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Journal of Consumer Culture 2004; 4; 361

DOI: 10.1177/146954050404046523

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ARTICLE

Between Mothers and Markets

Constructing family identity through homemade food

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Abstract. The purpose of this article is to examine the role of homemade food in the construction of family identity. The article examines how homemade, its interface with markets' competing food offerings, and intergenerational perspectives on homemade can cast light on competing understandings of the family, social relationships, and the market. Using two empirical studies conducted in a Midwestern cultural setting, findings highlight the importance of family meanings of homemade food, the role of homemade food in demarcating the realms of the family and market, the influence of producer-consumer relationships on threats posed by the market to a coherent family identity, and the qualitative changes in the social reproduction of family identities that result from divergences in homemade food meanings and practices across generations.

Key words

consumption • families • food • homemade • production • social reproduction

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(London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi)

Vol 4(3): 361–384 1469-5405 [DOI: 10.1177/1469540504046523]

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THE PURPOSE OF OUR ARTICLE is to examine the role of homemade food in the construction of family identity. We adopt the perspective that food stands as a metonym for the family and marks family roles and relationships in a material form (e.g. Bourdieu, 1990; Douglas, 1975). We focus on the category of homemade food because it is charged with symbolism (Bugge, 2003; Charles and Kerr, 1988; Groves, 2001; Petridou, 2001) and may have a constitutive role in domestic rituals (such as American Thanksgiving) and domestic social reproduction (Charles and Kerr, 1988; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). In particular, norms and beliefs associated with branded food products have penetrated homemade food consumption and production practices, and generated qualitative changes in the processes of homemade food consumption and production (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991: 27–9). Branded food products are an increasingly influential factor in the social reproduction of home and family identities (Moore et al., 2002). Therefore, analysis of intra-household and intergenerational dynamics associated with competing understandings of homemade practices and meanings can foreground changes and challenges posed to the social reproduction of family identities.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Food meanings and practices embody social structures and relationships

Food meanings and practices embody social structures and relationships and fluctuate with local economic and social contexts (Fischler, 1980). Consumers' adaptation to normative pressures for convenience, casualness, and speed, implicit in practices of the fast-food industry, has significantly altered food habits, family life and consumption rituals (Oswald, 2003; Ritzer, 2004; Watson, 1997). Consuming fast-food, eating alone, eating in the car and on the run comprise increasing shares of food consumption occasions (Fetto, 2001; Gardyn, 2002; Hagendorf, 1998): nearly half of food expenditures in US households occurs outside the home (Gardyn, 2002: 34–5). One quarter of US kids claim to prepare family meals much of the time, a figure that has almost doubled since 1990 (Stoneman, 1999). Barely half of Americans eat a sit-down family meal everyday, and Americans lead Western consumers in eating alone (Valentine, 1999; Yin, 2003). These food patterns are reflected in corporate food marketing slogans such as 'saving time' and 'meeting individual needs efficiently' attached to ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat products (Bugge, 2003; Gardyn, 2002; Park and Capps Jr, 1997). Cultural discourses about creating and sustaining family are prominent in these appeals, promoting the premise that these products enable

families to engage in other activities (such as games and sports) as well as meet the individual needs of different family members to achieve and grow. Thus, partnering with these brands to provision the family contributes to preserving family life and the well-being of the family (DeVault, 1991; Miller, 1998).

Homemade food is also enveloped in these social discourses. Food companies attempt to imbue processed foods with the character, traditions, and meanings of 'homemade,' or facilitate consumers' transformation of these products into homemade dishes for their families (Arnould and Price, 2000; Price and Arnould, 2000; Warde, 1997: 132). Marketing personalized packaged foods is an allied trend (Gardyn, 2002). Because of such trends, family meals increasingly represent the intersection between the conflicting logics of the nurturing domestic group and the rationalizing global market economy (Bell, 1996; Warde, 1997; Weismantel, 1989).

Countervailing movements such as the 'slow food' (e.g. Moorman, 2002), 'natural health microculture' (Thompson and Troester, 2002), and gourmet and exotic food movements (Heldke, 2003; James, 1996) oppose McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2004) and promote alternative visions of family life and well-being. These movements tend to reproduce some aspects of what Wilk (2001) terms 'American moralism.' They reflect an American strain of utopianism that is a prescriptive value-laden endeavor built upon a romantic vision of the past (see also Parker, 1998). For instance, Murdoch and Miele (forthcoming) posit that marketers' practices surrounding the industrial aestheticization of food provokes a response of returning to 'traceable' social and natural connections of food (see also Gardyn, 2002).

Consistent with this perspective, homemade food is viewed as an 'authentic' creation of the family (Groves, 2001). Family meals become a central site for making family meanings (DeVault, 1991). Similar to the way that independently-owned rib joints, the slow food movement and natural or organic producers oppose a dominant, globalized, mass market food culture (Holley and Wright Jr, 1998; Murdoch and Miele, 1999), homemade food may oppose marketers' efforts to commodify homemade meals (Bugge, 2003; Holt, 2002; Miele, 1999; Peñaloza and Price, 1993). Hence, in some sense homemade may be a retaliatory consumption practice responding to the commodifying moves of marketing practice (Holt, 2002).

As illustrated by both prevailing and countervailing food practices, normative social discourses about the relationships between creating and sustaining family and food consumption and production practices are in constant dynamic interplay, proliferated and appropriated in branded marketplace offerings.

Food meanings and practices contribute to family and individual identity

Food meanings and practices contribute to family identity and domestic life (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988; Grieshaber, 1997; Valentine, 1999). A reason for producing meals within household groups is to construct home and family around shared consumption practices (DeVault, 1991). For instance, mealtime rituals discipline and 'normalize' children (Grieshaber, 1997). Mealtime rules even operate as regulatory mechanisms creating 'boy' and 'girl' identities around the dinner table. Moreover, 'proper meals' help maintain and reinforce a coherent patriarchal family ideology (Charles and Kerr, 1988). Family food consumption socializes moral values, duties, and valued experiences (Gullestad, 1995). At the same time, commercial socialization agents are at work. For instance, food advertisers, women's magazines, and cookbooks reproduce a message that providing a 'proper' meal is the key for women to a successful home life (Warde, 1997). Also, a Norwegian study found that women's identities are still connected to household food preparation and their duties of care (Bugge, 2003).

In sum, food plays a role in the production and negotiation of family and family member identities. Previous research shows some indications of the influence of food marketing in the structuring of individual and family identities. However, little is known about the influence of marketplace food discourses on family identity. Research leads us to expect that family identities are likely to be influenced by market forces.

Food practices influence social reproduction

While the relationship between food and social structure has been recognized (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas, 1975; Fischler, 1980; Levy, 1981; Wilk, 1999), little empirical research on social reproduction adopts a micro-level perspective (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Giddens, 1986). Social reproduction – the creation of patterns of thinking and behavior that ensure the affiliation and integration of family members into the wider macro-social order – should be examined, focusing on institutions devoted to procreation, socialization, sexuality, nurturance, and maintenance of the family and the household (Netting et al., 1984). For instance, Beoku-Betts (1995) suggested that Gullah communities in the Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina use food preparation and consumption practices to transmit cultural traditions, collective memories, and foster culturally prescribed skills related to self-reliance. Further, Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) found in a Thanksgiving context that intergenerational transmission of recipes, stories about family identity, and serving and dining practices reflected class and gender norms.

Nevertheless, middle-class social reproduction is increasingly contingent, and must be worked out across a variety of practices at the household level (Brown, 1995; Reay, 1998). For example, a study of intergenerational perceptions of food and health found limited traces of social reproduction. Specifically, the older generation had a relative emphasis on 'natural' foods, meat, and artisanal practices in food preparation (Blaxter and Paterson, 1984). Younger participants displayed a more positive attitude to processed foods and sweets and a relative emphasis on fruits and milk instead of meats.

Overall, food is implicated in contingent processes of social reproduction at the household level. Research would lead us to expect that homemade food is likely to transmit cultural heritage across generations. However, the work on social reproduction and food ignores dynamic changes in the vessels of social reproduction and the consequences of such changes for social reproduction.

METHOD

We examined the discourse of homemade food production and consumption and its interface with the marketplace in an intergenerational context. The research was conducted in the US Midwest over a two-year period. Two studies were involved. For the first study we conducted 21 long interviews across two generations in order to cast light on the broader contours of the homemade food category (McCracken, 1988). Interviews covered themes related to 'homemade' food preparation, meaning, and memories. Similar to the first study, the second study was comprised of long interviews with 44 consumers to study the relationship between homemade foods and valued possessions. To analyze the data, we first transcribed the interviews and then coded the manuscripts using QSR NVivo 1.2 using standard data analysis and interpretation procedures (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Spiggle, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Thompson, 1997).

FINDINGS

A mundane symbol: homemade as a representation of family identity

Homemade is a symbol of the American family. Images and associations of homemade anchored to a family member are numerous in the data. Homemade evokes images of the mother, grandmother, or other close family member in the midst of homemade preparation activities:

The images would be that of a relative, grandmother or mother in the kitchen working and preparing the food and the

overwhelming smell, and I have said this several times, but would be . . . the smell of roasted turkey probably. [Male, 46–50]

Homemade and memories associated with it tie together the notion of the homemade cooking event and the people that engage in such activities. However, these images are also highly nostalgic. They represent the collective past as prototypical events that idealize certain regularities in family life:

As a kid, we'd get up and go out to breakfast, you know, just get up, wake, you know, wake up and come upstairs and mom would have some pancakes going or some waffles going or you know, some eggs and bacon and just the, the full, you know, Saturday morning breakfast and ah, and, and that's just where, you know, it feels homemade to me. [Male, 20–25]

The two quotes above show how sensory dimensions of homemade food contain idealized memories of childhood and experiences associated with those memories (Sutton, 2001). In fact, these stories suggest moral undertones: they narrate understandings of what family is, what the key features of a family are, and what a family ought to be like. Informants' stories support the notion that homemade food expresses norms of family cohesiveness and solidarity (Lupton, 1994). Imagery surrounding homemade food valorizes family events as precious and special, incorporating them with themes of happiness and sharing. Homemade is an expression of family unity, bringing family members together in collective participatory projects:

Oh gosh, cinnamon rolls, um, probably the time that I spent with grandma helping her make these and playing with the dough. Helping to sprinkle the cinnamon over the dough. [Female, 42]

This quote illustrates a common theme in our data: homemade invites collective participation characterized by shared practices and common experiences. Operating as an idealization, homemade symbolizes fun that becomes a shared and cherished resource for family members. Homemade expresses unity and reciprocal connection among family members, as seen in a quote characterizing the preparation of homemade beer:

. . . people make it not necessarily because it's good, but it's fun. It's something they've done themselves and then they can talk about it and share it. So that's the good part about things that are

homemade. Things that you use yourself and share with others.
[Male, 56–60]

These quotes communicate the idea that homemade cements notions of sharing and reciprocity into material form. Throughout the two studies homemade food consumption and production discourses idealize family unity absent in much of daily life. Homemade food imbues continuity in self-understandings of the family.

Dynamic tensions: distinctions between homemade and ‘market-made’

Homemade discourse conceals the presence of the market. Unlike what is reflected in some informants’ idealizations, homemade products are at least partially manufactured, produced, packaged, and distributed through the market, rather than crafted from scratch. Homemade is not only a singular representation of family relationships but also a commodified mass consumption object. This presence of the market is reflected in the interviews as a tension between the ‘market-made’ and homemade in the form of idealized constructions of homemade and the negations of marketplace offerings:

I: Anything that is cooked at home is homemade to you?

R: Yeah. As long as it is not from a restaurant or a TV dinner, I would say. [Male, 20–25]

This quote illustrates the attempt to impose symbolic boundaries and to police the symbolic territory of homemade, a theme that resonated through the interviews. At the same time the quote also reflects the fact that almost anything can be homemade as long as it escapes the reach of the market and its commodifying logic. In fact, homemade is often defined by the informants as the absence of the market. Homemade lacks the commercial profit-making character of ‘market-made.’ Perhaps the most alienating aspect of the market-made food products is that they originate from an impersonal production system:

. . . if you really think about it everything starts from scratch no matter what it is. It started in someone’s kitchen and then that recipe became manufactured. And whenever something is manufactured it loses some of its originality because it’s now being made by a system that produces it the same way each and every time. [Male, 41]

This informant describes another important theme in the interviews: market-made food originates from a depersonalized system that serializes difference (Baudrillard, 1996[1968]). Homemade food, on the other hand, is defined via the absence of serialization:

The fact that it's not a rolled and pressed and water induced turkey, that it's the whole turkey. A turkey that's been stuffed, and sewn up. It's not a turkey roll; it's not precooked and kept warm in the oven for thousands of customers. [Female, 52]

Homemade has some singular qualities absent in market-made products. In fact, some of these imperfections of homemade food mark its singular quality in relation to the homogenizing, serial quality of market-made food. Hence, while the capitalist system appropriates food products and makes them into mass commodities, the production processes result in a loss of domestic meanings.

The loss of meaning is also associated with the problem of origins. Market-made evokes consumers' doubts about the origins of the market-made food product. Informants articulated their doubts and concerns about the 'true' origin of market-made products: they were skeptical about where their market-made food comes from and what ingredients have potentially been used in the manufacturing process. This skepticism against market-made food contrasts with a lapse of doubt and scrutiny associated with homemade food consumption. The origin of homemade provides a sense of certainty by safeguarding against dangers lurking in serialized market-made food. Homemade food originates from the realm of kin (Beoku-Betts, 1995), providing assurance of an absence of instrumental interest in production. Homemade originates from the realm of the home and 'comes from the heart':

You can get good food in a restaurant, but not homemade food. Homemade like, comes from the heart, and in your kitchen, and like I said, it's like the catering thing. I mean, catering food can be good, but it's not like special because the people get paid to do it. [Female, 16]

The love of family associated with homemade signifies an opposition to the commercial, instrumental interests of the market. Preparation and catering practices involved in homemade food consumption are part of the communication of devotional love towards family members. The presence of instrumental interests corrupts food while the love and caring associated

with the domestic sphere renders homemade indivisible from its producers, hence superior:

. . . mom's cookies aren't the same as like Soft Batches™ cookies, you know. There's just a difference there . . . every one of mom's cookies looks . . . you can just tell that they didn't come from a factory or anything . . . and then like the smell, the smell would be in the house. . . . Um, they're still gonna be warm, they're still gonna be, you know, just come right out of the oven, the chocolate's gonna be melted or anything . . . there's just a lot of different things go into that, that makes those cookies homemade that you're not gonna get from a store cookie. [Male, 20–25]

This young man describes how homemade possesses abundant qualities also noted in American Thanksgiving ritual consumption (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). Abundance is reflected in the way homemade is described to exceed the qualities of market-made along dimensions of smell, taste, freshness, and uniqueness. In fact, some informants describe how Campbell™ soup's uniformity and predictability is opposed to the imperfect character of homemade:

. . . they were big, big. And the chicken was also big, and big chunks and it just . . . nothing is uniform. Each time you pick up something it's little, little different, you know, you get. Whereas when you buy readymade Campbell™ soup or any other company, it's always the same and it looks exactly [the same] every time you open the can as the other one did. You never get any chicken, it's a little bitty one or two things and the broth has no real nice taste to it, it's kinda there. So hers was more . . . flavorful with the spices she added and always seemed to have bigger round slices of carrots and celery were chunks and stuff. Everything was just bigger . . . and packed more taste into it. [Male, 24]

Homemade soups are defined as 'chunky,' aromatic and 'flavorful' while market-made foods lack any of these associations or at best only imperfectly imitate them. Hence, while for market-made products uniformity is a sign of the lack of domesticity, the unpredictability of homemade food communicates the presence of a human element. Through its imperfections homemade becomes a resource for valued experiences.

Resolving dynamic tensions between homemade and 'market made': producer-consumer connections

The market induces tensions in homemade food production and consumption, but the enactment of intra-family producer roles through homemade processes mitigates market impact. The importance of the intra-familial producer roles can be seen in the fact that it is a building block of homemade meanings. Food is homemade only when the 'right' person is making it:

Anything can taste good homemade if the right person is making it. I may like something from the store but that's only because I haven't found someone who makes it from scratch and really excels at it. [Male, 41]

Homemade becomes homemade through the contaminating touch of the skilled producer. It is as if the physical co-presence of the mother to the cookies contaminates the homemade symbolically (Belk, 1988). Indeed, some informants described their grandmother's food as the best in the world. In this fashion, homemade food also helps to organize expectations for certain roles and create a context for the expression of intimacy in close familial relationships. Echoing the interview excerpt above, homemade is tied to conditions of social relationships (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). When made by a person to whom a consumer is close, the homemade product becomes imbued with special meanings, practices that deconstruct the market-made:

Probably if someone made it for me, like a parent, or a relative, or a friend or something because if you get catered food, that's just like people are paid to make it and that really doesn't seem like it's as special as if someone makes it personally for you or something. [Female, 16]

Performative, congealed labor transforms food products into homemade 'gifts' as seen in a quote that describes what happens when the roles are not filled in the consumption context:

. . . if you're cooking it for yourself it's not gonna seem homemade. But . . . if . . . somebody else cooks it for you, then like, like just serves it to you like at a dinner party or something. [Male, 20–25]

Homemade forges a semiotic connection between the producer and the consumer inaccessible to market-made goods. This ability of the producer to invest the product with meaning becomes magnified when the producer

is a close family member, at times assimilating the homemade to a 'gift', as one informant describes it:

I: Say that I had a piecrust and I made it and I put the cherries in it and stuck it in the oven. Knowing that, would you think that it's the same or you probably wouldn't even care?

R: Yeah, I would be pleased you did that because knowing that I would know the time and love one put into it to do that and I would be worth that cherry pie, and it is my favorite kind of pie, and I'd take that as very much of a gift. [Male, 46–50]

This notion of gift implies that homemade incorporates the moral component of reciprocity (Mauss, 1967). Further, as a 'gift' in the sphere of generalized familial exchanges, homemade is a gift that is 'putatively altruistic' (Sahlins, 1972: 193). It does not require immediate reciprocation. Also, the producer's proximity to production seems to imbue the homemade with *agape* (Belk and Coon, 1993).

What makes it special, for of all, you're giving of yourself but also um, you're individualizing it, getting what that family member or friend, what that individual really likes that, the specific flavor, the type that they like. . . . [Female, 50]

This quote illustrates how homemade singularizes its recipients (Belk and Coon, 1993). As a process of human action, the production of homemade is a performance that involves the display of devotional love (Miller, 1998). A condition of effective performance is that both producer and consumer need to be present; homemade is never realized unless direct connections between the producer and consumer are forged through singularizing practices. In the absence of *agape*, homemade loses much of its worth. Hence, the experience of homemade is not only a matter of person-role fit but also the delivery of a devotional performance.

Divergences in homemade meanings: intergenerational contrasts

While a number of themes in the data testify to convergence among informants, intergenerationally, diverging views on what is homemade, how it ought to be made, and what it symbolizes emerge. In the following, the younger generation refers to a group of informants below 36 years, middle aged to a generation aged between 36 and 59 years, and the senior generation refers to informants above the age of 60. These intergenerational contrasts have implications for social reproduction.

Origin of homemade

The definition of homemade is tied to the concept of origin. In the inter-generational context, the respondents diverged on the kinds of reference points that they use in constructing their understandings of the origins of homemade. For the younger generation, homemade is defined in opposition to mass production:

Uh, I preferred the homemade. I suppose if they followed the same recipe that she follows when she makes it, it might be alright but it's, usually what you have to do to mass produce a kolache [a Czech pastry], it takes away from the taste. [Female, 31–35]

Homemade negates mass production and its anonymity. On the other hand, among middle-aged informants, the reference point for conceiving homemade is nature. Whereas for the younger the origin point for homemade is in its distance from mass production, for the middle aged the reference point is distance from nature:

. . . I just think they have more flavor, um, and a lot of times you don't know what kind of preservatives they put in, like a box of cake mix, you don't know what kind of preservatives they put in there, you don't know what kind of chemicals are being used and, uh, of course when you use the ingredients from your home a lot of times you don't know there either, I guess, if you're, like if you're going to use apples in an apple cake, you're not sure if the apples were, um, sprayed with a bad chemical or if a bad chemical was used as fertilizer or whatever. . . . [Male, 51–55]

For the middle aged the origin of homemade is its linkage to nature and to romantic visions of purity and cleanliness. Finally, for the senior generation the origin of homemade is a normative model of a multi-generational family home:

A can of vegetables is not homemade, that is more of a convenience food. If fresh vegetables are available then I would consider that homemade, like fresh green beans. For a dinner there isn't too much that is homemade, if you are having a lettuce salad you cut up a head of lettuce and there you go it really isn't homemade. [Female, 78]

For the senior generation, the defining feature of homemade is not whether

the product originates from non-market sources as it is for the youth, or whether it originates strictly from natural sources as it is for the middle-aged, but the fact that the product is produced following a script prescribed by tradition. For the seniors, the origin of homemade is the labor process 'made from scratch' that involves a certain degree of dedication and effort.

Labor process

A second reference point that separates generations is the process of making homemade foods. When informants were probed about the production process, they diverged on their views of what represents its defining characteristic. For the young generation, the notion of homemade production involves the producer's labor:

. . . having to mix stuff and, you know, you make that batter for the dumplings with eggs and flour and. . . [Female, 22]

As illustrated in the quote, the idea of 'made from scratch' has only superficial significance. Homemade does not need to be made from scratch as long as it includes the productive involvement of the consumer. Homemade becomes homemade once the producer's labor is mobilized in the cooking process (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). This focus on labor contrasts with the perspective on the production process of the middle aged. For the middle aged, homemade is articulated not only through labor but also through the notion of 'made from scratch':

Homemade I think mostly of baked things that somebody that has made from scratch. Um, that's usually what I think of homemade is usually stuff that's been, it's a baked good or, or um, some type of, something that you eat. [Female, 51]

Homemade is defined by 'selection rules' reflected in consumers' reliance on ingredients in the definition of homemade foods. However, a stable set of signifiers for homemade is absent. Homemade is discursively constructed as 'made from scratch' even if production processes would entail the use of Hamburger HelperTM or other kitchen aids, 'time savers' or the like. In fact, it is more accurate to say that the notion of 'made from scratch' varies from one situation to another. Following Thompson (1996), this situational definition of homemade can be attributed to the middle-aged consumers' attempts to balance competing time demands. Working mothers face multiple demands that they accommodate through compromise. For them, the strategy for accommodating multiple time demands is to negotiate the meaning of 'made from scratch.' The senior generation stands at some

remove from this situational and malleable definition of homemade. For the seniors, cooking homemade is defined directly as a negation of the cooking practices of younger generations. For them, homemade is defined as not made from the box:

A working mom or something probably finds it easier to do a box. All they have to do is take the box off the shelf, put in the egg and milk and there you go. [Female, 78]

Homemade has a syntagmatic rather than paradigmatic basis for senior informants. Production of homemade foods involves combination rather than selection rules. That is, cooking homemade entails the combination of effort and ingredients in accordance with a historic script. Homemade is homemade when it exceeds a certain threshold level of dedicated effort and involves the use of authentic, fresh ingredients following a recipe rather than the use of 'boxes' or 'mixes.'

Experience of cooking homemade

A third point of intergenerational divergence among respondents was the consumption experience that cooking homemade provides to the consumers. Not surprisingly, for the younger consumer generation the experience of cooking homemade is related to creativity and personal accomplishment that represents a differentiated sense of self:

Just to try something different. To try something creative. To do something myself instead of buying it out of a box and adding eggs and water. Actually doing. [Female, 23]

Homemade becomes the manifestation of the producer, an intrinsic means of self-development and expression. On the other hand, for the middle aged, consistent with a theme in Miller's (1998) work on shopping, cooking homemade validates the self via the recognition of those who consume the labor embodied in the homemade meal:

. . . when you sit down and they say, oh this is good mom, or if I've tried a new salad or something you know, they're like oh, yeah this is good, can I have the recipe for that? Yes, it does make you feel good and it kind of . . . it boosts your ego even though it's a lot of work and it would be easy to order pizza like some people do they just order pizza, eat, sit down, open gifts and maybe that's their tradition but ours isn't that way . . . [Female, 51-55]

In contrast to the intrinsic value of homemade cooking practices among the young, among the middle aged it has extrinsic value; others' recognition boosts self-esteem. It is other oriented in the sense that it is related to recognition among the immediate social group, the family, and links their practices of appreciation to the labor of the chef. In line with Miller (1998), we might speculate that the foundation of self-esteem resides in the affirmation of the provider role that continues to be ascribed to women. Cooking is a form of contemporary sacrifice, as Miller (1998) puts it.

For the senior generation, cooking homemade provides a different experience. For them, the practice of cooking represents 'householding' practices central to the reproduction, control and mastery of a domestic non-market social arena:

Whatever that you have, that knowing that you prepared the food and made it the good food and it takes, it might take a little bit longer to prepare the food but it tastes so much better and it costs a lot less than just going to the store and, and buying whatever you're going to take home and pop in the oven or stopping at the, at a fast food place and buying something, you can spend twenty to twenty-five bucks just buying a fast food for your kids and it isn't even healthy food! [Female, 61]

In contrast to the intrinsic, self-oriented function of homemade for the youngest generation, and the other-oriented, extrinsic function of homemade among the middle aged, the practices of cooking homemade among the senior generation link to pragmatic concerns of a moral nature. Cooking homemade provides assurances that the producer has paid her moral dues, safeguarded the family from moral decay, and ensured communion by providing for the family.

(Dis)continuities in homemade cooking

Interviews also covered questions related to the role of traditions in homemade cooking. These data reveal a fourth source of discrepancies between the generations. The friction that emerged from the data related to the demands of everyday life and how they become projected onto practices that sustain tradition. Among the younger generation, informants recognized the role of tradition in homemade activities, but tended to mark their disconnection from the organic sources of traditional knowledge and practice of homemade. A middle-aged informant reflects on this disconnection as it relates to the younger generation:

. . . a lot of times you're, you're not around grandparents, ah, and I think grandparents and parents are the ones that instil these traditions and you're just not around them enough to learn all the skills and I think with women working they don't have time to do both, to passing on this because they're so busy. And I think the kids are really, really busy. Um, and rarely do kids get involved with helping parents cook anymore and usually it's fast food stuff and, and things that ah, you couldn't prepare very early ah, or very quickly, so that you can go out and do other activities. [Female, 51]

Informants attribute the failure to carry on tradition to busy lifestyles and demands posed by the modern world. However, rather than the fact that busy lives do not permit the reproduction of tradition, the quote resonates with a more fundamental realization: traditions of homemade production do not play a large role in these younger generation's lives. The informants attribute this to exogenous factors.

Middle-aged informants also juggle their busy lifestyles. However, unlike the younger generation, the middle-aged strive to reproduce homemade traditions in their daily lives more consciously. Their efforts involve the substitution of market-made ingredients for authentic homemade ones:

I: Okay, so then did you make your own noodles or did you get those at the grocery store?

R: No, I cheated a little bit on those. Um, I bought the frozen noodles. And they're just as good as the homemade noodles but I just don't . . . I don't have the time to make homemade noodles, myself, so I use the frozen ones. They're pretty good.
[Female, 42]

The emic term 'cheating' was also used elsewhere in the data. Substitutions constitute failures in the reproduction of tradition resulting in an experience of mild guilt, a theme also reported elsewhere (Thompson, 1996). This feeling that consumers short-change themselves stems from their departure from idealized cultural scripts. Such feelings pay homage and legitimate the cultural scripts in the breach. In this case, ruptures in the continuity of homemade traditions strengthen and reify homemade, imbuing materials and processes with the status of an authentic cultural model.

Whereas the younger and middle-aged generations' discourse of continuity is colored by failures to attain shared ideals, the senior generation's

sense of continuity is expressed in the idea that scripts are transferred from one generation and time to another. But they too encounter discontinuities in the homemade arena stemming from perceived shrinkage in family size:

I: Was that something that was handed down to you?

R: Yeah from grandpa's mom. All the breads were from grandpa's mom too. She always made a lot of that kind of stuff. Homemade baked pies and cakes were another one of her favorites to make and she did give a lot of them to me. Not too many people make that anymore and we can't eat it either. We have to watch that fat (laughter). [Female, 78]

For older informants, continuity is equated with knowledge and transmission of recipes. However, simultaneously they also realize that this knowledge is being threatened by changes in family composition as well as the younger generation's lack of concern for reproducing tradition. Hence, homemade food traditions are at times facing major discontinuities.

Relationship between homemade and 'market-made'

A fifth source of divergence among the respondents arose from differing views on the relationship between homemade and 'market-made' food. Although discourses about homemade tend to imbue homemade food with superior qualities, for the younger generation this superiority is not unequivocal. In fact, specific foods are better acquired in the marketplace:

I don't like when people make hamburgers at home. I think it's not as good as when I go to a restaurant and they give you a nice prepared seasoned hamburger. That, that would be one of some sort, or a hotdog, I love buyin' 'em off the street, from a vendor in New York, as opposed to me cookin' 'em at home. It just, doesn't have the . . . the taste that I want, for some reason. It's that kind of food. I'd almost say it's food that's normal to me, that's regular everyday, it's just kind of bland at home and I go out, to some place, and it seems to taste better. Whereas if it's ethnic food or different cultures in America and have – and I have it at home, it tastes better than having it somewhere else. Kind of like the antithesis of the other. [Male, 24]

Homemade has limits. For some food products homemade production processes are not an essential attribute. Hamburgers, hotdogs, pizzas, and foreign foods were mentioned by our informants as having something in

them that makes them inimitable. They cannot be copied successfully at home. In the language of Baudrillard's (1996[1968]) model-series distinction: for some market-made food products the 'model' does not originate in the domestic sphere, but in the sphere of the market. For these products, ironically, homemade simulates the original market-made product and only produces an imperfect replica, a series version of the market-made burger.

For the middle aged, a hierarchical relationship between the homemade model and commercial series holds. For them, the market provides a range of substitutes that simulate the homemade, the satisfactions of which vary. For instance, one of the informants talks about restaurants that are like homemade:

I think the G G's very, very homey. It's ah, and, and I think that adds to it. It's a very homey atmosphere. So I think we're looking at atmosphere plus smells plus people and I think generally if you get somebody who's very gracious that waits on you it, it kind of makes it a more homey atmosphere. And I think the G G is decorated pretty much like a home in a lot of ways. [Female, 51]

The restaurant 'G G' provides an atmosphere that simulates fairly successfully the homemade context. The distinction between homemade and market-made is maintained, but the degree to which the replica can claim the properties of the homemade context is limited. In this case, market-made claims attributes that make it appear like homemade. The seniors do not share this position. For the seniors the distinction between homemade and market-made is straightforward, and market-made products are inferior to homemade ones:

People say, 'Oh, well buy a Mrs Smith'sTM cherry pie or apple pie, it tastes just like homemade,' well some of these people don't know what homemade is. [Female, 62]

The senior generation maintains a quality hierarchy between the market-made and homemade products. Market-made products belong to an inferior product category. The senior generation disparages the market-made.

DISCUSSION

Our findings highlight four different points about the role of homemade food in the construction of family identities. First, family meanings of homemade food retain their importance in contemporary consumption.

Homemade food provides a metonym for a model of household activities that marks intergenerational care-giving, altruism and love as model characteristics. Contrary to previous research that suggests that normative pressures towards individual eating, convenience, and speed would overthrow the family meanings attached to homemade foods, we find that informants used homemade to reinvigorate their idealized family meanings. Earlier, it has been argued that 'family meanings have apparently escaped from homemade food' (Warde, 1997: 138). While this may or may not be true of advertising content in the early 20th century that Warde (1997) analyzed, it is not true of the homemade foods family members occasionally prepare. Homemade remains a vital symbol of the family.

Second, homemade food expresses family identity and opposes the market's attempts to commodify the homemade food category. Homemade food practices and discourses oppose the market-made and demarcate the realm of the market apart from the realm of the home and family identity. Perhaps this is because, as Borgmann (2000) suggests, production and consumption are unified and thereby retrieved from the alienation characteristic of 'paradigmatic consumption.' In our view, homemade food takes the shape of a 'model' against which market-made food appears as a 'series' (Baudrillard, 1996[1968]): market-made 'homemade' food simulates some valued characteristics of the homemade without being able to attain its 'model' status. However, homemade is clearly not a 'free-floating signifier' without any stable referent nor is homemade 'regulative' in a deterministic sense. If homemade were disconnected from all culturally organized sets of understandings, we would not find the intersubjective agreement about it we do. If homemade were deterministic, we would not find such flexible use of homemade food discourse in our informants' juggling of life circumstances. Instead, homemade is a malleable cultural construct that consumers find 'good to think with.' Homemade is a material objectification of a domestic moral order that provides consumers a sense of coherence in family life.

We also see that homemade cooking is a kind of food discourse as discussed by James (1996) and Bugge (2003). As in the UK and Norway, our informants' discourse is one of many moral discourses that circulate in US society. In the US, opinions about homemade are informed by cultural intermediaries such as women's magazines and the Martha Stewart industry (Fournier et al., 2001) that provide consumers with resources to articulate home and family identities. Not surprisingly, homemade food discourse most directly affects women and some men in the age group of 30–50 who seem to struggle in their attempts to realize the normative implications of homemade food consumption and production. They grapple with

transmitting domestic cultural values, enacting the roles and responsibilities of parental generations toward their descendents, and defending the domestic unit against the fissiparous pull of competing moral discourses (Oswald, 2003). The significance of homemade discourse might reside in its ability to ground consumers in the stable nurturing space that Oswald (2003) suggests is missing in today's frantic and fragmented technology-enabled lives.

Third, agentic producer-consumer relationships challenge the threat posed by the market-made to family identity. While some research shows that the market reorganizes family roles and responsibilities, resulting in intra-domestic conflicts (e.g. Oswald, 2003; Ritzer, 2004; Watson, 1997), consumer-producer connections can restore and reassert connections between family members. Homemade food consumption and production is a focal practice that facilitates active human engagement with material reality capable of enriching human lives (Borgmann, 2000). In this focal practice families rely on a moral resource base (including sacrificial processes involving *agapic*, devotional love) in order to transform market-made products into homemade products. Thus, as market-made provides consumers with opportunities to fulfill some social roles and normative expectations in their families, homemade food production and consumption practices enable family members to fulfill normative models of intra-household relationships. Homemade food discourse operates as a symbolic bulwark against intrusion of the market into the domestic domain. The market-made fails to overthrow the homemade.

Fourth, changes in homemade food incur qualitative changes in the reproduction of family identities. We find competing understandings of the homemade category as well as qualitative changes in social reproduction. Counter to Beoku-Betts's (1995) observation that food consumption and production practices reproduce cultural heritage, our data shows divergences across generations (Blaxter and Paterson, 1984). The younger generation enacts homemade traditions in ways discrepant from the models of senior generations and conceives of homemade as an individual accomplishment. In the language of Peircean semiotics, homemade has a conventional connection to family identity (Mick, 1986). For the middle-aged, who worry over their failures to realize prescriptions to produce homemade food 'from scratch,' homemade represents nostalgic family identities. In this case homemade has an indexical connection with family identity (Grayson and Shulman, 2000). Finally, for the senior generation homemade food has an iconic relationship with their remembered pasts and family identities. For them, homemade is reproduced by combining

authentic and fresh ingredients with the enactment of taken-for-granted scripts and roles historically associated with the production and consumption of homemade foods.

Future research would benefit from adopting an explicitly moral perspective on household food practices that views food consumption and production as sacrificial household duties intended to reinvigorate connections between family, cultural ideals, and social structure (Borgmann, 2000). This would provide fresh insights into how consumer society reproduces social structure. Future research could study how corporate marketing practices utilize moral resources to develop branded products and how consumers appropriate these very same morally imbued branded food products and what solutions they provide to consumers juggling their busy lifestyles. Such studies could help to question how moral resources are shaped by the marketplace, providing greater understanding of the triadic relationship between the market, morality, and food.

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