discourse to entangle concepts of food, nostalgia and desire to create "authentic" links to the homeland that members of the diaspora can use to bolster this ethnic identity in a foreign land. It is a part of their group identity.

The following quotations from comments to *Grab Your Fork* were made by immigrants. The comments clearly show the commenters acknowledging their national identity as well as their foodie credentials.

> *We went to Bagan last night which was a must for me as I am Burmese and new to Sydney. I have been to several other Burmese restaurants in Asia, US and UK, and I must say I was rather impressed by the food here**. It's authentic indeed......***
>
> *(Cho in Yee 16th October 2009)*

> *Thanks for the review.* ***Being a Malaysian in Sydney, I am always on the look out for outlets serving good (as in authentic tasting) Malaysian food.*** *Now to convince the husband that we need to go there :D*
>
> *(Celia in Yee 17th June 2007)*

> *Glad to see you've made it to Alice's. I've been 3 times since seeing your last blog about it when it was closed because I have a few Malaysian foodies who have been wanting to find good Malaysian and* ***it's the only place I've found in Sydney which makes popiah and is fairly close to a good one I've had in Malaysia.*** *I've tried just about all the dishes. next time try the wat tan hor and fried radish cake which are both very good and if having the ice kacang make sure you ask for them to put enough rose water. You'll see they put corn in there's (sic). Some pics of the dishes I've had are available to look at http://www.myspace.com/simonleong in my food slideshow.*
>
> *(Simon Leong in Yee 17th June 2007)*

Whilst consumers use nostalgic memory to inform purchase choices, it may lead to biased memories and selective recollections where the good times, and the extraordinary experiences over-ride the ordinary ones. Recreating the past in the present, or alternatively avoiding the present by re-staging the past, is often the motive for themed or ethnic restaurants (Tresidder & Hirst, 2012). Williams (2000) suggests that there has been a "nostalgia for tradition" that has come about due to the postmodern breakdown of traditional boundaries and the de-territorialisation of national economies and cultures. In the case of foodies dining out, the very act of consuming provides the "souvenir" they require to add to their collection of eating experiences, even if the experience which they collect is not a genuine one, rather a postmodern facsimile. Duruz (1999) suggests that nowadays even Anglo-Celtic Australian diners can retreat into a postmodern nostalgia of eating "*Nonna's"* cooking in their local Italian cafe. Similarly in the UK a series of television advertisments aims to convince potential consumers of their product that they will be eating Italian food just like *"Mama*" makes.

The urge to find the "authentic" can indeed be very strong. In a 2007 post about a simple food-court lunch-time meal Yee mentioned that her Malaysian-born friend found the Sydney versions of his favourite dish were not up to the standard he remembered from home.

> *The last time we'd been at Malay Chinese Takeaway, Mango Man confided he'd yet to find a good assam laksa in Sydney. My ears had pricked up immediately at this foodie challenge, and off onto the internet I'd went (sic).*
>
> *(Yee 26th April 2007)*

Soon there was a knowledgeable response from one of her readers:

> *The best assam laksa comes from Penang, and one of the best is in a small town on the west side of the island called Balik Pulau. There's a small coffee shop with a stall out the front that does it. Bellissimo! I've since found out that Balik Pulau is famous for assam laksa. So go there – **back to the source**.*
>
> *(Anonymous in Yee 26th April 2007)*

In January, 2011 Helen Yee finally did make a foodie trip to Malaysia, and went back to the origins of the dish to eat an "authentic" assam laksa on Penang, on the say-so of an anonymous tip.

> *Billy takes us to the famous Pasar Air Atam laksa stall, said to serve some of the best laksa in Penang ... at last our laksa arrives. We poke our chopsticks beneath its muddy surface and slurp down the slippery rice noodles greedily. Hot, salty, sweet and sour – our lips tingle, our taste buds rejoice and our bellies sigh with content.*
>
> *(Yee 4th January 2011)*

Taste is, according to Stiles et al. (2011), a comparative act. Yee seems to feel that this version of assam laksa eaten in Penang is indeed more "authentic" than the version she ate in Sydney. She travelled thousands of miles and waited over 4 years to try it. Perhaps it is the myth that had developed around the origin of the assam laksa that made it seem to taste better than the Sydney version; the location and the anticipation improved the experience of the meal, especially for her companion *Mango Man*. One can also question whether the concept of an *authentic reproduction* means that the Sydney version is not still enjoyable as a standalone experience – not better or worse, just different.

Poole (2012) on the other hand postulates that it is a mistake to suggest that there is one single “true” or “authentic” version of a dish. Any traditional dish cooked over generations will have many versions, and individuals will often prefer the family version with which they grew up – the “ghosts of taste” which relate to nostalgia. The foodie is on an eternal search for the nirvana of food, and for ethnic food, this does seem to amount to perceived authenticity, especially for those with that particular cultural background.

For postmodernists, however, in-authenticity is not a problem (Reisinger & Steiner, 2005) in many situations. It does not matter if foods have become part of a *fusion cuisine*, as the hyper-real is considered better, or at least no worse than, the original. At *Tetsuya's* Restaurant in Sydney, a Japanese-born, naturalised Australian cooks a *fusion* menu, incorporating aspects of Oriental, European and Pacific-rim ingredients and recipes, with his training in classical French cookery. This is one of the most celebrated eateries in Australia, yet the food could not be described as *authentic*. It is perhaps, then, reasonable to suggest that the *fusion* style which has developed due to Australia being an emigrant nation is in fact the national cuisine.

6.6 Chapter Summary

Chapter 6 has explored the conceptualisation and practical application of identity and community as applied to *Grab Your Fork*.

A number of theories of identity were considered. Personal identities are culturally recognised categories of humanity to which individuals see themselves belonging. Helen Yee's self-identity is clearly shown through the posts on *Grab Your Fork* and the follow-up comments. Her identity is reflexively created and clearly postmodern. The Internet is the perfect place for people to explore and develop their alternative identities through the use of pseudonyms. Helen Yee wishes to maintain a private space within the public place that is the blog.

A social identity comes about when other members of that category recognise the individual as a member of their group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is through such activities that what Turner (1974) called a sense of communitas with other participants or enthusiasts is created. The members of the foodie community use their experiences, as posted on blogs, such as *Grab Your Fork,* to construct their self-identity. This links the concept of Serious Leisure to Social Identity Theory (Shamir, 1992).

Stebbins (1992) and Jones (2006) suggest that Serious Leisure develops over four phases - Pre-socialisation, Recruitment, Socialisation and Identity Confirmation. Serious Leisure activity provides both personal and social Durable Outcomes (Stebbins, 1992) to the individual such as self-gratification, improvement of self-esteem, and the acquisition of a level of authority within the group; in the case of *Grab Your Fork* the group is an on - line community. Helen Yee comments that the community aspect of the blog provides her with infinite rewards, such as a network of like – minded enthusiasts whom are as food – obsessed as she is with whom to share virtual experiences and ideas. Blog writing is described by Bruns (2007) as a form of citizen journalism. For Helen, blogging is part of her Central Life Interest (Stebbins, 1996) that shapes her personal and communal identity.

It is during Socialisation that the individual learns about the unique ethos (Stebbins, 1992) of the group, including appropriate behaviours and terminology (Jones, 2006). Social identity links clearly to Serious Leisure. The individual's self esteem is tied to successful achievement in their chosen activity (Shamir, 1992). Badging is a mechanism by which communities can recognise the achievements of individual group members (Antin & Churchill, 2011). A badge awarded by one's peers is the ultimate recognition of status and standing in the peer group, providing the recipient with a sense of competence in executing the activity for which the badge was awarded (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990; Stebbins, 2010). This can elevate the recipient from the status of participant to leader, and advance them up the Serious Leisure Career Ladder (Stebbins, 1992).

In the case of *Grab Your Fork,* social interaction is at least as important as the food aspects of the blog for many readers. This collection of embodied individuals meeting in an online space-time location can still have social order and relationships (Jenkins, 1995). The meeting of embodied individuals in cyberspace naturally evolves into a virtual civilisation, and evolves into a disembodied hierarchy of its' own which may – or may not - mirror the hierarchy that would develop in the real world between the same participants.

When Yee commenced blogging, very few people knew what a blog was, and even fewer cared. The exponential increase in public and industry awareness of blogs over the years of *Grab Your Fork's* existence has altered the purpose for which it was originally created; it has become a wider opinion- based source of restaurant and food information. Kozinets et al. (2010) noted that with the growth of the internet, electronic word of mouth has become more prevalent and through that prevalence, more important - businesses pitch new ideas and products to bloggers in their capacity as opinion leaders. This has potential adverse consequences if it is apparent that the blogger is a mouthpiece for commercial enterprises.

Ethnic identity has influenced strongly the content of Helen Yee's *Grab Your Fork* blog. She identifies as an Australian-born Chinese. Recent research has found that ethnic identity starts to become more confused in second and third generation immigrants as individuals become acculturated (Rumbaut, 2005; Alba et al. 2002). By identifying as both Australian and Chinese, Yee has divided loyalties experiencing inherited nostalgia from her parents for a culture she has never experienced herself (Maghbouleh, 2010). As a schoolgirl, Helen yearned for the freckles and blonde hair which were the "true – blue badges of honour" of being a "real Aussie". Paradoxically, whichever ethnic identity she exhibits as a result of her immediate environment, it induces a yearning in her to revert to the other one.

Authenticity with respect to foodism is a consistent theme in Yee's blog, particularly in relation to ethnic food. Stiles et al. (2011) discussed "ghosts of place” and “ghosts of taste” with respect to memories of locations in which the food was consumed and the meanings attached to it. These “ghosts” have an impact on the expectations of people when consuming ethnic food that is described as authentic cuisine from their homeland, which can often lead to a level of “culinary citizenship”. Ultimately, social identity is all important for these individuals.

The following chapter collates the research findings and draws conclusions from them. These findings form the basis of recommendations to the restaurant industry regarding the potential of blog awareness as a technological market research tool.

7. Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the fundamental concepts and theories examined in this thesis, the methodology used and the findings to emerge from the research, collating them into a single cohesive advancement of knowledge. The researcher's journey is critically reviewed, and the strengths and weaknesses of the work highlighted. The findings are explored and developed into recommendations to the hospitality industry,

7.2 Theory Used

7.2.1 Food Blogging as Serious Leisure

Many types of leisure-time consumption activities can be described as Serious Leisure, and this thesis has demonstrated that the activities of Helen Yee in the development and maintenance of her Sydney-based food blog *Grab Your Fork* satisfy the criteria for classification as a Serious Leisure activity. Yee is a self-described foodie, a colloquial term applied to someone with an almost obsessive interest in food and dining (Barr & Levy, 1984). The continued usage of the term is evidenced by a recent article in *The Sunday Times* (Atkinson, 2013). Since its first appearance in the 1980's as a journalistic neologism (Watson et al. 2008), the term foodie has become widely acceptable in food circles, despite criticism by some others, such as Poole (2012) who called foodies "infantile gastromaniacs". In this study, foodies have been shown to be a community of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), and the following of foodism as a leisure activity fits within Stebbins and Hartel's (2011) understanding of a Serious Pursuit. The Six Characteristics of Serious Leisure were applied to Helen Yee's foodie activities and her "citizen journalism" (Bruns, 2007) of blogging and have been consistent to the paradigm.

7.2.2 Citizen Journalism & the Importance of Food Blogging

Bruns (2007) described bloggers as "citizen journalists" or "citjos", who provide online commentary in terms that ordinary consumers can relate to, rather than the esoteric language used by so-called "experts" – in this case professional food critics employed by newspapers and magazines. Yee's activities as a food blogger clearly fit her into the category of a "citizen journalist".

When Yee began writing *Grab Your Fork* in 2004, there was little understanding of what a blog was, at whom blogs were targeted and there was much doubt within the hospitality industry as to whether amateur restaurant reviews such as Yee's would have any impact on their business. Whilst there has been much question as to the impact of food blogs on consumer decision making, many industry professionals, in food and journalism, have treated blogs as unimportant (Yee 19th August 2007; Meryment 2011). Over the past nine years it has become obvious from the analysis of *Grab Your Fork* that this attitude has finally changed. In the U.K. Richard Corrigan of the feted *Corrigan's Mayfair* in London, for example, sees food blogging as a powerful medium for communication with and between potential customers (Low, 2010).

By June 2012, it was estimated that from a total world population of over 7 billion people, 2,405,518,376 (or approximately 34%) are connected to the internet (Miniwatts World Marketing Group, 2013). Statistics from research conducted by technorati (2011) support the premise that there is a growing trust of individuals with less traditional media such as blogs: 46% of people trust traditional media less than they did five years ago, 35% believe that blogs are taken more seriously than they previously were, and 19% believe that blogs are better written than traditional sources.

Given this growth, online consumer reviews have become an important resource for many people (Zhu & Zhang, 2010; Pantalidis, 2010). Many internet users are well off people who are likely to eat in restaurants, and therefore potential readers of food blogs (Guadagno et al. 2008). Those who read food blogs prefer their reviews to those of supposed "professional" reviewers who work for traditional publications. Bloggers are seen as more independent (technorati, 2011). Such amateur reviews aid in spreading word of mouth attitudes within a community of consumption (Gelb & Sundarem, 2002; Ho & Chang Chien, 2010), such as the group of people who have formed around *Grab Your Fork*. The members of these groups furthermore share their knowledge with each other via the medium of the blog.

7.2.3 Data Linkages

The interconnectedness between the activities associated with foodism and blogging, the motivation for the activities and the outcome of the activities in the context of Serious Leisure and Social Identity Theory cannot be explained simply by a positivist diagram. The complex nature of the interlinkages between these concepts would be better understood by descriptive rather than by diagrammatic means. In a postmodern world where knowledge is accepted as being multiple and truth is constructed, symbols and meanings are more important than objects, and consumption is more important than production. Foodism is an expression of postmodern consumption, which provides the contextual setting for this thesis.

From the outset it was assumed that Serious Leisure would be a major part of the theory and analysis of the study, as was shown in the Conceptual Framework on page 110. The original premise of the thesis was that in a post-modern world, individuals would become members of communities of consumption identified as "tribes" by Maffesoli (1996). However, the literature review and subsequent analysis demonstrated that the formation of the tribes occurred because individuals found that they related to others in the group and as a result they self – identified as part of the foodie tribe, the blogger tribe, or a mixture of both. It became clear over the period of study that Social Identity Theory was becoming increasingly important, rather than just an element of the discussion.

As Yee's blogging has become more accomplished, so her following has grown. Through that a close-knit community has developed. Foodies read - and may comment on - Yee's posts. Over time the community develops as individuals are socialised into the group. All of these activities lead into self-definition of the individuals as an in-group member of the social group, or an out-group member.

Individuals in the tribe share myths, values, rituals, an interpretative repertoire (a specialist vocabulary) and a hierarchy. Active members of the *Grab Your Fork* community have self- identified as members of "tribes" without necessarily having the knowledge of the academic term being coined to so describe them (E.g. Julia in Yee 22nd October, 2006). The objective of the individual's development within the community is ultimately to become a member of their "tribe" (Maffesoli 1996).

Helen Yee's transition from a simple foodie through to her self-definition within a wider social group as understood through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is readily tracked through the development of her blog. Her personal identity development can also be easily determined through both her own posts and the comments from community members as the blog and the community around it matures. Yee's confidence in the validity of her own opinions is reflected in the evolving content and length of the posts and the ensuing discussion with commenters. Helen's self-definition and self-perception of her position within the community and acceptance by the hospitality industry is reinforced by the positive affirmation afforded to her by them. This affirmation ranges from commenting on her blog posts to acting on the dining recommendations found within her blog. Initially, blogs were dismissed by the hospitality industry as being the uninformed opinions of amateurs. As time has progressed, these "uninformed amateurs" have been elevated to the status of credible amateurs and from that the recognition in Helen Yee's case of semi-professionalism. Yee's advancement up the Serious Leisure Career Ladder and her understanding of her own identity are framed by the postmodern, reflexive nature of writing the blog posts and the exchanges and interactions with the community as a result of it.

There is a strong feedback loop between Helen Yee's blogging activities and the impact it has and has had on her Serious Leisure activities. This in turn reflects in the development of her writing style; the evolution of her writing and her identity are symbiotic. Helen has numerous sub-identities – Australian-born Chinese, foodie, blogger, citizen journalist, online community member, online community leader – and these identities are determined by combinations of her devotion to her Serious Leisure activity, her self-identification and the positive affirmation of her peers (Schmidt, 2007; Guadagno et. al. 2007). The positive affirmation encourages further blog style development, which in turn is regulated by the degree of affirmation received as a result of it. One does indeed nurture and develop the other.

7.2.4 Social Identity Theory

Tajfel & Turner's (1979) theory on the Social Identity Perspective postulated that the individual has a level of understanding of their position within the group. This links to the concept of Serious Leisure in that in Social identity Theory, it is the self-confirmation as being an in-group member or out-group member that defines a person's definition of themselves (Shamir, 1992). *Grab Your Fork* has attracted individuals to it that have formed a community of consumption. As the community evolved and developed, the group of self – defined foodies and food bloggers developed a level of common beliefs, values, language and understanding. The collective nature of the community can be physically located in a space, place or time, or virtually located in cyberspace. In either case, the group of embodied individuals still maintain social order and relationships (Jenkins, 1995). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) has not previously been applied to either foodie communities or blogging communities. In the case of *Grab Your Fork* the network of individuals who have developed an on-line community are also foodies, so the theory was able to be applied to both situations, and was shown to be an appropriate approach with which to examine such a community.

7.3 Evaluation of the Research Process

7.3.1 Methodology

A service experience such as a restaurant meal is inherently interpretative, subjective and affective, and therefore requires a suitable qualitative research method to explore it (Andereck et al. 2005; Bonnemaison et al. 2007). Denzin (1997) suggests that ethnography can claim to be the discourse of the postmodern world. According to Goulding, (2005) the analysis of ethnographic data is the search for patterns, and ideas which will explain those patterns, providing situated or grounded knowledge. This makes ethnography and netnography in particular, a most suitable methodology to use to study postmodern consumers in the context of their social worlds. It is certainly true that in the postmodern environment the ethnographer will discover multiple truths, as truth and facts are socially constructed (Denzin, 1997). As a result of this, the study chose to use the emerging methodology of netnography (Kozinets, 1997) to explore and analyse the foodie blog *Grab Your Fork*. Bengry-Howell et al. (2011) describe netnography as being an exemplar method for this type of research.

In an ethnographic study, the sample is a small and judgemental one, opportunistically chosen in order to achieve rich data (Elliot & Jankel-Elliot, 2003, p. 216; Woodside et al. 2007; Fielding, 2008). Given the methodology chosen, the sample does not have to be representative of all other populations (Brown et al. 2003), rather it needs to provide rich data. This research chose *Grab Your Fork* as the blog to study by applying Kozinets' (2010a) recommendations for choosing a suitable online community to study:

1. **<u>relevant to the research focus and questions</u>**
   - This particular food blog concentrates on amateur restaurant reviews, with home cooking being a minor topic. It appeared from first viewing to have the potential to uncover the concept of Serious Leisure, and had a large community.

2. **<u>active, with recent and regular communications</u>**
   - There were many more, regular posts than other food blogs considered (250 posts in 2006, 205 posts in 2007 for example).
3. **<u>interactive, having flows of communication between participants</u>**
   - Substantial discussion between the blogger and commenters, and within the community.
4. **<u>substantial, in terms of numbers of users</u>**
5. **<u>heterogeneous, involving different participants</u>**
   - Large numbers of commenters (e.g. 345 different individuals in 2006, 504 in 2007).
6. **<u>data-rich</u>**.
   - Long posts, with descriptive language used, many photographs.

7.3.2 The Reliability of the Method.

Qualitative research does not fit well with the positivist framework of validity and reliability (Shenton, 2004). Guba and Lincoln (1989), however, proposed four alternative criteria: credibility; transferability; dependability and confirmability.

Although this study uses a relatively new methodology in netnography, it comes with the heritage of ethnography which is well-established, and which Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest gives credibility to the research. In addition, the data collection method in netnography relies on written material that is able to be retrieved from the archive at any time thus reducing the potential for transcription errors. Furthermore, the study is a longitudinal one, allowing the data to be viewed over a long period of time. Both Trochim (2006) and Shenton (2004) have suggested that prolonged engagement with the data will make the findings more credible, and Kozinets (2002) suggests that this long-term immersion in the community may equal a member check in normal ethnography.

In this study, there is no attempt made by the researcher to claim that the findings are transferable, as the findings of netnographic research tend to be pluralistic rather than generalisable. This was based on Guba and Lincoln's (1989) proposal of four criteria for measuring the soundness of qualitative data, and therefore is an alternative to the positivist views espoused by quantitative researchers. These alternatives are credibility as a replacement for internal validity, transferability for external validity, dependability for reliability and confirmability for objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The research context has been fully described in detail in the methodology chapter, along with any assumptions made. As dependability is closely linked with credibility, it would be impossible to replicate the findings by using another food blog, or indeed *Grab Your Fork* over a different time period as the research contexts will be different.

In the case of confirmability, Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend that the researcher admits to their own preconceptions at the time of beginning the research, and that there should be an appropriate and followable data trail through the research. In this thesis, the researcher was familiar with the geographical location of many of the subject restaurants discussed within *Grab Your Fork.* The researcher had some personal experience by either eating within those particular establishments or by reading professional reviews during her period of residency in Sydney. However, at the time of commencement of this thesis, the researcher had not been resident in Sydney for some two years, and thus the personal experience was not considered to be a factor in the objectivity of the analysis; establishments change hands, change staff and inevitably evolve to match the ever changing tastes and fashions of their customers, making any prior experience or preconceptions both null and void. Tetsuya's is a possible exception, as at the time of the research it was considered to be one of the best restaurants in the world, and had a level of media exposure commensurate with that status.

As this thesis is a longitudinal study, the evolution of the blog posts and comments extracted from the blog for inclusion within the thesis demonstrate the chronology of Yee's ascendency up the Serious Leisure career ladder, and in parallel with that her status changes and development of her Social Identity within the group. The dates associated with the blog extracts within the thesis provide a chronological record that forms an audit trail within the work (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

7.3.3 Ethics

The use of netnography does raise some particular ethical issues. Informed consent becomes more difficult in an online environment (King, 1996; Sharf, 1999) and also a major question is whether the researcher should disclose their presence to the community being observed. In the case of this thesis, the researcher obtained permission to study the community by sending an email to Helen Yee. This researcher has also followed the guidelines of several authors in making the assumption that blogs are a public, not private, publishing space (Bassett and O'Riordan, 2002; Kozinets, 2010b) therefore making the requirement to ask permission to read and study the comments unnecessary . This decision was made as it is clear that blogs are intended to be read by other people. In the case of *Grab Your Fork*, Helen Yee invites comment and happily discusses her posts with members of the online foodie community. Kozinets (2010b) suggests that "implied consent" applies when individuals make a public online comment. Although Kozinets (2010b) does suggest not using online pseudonyms, other authors have felt that merely changing the name used by bloggers or commenters will not be sufficient to hide their identity, especially if direct quotes are used (Beaven & Laws, 2006; Lipinski, 2006). Yee has also registered her blog as Some Rights Reserved with Creative Commons (CC) (http://creativecommons.org/), which shows that she is prepared for her blog posts to be shared, copied, distributed and transmitted by other Internet users.

Furthermore, this researcher decided to undertake the study by means of participant observation, specifically being a "complete observer" (Elliot & Jankel-Elliot, 2003) and not contributing to the discussion. The reason for this is that it was felt that being a contributing member of the community for a long period would influence the discussion, and negate one of the major advantages of netnography, which is that it is less intrusive that traditional ethnography (Paccagnella, 1997; Hookway, 2008). Kozinets (2010b) agrees that whilst "lurking" on a bulletin board has negative connotations, that when studying a blog, the researcher need not be actively involved in the discussion of the community, and that many blog readers also do not contribute comments, so that there is nothing unusual in the researcher taking this position.

The research into *Grab Your Fork* inevitably involved a level of familiarity with the group as a non-participative observer. This observational position was with the full knowledge and consent of Helen Yee. It is therefore possible that Yee's approach to the blog was altered as a result of her knowledge of this observation of it. However, those other participants and community members were unaware of the observation of their activities, and hence it is considered that the act of observing had negligible effect on how the dynamics developed.

7.4 Critical Reflections on the Researcher's Journey

The researcher evolved into a self-identified foodie in the mid-Nineteen Eighties, where holidays became an opportunity to "collect" visits to famous restaurants, eat meals by famous chefs and to eat "authentic" international cuisines. On many trips the only knowledge of the country's language was what could be read from a menu; this was usually extensive.

Grab Your Fork satisfied Kozinets' (2010b) Six Criteria, and also kept this researcher's interest. There was a level of "local understanding" of the blog posts as this researcher had spent most of her adult life in Sydney; a number of the restaurants to which Yee referred were known to her, and a few had even been visited in the past. As a direct consequence of this familiarity, a conscious effort was made to disregard any previous experiences and personal opinions.

Hamilton et al. (2012) discussed their own experiences as researchers of consumption, and felt that not only does the researcher bring themselves to the field, but that the field interacts with the researcher to alter the self. This fits with previously discussed concepts within this thesis, such as those of Giddins (1991), regarding the perpetual re-invention of the self, and Turner's (1967; 1974) understanding of society as a structure of changing positions. Hamilton et al. (2012) suggest that Turner's concept of the luminal stage which marks the "ambiguous, unsettled and unsettling" (p. 277) change between such positions can be applied to the personal development of this researcher over the period of her involvement with the research project. This researcher's experiences over the course of the study do support these concepts; for example, the researcher now has a higher level of acceptance of blogging as a source of "street level" information on a variety of experiences and products. This was an unexpected side-benefit from the work. A further personal benefit is the opportunity for further research in this area.

Over the period of study, the research has moved away from its' marketing origins to become more anthropological. The initial concept was to explore the blog to uncover extraordinary experiences within it (Abrahams, 1986). However, the research direction began to find its' own course as the blog posts altered and the blog matured. The researcher did not initially expect that the level of interest in, and the apparent pertinence of blogging *per se* would be directly proportional to the depth of immersion into the data. This became apparent as the research progressed. The Social Identity (Tajfel &

Turner, 1979) of the internet-mediated community developed in parallel with the original concept of a Community of Consumption (Schouten & McAlexander 1995). The eventual title of the thesis "*Grab Your Fork:* A Netnographic Study of a Foodie Blog and its Community" shows this progression.

7.5 Satisfying the Aims & Objectives of the Study

The aim of this thesis has been to examine critically the key themes of food blogging as a form of Serious Leisure, and to explore through Social Identity Theory the mediation of meanings and understandings of self for the blogger and her followers. This was achieved by a number of objectives:

1. **To critically assess the current state of the literature regarding foodie culture, blogging and communities of consumption.**

The current state of the literature was analysed in the literature review in chapters 2 and 3. It was found that whilst blogging has only been in existence since the mid- 1990s, it has been well-discussed in the literature. Communities of consumption have received much attention since Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) seminal paper on Harley-Davidson owners, however there is little written about foodie communities either on or off-line. This thesis fills a gap in the current published literature.

2. **To review and assess the concept of Serious Leisure as an explanation of the development of foodie attitudes and behaviour**

Yee speaks of *genuine works of passion*, *bewildering intensity, eagerness to share, unabated love*. Her quoted words are confirmation that her involvement in this pursuit requires perseverance – a fundamental component of the Serious Leisure activity. Blogging about visits to exclusive restaurants or consuming exotic fare is an example of badging (Antin & Churchill, 2011). By collecting exclusive or unusual experiences, the foodie advances up the Serious Leisure Career Ladder. By improving personal knowledge and skills pertinent to foodie activities, the veracity of the blogs is improved. For example, Yee attended a specialist cooking class to learn about Kaiseki – a particular style of Japanese cooking. This is an input of Significant Personal Effort (Stebbins, 1992) and results in Skilled Consumption (Scitovsky, 1976).

Her involvement has resulted in a certain amount of paid journalism – an example of Durable Benefit. As a consequence of this work, she has the Social Benefit of being looked upon as an authority within the foodie community, which in turn results in further ascendance of the Serious Leisure Career Ladder. The uniqueness of the ethos within the community, or communitas (Turner, 1969) reinforces the differences between the in-group and non-members. In-group participants have a sense of belonging, which increases in parallel with their intra-group activities. As this sense of belonging becomes more pronounced, their self – identification within the group intensifies (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This is illustrated by Yee's visit to Tetsuya's.

3. <u>To analyse the posts and readers' comments of a suitable blog in order to identify evidence of a foodie interpretive repertoire</u>

Grab Your Fork was identified using Kozinets' (1999; 2010b) criteria for suitable Netnography material. The use of specific terminologies is part of the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) of members of a community, and is known in discourse analysis as an interpretative repertoire (Wetherell & Potter, 1988; Hjørland, 2006). Members of the SL community have specialist skills and knowledge, and use specialist terminology in their discussions which reinforce this marginality from the mainstream (Jones, 2006; Stebbins, 1996). The language used in this blog assumes a high level of knowledge of culinary terms, methods and ingredients by the readership, and highlights the unique ethos of the group (Stebbins, 1992; Jones, 2006). Such language adds to the social understandings of such a group, and aids in creating meaning.

Although there is a "foodie language" in use between members of the community, it has not developed to the extent that use of words or phrases is so dissimilar to that used by off – line foodies. The culinary terminology – cooking methods, ingredients – used in the blog would be understood by other foodies and persons involved in hospitality and catering. Food related "Blog-speak" has not yet evolved.

4. <u>To identify and critique the shared system of meanings for the foodie "tribe" in these patterns</u>

As highlighted by Tsaur and Liang (2008), Serious Leisure participants develop cliques with like minded people based upon their mutual beliefs, values, principles and standards. This is known as the Unique Ethos of their activity (Stebbins, 1992). Due to this Unique Ethos the community tend to speak profoundly and frequently with regards to their Serious Leisure activity (Tsaur & Liang, 2008; Stebbins, 1992). During the analysis, evidence was sought to identify examples of members of the in-group using such skills and knowledge within the on-line discussion. Numerous examples have been given where commenters have clarified a post made by Helen Yee, or another poster.

5. <u>To critically evaluate using Social Identity Theory how meaning is used by the individuals to interpret their experiences and construct self-identity</u>

Leisure experiences are subjective and emotional (Holbrook & Hirschmann, 1982), and the circumstances of the event will dictate the personal symbology attached to it. The case under study in this thesis is a community of consumption in the consumer behaviour sense – a "tribe" (Maffesoli 1996). If the diner then blogs about the experience, this is then transformed into something more tangible for the group to share. It is also suggested (Giddens, 1991; Chaffee, 2011) that postmodernism has made reflexive identity radicalise – no longer does it simply assist in individual self-identity, rather that it is involved in the development of social structures through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Carừ and Cova (2007) suggest that postmodern consumers are seeking experiential gratification within a social context: group members experience the situation as collective and liminoid (Turner, 1977), which is characteristic of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A meal at the *chef's table*, for example takes the diner well beyond the standard restaurant experience, it is liminoid, and the celebrity chef represents the "high priest" of food.

This Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is the understanding of the self as an in-group member. If the social identity is salient, the individual acts as a group member, within group norms; if personal identity is salient then they don't (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Abrams et al. 1990). This "depersonalisation" means that individual characteristics are of less importance than how the group members are similar to each other (Reicher et al. 1995).

Non-salience with the group may be for a number of reasons. Whilst Helen Yee identifies herself as a blogger and also as a foodie, the individual may have chosen to identify with a national or ethnic label. Yee also describes herself as an *ABC* for example. Inherited nostalgia (Maghbouleh, 2010) has an important meaning for the self- identity of immigrants and their children. At other times an on-line pseudonym may be used as a mask to hide behind.

6. <u>To review and assess how understanding the myths, values, rituals, and vocabulary of the foodie tribe can assist restaurant marketers to better understand their foodie customers.</u>

Consumers seek out quality information before making purchase decisions, and with the growth of the internet, online consumer reviews have become an important resource (Zhu & Zhang, 2010; Pantalidis, 2010). Such amateur reviews aid in spreading word of mouth attitudes within a community. From a postmodern perspective, the opinions of citizen journalists are just as relevant as and perhaps more credible than paid reviewers. Even positivist research points to similar trends. A study by technorati (2011) suggests that there is growing acceptance of blogging as being a true, unbiased representation of the subject being reviewed. Readers interpret the presented information in blogs from a different mindset to that they employ when reading the traditional media. Those who read them are looking for a different experience than they would from a printed, professional, food review. Dining purchasing decisions made by the consumer based on an amateur review from a blog are more likely to be based on the reality of blogger's personal experience than purely on mainstream media hype. It is the linking value of an experience that is sought (Cova, 1996).

Community myths may involve the belief that a particular experience may be transcendent, liminoid, or a like a pilgrimage. An example is highlighted by Yee's post and the subsequent comments regarding her visit to *Tetsuya's* restaurant. Her references to the chef as "the master", and the comments by other community members about their own visits to the famed restaurant can be seen in this way. A second example is how Helen Yee is perceived by the members of *Grab Your Fork's* community. Considering her expertise and hierarchical position within the group, any particularly complimentary reviews of a dining experience will influence the opinions of other members of the group towards that establishment. Yee is seen as a foodie "high priestess" and therefore an almost unquestionable authority within the social group.

One of the rituals of bloggers when they visit a restaurant is to take photographs of their meals to post on the blogs along with their description and explanation of the food. For example, in a blog posted on 27th August, 2005 (see page 215), the discussion between Yee and another blogger, Pinkcocoa, regarding being too tired to take photographs, as well as having taken and posted photos from previous visits is punctuated by them actually taking photographs during this visit. Yee ends her post with the comment “Once a food blogger, always a food blogger” (Yee 27th August, 2005).

Traditionally, restaurants had a menu that was pre-ordained and the consumer selected items from that menu. Since the advent of social media, more specifically food blogging, the consumer has a voice and will comment with respect to the nature of the fare on offer. Restaurateurs should be more aware of the citizen journalist’s posts regarding the ambience of their premises, the service and the food – in fact the entire experience on offer. In this way, they can listen to informed opinion leaders such as Helen Yee, and view the contributions of casual commenters. By gathering consumer intelligence in this manner there is the opportunity for restaurateurs to instigate changes to their offering ranging from subtle enhancements through to a complete overhaul, without the very high element of guesswork that would have been previously involved.

7.6 Contribution to Knowledge

The internet has made the previously silent consumer’s voice audible, and by so doing it allows skilled amateurs (Stebbins, 1992) the opportunity to express their opinions freely and simply, and to share them with like-minded individuals. This allows communities to spontaneously develop much more rapidly, and over greater geographical areas than was previously possible. Time-zones and physical locations are irrelevant in the blogosphere. All that is required is a means to connect. This thesis has taken the established theories of Stebbins’ (1992) concept of Serious Leisure, and Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) Social Identity perspective, and applied them individually and in combination to novel situations which have not previously been explored. The work involved in the thesis has demonstrated the validity of these theories in a hospitality environment, specifically using the concept of the social media tool of blogging as its basis. Foodies are people with an inordinate interest in food and eating. They are more likely to eat out regularly than other sections of the population and therefore should be an important marketing tool for the hospitality industry. The practical application of the findings of this research therefore relates to the ability of restaurateurs to benefit from the latest form of consumer feedback – electronic word of mouth (e-WOM).

One "professional" critic's opinion is not necessarily representative. The opinions of the community of a blog, which by its very nature can be a large number of skilled amateurs, provides a much more rounded impression of the dining experience in a particular restaurant, and comparisons between similar restaurants. These opinions will very likely be diverse, allowing the reader to make a more informed decision regarding their choice of restaurant. Readers of food blogs see the writing of bloggers as more independent and therefore less open to external influence than supposedly "professional" food reviewers whose meals are paid for by their employers. This has induced the traditional media to reconsider their place in the readership's lives and to embrace the alternatives available. In an article, the Weekend Australian magazine made the statement that bloggers are "failed journalists" (Meryment, 2011). In less than two years *Grab Your Fork* has altered that thinking to the extent that Meryment has collaborated, rather than competed with, Yee in the editing of a food book. This supports the premise that the journalist's motivation for entering into this collaboration is a professional's recognition of Yee's credibility as a "citizen journalist" (Bruns, 2007).

This research has shown that foodies are more likely to trust the opinions of food bloggers than traditional food critics. This being the case, then, instead of dismissing the opinions of food bloggers the restaurant industry should be more embracing of them. Over the time period used for this study, it slowly became apparent that certain Sydney establishments were becoming more open to this thinking and more aware of the potential; *Merivale* opened their kitchen to four food bloggers to cook a meal for paying guests (Yee 29th July, 2010). The $60.00 per head tickets sold out extremely quickly and the food blogging community turned out in force to support their comrades. The subsequent coverage of the meal within food blogs was excellent public relations for the restaurant. Such an event would have been unlikely ten years ago, when bloggers where treated by the hospitality industry as amateurs who were at best an irritation, and more likely to be completely disregarded.

Blogs have developed over the past ten years into an important tool for marketing, in particular for intangible service experiences such as restaurant meals. The increasing acceptance of the inclusion of independent bloggers as part of their distribution channel is a vital part of the marketing requirements for 21st century restaurateurs. The blogger gets self-satisfaction from writing the blog – it is an important part of their Serious Leisure experience – and the blog provides the restaurateur with the potential to increase their client base at a negligible cost. It is in the restaurateurs' best interests to monitor blogs such as *Grab Your Fork* and alter their products to meet the needs of their market as expressed through the posts of the blogger, and the conversations of the blog community.

Kozinets (2006) has argued that the mass adoption of networked personal computing since the mid-1990s has led to the development of new cultural formations on-line which require new research methodologies. Netnography is an ethnography which is conducted on the internet, in particular one in a consumer context (Kozinets, 2002; Hair & Clark, 2003). Bengry-Howell et al. (2011) describe netnography as being an exemplar method for research which studies online cultures and communities formed through computer-mediated communications (Kozinets, 2006a). The use of netnography for this study adds to the knowledge in the field of hospitality consumer behaviour and marketing, where its use is increasing.

In the case of this research, the community studied was a foodie community which had developed around a Sydney-based food blog, *Grab Your Fork*.

The initial literature review showed that at the beginning of this study, there were very few other netnographies, and none of foodie communities. Research by Ambrozas (2003) did look at Canadian foodies however this was not a study of an on-line community. Netnography has become a more popular research method (eg. Bengry-Howell et al. 2011). This study therefore adds to the body of knowledge by specifically providing a netnography used in the context of foodism, Serious Leisure, Social Identity Theory and the impact of blogging on all of these.

7.7 Conclusions & Recommendations

- Firstly foodism, blogging and food blogging are Serious Leisure activities. Helen Yee's out - of - hours activities involved with consuming food and blogging about her experiences of doing so fit with Stebbins' (1992) definitions of Serious Leisure and its Six Characteristics. Throughout the period of study it has been possible to see Yee climbing the Serious Leisure career ladder from an individual who was blogging for her own interest as a public diary of her eating experiences to a semi-professional food writer.

- Secondly, the group of individuals who have developed into an on-line community around *Grab Your Fork* create their social identity through a sense of belonging with other in-members of the group. This is supported by Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory. Group members share values, beliefs and meanings, and an interpretive repertoire. This is also linked to their Serious Leisure identity, as suggested by Shamir (1992).

- Thirdly, Yee is a key individual in an information network: she is in a position to disseminate information and shape the tastes of her readers. Her comments on the food, the service and the décor of the establishments she reviews should be taken seriously. Throughout the early posts it was clear that industry professionals did not take food bloggers seriously, however this began to change over time, as

Helen developed a greater credibility and following. In response to Yee's post of 20th June, 2011, an anonymous commenter claimed that he chooses 90% of his restaurants based on blogs such as *Grab Your Fork*. Statistics from technorati's *State of the Blogosphere Report* (2011) suggest that 46% of people trust traditional media less than they did a year previously. Blog readers prefer to get their information from independent bloggers rather than traditional sources of media.

The following recommendations are made in view of the findings:

- **Restaurateurs would benefit from attracting foodies to their establishments with special events that acknowledge the skilled consumption knowledge of foodies.**

As foodies are people with an inordinate interest in food and eating, they are more likely to dine frequently in restaurants than other sections of the comparable population. They choose to dine out for the experience rather than merely the convenience of not having to cook themselves. They are therefore an important market for the hospitality industry.

- **Restaurateurs would benefit from fully embracing the blogging community by using the latest form of consumer feedback – the electronic word of mouth of foodies via their food blogs.**

Blogging has evolved into a credible communication medium. A memorable experience has the potential to be relayed to many more people via a blog than via any other medium. e-WOM is a self – targeting medium that is a largely untapped resource for marketing at no cost.

- **It would be commercially advantageous if restaurateurs took food bloggers more seriously than they have done previously.**

Many consumers are more likely to trust amateur restaurant reviews on-line than those of so-called "expert" restaurant critics in the traditional media. The views of the amateur consumer are free from commercial influence. The amateur reviewer is spending their money on buying the meal, and is therefore likely to be more objective with respect to the value for money of the entire experience.

7.8 Strengths & Weaknesses

7.8.1 Weaknesses

- In an ethnographic study, the sample is a small and judgemental one, opportunistically chosen in order to achieve rich data. This, however, means that it is not necessarily representative of all other populations, and cannot be replicated (Holloway & Brown, 2012).
- With an ethnographic method, the results are not transferable, for example to a different foodie blog written by another person, or even to *Grab Your Fork* over a different time period (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The compensation for this lack of generalisability is the depth of understanding gained in one setting (Fielding, 2008), particularly when the results are written up as "thick description" (Geertz, 1973).

7.8.2 Strengths

- The elapsed time from inception to final data point covers the entire life of the blog and thus is a complete study sample of *Grab Your Fork*. The benefit of this is that the data is not merely a "snapshot" of the blog; rather it is an observed evolution of the life of the blog and its community.

- Netnography has a number of advantages as a methodology, including being less intrusive into the microcosm that is the world of the blog.
- The thesis brings literature and theory together from a number of areas which have not been considered in combination previously. The scope of literature on Serious Leisure has been enhanced by the inclusion of foodism and blogging.
- Social Identity Theory has been used to explain facets of Serious Leisure such as a Sense of Belonging and the Unique Ethos – as suggested by Shamir (1992) and Shipway and Jones (2007). It has also been discussed in terms of on-line communities. The thesis has established that social groupings can - and do - exist as collections of disembodied individuals.

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Appendix 1: Publications Based On This Thesis

Morgan, M. & Watson P. 2007. *Resource Guide to Extraordinary Experiences.* HLST Network of the UK Higher Education Academy http://www.hlst.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/guides/extraexperiences.html

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Appendix 2: Example of Coding.

Grab Your Fork

sydney eats * tasty travels * a feast of photos

« Home | Pyrmont Growers Market »

SACRED / PROFANE

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 06, 2005

Tetsuya's, Sydney

PILGRIMAGE

At $175 a head, Tetsuya's is perhaps seens as the gastronomic Mecca for Australian foodies. "*One day I'll go*", is the repeated mantra. "It's just so *expensive*..."

→ "COLLECTING A TROPHY" → BADGING

For non-foodies, their look of bewilderment is genuine. "$175 for a meal?" they bleat. "And it costs $75 on top of that for matching wines?" Their pupils dilate in disbelief.

But they don't *understand*. This is not just "a meal". This is art. This is ten courses of culinary genius. This is the inner temple of gastronomy. This is Tetsuya's.

PILGRIMAGE

- INSIDERS / OUTSIDERS

EXPECTATIONS

EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE

- PERSEVERENCE (S.L.)
- BADGING

From the moment we made our booking way back in December last year (bookings for Saturday nights allegedly fill up to 3 months in advance), I would walk past the gates of Tetsuya's on Kent Street with increasing anticipatory drool. During the day, the steel gate draws back only when a pin number is entered by delivery drivers, further adding to the mystique and air of exclusivity.

→ HEDONIC CONSUMPTION

What gastronomic treasures lay beyond in this hidden fortress?, I would wonder as I dawdled past. I felt like Charlie Bucket peering through the gates of Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, as I daydreamed about the delicious treats housed within.

So it was with childish glee when we finally got to walk up the Tetsuya's driveway last Saturday night. Suited staff seemed to congest the entrance (attendant parking costs $25) as we casually strolled up the stairs with nonchalance (oh yes, we dine here every weekend).

Inside, the restaurant was much larger than I expected (no, I never even got here when this used to be Suntory) with a number of small-ish rooms branching off in different directions. Sculptures and paintings add an air of cultural ambience (ok, yes I mean posh) with the building forming a somewhat L-shape around the famed Japanese-style rock garden with mini-waterfall (pic at end of post).

But I know, I know–you just want the food photos. *sigh* → BLOGGING

↓

ADD TO CHARACTER / INTEREST OF G.Y.F.

GRAB YOUR FORK is Helen's gastronomic journey around Sydney and abroad. She writes a monthly Eat This! column for Time Out Sydney and is Cheap Eats editor for the 2012 Eating and Drinking Sydney guide. Hel contributing writer for The Foodies' Gui and a reviewer behind the 2012 Food L Chinatown. Her work has been publish Voracious: The Best New Australian F Read more about Helen or send an em

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Grab Your Fork Highlight

What's Hot
> Peanut pretzel sundae at Hartsyard,
> Knuckle sandwich at Sixpenny, Stan
> Pickled chokos at Cornersmith, Marr
> Deep-fried pickles and avocado at Th
> Escabeche of mussels at Freda's, Cl
> Baked eggs at Circa Espresso, Parr

> Seasonal salads at Kitchen by Mike,
> $3 pintxos Tuesdays at The Carringt
> The 1.7kg tomahawk steak at Chophi
> Offal tacos at El Loco, Surry Hills
> Tuna jaw at Izakaya Fujiyama, Surry

Highlights
> Top 10 Sydney Eats for Tourists
> Your Guide to Mushroom Picking in
> Penang Food Tour food blogger style
> TOYS Collective: Blood, Bones & But
> Pepe Saya Butter factory tour

> Bloggers vs Critics - can anybody wr
> Behind-the-scenes on a food photog
> Sydney Roller Derby League
> Iron Chefs Chen and Sakai in Sydney
> The man behind Gumshara Ramen

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Pyrmont Growers Market
Comment corner
Zest tell me the truth!
EoMEoTE #5: Eggymite–Scramblec Vegemite...
Una's on Broadway, Ultimo

*Bread roll with Tetsuya's **black truffle salsa butter***

BLOGGING

Yeah I know. My commitment to the foodblogging community saw me taking pictures of the house bread. But the bread was good. Freshly baked, warm, fluffy, crusty and slathered in black truffle salsa butter. I have a jar of this at home which I have yet to christen.

FOODIE

After perusing the phonebook-sized wine list (seriously it must have been about 20 pages in a heavy leather binder) we eventually decided on the 2002 **Delatite Dead Man's Hill Gewurztramminer** ($42) which was predictably light and fruity. We exercised restraint and resisted the 1973 Dom Perignon ($1200) and the 1990 Krug Clos du Mesnil ($1320).

Our waiter quickly outlined the degustation concept (Tetsuya's used to offer an a la carte menu, but so many diners opted for the degustation that he abandoned it) and explained the first six dishes which would be savoury. He then rattled off a number of key ingredients and reassured us that should we have any problem or allergy with any of the above then it would be *absolutely no problem* to remove or replace the ingredient.

We had no issues. Except we were hungry.

Hors deuvre: *Snow egg and caviar sandwich*

Fancy having one of these packed in your lunchbox for school? The bread was soft, white and fluffy, the egg was creamy and the caviar was bon, bebe, bon! → FROM AUSSIE ENGLISH TO O.T.T. FRENCH.

USE OF POETIC LANGUAGE.

Savoury course #1:
Tartare of tuna on sushi rice with avocado

La Peniche, Stanmore
Out of Africa, Manly
Bairro Portugues - Petersham Foo
Berry bombs
Pink Salt, Manly

Favourite feeds..
Memorable meals..
Food made with love..
Ten questions with..

Sydney Eats

Sydney CBD..
Haymarket/ Chinatown..
Surry Hills..
Darling Harbour and Pyrmont..
Broadway, Ultimo and Chippendale..

Sydney North
Sydney East..
Sydney Inner West..
Sydney North West..
Sydney South West..
Sydney West..
Sydney South..

All Sydney restaurants by cuisine..

Bakeries and sweets in Sydney--by type
Bakeries and sweets in Sydney--by locati

Other Australian Eats

ACT..
NSW..
SA..
VIC..

International Eats

Japan..
Malaysia..
Thailand..
New Zealand..
Philippines..
Singapore..
USA..
Markets around the world..

Delicious Adventures Arc World

This dish felt like an old friend after **seeing Tetsuya create this dish at a DJs Food Hall demonstration** and then racing home and **attempting to make it myself**.

But this will still so deliciously good, and the pepperiness of the avocado was divine.

FOODIE
→ SKILLED CONSUMPTION (Scitovsky 1976)

Savoury course #2:
(clockwise from top left)
Tuna marinated in soy and mirin
Cold corn soup with basil ice cream
Trevally with preserved lemon.

POETIC LANGUAGE USED

The tuna was firm and tasty, the trevally sang with lemon but the highlight for me was the basil ice cream cold corn soup. Cold, salty and exploding with basil flavour, it was the perfect compliment to the corn. I remember Tetsuya telling us at the demonstration how to re-create these dishes—I'm kicking myself I didn't take notes.

FOODIE – SHE HAS MADE THIS DISH.

Savoury course #3:
Confit of petuna Tasmanian ocean trout with konbu, daikon and fennel; served with a seasonal green salad.
(Tetsuya's signature dish)

COMMUNITY SHARES KNOWLEDGE.

~~We're still puzzling over why this was called a confit when the ocean trout appeared to be uncooked.~~ The ocean trout appeared to be uncooked but had actually been cooked confit-style, immersed in oil at a very low temperature. The ocean trout was springy with freshness and melt-in-the-mouth tender. Encrusted with finely chopped konbu and highly salted, at times I felt the sweetness of the trout was overwhelmed by the flavour of seaweed but who am I to argue with The Master.

→ "SACRED"

As you bit into each shiny firm globule, the trout roe burst their briney goodness all over your dancing tongue. According to the waiter these were unpasteurised, meaning they were milked fresh from Australian trout (all imported caviar must be pasteurised). Another highlight.

SKILLED CONSUMPTION

HEDONIC CONSUMPTION

Savoury course #4:
Ravioli of lobster and crab with shellfish essence

Light and delicate, the lobster and crab-filled ravioli was enhanced by the small disc of shellfish terrine underneath. There was crab, there was lobster, there was roe. And then there was none. Only a vague blurred tongue-print.

Savoury course #5:
Twice cooked de-boned spatchcock with braised daikon and bread sauce.

SKILLED CONSUMPTION
↓
KNOWLEDGE OF METHODS.

Pity the poor chef who must de-bone spatchcocks all day. The spatchcock was surprisingly moist, the soy beans tasted freshly shelled and the yellow vegetable was actually a meticulously carved potato (unless our tastebuds committed a huge faux pas).

Underneath the spatchcock bundle was a disc of simmered daikon radiating earthy miso flavours.

The gourmand's meat and three veg.

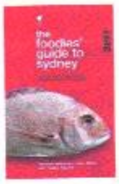
Food blog faves - Australia
Food blog faves - Asia
Food blog faves - Europe
Food blog faves - Canada & Amer
Photography blog faves

Sydney Outdoor Markets

FIRST SAT: Good Living Growers Market, Pyrm
SECOND SAT: Castle Hill Farmers Market
THIRD SAT: Northside Produce Market
EVERY WED: Farmers Market, Ent Quarter
EVERY FRI: Hawkesbury Harvest Farmers Mark
EVERY SAT: Eveleigh Farmers' Markets
EVERY SAT: Farmers Market, Ent Quarter
EVERY SAT: Kings Cross Organic Market
EVERY SAT: Orange Grove Markets
EVERY SAT: Warwick Farm Trackside Market

Organic Food Markets
More Sydney markets

PUBLISHED WORKS



PRESS AND MEDIA

JamieOliver.com
702 ABC Sydney
MY NIKON LIFE
NewStatesman
Weekend Australian
Daily Telegraph
702 ABC Sydney
CNN

Savoury course #6:
Grilled Wagyu beef with asian mushrooms and lime jus

INTERPRETIVE REPERTOIRE (GROUP LANGUAGE)

The Wagyu was actually a paper-thin scroll of beef carefully rolled up and very lightly seared. Mushrooms were shimeji, shiitake and chestnut.

→ KNOWLEDGE OF INGREDIENTS.

Dessert course #1:
Orange and honey sorbet with black pepper

Two shot glasses were presented on a platter with the waiter recommending we have the orange sorbet first. Pepper and citrus pair surprisingly well and cleansed the palate.

Dessert course #2:
Tetsuya's take on strawberry shortcake

The strawberry shortcake was a base of sweet syrupy crust layered with a strawberry coulis and garnished with a dollop of cream. We were instructed to mix the layers before consuming. I tried taste-testing the crust layer on its own (for purity of research, of course) but before too long all the layers had swirled together in a pink hurricane of sweetness.

This was a smash hit with two dining companions in particular who couldn't stop raving on

AWARDS

Like Be the first of your friends to this.

about it. I liked it, but I wasn't swooning. Although I did like the genuine macerated strawberry in the middle.

Dessert course #3:
Blue cheese ice cream with pear and sauterne jelly

KNOWLEDGE OF BRANDS

Ahhh, now this kind of ground-breaking flavour revelation was more to my liking. Tasting rather like creamy soft blue cheese, enquiries to the waiter indicated this is made with King Island Endeavour.

HEDONIC CONSUMPTION

I liked it. It was different, interesting and provocative.

Dessert course #4:
Floating island with praline and vanilla bean anglaise.

INTERPRETIVE REPERTOIRE

We expected a quenelle of soft meringue so this one took me by surprise. However within the soft marshmallowy pillow ran a river of liquid praline. This was delicate, light and very more-ish!

FOODIE.

Petit fours

By the time we were served our petit fours it was past 11pm. Ten courses over four hours… who said this wasn't value for money?

INSIDERS | OUTSIDERS

The petit fours were what looked like Marie biscuit shards encased in a dried date mixture and then rolled in coconut. My flat white coffee was amazingly good (read: strong and flavoursome) and the tea was also wonderfully hearty and served in a traditional-looking Japanese iron teapot.

FOODIE EXPECTATIONS

Overall? This is undoubtedly a treat-kinda restaurant where the impeccable service and elegant surrounds add an air of occasion. I was impressed with the way waitstaff seamlessly took over from one another and how, when one of our party was in the bathroom when we were delivered our next course and accompanying ingredient spiel, the waiter loitered inconspicuously in the background and retold the information again when they returned.

EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE

The food was faultless and yes, we even saw Tetsuya who wandered into the dining area to speak to a couple in the corner for a good five minutes (personal friends or particular VIPs no doubt as he left again at the conclusion of the conversation).

SACRED | PROFANE

A member of our dining party even managed to wangle their way briefly into the kitchen (ok they work in hospitality) for a squizz. Apparently the kitchen was surprisingly calm and quiet, with chefs beavering away diligently although no sign of Tetsuya on the pass.

EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE

There were a couple of extra courses we declined on, including Pacific oysters with Tetsuya's oyster dressing and a cheese platter. But honestly, we were well and truly satiated by the meal's conclusion.

Favourite courses:
Tartare of tuna on sushi rice with avocado;
Cold corn soup with basil ice cream;
The ocean trout and the unpasteurised trout roe; and
The blue cheese ice cream.

FOODIE EXPERIENCE

Was it worth it?
Absolutely.

INSIDERS | OUTSIDERS

Tetsuya's, Sydney | Grab Your Fork: A Sydney food blog

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Tetsuya's
529 Kent Street, Sydney
Tel: +61 (02) 9267 2900

10-course degustation menu $175
With matching wines $250
(Prices correct at April 2005 -
for up-to-date pricing, please contact the restaurant directly)

Lunch: Saturday from 12noon
Dinner: Tuesday to Saturday from 6.00pm
Closed Sunday, Monday and public holidays

Related GrabYourFork posts:
Tetsuya Masterclass and degustation (Mar 2010)
Tetsuya demonstration at DJs (Feb 2005)

→ BLOGGING OF RELATED FOODIE EXPERIENCES.

Earth

54 comments - Add some comment love

SHARE

posted by Helen (AugustusGloop) on 4/06/2005 11:59:00 PM

54 Comments:

SACRED|PROFANE

COMMUNITY SHARES:
- KNOWLEDGE
- EXPERIENCES
- INTERPRETIVE REPERTOIRE.

At 4/07/2005 12:06 AM, OsloFoodie said...

Sigh, and sigh again. That's all I could manage while reading this post. Whatever I eat for dinner tonight, it will taste bland, bland, bland. Appreciate the writing and photos, AG. Sometimes I feel the same way about taking photos and trying to eat at the same time, feeling shy, etc.

→ BLOGGING

At 4/07/2005 1:23 AM, Julia said...

HEDONIC

Ooh, and aah, was all I could manage as I drooled over the pics and read your commentary. What can I say, AG? I'm speechless with envy. :)

At 4/07/2005 9:31 AM, CherryRipe said...

Looks absolutely delicious! Thanks for sharing. :)

At 4/07/2005 3:33 PM, Ben said...

NB: JULIA + CHERRYRIPE ARE BLOGGERS, BUT NO MENTION OF THEIR OWN SITES.

Awesome! I've never managed to make it along to Tets' as I'm sure I'd have to wine match and of course one needs company, so $500 has always managed to scare me away. → NON-FOODIE COMMENT.

(IS BEN INSIDE OR OUTSIDE THE GROUP?)

Did you go with your work foodie gang? Looks like you had a great time.

The blue cheese ice cream is inspired - was it as yummy as it looks? Nice transition between savoury and sweet I imagine. → FOODIE COMMENT

At 4/07/2005 3:50 PM, SiaoChaBoa said...

What a heavenly entry.. AG..!! I'm envious.. and drooling at the same time..! Give me a big towel.. honey..! HEDONIC

At 4/07/2005 5:52 PM, gwenda said...

wowwww. cant wait for the day when i've saved up enough to eat there! thank god i've got 5 years here to save up for my tets pilgrimage! → SACRED/PROFANE

At 4/07/2005 9:24 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

NB: HELEN RESPONDS TO EVERY COMMENT.

Hi OlsoFoodie - Nay, your dinner will involve smoked seafood, reindeer and other gourmet delicacies with squiggles and circles on top. Not to mention casual jaunts to Denmark and Sweden! =P

↳ DIFF. EXPECTATIONS OF WHAT IS "EXTRAORDINARY". cf. "NORMAL" OR "MUNDANE"

Glad you enjoyed the post. And the good thing about degustations is that noone can complain you're taking too long with the photos! Most of my friends are now used to my Obsession. =) BLOGGING → ACCEPTANCE BY GROUP.

Hi Julia - It was all good. And it's great sharing it with everyone too. But isn't the grass always greener on the other side of the fence?

Hi Cherry Ripe - It was delicious. Glad you enjoyed the post. Have I convinced you? :)

Hi BHR - It's a splurge-type evening but hey, we all deserve one once in a while.

I dined with three friends. Our foodie club tends to be a little more low-key.

The blue cheese icecream was good. But then, I love blue cheese. Esp Stilton.

Hi MrsT - Glad the photos and descriptions worked. Just mind that puddle by your feet there. You might slip =) HEDONIC

Hi Gwenda - Start saving! The journey is worth it =)

At 4/07/2005 10:33 PM, Santos said...

[burning with envy] you lucky, lucky gloop, you.

At 4/08/2005 12:26 AM, pinkcocoa said...

ahhhhh AG!!! So this is your little secret. You! tsk tsk tsk *shake head*

But, congrats! You made it there!! Can't believe you waited 3 long months! The food looks soooooo good. grrrr. I am so jealous! And such a wonderful effort of taking each and every single dishes you guys had! *yum* I wonder if I could get the dessert courses to come first :p The corn soup with basil sorbet looks delicious but I think I am more into the desserts :p → EXTRAORDINARY EXP. → PERSERVERENCE IS REWARDED BY PEERS (S.L.)

You lucky thingie!!!

At 4/08/2005 4:53 PM, Kirsten said...

Wow, I'm absolutely green with envy. Being a huge red meat and mushroom fan I love the look of the beef.

I'd imagine your eating experiences this week have felt a bit lacklustre after that feast.

At 4/09/2005 4:39 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Santos - aww, but Cuam is where it's at ain't it? =) → H.Y. RECOGNIZES WORLD-RENOWNED BLOGGER WHO IS USING THEIR PERSONAL NAME HERE.

Hi pinkcocoa - Yeah it was a long three months but before we knew it, it was time to feast. - PERSERVERENCE; BADGING.

Yeah I think our dining experience was definitely extended time-wise by my incessant snapping of photos. ↳ BLOGGING

→ INTERPRETIVE REPETOIRE / FOODIE KNOWLEDGE

Hi Kirsten - The wagyu was good but i think i would have preferred the beef in a whole piece rather than flattened. I think each dining experience has its own things to appreciate. Tets was good, but I wouldn't want to eat there every week (nor would my wallet!). Each meal is what you make it! =P

At 4/10/2005 8:11 PM, DiveMummy said...

Let me just wipe the drool off the keyboard....well done AG....I think I would still be too busy days later, rolling my eyes in gastronomic delight, to be able to speak and articulate the experience.

→ HEDONIC.

I'll have to start saving my pennies.

At 4/10/2005 11:40 PM, Reid said...

Hi AG,

The food looks so delicious, but I highly doubt that I'd go out for a $175 per head meal. When I saw the name, I thought this would be a Japanese restaurant complete with tatami mats, but do you think it's more fusion?

→ THIS COMMENTER SHOWS THAT HE IS AN "OUTSIDER"
- DOESN'T UNDERSTAND HOW THE FOODIES SEE THE "SACRED", EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE.

I think if I went to a place like that I'd be afraid to take pictures!
LOL!

At 4/11/2005 2:33 PM, pinkcocoa said...

hahahaha AG, I have also noticed it took us so much longer to finish a meal each time we dine out too because I would snap, snap and snap. Er, I also notice there are always ppl staring curiously at my attempt to take photos of my food :p
I am still soooooooo jealous!!!! "waaaaaaaa"

→ BLOGGER, BUT ALSO AN "INSIDER"

At 4/11/2005 9:16 PM, Niki said...

It looks spectacular! I'm looking forward to when I can make it up to Sydney to go there... I'm still planning to write an entry about my degustation menu a few weeks ago at Ezard at Adelphi, which also cost in the stratosphere ($115 for 8 courses), but was certainly a food highlight of my life so far...!

→ FOODIE WHO ALSO SHOWS UNDERSTANDING OF THE "SACRED".

At 4/13/2005 12:18 AM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi DiveMummy - Ahh but articulating the experience allows you to relive each mouthful as you search for just the right adjective or metaphor.

INTERPRETIVE REPETOIRE → EXPERIENCE

Glad you enjoyed the post. Save the pennies and relish the extravagant experience.

→ HEDONIC

Hi Reid - Yes Tetsuya's does profess to serve Japanese food with a French influence as per Wakuda's culinary background and experience.

→ EXPLAINS TO "OUTSIDER".

I was surprised too when I heard that the decor was very non-Japanese except, of course, for the lovely garden out the back.

It is a rather upmarket establishment but nah, I think I'm getting used to obsessively photographing my meals now. Besides I was driven by the reassurance that I'm unlikely to dine here again (in the near future anyway). Flash was off so there was minimal disturbance to diners anyway.

→ BLOGGING
↳ SERIOUS LEISURE!

Hi pinkcocoa - I'm sure foodblogging could be used as a dieting method as by the time you photograph everything you've lost significant consumption time.

And don't worry, the starers just need to be shown the light. Or the bite, as the case may be.

Hi Niki - It was a pretty spesh nite--story to tell the grandkids and all =P

→ EXTRAORDINARY EXP.

Looking forward to hearing about your degustation at Ezard at Adelphi! I hope you took photos! =P Degustation is always exciting and often eye-opening.

↳ IDENTIFIES ANOTHER BLOGGER

At 5/12/2005 11:20 PM, runawaymind said...

Hi AG
I went to Tetsuya's a couple of years ago. I recognise the confit of Tasmanian ocean trout. oh Yummmmm!!!!! ..... Thanks for bringing back some great memories of one of my best meals ever. Yes, I totally agree - non-foodies dont understand and cant imagine spending that much money on whats to them "just a meal". But boy oh boy, what a taste-fest! Each course was sublime, subtle, was I had driven to the city. Once I found out about the matched wines, I decided to leave the car parked in the city carpark (bugger the overnight charges) and taxi it home. Bottoms-up! Not a single regret!

→ AN INNER MEMBER OF THE FOODIE GROUP:
- SHARES KNOWLEDGE
- EXPLAINS VALUE.
- NOTE H.Y. AMENDS ORIGINAL POST IN LINE W. COMMENTS

Glad to find a foodie who likes food and writing! :-) Like the others, am impressed you took photos at a place like that!

At 5/14/2005 7:40 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi runawaymind - Unfortunately (or fortunately, for my wallet, anyway), I'm not a huge drinker so we declined on the wine.

Glad to hear you enjoyed reliving the experience. And as for taking photos... ahhh it was the least I could do for my international food bloggers! The waitstaff didn't bat an eyelid.

→ BLOGGING
↓
SHARING W. COMMUNITY

At 9/06/2005 11:58 PM, krangsquared said...

Oooh yeah! Finally, I've got more detail on the food we ate! Went to Tetsuya's for my wife's birthday, and it was simply magical. And I'm really glad I took photos of our food! Wasn't really that embarrassed as I noticed other people started taking out "their" cameras and taking pics of their food.

→ COMMUNITY MEMBER SHARES PERSONAL EXP
→ TAKES FURTHER WHEN ENCOURAGED.

From the outside, Tetsuya's actually looks like an embassy, what with the gates and all. Maybe they should rename it "The Republic of Tetsuya's". =)

At 9/08/2005 12:22 AM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi krangsquared - You mean you didn't keep your menu from the evening? We asked nicely and the waiter just smiled and nodded.

→ "SOUVENIR" OF THE EXPER.
↓
BADGING.

I was the only person taking photos in our section that evening but I have heard of other people mentioning that they've seen other food photographers.

I made sure I didn't use my flash though, as that can get rather annoying for other diners (as well as ruining your photos anyway).

Due credit to Tetsuya's staff who were so wonderfully accommodating and professional without being patronising or stuffy.

And yes, Tetsuya's does look like an embassy. It certainly added to the drama of finally walking through those gates for the first time!

→ EXTRAORDINARY EXPER.
↳ EXPECTATIONS.

At 12/03/2005 8:40 PM, - Roy said...

Geez, great review!! Truly great review!! Yums!!

→ SEES IT AS A REVIEW ONLY
↳ FUNCTIONAL.

At 12/04/2005 2:15 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Roy - Thanks. It was great food. Definitely an occasion to remember!

At 1/09/2006 2:21 PM, Benn said...

I went just after Christmas and it was well and truly fabulous.

My review will be up soon!

At 1/13/2006 9:30 AM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Ben - Cool. I look forward to it!

BLOGGING.

At 1/28/2006 12:09 PM, schmendrick said...

I noticed that you wondered about the 'confit' part of the confit of ocean trout - tetsuya's signature dish.

I had the same question when we celebrated our 10 year anniversary there last week, and the waiter explained that it is 'cooked' for either 4 or 6 hours (can't recall) in warm (not hot) oil so that it looks like it is raw, but technically isn't. If 'confit' means long and slow, this certainly qualifies, but still, even after the explanation, I'm still amazed! :-

→ AGAIN, COMMUNITY MEMBER SHARES KNOWLEDGE → SKILLED CONSUMPTION

At 1/30/2006 1:11 AM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Schmendrick - Thanks for letting me know. That does make sense now. I knew Tets would never lie =) → SACRED/PROFANE

At 5/12/2006 11:29 AM, Konigsberg said...

My friends and I have discussed going to Tetsuyas, but none of us have ever gone to such a fancy place so there's a bit of worry. How formal does one have to dress? I don't want to look too formal, or not formal enough... is there anything else one must be prepared for/think about before going to a place like this?

→ "OUTSIDER" ASKS H.Y. FOR ADVICE → SHE IS SEEN AS AN EXPERT ON. S.L. CAREER LADDER.

Tetsuya's, Sydney | Grab Your Fork: A Sydney food blog

UNIQUE ETHOS, NORMS, VALUES, etc.

S.I.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

At 5/13/2006 10:54 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi fufururu - It's a lovely evening out but I wouldn't worry too much about the dress code. Smart casual is fine or dark classic evening wear. Just dress comfortably as your meal will take about 4.5hours!

→ SOCIALISATION OF NEW GROUPMEMBERS IS DONE GENTLY.

The only suggestion I would say is to be well-rested =) I found the complexity of presentation, flavours and ideas with each course required intense scrutiny, consideration and thoughtful deliberation. That could just be me, but I felt obliged to pay careful attention to every dish and try to "memory bank" every sensation.

→ EXTRAORDINARY EXP.

It's a great experience though and I hope you do make it. You will have a ball =)

At 9/13/2006 5:05 PM, Anonymous said...

→ SHARE "INSIDER" INFO. W. OTHER MEMBERS.

you know that if you are there for a very special occasion and they find out, there are a couple of extra courses that they sometimes bring out - free.... I went with my husband on our anniversay and we got the most divine chocolate cake at the end of the meal....and we'd even gone the BYO route, so it wasn't as if we had spent up big on posh wine....

At 9/13/2006 11:44 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Anonymous - I had noticed that others had reported this. That's so sweet of staff, and makes an appreciated personal touch that is infinitely classy.

At 9/26/2006 10:11 PM, yvonne said...

I went to Tetsuya's last night, and the service was absolutely amazing. Just as we left and got our coats, Tetsuya himself came and spoke to us, asking about our meal and so forth. What a personal touch to a beautiful meal, it made the night so much more memorable. → SACRED/PROFANE.

→ EXTRAORDINARY EXP.

At 9/27/2006 10:40 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Yvonne - You can't really top that for an end to your evening! How memorable. Lucky you!

At 12/22/2006 5:06 PM, Kristen said...

Tetsuya's is spectacular - no doubt about it. However, back in the days of Janni Kyritsis (however it's spelt), my husband and I were floored by the degustation at MG Garage. Shame it's gone... loved Tet's but MG's made me squeal!

→ SHARE OTHER EXPER. EXPECT INSIDERS WILL KNOW THE RESTAURANT + CHEF.

At 1/13/2007 11:47 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Kristen - I never did make it to MG Garage even tho' it had always been on my wishlist. Sounds like you'll be living on those memories for a while yet!

At 1/23/2007 10:12 PM, Bryan Burrell said...

Just discovered your interesting blog as I am searching for Tetsuya information.
Note that both the wild and farmed caviar we distribute are unpasteurised - it is allowed.
See our website:
www.friendandburrell.com.au
I'll track your site now that I have found it as I love reading about our wonderful restaurants here.
Bryan Burrell

SUPPLIER PROVIDES FOODIE INFO. TO SKILLED CONSUMERS

At 1/27/2007 1:55 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Bryan - Wow. I didn't realise the caviar was unpasteurised. I'm glad you enjoyed this post, and I agree, I love reading about Sydney restaurants!

At 8/06/2007 4:26 PM, unablogger said...

Is dinner degustation the same as lunch?

At 8/09/2007 12:13 AM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi unablogger - I presume so. I haven't had the lunch degustation. Perhaps best to call them to check?

At 8/09/2007 4:55 AM, unablogger said...

yeah it's the same.
I've booked it for next month

(NEW) GROUP MEMBER SHARES NEW INFO.

wheeeeeecccc

btw is there any way to enable
email notification when someone is replying to a blog comment like in LiveJournal?

love your blog!

At 8/12/2007 11:47 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Unablogger - Enjoy your meal :)

And no, as far as I'm aware there is no comment-reply notification option on Blogger :(

BLOGGING

OSCAR ↑ HIERARCHY

At 9/09/2007 8:42 PM, Oscar Trimboli said...

It's an experience

– EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE

It's Disneyland for adults who love food and the passion to create a great experience

– HEDONISTIC CONSUMPTION

Something you need to do once in your life

http://oscartrimboli.spaces.live.com/blog/cns!AB8385CF67205ABD!675.entry

At 9/10/2007 12:03 AM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Oscar - It's an amazing evening of dining isn't it? Great to read that it met all your expectations and more (and the waiter googled you? wow).

→ EVIDENCE THAT H.Y. READS BLOGS OF OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

At 9/12/2007 1:12 AM, unablogger said...

alright did a Tets and
I'm rather disappointed. Found out
that I don't really like French.
cuisine (first time going to a French restaurant). It's alright but certainly I won't fork out $185 again.

→ COMMENTER IDENTIFIES THEMSELVES AS AN "OUTSIDER" – NOT SHOWING A LEVEL OF SKILLED CONSUMPTION

KNOWLEDGE

At 9/12/2007 6:21 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Unablogger - I think media hype can lead to disappointment, although I wouldn't call Tetsuya's typical French cuisine. It's supposed to be different, unusual, and a challenge to the senses.

I did find Tetsuya's quite an intense experience, and one that really required thought and deliberation with every mouthful. Not every person's cup of tea perhaps, but certainly a unique Sydney dining experience.

→ H.Y. IS STILL POLITE AND GIVES A GENTLE LET-DOWN

At 9/13/2007 7:08 PM, Homesick Foodie said...

Always fun to read about Tetsuya's!

Living on the other side of the world now, we have had the opportunity to eat at some of the best restaurants in Europe and America but Tetsuya's is always the benchmark we come back to.

On the cost thing - £250 per head is seriously amazing value. I expect to pay twice that for a similar (but not quite as high) quality meal in Europe (England and France at least). I urge anyone even half-interested to take the plunge - you will not regret it!

→ AGAIN SHARING OF TOP RESTAURANT + CHEF'S NAMES.

On the world class thing - the only restaurant I have eaten at that has matched Tetsuya's for quality of cooking and interesting options on the menu is El Bulli.

→ SKILLED CONSUMPTION / KNOWLEDGE SHARED W. COMMUNITY.
↓
FOODISM AS S.L. FOR THIS COMMENTER

For me, El Bulli sits a short head in front just because of the scale (30 courses there!), the setting (middle of nowhere on NE Spanish coast), the originality (Ferran Adria's work going back to the early 80's is the reason why Tetsuya's can exist as it does now) and the anticipation that having to fight a year in advance with 400,000 other people to try and score one of 8000 reservations creates! The almost non-existant wine markups were also a pleasant change to the standard extortion.

Despite all that, my wife still puts Tetsuya's down as her favourite meal ever though - something about your first world class meal always being the sweetest...!

At 9/14/2007 10:30 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Homesick Foodie - Oh I'd love to eat at El Bulli. I saw the Anthony Bourdain ep about Ferran Adria and I so want to try all those dishes!

And yes, I wholeheartedly agree that the Sydney dining scene is very very affordable with incredible value (and ingenuity!).

FAMOUS CHEF FROM EARLIER GENERATION

At 7/12/2008 12:57 PM, Thermomixer said...

Hi Helen

Congratulations on ALL the work you do to entertain foodlovers. Have browsed your sites before but saw this post and thought I would add some knowledge (that you may well know now). Have you been back to Tetsuya's?

→ BLOGGING

The ocean trout is called a confit because it is cooked in oil. It has been a work-in-progress since the early 90s and follows on from a dish that Tony Bilson made. Used to be done in oil just in the oven at 70 degrees for a long time-not sure how long. It has been prepared in different ways over the years. When I visited in January, Tetsuya told me that his latest method involves sealing in a vacuum bag with oil - I think grapeseed may be the type now - and cooking at around 70 degrees in the oven (but with the door partly open?). Tetsuya has been involved with Petuna the company in Tassie that produces the ocean trout. When you go back try the ocean trout and you will notice that although it looks uncooked by the colour, that the texture has changed and it has "cooked". Please let me know & I may be able put in a word for you.

COMMUNITY INSIDER GIVES PEER APPROVAL
- BADGING
- S.L. CAREER LADDER

→ "TETSUYA TOLD ME...."
ABSOLUTE INSIDER
- SACRED/PROFANE

At 7/16/2008 8:22 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Thermomixer - Thanks for the info, and yes, I had since discovered the secret of Tetsuya's low-temperature cooking. As you say, it seems to be all the rage these days with all kinds of proteins.

At 12/05/2008 5:43 PM, Anonymous said...

Hi Helen,

I was lucky enough to get a reservation for Saturday 27 December for lunch! (the lady taking the call laughed at the eagerness in my voice!)

What is the etiquette in terms of taking pictures of each course? When I dined at Babbo in NYC I was a little embarassed to take pictures so when I got home (the wine didn't help) I forgot courses and it all seemed to blend together into one blissful experience.

→ ETIQUETTE QUERY ASKED OF H.Y. WHO IS SEEN AS "EXPERT"

I have a low light lens on my digital SLR, so I wouldn't need a flash. Tips?

Loved your review and I look forward to trying it for myself! :)

Victor

At 12/06/2008 3:48 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi Victor - Ooh lucky you! I didn't have any problems with taking photos. I think they are quite used to people taking photos what with the popularity of digital cameras and they're not all foodbloggers either!

→ FUNCTIONAL ANSWER.

I brought a little tripod along as the lighting is quite dim. Generally I avoid using a flash as it can disturb other diners (particularly all those romantic couples celebrating anniversaries). If you don't have a tripod, I'd suggest resting your camera on a glass or book.

Enjoy your meal, and as a tip, if you're celebrating something and let the kitchen know, I think they usually provide an extra dessert with a congratulatory message ;)

At 5/04/2009 5:06 PM, bacchaebabe said...

I've eaten at Tetsuya's on a number of occasions and have unfortunately never had the blue cheese ice cream. For those that may want to try a similar thing in a slightly cheaper environment though, Gelatissimo in Newtown does a stunning blue cheese gelato. They don't always have it on but it can be bought by the tub. It's my favourite flavour there ever.

SHARE KNOWLEDGE.

At 5/05/2009 10:36 PM, Helen (AugustusGloop) said...

Hi bacchaebabe - Do you mean Gelatomassi? I didn't know they offered a blue cheese gelato. Will have to check it out next time I'm in the area. Thanks for the tip :)

At 9/14/2009 9:48 PM, M said...

Nice..I'm getting hungry just looking at them.
I went in 2008, and i also took some pictures. The courses are very similar.

check them out at my blog.

http://the-only-place-to-blog.blogspot.com/2009/09/tetsuyas-fine-dining-japanese.html

→ ANOTHER BLOGGER GIVES LINK TO THEIR SITE.

At 9/15/2009 12:58 AM, Helen (Grab Your Fork) said...

Hi M - Quite a few similar dishes indeed. Thanks for sharing and hope your next Tets meal is just as memorable!

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