

Families and Food: Marketing, Consuming and Managing

As we noted in the call for papers for this *European Journal of Marketing* Special Issue on Families and Food, the family is often presented in popular culture, media and advertising as an immutable institution, enduring in its practices and symbolic functions. While the family remains an important consumption site and source of socialization into consumption practices in the marketplace, the constitution of the family has moved beyond the traditional suburban nuclear structure to encompass a variety of formations. This has made the sources of influence on family consumption increasingly complex and highly varied. There have been calls to focus on how this diversity (in structure, form, subculture, constitution, race, ethnicity) affects food consumption choices, practices and processes (Moore *et al.*, 2016). A better understanding of familial practices of managing and consuming food, and the related marketing practices, can help promote better dietary habits and patterns of consumption and thus support policy initiatives around health conditions such as obesity and diabetes. The focus in this special issue is on how ideas about family are constructed in relation to food and food consumption; and the associated marketing issues related to managing, governing and regulating food practices.

We were delighted with the response to this call for papers and would like to thank all those authors who took time to submit papers. The final selection reflects a truly international and interdisciplinary perspective on family and food practices.

We begin this special issue with an introductory viewpoint where we discuss a key theme that emerged from across the papers: the responsabilisation of family and food. We have organised the ten competitive research papers around the family lifecycle starting with the idea of eating as centred on routine and everyday practices (Dyen, Sirieix, Costa, Depeyaz and Castagna) and then going on to examine some of the tensions in intercultural couples (Rogan, Piacentini and Hopkinson). As the presence of children alters household dynamics so parents draw on their own experiences in a form of intergenerational reflexivity (Kharuhyothin and Kerrane), but children, in turn, exhibit their own food preferences and agency, and we learn about the nuanced cultural biography of pet-stocking and the family dynamics around family pets “who” end up on the family table as food (Bettany and Kerrane).

Then follows an examination of how the subjective well-being of Chinese teenagers is strongly tied to eating as a family rather than with peers (Veeck, Yu, Zhang, Zhu and Yu), and we learn how this can lead to sources of friction, among adult children, that can be resolved or mitigated through food practices outside the home (Yau and Christidi). Extending this theme of intergenerational socialisation into the older stages of the family life cycle, Trees and Dean examine the re-establishment and strengthening of familial links in old age when parents are cared for by their adult children. In a shift towards health and well-being we learn how the food well-being of women in poor rural families in India, while being constrained by entrenched gender and power hegemonies, can also be challenged by recognizing and remunerating women’s care work and encouraging men to participate in food work (Voola, Voola, Wiley, Carlson and Shridharan). The theme of intergenerational transfer of dietary knowledge, identified in several of the invited commentaries, is revealed as managed and negotiated by the dietary gatekeeper in a comprehensive, longitudinal study among Australian families (Wijayaratne, Reid, Westberg, Worsley and Mavondo). Finally, completing the international perspective of the special issue, along with an interest



in food traditions and practices, we see how one long established advertising campaign, through a process of iconisation and the symbolic invention of the “modern family”, successfully reinvented breakfast in Italy (Pirani, Cappellini and Harman).

The Special Issue ends with a section of four invited commentaries from five key scholars from different disciplinary streams and yet all working broadly in the area of family and food. Linda Price and Amber Epp open the commentaries with their comprehensive review of how food practices create, realise and “assemble” families. They invite more work on these ideas about how the intergenerational transfer of food practices make for family and family life. Peter Jackson, in his nuanced reading of an IKEA advertisement, reveals the ways in which even convenience and commercial fast food can be overlaid with emotional value to serve as a means of constructing, rebuilding, linking across generations and even reimagining the idea of family. His own research often affirms that the use of commercially produced food can “cross back” over the commodity barrier to contribute to building and supporting family values. Charlene Elliott questions the very fluidity of our definitions around who might be called a “child”, and considers the implications of this for family life as well as for the commercial and marketing worlds. Elizabeth Moore, similarly, looks at intergenerational influences across the life stages and lifecycle of the family itself and calls for more intergenerational research to examine the ways in which children’s food preferences are shaped in terms of how parents choose which food practices to keep and which ones to discard.

We hope that this Special Issue stimulates discussion about how food serves to create and reinforce familial emotional structures and how inextricably and inherently the two are linked. Across all of the papers food emerged as an emotional “glue” during family life stage changes, recreating practices of “familyness” and love in times of precariousness for the family structure (Jackson).

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Reference

Moore, E.S., Wilkie, W.L. and Desrochers, D.M. (2016), "All in the family? Parental roles in the epidemic of childhood obesity", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 43 No. 5, pp. 824-859.