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The gendered production of food-related identities as interactional phenomena: an investigation of talk-in-interaction at the South African braai

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2018

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27116

Lewis, Ilse (2018) The gendered production of food-related identities as interaction phenomena: an investigation of talk-in-interaction at the South African braai, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27116

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Abstract

This study explores the intersectional production of the social categories of gender and food-related identities, as they emerge as interactional phenomena. The dataset consists of approximately five hours of recorded participant interactions at a residential braai – a common social event in the lives of everyday South Africans. My analysis follows feminist conversation analytic principles, and demonstrates how participants establish and manage their food-related identities, as intersecting with gender, in interaction. It illustrates how various interactional strategies are employed toward managing potential incipient identity-related interactional conflict. This systematically results in the achievement of group solidarity, whilst steering the interaction away from confronting the wider-ranging ideological concerns that underpin this potential conflict in the first place. Thus, the wider political; environmental; and socio-economic matters related to individual choices regarding food consumption, are effectively abandoned in interaction, and thus left uncontested. I conclude with a discussion regarding the implications of these findings for the everyday resistance of dominant cultural discourse, related to the gendered politics of food consumption.

Keywords: food-related identities; gender; feminist conversation analysis; interaction