Gender, Fast Food, and Nutritional Perspectives in Contemporary Philippines

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Local health and foodways are exposed to new and problematic elements as corporate fast food becomes increasingly ubiquitous. A 2005 consumer survey completed by 160 college-age women and men in provinces in the Philippines elucidates how fast food is conceptualized and its effects mediated locally. Paying attention to intersections of gender and fast food amid ongoing rivalries between global (McDonald’s) and local (Jollibee) restaurant chains, this paper addresses the (dis)similarities underlying: (1) how fast food is regarded in terms of diet, nutrition, and hunger satisfaction; and (2) how prevailing consumption patterns manifest themselves within the gendered framework of local populations.

**Keywords:** fast food, globalization, obesity

The far-ranging influence of corporate fast food has emerged as one of the most conspicuous, if not defining, feature of global modernity (Ritzer, 2000; Schlosser, 2001, 225-254). Few contemporary societies remain beyond the transformative sway of this highly adaptable and multifarious retail form. Over the past three decades McDonald’s and other transnational brands have made significant inroads in diverse market settings around the world (Houston, 2005, 124-125; Watson, 1997). So entrenched is the presence of corporate fast food nowadays, in fact, that many aspects of global chain operations have become effectively indigenized at the local level. That is, they are largely removed from their Western origins, sometimes bearing merely a superficial resemblance to their U.S. and European counterparts in specific areas of fast food production and consumption (Matejowsky, 2007; Watson, 1997).

Sophisticated marketing campaigns, glossy aesthetics, and the development of select products to better suit native palates have been at the forefront of industry efforts to attract and maintain consumer followings in countries outside of North America and Europe. The spread of Western fast food operators has both profoundly and subtly transformed dietary, health, and consumption patterns among local populations in towns and cities across Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere (Gill, 2006; Hawkes, 2002; Mydans, 2003; Pingali, 2007; Popkin, 2008; Rosenthal, 2008; Watson, 1997).

The influx of Western quick-service eateries in developing markets has generated growing awareness of new styles of cuisine among local populations (Hawkes, 2002). It has also
given rise to numerous homegrown chains that increasingly challenge the hegemony of multinational brands. Jamaica’s Island Grill, Guatemala’s Pollo Campero, Brazil’s Bob’s, and the Philippines’ Jollibee represent some of today’s more recognizable and profitable indigenous fast food outfits (Houston, 2005, pp. 124-125; Luxner, 2002; Stein, 2007).

While these domestic restaurant chains resemble their transnational competitors in fundamental ways, especially as nearly all follow the basic production and service techniques pioneered in the U.S. years ago, they are much less similar with regard to the flavors and ingredients defining their respective bills of fare. Most native firms operate with a keen understanding of the nuances that inform traditional dining preferences and tastes. These insights have proven invaluable when it comes to creating menu items that favorably resonate with consumers. In this way, indigenous brands usually hold the upper hand over their highly capitalized global rivals in attracting and retaining local clientele. Certainly, McDonald’s and other industry giants have struggled to realign their operations in overseas markets as these enterprising domestic players assert more control over local fast food scenes (Rai, 2005).

With competition between national and multinational restaurant chains intensifying globally, new types of consumer practices and perceptions begin to emerge at the community level (Matejowsky, 2007, 2008, 2009). Fast food attitudes and experiences manifest themselves locally in myriad ways, influenced directly and indirectly by various considerations. Among other things, they are shaped by immediate concerns involving matters of hunger, convenience, and/or disposable income. At a deeper level, they are filtered through numerous mediating factors including those related to age, diet, ethnicity, education, household composition, religion, and socioeconomic status (Atkins & Bowler, 2001, 255-271).

No less significant than these latter variables is the role of gender. If anything, gender provides one of the most viable frameworks for analyzing fast food consumption and perceptions in non-Western settings, as few other demographic characteristics are more concretely defined. Doubtless, the subtleties of how consumers in developing milieus conceive of quick-service eateries, utilize their products, and adhere to the contexts they create become more sharply delineated when considered from a gendered perspective.

CONTEXT, OBJECTIVES, AND OVERVIEW

It goes without saying that women and men relate to food differently (Counihan, 1999, 6-24). Cross-culturally, matters of male and female identity are often inextricably linked to particular foods and the rules governing their procurement, production, and consumption (Atkins & Bowler, 2001, 311-320; Kahn, 1986; Meyers, 2001). Foodways provide an enduring context for understanding the complementary, if frequently hierarchical, relations that give shape to the lived experiences of women and men worldwide (Counihan & Kaplan, 1998, 1-10). Within this framework, questions on how populations in developing societies approach and negotiate the increasingly pervasive influence of corporate fast food, raises some intriguing research possibilities, particularly for anthropologists and others interested in local intersections of food, gender, and health.

The food-centered activities of males and females are now exposed to new and potentially homogenizing elements as indigenous and non-indigenous fast food chains become more globally ubiquitous. Overlapping domains of food and gender stand susceptible to transformation as a result of aggressive industry marketing and the standardized practices and formats emphasized by this modern culinary approach (Counihan, 1999, 57). Arguably, the underlying complexities that define and differentiate established food practices and perceptions for men and women in developing contexts are subject to varying degrees of reconfiguration as national and
multinational restaurant chains exert greater influence locally.

If knowledge of national and global fast food’s growing impact on the gendered dimensions of indigenous foodways becomes more deeply resonant when examined at the community level, this work stands to offer some revealing insights into an emerging area of food studies and anthropological discourse on transnational cultural politics. In particular, it opens up new lines of inquiry by considering how corporate fast food cuisine is now conceptualized, and its effects, mediated by college-age women and men within a specific developing locality. With special attention to the conjunctures of gender and fast food amid longstanding global/local chain rivalries, this research addresses the (dis)similarities underlying: (1) how prevailing consumption patterns and nutritional regimes manifest themselves locally within the gendered framework of less affluent populations; and (2) how young adult males and females conceive of national and multinational fast food cuisine with regard to diet, nutrition, and hunger satisfaction.

While findings from this work are more data-driven than theoretical, specifically focusing on the experience of one particular community, these nevertheless help to enhance understanding of globalization’s diverse outcomes within developing milieus. In many ways, accepted notions of the dominance of Western fast food chains in overseas markets are challenged, to reveal the counter-hegemonic tendencies that now variously inform local perspectives on rival national and multinational brands (Matejowsky, 2007). Moreover, these findings illuminate the gendered dimensions of contemporary food practices and beliefs. This latter area of contribution has applied implications as research findings work to reveal those fast food perceptions adversely influencing aspects of local women’s and men’s health and health behavior.

Before describing the impact of corporate fast food on young men and women within a specific locality, I will first outline several research questions integral to this work’s overall objectives. After that I will trace the rise of global and local quick-service eateries countrywide and examine those chains which drive fast food expansion. Next, I will present findings drawn from ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out in a provincial urban community in 2005 and 2006. Significantly, the data collected during this research enhances the paper’s empirical integrity by operationalizing local fast food attitudes and behaviors from a gendered perspective. Equally important, it helps sketch out some of the nutritional beliefs prevalent among college-age women and men in non-Western societies. Following this, I will summarize the study’s major research findings and situate them within the shifting context of the nation’s overall health profile. Lastly, I will offer some concluding remarks on the complexities emerging from the increased interplay between corporate fast food, gender, and local health.

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

A number of salient issues arise as corporate fast food assumes greater influence over native customs and foodways. Particularly relevant to this paper’s research objectives is how consumption patterns and nutritional perceptions are expressed vis-à-vis gender in developing societies. Knowledge of such matters not only highlights the intricacies and contradictions of the transformative spread of global consumer culture into what was once called the Third World, it also reveals the subtle and not so subtle differences underlying how women and men presently conceptualize and negotiate encroaching Western dietary habits and nutritional regimes. Significantly, practical insights for those looking to combat the rise of non-infectious diseases at the local level, particularly those related to the accelerating global obesity epidemic or “globesity” (International Obesity Task Force, 2008; Popkin, 2008; Stix, 2007) become more apparent as (mis)conceptions about fast food’s nutritional value are identified among males and females.
What is known and not known about the impact of corporate fast food on men and women in developing milieus can be drawn into sharper focus through a series of pertinent research questions. Among these are: How often do local males and females consume fast food? Are there gender differences in perceptions of this style of cuisine’s substantiality? In other words, do men and women generally consider fast food as light fare analogous to snacks, or do they view it as something more filling, like proper meals? How is fast food cuisine regarded by local males and females with respect to diet, nutrition, and other health matters? Which fast food brands are more popular with male and female patrons: transnational chains or domestic ones? Similarly, are there any major distinctions between women and men when it comes to conceptualizing the nutritional value and substantiality of multinational fast food brands vis-à-vis homegrown outfits?

Taken as a whole, these questions seek to establish a basis for understanding the gendered dimensions of global/local interactions in developing societies. Increasingly exposed to the transformative sway of Western market forces, local men and women often mediate global processes in distinct ways. Rationales for dealing with new and sometimes adverse influences are rooted in established patterns of belief and practice.

It is through these ingrained systems that individuals strive to make sense of unfamiliar aspects of advancing global modernity. Such reasoning finds clear expression as local women and men begin to weigh the increasing appeal of national and multinational fast food against its largely unrecognized health consequences. The aforementioned questions work to capture relevant data from which can be drawn several tentative conclusions on the growing impact of corporate fast food on the gendered foodways and health perceptions of specific communities within moderate and low income societies.

**FAST FOOD IN THE PHILIPPINES (1981-2006)**

To more fully explore the subtle and profound dimensions of corporate fast food and gender in developing contexts, this study focuses on recent trends in the Philippines. With a commercial landscape steadily transformed by processes of globalization and neo-liberalism over recent decades, the country lends itself quite readily to this type of research. Notable changes wrought by this new market climate include the rise of a largely urbanized and brand-conscious middle class. The pronounced influence of this segment of Philippine society is perhaps most commonly expressed through its orientation towards capital expenditure and mass consumption. Middle class Filipinos have helped drive growth in diverse retail sectors throughout the 1980s and beyond, including a now thriving fast food scene.

The history of corporate fast food in the Philippines dates back to the early 1980s when McDonald’s first started operations in Metro Manila. In compliance with laws barring majority foreign ownership in local retailing, the Golden Arches teamed up with an indigenous firm, McGeorge Food Industries, to launch their brand locally. Headed by Chinese-Filipino retailer George Yang, the company secured the master franchise from McDonald’s International in 1981. This licensing arrangement granted Yang exclusive rights to operate McDonald’s restaurants nationwide (Economist, 2002).

Since then, various other transnational chains, including A&W, Burger King, Dunkin’ Donuts, Domino’s, KFC, Pizza Hut, Kenny Rogers’ Roasters, and Wendy’s, have followed the Golden Arches’ lead by joining forces with local companies to launch outlets across the Philippines. Notably, these Western restaurants have provided many Filipinos with their first fast food experience. The high-profile and international cachet of multinational chains like McDonald’s has generated considerable affinity for American-style fast food at the local level.
Such fondness, however, has not always translated into sustained financial growth, especially after domestic companies such as Jollibee came into the scene.3 McDonald’s enjoyed top industry status in the Philippines for approximately three years before it was supplanted by rival homegrown chain Jollibee in 1984. The Jollibee Food Corporation was founded by Chinese-Filipino entrepreneur Tony Tan Caktiong and his brothers in the mid-1970s. At first, Jollibee operated as a neighborhood ice cream parlor in Manila before shifting focus to hamburgers, French fries, and other fast food standbys when these non-dessert items proved more popular with customers. Over the course of three decades, the company has established hundreds of Jollibee restaurants across the Philippines (Conde, 2005).

Given Jollibee’s remarkable ascendancy, it is perhaps not surprising that Western chains such as McDonald’s have experienced only mixed success within the Philippines’ flourishing fast food trade. The Golden Arches has made a number of missteps trying to build up its consumer base both within and beyond Metro Manila. Indeed, the Philippines remains one of the few territories where McDonald’s does not dominate fast food retailing (Economist, 2002). Despite its lead in most other foreign markets, the brand’s middling performance in the Philippines represents a serious source of frustration for company officials (Conde, 2005). Indigenous outfits like Chowking (Chinese fast food), Greenwich Pizza, Goldilocks (bakery goods and native dishes) and, most notably, Jollibee have demonstrated much more skill in attracting and retaining Filipino consumers, in contrast to most Western chains.

By the late 1980s, with the gap separating national and transnational fast food increasingly widened, many global chains began revamping their operations to better reflect local tastes and customs. Besides retooled advertising campaigns with narratives relevant to most ordinary Filipinos, these efforts mainly entailed the launch of new menu options that strove to conform to traditional palates. While fast food mainstays like hamburgers and French fries remained virtually unchanged from those sold at their U.S. restaurants, the Philippine affiliates of the chains began incorporating new ingredients and selections to their core menus. These changes usually involved sweetening product flavorings or including steamed rice with select entrées. Notably, McDonald’s unveiled dishes like McSpaghetti (pasta noodles with sweet tomato sauce and chopped frankfurter bits), Chicken McDo (fried chicken, steamed rice, and gravy), and Mango Shakes to appeal specifically to Filipino consumers and cut into Jollibee’s customer base with varying success (Ritzer, 2000, 173).

Ironically, as McDonald’s and other Western chains in the Philippines began orienting their operations to better emulate the winning practices of Jollibee, it is important to recognize that much of Jollibee’s ongoing success comes from following the innovative standards and techniques that McDonald’s developed in the U.S. years ago. This copycat strategy, along with intensive marketing efforts and frequently changing menus, has been instrumental in driving Jollibee’s successful quarter-century run as the Philippines’ most popular fast food brand.

As it currently stands, Jollibee controls over 50 per cent of the Philippine fast food market. The firm posted upwards of P2.146 billion ($45.5 million) in net income for 2006. These corporate earnings surpass the previous year’s high of P1.69 billion ($35.6 million). Jollibee’s systemwide sales increased by 13.5 per cent at this time, while net income as a per cent of revenue rose from 5.8 per cent in 2005 to 6.4 per cent in 2006 (Cuevas, 2007). Such strong growth over the years has allowed Jollibee to shore up its dominant position with the recent acquisition of rival homegrown chains Greenwich Pizza and Chowking. Perhaps more notably, Jollibee is now ranked as one of Southeast Asia’s most profitable corporations, with dozens of overseas outlets spread across the Asia-Pacific and beyond (Conde, 2005).
FAST FOOD SURVEY AND HISTORY – DAGUPAN CITY, PANGASINAN

The gendered dimensions of fast food consumption in the Philippines can be approached through various research methodologies. Primary findings for this article are drawn from survey data I collected using a comprehensive questionnaire that was completed by 160 college students in Dagupan City, Pangasinan in July 2005. Men and women between the ages of 18 and 23, from predominately low to middle income households, and enrolled at the city’s three largest universities, all participated in this survey. Based on student responses to a series of structured and standardized survey questions about fast food, McDonald’s, and Jollibee, more firmly established are new insights into the gendered dynamics of how young adult Filipinos living in the provinces currently comprehend, consume, and adapt to manifestations of corporate fast food.

Dagupan has long served as one of northern Luzon’s most populous and important commercial, educational, and financial centers. Situated along the Lingayen Gulf and bisected by the Pantal River some 210 kilometers north of Metro Manila, the city consists of around 130,000 residents living in approximately 25,000 households spread across 31 municipal precincts amid a patchwork of manmade fishponds and rice paddies. Over the years numerous quick-service eateries have emerged and prospered locally, thanks to an expanding consumer base increasingly exposed to fast food marketing and products (Dannhaeuser, 2004, 139-145).

Western-style fast food first appeared in Dagupan in the early 1980s with the launch of a few small transnational eateries, including Dunkin’ Donuts and Shakey’s Pizza. In subsequent years several other national and transnational chains opened branches or franchises in downtown Dagupan, most notably the city’s first Jollibee restaurant, which was propitiously located near a high traffic business intersection. Even some of the city’s poorer and outlying districts became subject to corporate fast food influences as small 24-hour Big Mak, Burger Machine, and Frank’N Burger mobile kiosks began to dot various neighborhoods (Dannhaeuser, 2004, 234).

The pace of local fast food growth was punctuated unexpectedly by a major earthquake in 1990. Although initially devastating to downtown Dagupan and surrounding areas, the disaster and its immediate aftermath precipitated the opening of three modern shopping malls in and around the city proper in the mid-1990s. These large-scale facilities featured popular corporate restaurant chains such as Chowking, Greenwich Pizza, Jollibee, KFC, and McDonald’s. In 2005, there were some three dozen quick-service eateries, representing 13 different national and transnational brands operating in greater Dagupan. Among these were two McDonald’s and four Jollibee restaurants, all located near one of the city’s three major universities: the University of Pangasinan, the University of Luzon, and the Colegio de Dagupan.

Students enrolled in these three institutions of higher learning comprise the primary pool of informants from which research data is drawn. Before examining their survey responses in more detail, it should be noted that the findings summarized in Tables 1-7 are not necessarily representative of all Filipino fast food consumers. Rather, they reflect the beliefs and practices of one particular segment of Philippine society; in this case, college students in the provinces. By focusing on male and female undergraduates, a viable, albeit preliminary account of the influence of corporate fast food over contemporary Philippine lifeways, takes shape. In this way, knowledge on prevailing consumption patterns, brand preferences, and perceptions of the substantiality and nutritional value of fast food within developing contexts becomes more fully delineated. At the very least, these survey findings may provide a general baseline against which the results of more comprehensive studies on fast food consumption in the Philippines and elsewhere can be critically evaluated.
CONSUMPTION PATTERNS AND BRAND PREFERENCES: FAST FOOD, JOLLIBEE, AND MCDONALD’S

Consistent with other studies examining similar practices in the Philippines today (AC Nielsen, 2004), survey findings from Dagupan suggest that fast food has become fully integrated into the everyday lives of male and female college students in the provinces (see Table 1). Results for both genders within Table 1’s “Fast Food” column reveal that nearly nine out of ten research participants currently eat fast food at least once or twice monthly. Almost half of all undergraduates report consuming it more often. That is, around three or more times each month.

Such findings are somewhat less compelling within the individual “Jollibee” and “McDonald’s” columns of Table 1. Data on those students who consume fast food minimally three times per month reveal slightly less robust numbers at the respective chains, compared to the more broadly defined fast food category. Indeed, around one-third of all survey participants report eating Jollibee cuisine more than thrice monthly; while only one-quarter of these same diners consume McDonald’s fare that many times. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the choice between the two restaurant brands, Jollibee emerges as the more popular fast food eatery compared to the Golden Arches for all of those repeat patrons surveyed.

The most compelling data suggesting gender differences and fast food consumption is found among those survey respondents who consume this type of food most frequently. Although such distinctions are statistically insignificant, it is worth noting that the number of males within

Table 1.
Frequency of Fast Food Consumption amongst Males and Females—“How often do you eat fast food?”—Dagupan City, 2005. (N = 160)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fast Food</th>
<th></th>
<th>Jollibee</th>
<th></th>
<th>McDonald’s</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or fewer times per year</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>(28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 times per month</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>(39)</td>
<td>(36)</td>
<td>(48)</td>
<td>(34)</td>
<td>(34)</td>
<td>(34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 times per month</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 4 times per month</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>(30)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(67) (90)</td>
<td>(69)</td>
<td>(91)</td>
<td>(63)</td>
<td>(87)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 157</td>
<td>N = 160</td>
<td>N = 150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

χ² = 5.56
p ≤ .135

χ² = 1.82
p ≤ .769

χ² = 3.73
p ≤ .443

*Marginal totals can be less than 160 due to missing values. “Fast Food” data define this style of cuisine in a broad sense. Data are not narrowly focused on any particular fast food genre/chain and apply to both national and multinational brands. Data featured in the “Jollibee” and “McDonald’s” columns relate specifically to these respective chains.
that subset of research participants who report eating fast food three to four times monthly is 12.5 per cent higher than their female counterparts. Curiously however, the number of females within the next subset of undergraduate Dagupeños — those consuming fast food more than four times each month — is higher than their male equivalents by almost the same margin; in this case, 12.4 per cent. Simply put, women comprise a slightly larger share of those research participants who consume corporate fast food more than once a week. Perhaps if the overall sample size of the survey had been larger, the gender differences among these two subsets within the “Fast Food” column would have been more pronounced.

When attention shifts to student consumption patterns at Jollibee exclusively, no significant gender variation arises. The same, however, cannot be said for survey data for dining frequencies at McDonald’s. Findings from the Golden Arches’ more sporadic diners — those that eat at McDonald’s three or fewer times annually and those that do so no more than twice each month — reveal discernible, albeit statistically insignificant (p < .443) gender differences. Again, what emerges is not a case of one gender numerically exceeding the other in both column subsets. Rather, like the two groups of recurrent fast food consumers mentioned above, either males or females have higher numbers in one McDonald’s subset but not the other.

Hence, the most infrequent McDonald’s diners tend to be female, nearly one-third of those women surveyed. Only one-fifth of male participants can be similarly classified. The fact that women in this particular subset are over twice as likely to choose McDonald’s over Jollibee may indicate that these irregular fast food diners assign some kind of novelty value to the brand, possibly related to its enduring global appeal and myriad pop-culture associations, factors not presently identified with Jollibee’s more localized image. However, within that subset of students who consume McDonald’s fare only once or twice per month, it is men who outnumber women. Specifically, more than half of surveyed males within the “McDonald’s” column in Table 1 corresponds to this category, with less than 40 per cent female undergraduates classified in the same way.

At this stage, it is unclear why such minor gender differences appear within the “Fast Food” and “McDonald’s” columns in Table 1. Information derived from further ethnographic work in the Philippines, especially follow-up interviews of undergraduate Dagupeños, would likely clarify these underlying patterns. All things considered, what surely stands out as the most unambiguous finding of Table 1 points to just how many male and female college students regularly consume corporate fast food nowadays. Even as conditions of poverty remain prevalent throughout the provinces in the Philippines, quick service eateries continue to attract large numbers of young adults from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and not just those with discretionary income to spend (AC Nielsen, 2004).

STATUS AND SUBSTANTIABILITY OF FAST FOOD, JOLLIBEE, AND MCDONALD’S

Regarding differences in how female and male undergraduate Dagupeños perceive the status and substantiality of corporate fast food, in general, and McDonald’s and Jollibee, in particular, several notable findings emerge (see Table 2). Perhaps most striking is the fact that so few research participants characterize fast food from McDonald’s, Jollibee, and other quick-service eateries strictly within the context of a proper meal. More than eight out of ten students view it as either snack food or as both a formal meal and snack.

Indeed, Table 2 has scant data suggesting significant gender variation among survey participants, aside from the “Fast Food” column subset that does not consider fast food a snack. With almost no female respondents viewing fast food exclusively as a meal, it is not surprising that the gender difference in this subset emerges as statistically significant (p ≤ .001). Tentatively,
Table 2.
Gendered Perceptions of Fast Food/Jollibee/McDonald’s as Snack Food or Proper Meal—“Is fast food/Jollibee/McDonald’s food a snack or meal?” - Dagupan City, 2005. (N = 160)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fast Food</th>
<th></th>
<th>Jollibee</th>
<th></th>
<th>McDonald’s</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper Meal</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td>(25)</td>
<td>(39)</td>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>(36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(28)</td>
<td>(50)</td>
<td>(33)</td>
<td>(46)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td>(43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(68)</td>
<td>(90)</td>
<td>(65)</td>
<td>(89)</td>
<td>(64)</td>
<td>(83)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Marginal totals can be less than 160 due to missing values. “Fast Food” data define this style of cuisine in a broad sense. Data are not narrowly focused on any particular fast food genre/chain and apply to both national and multinational brands. Data featured in the “Jollibee” and “McDonald’s” columns relate specifically to these respective chains.

such lopsided results suggest that men are much more likely than women to characterize this kind of food as something more ample-sized and filling. These findings might be considered anomalous within the specific framework of Table 2 since similar results are not replicated in the corresponding subsets of its “Jollibee” and “McDonald’s” columns. Yet, these results should not be dismissed as entirely off base within the survey’s wider context, as select data from Tables 3 and 4 also seem to support this position.

Even with the seemingly atypical findings in Table 2, it should be reiterated that associations between fast food and snack food remain strong throughout the survey. Indeed, these perceptions are quite evident in Table 3 when students are asked to record the time(s) and/or meal(s) when they customarily dine at Jollibee or McDonald’s. Significantly, the most popular response is not breakfast, lunch, or dinner but rather merienda, which roughly equates with a light pre-dinner meal (see Table 3).

In the Philippines, merienda is comparable to traditional British tea time in that it refers to any snack eaten mid- to late afternoon. Besides curbing in-between meal hunger, merienda provides opportunities for casual socializing among friends, peers, and co-workers over something light, a few hours before dinnertime. As Table 3 demonstrates, both female and male research participants are almost four times more likely to eat merienda at Jollibee instead of breakfast or dinner. These same patterns are slightly more pronounced when related to McDonald’s. It stands to reason that students typically patronize McDonald’s and Jollibee during merienda time since it takes place towards the end of the school day, and all three universities are located within close proximity to the restaurants. Beyond their extensive and relatively inexpensive snack offerings, the clean surroundings and modern amenities of the eateries also heighten their appeal for this daily social gathering.
In terms of gender variation, two relevant findings emerge from Table 3. First, there is a statistically significant difference (p ≤ 0.0588) in how often females lunch at Jollibee compared to males. Second, and perhaps more noteworthy, are the statistically significant gender differences related to merienda at both Jollibee (p ≤ 0.0250) and McDonald’s (p ≤ 0.0059). These latter findings suggest that women are more likely than men to utilize chain restaurants as a venue for the traditional “fourth meal.” Overall, gender differences in Table 3 seem to support notions that co-eds are more inclined to in-between class socializing with friends than male students; and/or the tendency of some males is to view fast food more as a formal meal and less as a snack (see Table 2).

Besides notions of fast food as proper meals or light fare, how survey respondents view this type of food in terms of fullness or substantiality reveals some notable, if slightly inconsistent, gender differences (see Table 4). As Table 4 makes clear, males are more evenly divided than females when it comes to feeling suitably full from eating fast food, Jollibee, and McDonald’s cuisine. About half of themen report that this food leaves them more than adequately sated, while roughly the same number states that it is not substantial. In contrast, only one-quarter of co-eds consider food from Jollibee, McDonald’s, or other quick-service eateries as sufficient in satisfying hunger.

Interestingly, differences between women and men with respect to Jollibee’s perceived substantiality are slightly less apparent in comparison to findings from the other two columns of Table 4. In fact, gender difference associated with corporate fast food in general, and McDonald’s in particular, is so pronounced that it emerges as statistically significant (p ≤ 0.018 and p ≤ 0.005 respectively). One possibility as to why there is less gender variation in perceptions of Jollibee’s substantiality compared to that of other brands may have to do with the familiarity or comfort Filipinos derive from traditional ingredients and flavors favored by this homegrown chain. Such positive Jollibee associations may help override other factors working to divide fast food perceptions along gender lines. Again, this is an aspect of survey findings that would benefit from further ethnographic consideration, particularly through the application of more detailed interview questions.

Initially, it appears difficult to square select data from Table 4 with findings presented in other tables. Expectations of parallel results in Table 4 are anticipated, based on information from Table 2.
Table 4.  
Gendered Perceptions of Fast Food Cuisine’s Substantiality—“Does fast food make you feel full?”  
– Dagupan City, 2005. (N = 160)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fast Food</th>
<th>Jollibee</th>
<th>McDonald’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(30)</td>
<td>(23)</td>
<td>(21)</td>
<td>(33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(37)</td>
<td>(64)</td>
<td>(42)</td>
<td>(63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(67)</td>
<td>(87)</td>
<td>(67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>7.786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>≤ .018</td>
<td>≤ .102</td>
<td>≤ .005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Marginal totals can be less than 160 due to missing values. “Fast Food” data define this style of cuisine in a broad sense. Data are not narrowly focused on any particular fast food genre/chain and apply to both national and multinational brands. Data featured in the “Jollibee” and “McDonald’s” columns relate specifically to these respective chains.

For example, although few research participants equate menu items from Jollibee, McDonald’s, and other fast food outfits exclusively with proper meals (see Table 2), anywhere from one-quarter to one-half of those surveyed characterize selections from these chain eateries as sufficient or more than adequately filling (see Table 4). At first glance, it seems that there should be more consistency between perceptions of substantiality (i.e., filling or not filling) and characterizations of status (i.e., snack or meal). However, perceived incongruities of this sort appear much less relevant when the survey options available to students in Table 2 are considered. The fact that so many respondents classify fast food broadly as both a snack and as a proper meal does much to clarify any apparent incompatibilities between Tables 2 and 4.

Suffice it to say, the overriding pattern from Tables 2, 3, and 4 remains one whereby corporate fast food cuisine is primarily viewed by undergraduate Dagupanos as light fare that only goes so far in assuaging everyday hunger. Within the context of gender, such findings are more readily apparent among university co-eds, compared to male college students. That is, menu offerings at Jollibee, McDonald’s, and elsewhere are more likely to be considered substantial by young men in their late teens and early twenties, even as most male and female survey participants do not feel fast food sufficiently comprises a formal meal.

FAST FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL PRECEPTIONS

Perhaps the most significant findings related to the stated research objectives of this article are how female and male college students view corporate fast food’s nutritional status. Whether this type of convenience food is considered “good for you,” “bad for you,” or “neither good nor bad,” it is essential that local perspectives on this subject receive proper consideration, given that corporate fast food’s influence over Filipino eating habits appears now deeply entrenched at the community level (AC Nielsen, 2004). In this way, a more complete understanding of the interplay between local fast food consumption and men’s and women’s health and health behavior
comes into focus. Such findings hold important implications as what intensifies is the need to realign components of the state’s health apparatus in the face of new and rapidly emerging medical conditions.

As Table 5 makes clear, no major gender differences arise in how local college students perceive corporate fast food’s nutritional value (see Table 5). Both female and male undergraduates view its dietary benefits in essentially the same way. Even with this consensus, it is notable that findings from both genders tend to run counter to prevailing beliefs in the U.S. and other Western nations. Surprisingly, when asked to characterize the nutritional value of fast food in terms of its overall wholesomeness, less than six per cent of undergraduate Dagupenos view it negatively. Many more, over 80 per cent of research participants, consider it either positively or benignly in terms of its impact on physical health.

Underlying reasons as to why so many young adult males and females perceive fast food in this manner would certainly gain clarity through further ethnographic consideration. Until such time, it seems local notions about corporate fast food’s role, if not actively promoting individual health, then certainly not undermining it, would be difficult to dislodge, especially with the industry’s modern image and standardized preparation scheme.

One possibility in explaining why so few respondents view corporate fast food cuisine as unhealthy may have to do with beliefs highlighted by Yan (1997) about the “scientific design” of fast food vis-à-vis more traditional cuisine among urban Chinese in the 1980s (44-45). Another possible explanation is the fact that Jollibee, McDonald’s, and other leading chains do not really prioritize the dissemination of their products’ nutrition information to restaurant patrons (Matejowsky, 2009). Unlike recent developments in the U.S. and Europe where various consumer groups, policymakers, and health advocates have aggressively pushed for heightened scrutiny of the nutritional value of fast food and marketing practices, no comparable efforts have emerged in the Philippines. So, while not secretly withholding data on calories, fat content, and daily recommended dietary allowances from the general public, industry players have received no real external pressure to actively publicize this

Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gendered Perceptions of Fast Food and Nutrition – “In terms of nutrition, fast food is:” - Dagupan City, 2005. (N = 160)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither good nor bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \chi^2 = .8732 \]
\[ p \leq .832 \]
kind of information. For Filipino consumers, this means that quick-service eateries typically do not provide in any conspicuous manner the nutrition tables, labels, or other relevant data that are increasingly standard features of Western fast food operations.

BRAND NATIONALITY AND NUTRITIONAL PERCEPTIONS

Probing deeper into gender perceptions of corporate fast food and nutrition among undergraduate Dagupenos, research findings also suggest that a restaurant chain’s nationality influences local consumption patterns in significant ways. Whether local operations are identified as Filipino or non-Filipino (i.e. American) seems to hold some bearing on consumer practices and attitudes towards fast food. As Tables 6 and 7 demonstrate, out of six possible restaurant choices (three Filipino brands and three non-Filipino brands), both male and female survey participants generally rank Jollibee and other homegrown outfits as not only more favorable with regards to dining preference compared to their non-local counterparts, they also categorize their menu items as more nutritious.

Notably, certain gender differences appear in the “First” ranking of dining preference (see Table 6) and nutritional value (see Table 7) among Filipino brands. These findings suggest that college age men are somewhat less likely than young adult women to rank Filipino fast food higher in terms of dining choice and nutrition. In fact, gender differences in the “First” rankings of nutritive value for native chains in Table 7 are sufficient to emerge as statistically significant ($p < .0467$). In much the same way, corresponding gender differences are also apparent when the

Table 6.
Gendered Rankings of Preferred Filipino and American Fast Food Brands* – Dagupan City, 2005. ($N = 160$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Filipino Fast Food Brands</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>American Fast Food Brands</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>55.1% (38)</td>
<td>65.9 (60)</td>
<td>$p \leq .1419$</td>
<td>30.4 (21)</td>
<td>30.8 (28)</td>
<td>$p \leq .4880$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>34.8 (24)</td>
<td>50.5 (46)</td>
<td>$p \leq .1051$</td>
<td>51 (35)</td>
<td>47.3 (43)</td>
<td>$p \leq .3725$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>39.1 (27)</td>
<td>50.5 (46)</td>
<td>$p \leq .1728$</td>
<td>46.4 (32)</td>
<td>47.3 (43)</td>
<td>$p \leq .4692$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>37.7 (26)</td>
<td>53.8 (49)</td>
<td>$p \leq .0921$</td>
<td>46.4 (32)</td>
<td>40.7 (37)</td>
<td>$p \leq .3169$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>44.9 (31)</td>
<td>36.3 (33)</td>
<td>$p \leq .2418$</td>
<td>42 (29)</td>
<td>57.1 (52)</td>
<td>$p \leq .0961$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td>40.6 (28)</td>
<td>29.7 (27)</td>
<td>$p \leq .1988$</td>
<td>43.5 (30)</td>
<td>62.6 (57)</td>
<td>$p \leq .0440$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Six fast food brands are individually ranked by students in terms of dining preference. Three are Filipino brands (Jollibee, Chowking, and Greenwich Pizza) and three are American brands (McDonald’s, Shakey’s Pizza, and Kentucky Fried Chicken). “First” denotes what respondents view as the most preferred brands, while “Sixth” ranking indicates what respondents view as the least preferred brand.
Table 7.
Gendered Rankings of Filipino and American Fast Food Brands’ Nutritional Value* – Dagupan City, 2005. (N = 160)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Filipino Fast Food Brands</th>
<th>American Fast Food Brands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td>(65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td>(48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(29)</td>
<td>(45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(25)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Six fast food brands are individually ranked by students in terms of nutritional value. Three are Filipino brands (Jollibee, Chowking, and Greenwich Pizza) and three are American brands (McDonald’s, Shakey’s Pizza, and Kentucky Fried Chicken). “First” ranking denotes what respondents view as the most nutritious brand, while “Sixth” ranking indicates what respondents view as the least nutritious brand.

“Fifth” and “Sixth” rankings of dining preference (see Table 6) and nutritional value (see Table 7) are taken into account among American fast food brands. Suffice it to say, university co-eds tend to view homegrown chains slightly more favorably than male students.

Setting aside these gender differences for the moment, it is clear that the overall findings of Tables 6 and 7 are that provincial men and women in their late teens and early twenties find Filipino restaurant chains preferable and their cuisine more wholesome. Again, this may not be that surprising, given that domestic outfits are more advantageously positioned than foreign brands in the creation and promotion of products that appeal to local sensibilities (Conde, 2005; Wilson, 2004). Rather than focusing on core menu concepts developed overseas to meet the established tastes of Western appetites, indigenous companies have succeeded by formulating products specifically for Filipino consumers. This knack for effectively integrating local preferences for sweet and juicy fare into their respective menus is effectively grounded in a more intimate understanding of traditional foodways. American fast food operators like McDonald’s have experienced only mixed results in the production of dishes better suited for local tastes, compared to Jollibee and other Filipino firms (ibid.). Although the Golden Arches has had some success with distinctly localized products like Mango Shakes and McSpaghetti, their basic menu continues to emphasize the hamburgers and French fries that have been served at their U.S. outlets for decades (Business Asia, 2000; Economist, 2002).

It is probably not a new insight, that the cuisine of Filipino fast food brands is considered more nutritious than its American counterparts (see Table 7). The familiarity that consumers have with the flavors and ingredients favored by homegrown chains arguably does much to influence local perceptions of their menus’ overall...
wholesomeness. No less important is the fact that steamed rice is more readily available at the domestic quick-service eateries. Notably, Chowking, the Philippines' leading Chinese fast food chain and Jollibee subsidiary, serves this culinary staple with practically all of its non-dessert items. Reasonably speaking, it seems that students would perceive Filipino eateries, especially Chowking, as higher in nutritional value compared to McDonald's and other U.S. chains, given the centrality of rice to traditional foodways and its secondary status among these non-local brands.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Several tentative conclusions can be drawn from the responses of undergraduate Dagupenos on the gender dimensions of fast food practices and perceptions in the Philippines today. First, fast food consumption appears as an inextricable aspect of everyday life for young adults living in towns and cities across the archipelago. Nearly eight out of ten female and male respondents report dining on this type of fare at least once or twice per month, with Jollibee decidedly more popular than McDonald's in most instances. Second, menu selections from McDonald's, Jollibee, and other quick-service eateries are typically considered more as snack food and less as proper meals. Third, brand nationality influences local perceptions of dining preference and nutrition among area fast food patrons. Homegrown chains such as Jollibee and Chowking emerge as more highly ranked in these areas compared to their American counterparts. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, few undergraduate Dagupenos of either gender perceive corporate fast food cuisine as having adverse health effects. In marked contrast to prevailing views in the U.S. and Europe, only a small percentage of young adult Filipinos in the provinces consider this type of fare deleterious to their good health.

In light of these findings, it is useful to address other national trends currently altering the contours of daily life for men and women in the provinces. Such consideration not only establishes a viable backdrop against which the relevance of local survey results can be critically evaluated, it also better situates the fast food experiences of research participants within a broader societal context.

Unfolding in parallel with corporate fast food expansion in Dagupan and other Philippine towns and cities is a significant, albeit less conspicuous transformation in the nation's overall health profile. Like populations in other low and moderate income countries undergoing a rapid nutrition transition (Popkin & Gordon-Larsen, 2004; Prentice, 2006), Filipinos are now beginning to confront the various medical issues directly and indirectly associated with aggregate weight gains (Mydans, 2003). Since obesity and obesity-related conditions were once only considered symptomatic of the health regimes and prevailing lifestyles of industrialized societies, their emergence in the Philippines and across the developing world has largely gone unrecognized until recently (Popkin, 2008).

Overweight and obesity rates amongst Filipinos have trended upwards in recent years, mirroring the newfound economic prosperity that began taking root locally in the 1990s (FAO, 2001, 15-18). The growing impact of these conditions exerts new pressures on already stressed public health systems (Adair, 2004). Notably, the Philippines's healthcare apparatus still appears oriented primarily toward fighting those longstanding nutritional problems associated with hunger and undernutrition. With already undercapitalized resources, it is unlikely that public and private health agencies can sufficiently realign their operations to effectively address the medical urgencies arising from what is fast becoming an obesity crisis (Sy, 2008).

These emerging health trends in the Philippines take on added significance when considered from a gendered perspective. Comparative World Health Organization (WHO) projections from 2002 through 2015 paint a particularly troubling portrait for local females (WHO, 2008).
Age-standardized estimates for overweight and obesity amongst males and females aged 15+ years for 2002 suggest that the proportion of Filipinos with body mass index (BMI) categories of overweight, classified as a BMI higher than 25 (Gibson, 2005), is 25.4 per cent for females and 21.7 per cent for males. Three years later in 2005 these figures notably rise to 28.5 per cent for females, while those for males increase only slightly to 21.9 per cent. By 2010, the anticipated prevalence of overweight Filipinos stands at 33.6 per cent for females and 22.2 per cent for males. Significantly, by 2015, the projected estimate for overweight females is 38.8, a 13.4 per cent jump from 2002, while the percentage of overweight males is 22.5 per cent, reflecting only a 0.8 per cent increase from 2002 (WHO, 2008).

When obesity, categorized as a BMI of over 30 (Gibson, 2005), is taken into consideration, a similar gendered trend emerges among Filipinos. For 2002, 2.8 per cent of females and 1.1 per cent of males are classified as obese (WHO, 2008). Estimates for the next 13 years show the prevalence of obese females increasing from 3.7 per cent in 2005, to 5.5 per cent in 2010, and, finally to 7.8 per cent in 2015. Conversely, there are almost no changes in obesity rates for males, increasing only to 1.2 per cent by 2015 (ibid.). While the causative relationship between rising corporate fast food consumption and increased weight gains among Filipinos, particularly for females, is not yet fully established, the above figures suggest that the Philippines’ health profile is suffering various ill-effects brought on by the adoption of Western-style dietary habits and spreading “globesity” (Mydans, 2003; Stix, 2007).

CONCLUSION

When considered all together, the collected data from Dagupan City offers new insights into gender perceptions of corporate fast food cuisine among college-age adults within developing contexts. Survey results suggest that Filipinos in the provinces in their late teens and early twenties are susceptible to the direct and indirect effects of aggregate weight gains. Such findings are particularly relevant given the aforementioned WHO projections for overweight and obesity rates in Philippines from 2002 to 2015 (WHO, 2008). Young adult women, in particular, must now contend with new and not entirely familiar health issues at the community level, as the availability and consumption of corporate fast food increases. Indeed, this vulnerability to obesity and obesity-related conditions is exacerbated by a consumer population that is still largely misinformed about fast food’s overall nutritional value and its deleterious effects on individual health. How much the failure of local fast food patrons to fully grasp this cuisine’s ill effects is related to the accessibility of relevant nutritional information, remains open to question.

While Filipinos in the provinces have increasingly assimilated dietary practices originating from the U.S. and other industrialized nations into their everyday lives, it is apparent from survey responses that local conceptions of fast food concerning diet, nutrition, and hunger satisfaction in many ways diverge significantly from longstanding Western views. Clearly, fast food consumption is not the only dynamic driving the global spread of obesity and obesity-related conditions worldwide over recent years. Yet few other factors can account for the increased popularization of Western nutritional regimes in advanced less developed countries like the Philippines (Hawkes, 2002; Mydans, 2003; Pingali, 2007). The shared misconceptions of males and females about fast food’s nutritional value, present serious hurdles for governments and health agencies learning to combat the growing implications of rising “globesity.” The fact that few public or private health services in the Philippines have come to terms with the depth and scope of this shift in national health does not bode well for slowing, much less arresting, obesity rates any time in the foreseeable future (FAO, 2001).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Josie Gonzalez, Mario Granada, Martha Heine, Barbara Kinsey, Leslie Sue Lieberman, Lorena Matejowsky, Michael Newlin, and Andrew Todd for their valued contributions to this work. Moreover, gratitude is extended to the University of Central Florida (UCF)’s Department of Anthropology, UCF’s Office of Commercialization and Research, and the UCF Southern Region for their support during this research endeavor.

NOTES

1 For the purposes of this paper, the terms “substantiality” or “fullness” are meant to be understood as adequately satisfying hunger (Counihan and Kaplan, 1998, p. 2).

2 By 2000, it was estimated that a consumer base of some 60 million regular fast food diners supported the 2,000 or so quick-service eateries operating countrywide. Significantly, these patrons spent considerable amounts of money on fast food even when they had little discretionary income (Business Asia, 2000). Moreover, a recent survey (AC Nielsen, 2004) reports that 99% of Filipinos are fast food patrons and that the Philippines ranks behind only Hong Kong and Malaysia as the top global market for fast food consumption.

3 Significantly, Jollibee and most other native restaurant chains offer local consumers similar on-site amenities as their Western counterparts, including air conditioning, piped in music, modish décor, children’s play areas, and clean restrooms. Moreover, the price differentials for menu items at the respective eateries are fairly minimal. So much so in fact, that cost typically does not figure into decisions about where to dine among national and multinational fast food eateries.

4 Both male and female students at these post-secondary institutions are utilized as research participants. This is done for three primary reasons. First, coeducational university classroom settings expedite survey distribution and collection. Second, college students in Dagupan and elsewhere are highly exposed to fast food influences, given the close proximity of quick-service eateries to their respective campuses. Finally, few segments of Philippine society are more brand savvy and trend conscious than late teens and young adults.

5 Notions about fast food as snack food are probably best explained by the fact that rice, the main staple item in the Philippines, is not prominently featured on most fast food, except in Chowking. This cereal grain has long served as the centerpiece of agricultural and culinary practices in the Philippines, as in other parts of East and Southeast Asia, (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1997, pp. 166-9). So essential is rice to local foodways in fact, that it is almost never absent from breakfast, lunch, or dinner (Kittler & Soucher, 2007, p. 314). Arguably, it becomes difficult for Filipinos in the provinces to visualize the essential components of a proper meal within the context of corporate fast food, when McDonald’s, Jollibee, and other leading brands are mainly oriented towards their versions of Western standbys like hamburgers and French fries, and rice appears only as a side item on select dishes.

6 Such findings seem to conform to my own ethnographic observations about the gendered composition of school day crowds at various quick-service eateries in Dagupan. In an attempt to operationalize such observations, my research assistant and I conducted a weeklong male and female table count during peak business hours in July 2006 at the Jollibee restaurants adjacent to the University of Pangasinan and the Colegio de Dagupan campuses. While far from definitive, the results of this tally reveal that women are over 1½ times more likely than men to dine at fast food outfits during the busiest part of a weekday, tentatively suggesting that Dagupan’s quick-service eateries reflect a largely female clientele. Notably, similar gender differences have been documented by other fast food researchers conducting fieldwork in Asia (Bak, 1997, pp. 146-150).

7 Collected survey data show that there are virtually no differences between males and females regarding meal and consumption patterns of fast food menu items.

8 As foreign markets took off in East Asia and neighboring regions in the 1980s, it was quickly noted that part of the appeal of American style fast food for some overseas consumers centered on its perceived nutritional qualities. Rather than being viewed as unhealthy or nutritionally deleterious, this was often considered to be, if not actively good for one’s physical health, then certainly not detrimental to one’s general well-being. Such assumptions were based primarily on the standardized preparation scheme that most national and multinational chain restaurants follow (Yan, 2000, p. 211). The efficiency and regimentation of this culinary approach reinforces notions that American-style fast food is generally superior to indigenous cuisine since it is “scientifically designed.” In other words, its menu items provide daily essentials such as water, sugar, fat, protein, starch, and vitamins and meet rigorous industry standards for quality and hygiene (Yan, 1997, pp. 44-5).

9 The lack of public and corporate attention to this matter may simply reflect the fact that until recently, problems stemming from fast food consumption, particularly overnutrition, were generally conceived to be tangential to the nation’s basic health needs. As a developing country, the Philippines faces more urgent social, economic, and political issues that clearly have a more pressing impact on the lives of everyday citizens. With few Filipinos now visibly
suffering from obesity and obesity-related conditions, the need to actively publicize nutrition information has not been infused with any real sense of urgency. Just how much change local eating habits would undergo if fast food nutrition information were more readily accessible is still open to question. All things considered, it would probably represent a step in the right direction towards creating a more educated consumer population amid the now widespread popularity of corporate fast food cuisine (AC Nielsen, 2004).

For American fast food brands, gender differences for the “Fifth” and “Sixth” rankings of dining preference are significant at \( p \leq 0.0961 \) and \( p \leq 0.0440 \) respectively (see Table 6). Gender differences for the “Fifth” and “Sixth” rankings of nutritional are significant at \( p \leq 0.0678 \) and \( p \leq 0.0828 \), respectively (see Table 7).

REFERENCES


