

Mothers and Food: Negotiating Foodways from Maternal Perspectives

Florence Pasche Guignard and Tanya M. Cassidy, Editors
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When I read the “Introduction” to *Mothers and Food: Negotiating Foodways from Maternal Perspectives*, I was saddened to read that the editors, Florence Pasche Guignard and Tanya M. Cassidy had divided their submissions into two separate volumes. This second volume focuses on what researchers have learned from analyzing women’s roles in choosing recipes and planning meals; creating shopping lists; comparing prices; choosing organic, local, or the least expensive; cooking, serving, and cleaning up; growing food (from planting gardens to housing chickens or bees); struggling with limited budgets as well as severe food scarcity; being held responsible for the family’s health, and, in particular, their children’s health; struggling with local and (perceived) national scrutiny that would mark them as good mothers or bad mothers. There are no personal narratives or autoethnographies in this volume; those are found in first volume. One of the attributes I most admire about Demeter Press is the (rare for academic publishers) belief that the personal and the academic are and should be intermingled. I also was perplexed by the fact that the studies, on the whole, address heterosexuals—or individuals presumed to be heterosexual by default—and mothering. I found myself wondering how addressing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, questioning, intersex, asexual, ally, and/or pansexual (LGBTQ2QIAAP) mothering and food would have added to this collection. That said, as the list above indicates, *Mothers and Foods* offers readers a rich array of insights.

The volume is divided into four sections: Domestic Food Work and the Family Meal; Health, Medicine, and Nutrition; Food Security in Insecure Circumstances; and Representations, Communication, and Media. They “invite readers to pick and choose, to discover other themes that we did not highlight through the organizational structure of this book” (6). It is easy to do so. I wanted the mothers in the Mount Airy neighbourhood of Philadelphia (studied by de Kramer) to meet the women in the rural southwestern community in Uganda (studied by Kyomugisha, Atugabirwe, and Nshemerirwe). I had such sympathy for both groups of women and imagined how they could learn from one another. De Kramer focuses “specifically on the contradictions that emerge for a group of mothers who are trying to run their households on

the most limited budgets while, at the same time, fully subscribing to local, demanding, and expensive class norms around food, body size, and parenting” (30). Initially, the women in Uganda wanted to focus on improving the yield of their banana crop; however, they learned through the intervention of Gender and Development (GAD), as well as through personal interactions with three members of GAD and the authors of the piece, that their families, and their children specifically, would benefit from adding sweet potatoes to their crops. The women of Mount Airy have taken on an exhausting “third shift” in order to meet the food norms of their neighbours while the women in rural Uganda learned “new and innovative farming methods” (198) that not only improved their crop yield, but also improved their health.

At the end of each essay, I thought, “Wow! What next?” For example, Tanya M. Cassidy’s, “PumpMoms: Technology, Stigma, and Support,” addresses the difficulties faced by mothers with premature infants. The thirty-five women she interviewed all “described the alienation they felt when confronted with the medical necessity associated with producing maternal milk for their infants who were in the NICU” (123). In cases of inadequate milk supply, Cassidy points out, “[o]ther mothers’ milk’ becomes an option based on generosity and support” (129) as mothers donate their breastmilk in order that “all infants have the opportunity to be given the health benefits associated with maternal milk” (129). In “Secrets of a Food Storage Mom: Mormonism, Motherhood, and the Mainstreaming of Emergency Preparedness,” Deborah Whitehead explores the ways in which survivalists, and more specifically, survival moms, have turned to Mormons to learn best practices in terms of storing emergency water supplies and food, as well as in terms of rotating their storehouse.

Each author/set of authors offers a perceptive, thought-provoking, sympathetic study of a set of texts (e.g., Barilla Pasta advertisements and commercials) or a specific subset/group of mothers (e.g., *femivores*). Not only is this collection meaningful to anyone interested in Food Studies and/or Motherhood, but it also would make a wonderful addition to an undergraduate or graduate course on Food or Mother Studies. These authors repeatedly and eloquently clarify how and why “the maternal figure is always defined by what she does for other people—namely feeding them and responding to their expectations and desires” (Stano 267).