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Eat Y'Self Fitter: Orthorexia, Health, and Gender

Christina Van Dyke

In Anne Barnhill, Mark Budolfson & Tyler Doggett (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Food Ethics*. Oxford University Press. pp. 553-571 (2017)



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Abstract

Orthorexia is a condition in which the subject becomes obsessed with identifying and maintaining the ideal diet, rigidly avoiding foods perceived as unhealthy or harmful. In this paper, I examine widespread cultural factors that provide particularly fertile ground for the development of orthorexia, drawing out social and historical connections between religion and orthorexia (which literally means “righteous eating”), and also addressing how ambiguities in the concept of “health” make it particularly prone to take on quasi-religious significance. I argue that what makes this sort of disordered eating destructive to both men and women is ultimately a common urge to transcend rather than to embrace the realities of embodiment. In sum, I believe that orthorexia is best understood as a manifestation of age-old anxieties about human nature and mortality—anxieties which current dominant sociocultural forces prime us to experience and express in unhealthy attitudes toward healthy eating.

Keywords

orthorexia health eating disorder somatophobia embodiment gendered eating

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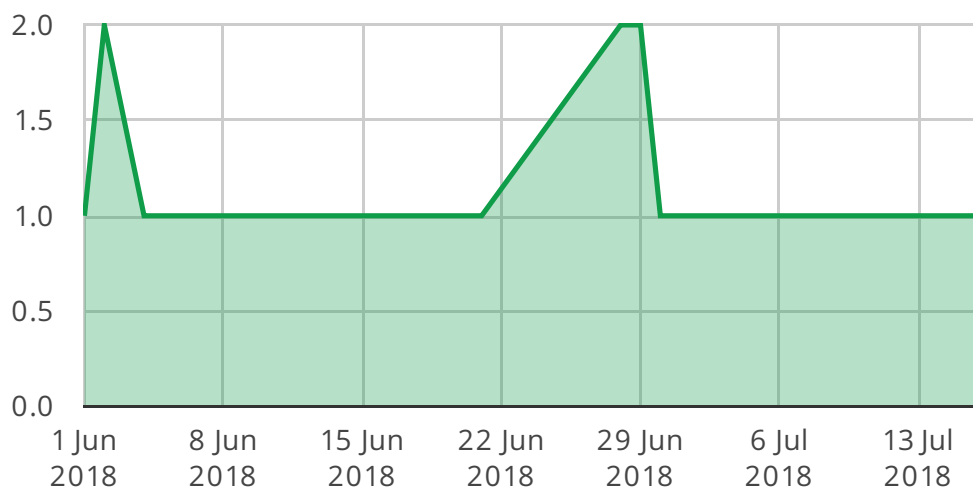
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