MOTHERHOOD STUDIES / WOMEN'S STUDIES / GENDER STUDIES / SOCIOLOGY

From multidisciplinary perspectives, this volume explores the roles mothers play in the producing, purchasing, preparing and serving of food to their own families and to their communities in a variety of contexts. By examining cultural representations of the relationships between feeding and parenting in diverse media and situations, these contributions highlight the tensions in which mothers get entangled. They show mothers' agency — or lack thereof — in negotiating the environmental, material, and economic reality of their feeding care work while upholding other ideals of taste, nutrition, health and fitness shaped by cultural norms. The contributors to *Mothers and Food* go beyond the normative discourses of health and nutrition experts and beyond the idealistic images that are part of marketing strategies. They explore what really drives mothers to maintain or change their family's foodways, for better or for worse, paying a particular attention to how this shapes their maternal identity. Questioning the motto according to which "people are what they eat," the chapters in this volume show that mothers cannot be categorized simply by how they feed themselves and their family.

---

*This collection explores the ways that a mother's role in food procurement, food preparation, and meal serving becomes a crucible for gendered, class, and racial dynamics that reflect public and private agendas. Mothers are shown to be agentive actors whose mothering work repurposes, repackages and rewrites dominant ideologies through everyday activity. The authors creatively demonstrate important ways that mainstream discourse and the dynamics of the neoliberal project articulate with mothers' lives and identities in their kitchens and at their dinner tables.*
**—JANET PAGE-REEVE, Research Assistant Professor, University of New Mexico**

*This manuscript effectively brings together the multifaceted and socially/culturally complex topic of mothering and food. Taking a global perspective that includes recognition for the constraints of social expectations and economics, the collection highlights the relationship between mothers and food while also critiquing the naturalization of this association. It is a powerful contribution to maternal studies, sociology and the anthropology of food.*
**—MELINDA VANDENBELD GILES,** University of Toronto, Editor of *Mothering in the Age of Neoliberalism*

DEMETER

FRONT COVER ARTWORK:
MINDY STRICKE AND JANE JONES

PRINTED IN CANADA

**Demeter Press, Bradford, ON, Canada**

ISBN NO. 978-1-77258-002-0

9 781772 580020

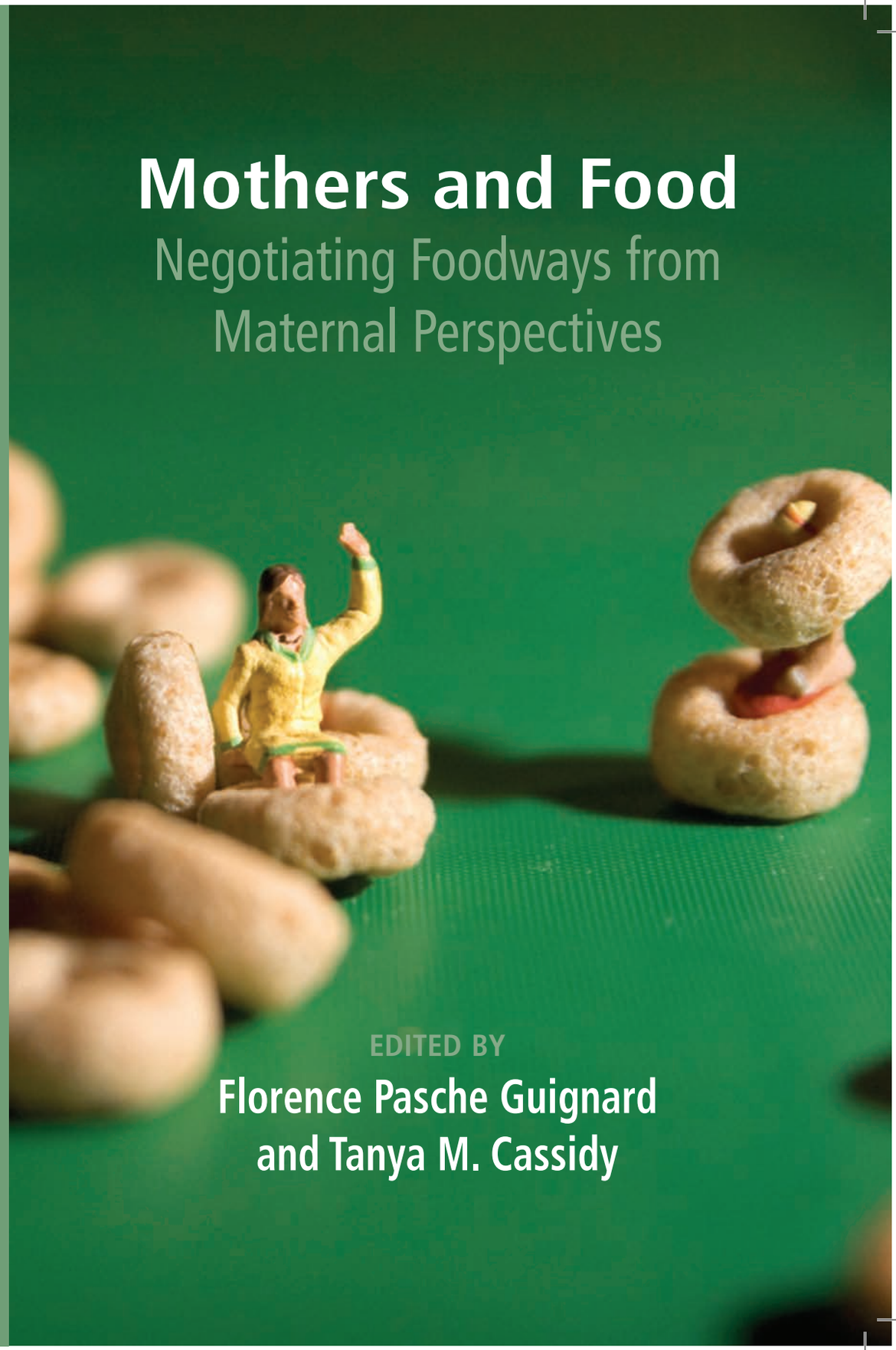
MOTHERS AND FOOD: NEGOTIATING FOODWAYS FROM MATERNAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITED BY Florence Pasche Guignard and Tanya M. Cassidy

DEMETER

# Mothers and Food

## Negotiating Foodways from Maternal Perspectives



EDITED BY

**Florence Pasche Guignard and Tanya M. Cassidy**

Copyright © 2016 Demeter Press

Individual copyright to their work is retained by the authors. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means without permission in writing from the publisher.

Funded by the Government of Canada
Financé par la gouvernement du Canada | Canada

Demeter Press
140 Holland Street West
P. O. Box 13022
Bradford, ON L3Z 2Y5
Tel: (905) 775-9089
Email: info@demeterpress.org
Website: www.demeterpress.org

Demeter Press logo based on the sculpture "Demeter" by Maria-Luise Bodirsky <www.keramik-atelier.bodirsky.de>

Printed and Bound in Canada

Front cover artwork: Mindy Stricke and Jane Jones

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Mothers and food : negotiating foodways from maternal perspectives / edited by Florence Pasche Guignard and Tanya M. Cassidy.

Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-1-77258-002-0 (paperback)

1. Food--Social aspects. 2. Mothers. 3. Families. 4. Parenting. I. Pasche Guignard, Florence, 1981–, author, editor II. Cassidy, Tanya M., 1963–, author, editor

GT2850.M68 2016 394.1'20852 C2016-901279-4

# Mothers and Food

## Negotiating Foodways from Maternal Perspectives

EDITED BY

**Florence Pasche Guignard and Tanya M. Cassidy**

DEMETER PRESS

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements
**xi**

Introduction
*Florence Pasche Guignard and Tanya M. Cassidy*
1

**I:**
**DOMESTIC FOOD WORK AND THE FAMILY MEAL**

**1.**
Feeding without Apology:
Maternal Navigations of Distal Discourses in
Family Meal Labour
*Amber E. Kinser and Katherine J. Denker*
11

**2.**
Feeding the Squeezed Middle-Class Family:
Maternal Stress, Dilemmas, Contradictions,
and the Third Shift
*Neri de Kramer*
28

**3.**
The Critical Kitchen:
Public Kitchen Discourses and Private New Zealand Families
*Rachel Lamdin Hunter and Kahurangi Dey*
41

**4.**
Nurturing the Sustainable Family:
Natural Parenting and Environmentalist Foodways in
Francophone Contexts
*Florence Pasche Guignard*
55

**II:**
**HEALTH, MEDICINE, AND NUTRITION**

**5.**
Mothering Discourse and the Marketing of Dairy
as a Cancer-Fighting Food
*Alissa Overend*
73

**6.**
Vigilance and Valour in the Kitchen:
Feeding, Eating, and the Intellectual Work of Motherhood
in Food-Allergic Families
*Heather Hewett*
88

**7.**
Feeding the Family When the Mother Is Sick
*Catherine Morley*
103

**8.**
PumpMoms:
Technology, Stigma, and Support
*Tanya M. Cassidy*
118

**9.**
Maternal Fruit and Vegetable Consumption in Canada:
Differences between Anglophones and Francophones
*Davod Amhadi Gheidari, Gale E. West,*
*and Simon Langlois*
133

**III:**
**FOOD SECURITY IN INSECURE CIRCUMSTANCES**

**10.**
Cooking to Win the War:
Canadian Mothers in the Second World War
*Tracey Leigh Dowdeswell*
149

**11.**
Secrets of a Food Storage Mom:
Mormonism, Motherhood, and the Mainstreaming
of Emergency Preparedness
*Deborah Whitehead*
161

**12.**
Mothers as Managers of Scarcity:
Poverty and Food Security in Brazil
*Simone Bohn and Luciana Veiga*
175

**13.**
Feeding the Family in the Face of Climate Change:
Mothers of Rural Southwestern Uganda
*Florence Kyomugisha, Bernardine Atugabirwe,*
*and Caroline Nshemerirwe*
190

**14.**
When Mothering Does Not "Measure Up":
Breastfeeding in the Context of Obesity and
Income-Related Food Insecurity
*S. Meaghan Sim, Megan Aston, and Sara F. L. Kirk*
205

**IV:**
**REPRESENTATIONS, COMMUNICATION, AND MEDIA**

15.
Mothers as Trickster Figures Who Hide
Vegetables in Kids' Food
*Vivian Halloran*
221

16.
What Are We Feeding Our Children
When We Read Them a Book?
Depictions of Mothers and Food in
Contemporary Australian Picture Books
*Laurel Cohn*

232
17.
Gluten-Free Casein-Free:
Food, Autism, and Challenges to Scientific Motherhood and Neoliberalism
*Emilie Zaslow*
245

18.
I Feed Therefore I Am:
Mothers, Pasta, and Advertisements
*Simona Stano*
259

**V:**
**SPACES, BORDERS, ENVIRONMENTS, AND MATERIALITY**

19.
Mothering and Food Work in the Nuclear Family Home:
A Spatial Analysis of Feeding Children
*Jennifer L. Johnson*
275

20.
Yamatji Mothers Negotiating Economic and Social Capital
*Melanie Dembinsky*
288

21.
(Re)Defining Femivorism:
Connections between Food, Motherhood, and Spirituality
*Audrey Lundahl*
300

22.
Becoming Mother, Becoming Matter:
The Agential and Affective Capacity of Food in
Performances of the Good Mother
*Emilie Dionne*
312

About the Contributors
325

# Acknowledgements

This is the second book that we have published with Demeter Press, and we would like to reiterate our gratitude to Professor Andrea O'Reilly for supporting an initiative that has become two distinct (but related) projects: *What's Cooking Mom? Narratives about Food and Family* (2015) and the present volume, *Mothers and Food. Negotiating Foodways from Maternal Perspectives* (2016). We are indebted to the efficient and supportive Demeter Press staff for their invaluable help in bringing this book to life and their patience with us throughout this process.

We are grateful to the many scholars and authors who answered our initial call for contributions, encouraging us to explore the opportunity to edit not just one but two volumes with Demeter Press, extending our collaboration into international contexts. Our profound appreciation goes to the contributors to this volume who conduct research or work in Africa, Australia, and Europe as well as in North and South America. We also would like to thank participants to the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI) conferences in Toronto and to the international Motherhood and Culture conference in Maynooth, Ireland, who showed interest in the topic of "mother and food." Their constructive feedback on our project from a motherhood studies perspective was a great encouragement for us.

Florence wishes to thank the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto for hosting her as a postdoctoral

researcher and the participants of the 2013-2015 "Diasporic Foodways" working group at the Jackman Humanities Institute whose interdisciplinary approach and passionate discussions in food studies were directly relevant to her research and to this editorial project. Tanya wishes to thank her new colleagues in the Maternal and Infant Nutrition and Nurture (MAINN) unit at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) as well as her colleagues at both Maynooth University and the University of Windsor, in Canada, for their continuing support. We appreciate, in particular, the detailed comments from colleagues who agreed to have a pre-publication "taste" of the manuscript as anonymous peer-reviewers. Their critical advice has contributed into making the final "recipe" even better.

For both co-editors, this and our previous edited volume with Demeter Press were done as part of other broader research projects or in addition to them. During the process of editing this volume (2013-2016), we received funding supporting our academic engagements and our research projects from various sources, including the Swiss National Science Foundation, the EU Horizon 2020 Marie Skłodowska Curie Funding action as well as the kind and generous support from the private foundation of the late Joseph Vijuk and his partner, Drenda.

Finally, on behalf of the contributors, we thank all of those among our family, friends, and colleagues who supported us in various ways, both in academe, at home, and in the blurry zones in between, especially at times when we had "so much on our plate." Whether they commented on a draft, shared a bibliography, prepared us a packed lunch for a busy day, or washed the dishes after dinner, many helping hands were involved in sustaining us throughout the process. For such support networks, we are immensely grateful.

# Introduction

FLORENCE PASCHE GUIGNARD AND TANYA M. CASSIDY

*MOTHERS AND FOOD: NEGOTIATING FOODWAYS from Maternal Perspectives* is our second volume published with Demeter Press on the topic of families and food. Along with our previous edited collection (*What's Cooking, Mom? Narratives about Food and Family*, 2015), this book results from a call for contributions that generated international interest across various disciplines which contribute to the now well-established field of motherhood studies. We chose to concentrate all of the absorbing personal narratives and autoethnographic pieces that we received, drawing from literary and social scientific perspectives, within our first book. Our second volume is also interdisciplinary, and although many of the contributors to this volume are also mothers, their contributions tend to focus their researchers' gaze on others as opposed to themselves. They examine, from multiple perspectives, the cultural representations and social interactions of the relationships between food and families, at the centre of which is the maternal role. These contributions discuss research that uncovers the social and cultural logic that governs how mothers take decisions about food, often within a range of constrained options, and how they account for them, both to themselves and others. The chapters in this book also look at how mothers are represented in their role as food providers, cooking and feeding their families, as well as at the social organization that underlies and supports all of these practices and processes. Combining historical, sociological, and anthropological perspectives, this volume adds substantially to an already rich scholarship on gender and food by replacing

ignored, often silenced, maternal voices at the centre of inquiries regarding the work of "feeding the family" (DeVault). By calling attention to the "invisible labor that goes into planning, making, and coordinating family meals" (Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 21), these chapters make important contributions to understanding in greater depth how this process affects mothers in their interactions with other important actors, such as their children, their partners, other relatives, caregivers, schools and daycares, the state, food companies, and larger communities. Looking at what mothers think and do—not only "through the kitchen window" but also in dining rooms, in their gardens, in supermarkets, in farmers' markets, or in restaurants—we expand our focus on the "intimate meanings of food and cooking" (Avakian) for women to consider some of the public ramifications. Our contributors, thus, explore how mothers are represented in meeting expectations in this vocation and how such culturally and historically determined social divisions of labour evolve in spatial and temporal terms.

Far from reinforcing the contentious association between "Food and Femininity" (recently and critically re-explored by Cairns and Johnston through a sociological lens) in general, the authors in this volume engage in collective debates about the respective locations of mother work and food work and about mothering and nurturing as unavoidable or natural relationships. Our contributors question stereotypical ideals of the selfless, even sacrificial at times, "nurturing mother." Although other scholars ask "why families eat the way they do" (Beagan et al.) and lay the focus on parenting and nurturing children, we actively focus on mothers and the many dimensions of food. Scholars have sought to complicate these imaginings over the last decades through studies about "intensive mothering" (Hays) or "total motherhood" (Wolf), in which some attention is paid to nutrition. Other works (DeVault; Counihan and van Esterik) have focused on the gendered dimensions of care work that involves feeding, in particular feeding infants (Bentley), and cooking in general (Crowther). At the same time, other recent discussions have looked at children's food cultures to uncover "what food means to children" (Ludvigsen and Scott) or at "kids' foods" (McDowell). Researchers more often consider the parents' roles in children's food preferences, but the children's roles and taste

preferences as well as how these affect mothers' food "choices" rarely are investigated. This collection aims precisely at filling the gap between these two areas: one that looks at children's foodways and preferences, and one that looks at how gender is constructed through food practices, often with a focus on domestic cooking and the maternal role.

Many such studies show that nutrition and feeding are particular sites of what may make motherhood and mothering intensive. Our contributors question the identification of mothers as "natural" or "instinctive nurturers" of the family, despite the prevailing representations that picture them as such. Instead, their contributions show how social and cultural contexts framed by constraints limit maternal agency, which is culturally constructed rather than naturally given. Even if domestic food work and parenting tasks now tend to be shared more than in other times in history (at least in some Western or Euro-American contexts), it remains a statistical fact, whether we are talking about a "second" (Hochschild) or "third" shift (Gertsel), that most domestic food work, in particular that made for the benefit of children, is performed by mothers rather than by fathers. Even when other family members[1] take on the work of feeding the family, food and femininity remain closely associated (Cairns and Johnston) and still dominate the public imagination, evidenced by media discourses and marketing strategies. Among all other strands of the association between food and femininity, such as self-control, body shape and seduction through food (the cooking *wife* overlapping only partially with the cooking *mother*), we chose to focus on the maternal role rather than on the many pressures on women's bodies through food-related discipline, as well as on the gendered expectations and the inequitable division of household labour both in the domestic sphere and in other sites where mother work includes preparing food for children.

Some of our contributors explore the contradiction between (re)affirming the traditional gender role of the mother as a nurturer while withholding from them the power that goes along with the responsibility of feeding and the outcomes of feeding children. This volume features studies that highlight the political, social, and cultural tensions in which contemporary mothers get entangled. Mothers, more than other women, are subjected to

increased social control and scrutiny because they are responsible not just for feeding themselves but their children as well. The health and body shape of the child is increasingly seen as the measure of the "good mother." Other criteria—such as access to quality food, which is often dependent on income and location and becomes a marker of social status—are forgotten or dismissed as less important than "individual choice" or "lifestyles choices" that focus on diets. Failure is attributed exclusively to mothers, although they often have little power over the results of feeding, and their agency depends on many other factors that are both socio-political and financial, as some of the chapters demonstrate.

The first section of our book examines the central topic of domestic food work and the family meal, and explores some of the ways in which mothers resist formulaic "ideals" that are imposed on them. Its four chapters pose the question why the frontline in reforming the food system has to be in someone's kitchen, while also recognizing that "[t]he emphasis on home cooking ignores the time pressures, financial constraints, and feeding challenges that shape the family meal" (Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 25). Some of our contributions outline the dilemmas faced by mothers who have to juggle working part or full time for a necessary income and negotiate the demands of food practices that obey a variety of imperatives, in addition to just quality and quantity (i.e., food must be healthy, fresh, local, seasonal, organic, varied, creative … desiderata that are sometimes incompatible with one another). Mothers have to care not only for themselves and their children but also for their social status, and sometimes their larger communities and the environment.

Some of the chapters in this first section have already set the stage for the theme developed in our second section: the confrontation between mothers and "the experts" (Nathanson and Tuley), in particular medical ones. The purpose of the chapters in the second section is to interrogate some of the assumptions and categories regarding maternal responsibility and ownership of problems as well as solutions. Evaluating the health impact of food practices is not the primary concern of our authors, who adopt sociological and anthropological perspectives. Rather, they show how mothers engage with a variety of contradictory discourses that promote

"healthy eating" and norms of good mothering through food, sometimes pitting these discourses against one another. Starting with breastfeeding, mothers are held as primarily or exclusively responsible for the outcomes of their children's diets, although issues of race, class, income, and social status often prevent them from having full control and authority over how, what, when, and where they feed their family, especially in neoliberal capitalist economies.

In the third section of our volume, we move to what mothers do in the "insecure circumstances" that such neoliberal economies sometimes contribute to create. The topic of food security and insecurity in a variety of difficult circumstances or in preparation for such times is central to the five contributions in this section. War, poverty, climate change, sudden disasters and/or loss of income are just a few of the precarious circumstances that mothers prepare for or concretely deal with, sometimes for long periods of time. Often economic in origin, these tragedies affect the ability of mothers to feed themselves and their children, but mothers do improvise and deploy a remarkable range of coping strategies. These chapters explore the role played by mothers in partnership with, or as members of, public state agencies and governments programs, private initiatives, humanitarian associations, and charities. They also show how mothers often are left on their own to cope with food insecurity and negotiate their identities as providers of food for the family in adverse circumstances.

Following feminist scholarship that highlights "critical perspectives on women and food" (Avakian and Haber), some of the contributions also examine how food purchasing or producing, cooking, and feeding representations are stable or change over the years and how they come to include other people who mother (in Sara Ruddick's sense of *mother* as a verb rather than as a noun), such as fathers, grandparents, or other caregivers. This is the case, in particular, in the fourth section of this book, where representations of maternal food work are explored in a variety of media. Contributors look at materials such as marketing advertisements, public service advertisements that stress health prevention, advice books, and cookbooks that specifically target parents of young children, and picture books aimed at children themselves. Finally

and decisively, some contributors focus on mothers' rich expressions in the "mamasphere," where food and feeding along with their attendant challenges are recurring topics of online conversations and debates.

Some chapters clearly demonstrate that choices made by mothers for themselves and their families are not just series of individual decisions governed by personal taste. A mother has to deal with expectations from many people, including partners, extended family, and others with whom she interacts. In line with the explorations of domestic food work, the contributions in the fifth section further explore the materiality of food and feeding, and highlight some of the constraints and incoherencies that frame this domestic food work. Looking at how material resources contribute to shaping food practice, not only in an economic sense but also in terms of spatiality and access, reveals a web of competing tensions. Accordingly, these contributions consider not only maternal agency but the agency attributed to food and to the spaces in which food work and feeding are carried out. Also, some chapters show how certain proponents of environmentally sustainable, socially fair, and healthy food systems tend, paradoxically, to reinforce elitist visions and promote apolitical disengagement through a return to an idealized home cooking. Mothers are pressured to perform this "privatization" of food ethics, yet no suggestions are offered as to how the more global food system could be changed positively and in a more inclusive way.

Despite the variety of the contexts, materials, and topics covered, we have identified recurring themes around which we offer these contributions, as they tackle the extremely diverse and sometimes visceral topic of mothers and food. At the same time, as this is an edited volume that brings together different perspectives and disciplinary approaches, we invite readers to pick and choose, to discover other themes that we did not highlight through the organizational structure of this book. Whether they live in the Global South or in the North, or whether their children are under or overweight, mothers deal with related sets of issues on a daily basis. At the global level, the same food system is dominated by big, for-profit corporations and agribusinesses that a growing number of voices, including maternal ones, protest against and

challenge. At the same time, at the local level, as the chapters in this volume demonstrate, the effects produced by such systems often depend on socio-economic status and other criteria. They include the necessity to monitor children's diets because of food allergies, obesity, malnutrition or, sometimes, starvation not just at the family level but at the national one. At the heart of these global inequities, mothers are central actors in negotiating food systems, food politics, and culturally determined foodways. The contributors to *Mothers and Food* recognize this by going beyond the normative discourses of health and nutrition experts and beyond the idealistic images that are part of marketing strategies. We explore what really drives mothers to maintain or change their family's foodways, for better or for worse, paying particular attention to how this shapes their maternal identity.

## NOTES

[1]See Szabo for a study of men's domestic cooking practices and Donohue for an edited collection that highlights voices of "fathers who cook for their families."

## WORKS CITED

Avakian, Arlene Voski, and Barbara Haber, eds. *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005. Print.

Avakian, Arlene Voski, ed. *Through the Kitchen Window: Women Explore the Intimate Meanings of Food and Cooking*. Oxford-New York: Berg, 2005. Print.

Beagan, Brenda, Gwen Chapman, Josée Johnston, Deborah McPhail, Elaine M. Power, and Helen Vallianatos. *Acquired Tastes. Why Families Eat the Way They Do*. Toronto-Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2014. E-book.

Bentley, Amy. *Inventing Baby Food: Taste, Health, and the Industrialization of the American Diet*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2014. Print.

Bowen, Sarah, Sinikka Elliott, and Joslyn Brenton. "The Joy of Cooking?" *Contexts* 13.3 (2014): 20-25. Web. 15 May 2015.

Cairns, Kate and Josée Johnston. *Food and Femininity.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2015. Print.

Cassidy, Tanya M. and Florence Pasche Guignard, eds. *What's Cooking, Mom? Narratives about Food and Family.* Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2015. Print.

Counihan, Carole and Penny van Esterik, eds. *Food and Culture: A Reader*. 3rd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print.

DeVault, Marjorie L. *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. Print.

Donohue, John, ed. *Man with a Pan: Culinary Adventures of Fathers Who Cook for Their Families*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2011. Print.

Gertsel, Naomi R. "The Third Shift: Gender and Care Work Outside the Home." *Qualitative Sociology*. 23.4 (2000): 467-483. Print.

Hochschild, Arlie, with Machung, Anne. *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking. 1989. Print.

Ludvigsen, Anna, and Sara Scott. "Real Kids Don't Eat Quiche. What Food Means to Children." *Food, Culture and Society: An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 12.4 (2009): 417-436. Web. 17 May 2015.

McDowell, Adam. "Death to the Chicken Finger. How We Created an Entire Generation of Unsophisticated, Picky Eaters—And Why We Must Stop the Tasteless Cycle." *thenationalpost.com*. National Post, Feb. 2015. Web. 2 May 2015.

Nathanson, Jessica, and Laura Camille Tuley, eds. *Mother Knows Best: Talking Back to the "Experts."* Toronto: Demeter Press, 2008. Print.

Ruddick, Sara. *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995. Print.

Szabo, Michelle. "Men Nurturing Through Food: Challenging Gender Dichotomies around Domestic Cooking." *Journal of Gender Studies* 23.1 (2014): 18-31. Print.