



If we looked at eating as an activity to relish rather than as an invitation to gluttony, says Paul Rozin, PhD, we'd all be not only healthier but happier.

The Pleasure Teacher

Order something you've never tried before. Linger at the table. Let the ice cream melt on your tongue, and really taste it.... How one noted psychologist is transforming what we think about when we think about food. **BY MICHELLE STACEY**

HERE, RIP OFF A PIECE OF this," says Paul Rozin, coming to a halt right in the center of teeming Reading Terminal Market, a 115-year-old marketplace turned food court in central Philadelphia, and offering up a crusty raisin-nut loaf. "Part of the pleasure," he says in his gravelly voice, "is in the ripping."

Everyone likes pleasure, but Rozin's interest in it isn't merely sensual, nor limited to desire, longing, and satiation; it is, rather, a rigorous intellectual and academic exercise. Paul Rozin has made a career of studying pleasure, especially as it pertains to eating.

Technically speaking, Rozin—bearded, 70-something, and irrepressibly enthusiastic—is a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, where he has been teaching for the past 44 years. Originally from Brooklyn (where he was raised on

American and Jewish food), Rozin studied at the University of Chicago and followed his joint PhD in biology and psychology at Harvard by examining animals' food choices. But about 25 years ago, he switched his focus to humans, becoming something of a gustatory anthropologist as he tries to tease out what our eating says about us—as individuals, as families, as cultures. And since our particular culture appears to be stuck in a moment of marked anxiety and conflict about the foods we eat (should we swear off carbs? which is more dangerous, salmon or beef? why are we all getting so fat?), the answers Rozin is discovering seem to be arriving just in time. Reading Terminal Market is something of a field trip for Rozin, so we perch on a couple of stools at a Greek-food stand, give our orders to the man at the *[CONTINUED ON PAGE 216]*

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 214] counter, and begin to explore the current landscape of American eating.

ODDLY, THE FOODSTUFF THAT thrust Rozin into that landscape had more to do with pain than pleasure: It was hot chili peppers. In the early 1970s, Rozin's then wife, cookbook author Elisabeth Rozin (they divorced in 1991), was writing *The Flavor-Principle Cookbook*. In it she reported on how various cultures use hot peppers as a central flavoring element. But why, Paul Rozin wondered, did it ever even occur to people to eat chilies—substances that cause pain when first encountered? So he went to the Mexican highlands near Oaxaca for the answer.

There he let children of various ages choose packets of flavored powders and found that there was a point from ages 5 to 7 at which most kids began preferring the hotter flavors, but not before; the preference had been learned. Rozin wondered, could animals be taught to like them as well? He tried it on pigs and dogs. Given a choice, he says, “none preferred the tortillas with peppers. One dog was indifferent, but that was as close as it got. It occurred to me that there is something unique about the way people approach food—that the social meaning of food changes the eating experience in some essential way.” He did eventually find an animal who liked spicy food—a dog in the United States that was brought to the dinner table by its anthropomorphizing owner. “It had been *taught* to like peppers, just like the Mexican children,” Rozin says.

Rozin ended up coining a term for the hot-pepper affinity (along with other physical experiences that aren't logically very pleasurable): *benign masochism*. “I think humans enjoy doing things that their bodies tell them are dangerous—you're sweating, your mouth is burning—but that they learn are not going to hurt them. It's like riding a roller coaster. It's pleasurable because we learn that we'll survive it, and it becomes a thrill.”

That kind of illogic—the drive to eat

something painful or even something we don't like very much—offers Rozin endless fodder for study. We may have the same physiological mechanisms as a rat or a goldfish that tell our bodies to maintain a certain weight and take in certain nutrients, but in humans those have become buried beneath the weight of our desires, our cravings, the machinations of our conflicted brains.

We certainly don't just eat when we're hungry and stop when we're full; we eat

different types creates the desire to try them all,” Rozin explains. Therein lies food marketers' greatest weapon: Offer people greater options, and they will consume more.

The appeal of a plethora of choices is very American—a distinction that is providing much of the direction for Rozin's research these days. Think of a typical diner menu that offers everything from omelets to Greek salad to meatloaf and mashed potatoes, or even a higher-end restaurant that features ten or 20 entrées. “In a French restaurant,” Rozin says between bites of the meat pie he's now working on, “you get far fewer choices. They don't feel they have to cater to every little food preference someone might have.”



The pleasure is theirs: The French eat less but enjoy it more.

disconnect, says Rozin, is a central construct of American eating. “People misread their own desires all the time,” he says. For instance, many people prefer to buy variety packs of items like breakfast cereal or snack foods, even though they dislike some of the items that are included. “Why don't they just buy the kind they like?” Rozin asks. “Because people reliably think they will like more variety than they actually do.”

The jelly bean test shows the same thing: The more flavors of jelly beans people are offered, the more they'll eat, regardless of whether they're mixed together or separated by flavor. “Seeing the

because it's “time to eat” or because it would be rude not to, regardless of whether or not we feel hungry. That

ONE OF ROZIN'S COLLABORATORS recently put this cultural difference to the test, asking people in the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, France, Switzerland, and the United States one question: In an ice cream parlor, do you prefer to be given ten or 50 flavor choices? The only country in which the majority said 50 was the United States. “Constantly choosing is the American way,” says Rozin, who is himself bemused when he encounters evidence of the American mania for quantity over quality. “I went to one of those smoothie chain stores recently. I looked at the menu and realized there were about 6,000 different drinks you could order—there were eight different juices, five ‘boosters,’ yogurt or no yogurt, and you could make any combination of all these things.” Rozin proceeded to frustrate the person behind the counter by refusing a free shot of a vitamin booster. “In America, if it's free, you take it, whether you want it or not! That's the rationale behind supersizing—it's not exactly free, but it's a lot more food for very little more money. That's irresistible.”

Where Americans find their pleasure is what Rozin has recently been trying to parse out, and while using a theory developed by Daniel Kahneman, he has come up with a kind of psycho-algebraic pleasure equation. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 218]



[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 216] There are three species of pleasure, he explains: anticipatory pleasure, when you're looking forward to something; actual pleasure, which happens in the present moment; and remembered pleasure, reliving the experience afterward. The mathematical laws of pleasure, as he's worked them out, dictate that if you maximize anticipatory or remembered pleasure, you usually minimize another.

ROZIN PUTS THIS INTO DINING-out terms. "You're going to a restaurant that you know is great—you've been there before, and you even know what you're going to order ahead of time. So you have anticipatory pleasure—you're looking forward to it, you experience it in advance, and then the actual experience is great; it's just as wonderful as you remembered. But your remembered pleasure of it later will be almost zero, because you've had it several times before, and all those memories merge together."

He proposes an alternative approach, which is his personal preference. What if you go to the same restaurant but order something you've never had before? "Your anticipation will be clouded—you don't have this image of what you're going to enjoy. The new dish may be great, or it may not be as good as what you usually get. But trying something new has given you another experience, so when you look back on that restaurant, you'll have more to think about. The memories will be more powerful."

All of this, Rozin explains, is about maximizing pleasure—and that's where he sees a major difference between Americans and Europeans. Consider vacations. You can take a nice, easy Caribbean vacation, have great anticipatory and present-tense pleasure, and very bland memories—everything blends together into one sunny day. Or you can go to Italy, in which your anticipation mingles with some anxiety (*will the car work? will we get lost?*) and the actual experience from moment to moment might sometimes be challenging. But it would create new and specific vignettes: *We went to Siena and saw this great cathedral, and we had this amazing meal...*

"When you indulge in the same, albeit pleasant, experience over and over," Rozin

says, "you're not building memories of the richness of your life. You're doing other things, and maybe you're having a hell of a time. But cultures differ with this, and Americans in general like to make their lives easy. Europeans prefer to make life interesting." Rozin is a "memory person"—the one who orders something new, or who would rather have adventures in Europe than lie on a beach.

This search for new experience—what some might call small-scale risk-taking behavior—has sometimes driven Rozin to almost lawless lengths. There was the time he was visiting Spain and wanted to go to El Bulli, a restaurant on the Costa Brava famous for its astonishingly long meals—some 30 courses, which are served over five-plus hours. It's open only six months a year and is usually booked a full year in advance, and Rozin was unable to secure a reservation before traveling there. Such was his desperation for the gastronomic adventure that he squeezed under the restaurant's gate and begged shamelessly, and futilely, to be allowed to dine there. (He says with a mixture of pride and envy that his youngest son, Lex, a music theorist academic and serious cook, is the only person he knows who has feasted at El Bulli twice.)

But Rozin isn't a food snob: His dedication to pleasure makes him just as happy scarfing down a five-dollar lunch as he is relishing a five-hour haute cuisine dinner. After our spanakopita, we wander over to the L.D. Bassett ice cream stand, and Rozin tutors me on the proper techniques for savoring every molecule of flavor: "Hold it on your tongue and let it start melting there. Then feel its smoothness as it turns into goo," he says, doing exactly that with his scoops of butter-scotch vanilla and mango-apricot sorbet. "Most Americans don't eat slowly, enjoying each bite; we tend to gulp it down."

Rozin has been looking at the differences between Americans and Europeans, specifically the French, to understand why we have so many troubling issues about food and body weight. His comparison of best-seller lists found no diet book in the top 15 in France, while in the United States the top book was *The South Beach Diet*. (The Atkins diet books were also frequently on our lists.) He is arranging a

pedometer study to test his hypothesis that the French—notorious for their dislike of gyms—actually get more exercise than we do. "They walk, bicycle, and just move more," he says. A paper he published in 2003, "The Ecology of Eating," received a fair amount of press by proposing that at least part of the French paradox (the question of how they can eat a rich diet and yet be slimmer and have less heart disease than Americans) can be explained by the fact that French portion sizes are substantially smaller than ours. "Although the French eat less than Americans, they seem to eat for a longer period of time, and hence have more food experience," he wrote in his abstract of the study. "The French can have their cake and eat it as well."

"The nutrition fads have gotten out of control."

FOOD EXPERIENCE—THAT TALENT for appreciation—is what it's all about, Rozin explains as we wander the market, admiring rows of bright vegetables and glass cases full of huge brown country hams. All around us is ample evidence of the astonishing variety and bounty that confronts Americans every day—a confrontation that Rozin wants to address in the book he's writing. "I want to do a primer on eating sensibly and try to put the risks of eating in context: Is there really a pleasure-health trade-off? Or can things like chocolate actually be good for you? Well, they can be—it is! The nutrition fads have gotten out of control. I think a varied diet is what everyone should eat."

Rozin stops short in front of a bookstall and picks up a children's book titled *It's Disgusting and We Ate It!* "I have to add this to my disgust collection," he says. How we decide what is disgusting is another area of interest for Rozin, but we decide to leave that discussion for another time; pleasure is the order of this day. And in Rozin's philosophy, if it were the order of more of our days—if we looked at eating as an activity to relish rather than as an invitation to gluttony—we'd all be not only healthier but happier. **Q**

Michelle Stacey's most recent book is The Fasting Girl: A True Victorian Medical Mystery (Tarcher/Putnam).