CHAPTER 10

My most memorable meal ever! Hospitality as an emotional experience

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Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on social, as opposed to convenience, eating. This basic distinction is made by Cullen (1994), who suggests that social eating must fulfil certain social functions for it to be successful. The meal experience investigated, therefore, involves more than snacks, 'grazing' activities, 'refuelling', or those with ulterior motives such as business lunches (Lashley, 2000). It engages with the special and memorable occasion, providing insights into aspects concerned with emotions and inherent social dynamics. Meal occasions may be regarded both as an 'object' displaying structure and form as well as an

'event' with physiological, psychological and sociological components (Douglas, 1975), and are recognizable in that they tend to be associated with their cyclical appearance in the household and with social events (Mitchell, 1999). In this respect, Gillespie and Morrison (2001) suggest that consumption holds symbolic emotional value associated with rites of passage, such as graduation, wedding or funeral. Thus, this chapter incorporates sociological perspectives in drawing on the points of view of young consumers of hospitality, and delves into their emotions, associated social practices and value systems. Specifically, it progresses knowledge through an appreciation of the place and composition of a sociable and memorable meal experience within their lives as a structured object that represents a symbolic and emotional event, as supported by Warde and Martens (1998).

The content of the chapter illuminates that hospitality consumed in the home and in commercial settings serves a complex function in that consumption of associated products and services is in part used as a means of making and maintaining social relationships. For as Beardsworth and Keil (1997) emphasize, this adds the dimensions of kinship, friendship and enemyship as integral to the meal experience, as by their nature they cannot be easily divorced from the emotions embodied therein. Furthermore, the behavioural practices associated with the consumption of hospitality exhibit social meaning greater than the activity itself. For as Riley (1994) suggests, the meal reflects something of the social fabric within a country, particularly family, gender, class and age relationships as well as historical traditions. This positions it as a powerful cultural medium, symbolizing relationships and social institutions, and underlies its function in facilitating sociality and reinforcing social order as embodied in the process of repast sharing (Gofton, 1995). Fundamentally the chapter explores guests' emotions underpinning these social dimensions of meal occasions.

Methodology

Data incorporated into this chapter is derived from a pilot study involving 63 first year students registered on a BA in

Hotel and Hospitality Management at a British University. In order to provide a contextual setting, it may be useful to know that the respondents fall into a 17–25 age group, the majority originate from the West of Scotland, with European and overseas students accounting for approximately 15 per cent, and in the main they come from families of average to above-average affluence. They were required to write a 500 words narrative reflecting on their most memorable meal experience, and were guided to structure the content within an analytic framework composed of six dimensions: occasion; company; atmosphere; food; service and setting. Clearly, resultant findings are context, age, life experience, social status and culture dependent. Furthermore, the fact that they are students who have chosen to study hospitality, and that many have work experience in the sector, may mean that the insights are not necessarily atypical of contemporary youth in Britain. While these sampling limitations may detract from generalizability, this is arguably offset by the richness of findings, and the novel and insightful contribution to the existing knowledge base.

Semiotic theory offered a relevant framework for a systematic inquiry that allowed the researchers to interrogate the seemingly everyday language of the narratives for dominant meanings (Saussure, 1974; Barthes, 1973, 1977). Semiotic analysis provides an analytical model that elucidates meaning from texts via a deconstruction of the signifying codes. This can be done in two ways: paradigmatic choices and syntagmatic chains (Saussure, 1974). The former is defined from its distinctiveness and difference of the chosen sign from the other possible choices available; and from the connotations emerging from the choice (Barthes, 1973, 1977). However, the complete meaning of the message results from the selection and combination of these signifiers into syntagmatic chains of meaning. As Storey argues 'the meanings made possible by language are thus the result of the interplay of a network of relationships between combination and selection, similarity and difference' (1993, p. 71). Importantly, Storey emphasizes that the function of such communication is its ability to construct access to a perceived reality, rather than to reflect an 'existing' one.

Thus, in this way respondents' output was 'captured' and the narrative linguistically analysed to provide an indirect

portal to their thinking and to surface the structure of their values, feelings and ideas behind their selection of the event, their perceptions and personal evaluations (Gyimothy, 2000). Specifically, analysis took the form of systematic interrogation of every narrative to ascertain its significance via semiotic analysis. The data was categorized in two distinct ways: firstly by asking what is the significance of meaning in what is depicted according to the difference from the alternative choices that were not chosen (paradigmatic); secondly, by looking at the ways the associated choices create comprehensive and complementary chains of similar and dominant meanings (syntagmatic) (Saussure, 1974; Barthes, 1973, 1977). The text was read repeatedly for total immersion. As categories emerged, it became easier to begin to identify the significance of other elements within the narratives as they either confirmed or diverged from the initial themes to initiate further analysis and new classifications. This iterative, constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) underpins the research methodology.

Such a methodology is supported in that it has the potential to reveal respondents' perceived reality of the meal experience, and a deeper dimensionality to the service encounter (Johns and Howard, 1998). This leads Gyimothy (2000) to call for a more holistic and phenomenological approach to analysing consumptions experiences, instead of surveying service journeys according to some rigid, supply-based structure. Thus, narratives can provide a symbolized account of actions, which possess an organizing theme that weaves events into a coherent story of a dedicated consumer activity in which context, or ambience may offer a meaningful experience over and above food (Wood, 1994).

The multi-dimensionality of meals

The following sections explore the broader conceptualizations of the meal experience by investigating the perceptions, symbolized accounts and emotional reactions of respondents to events that they self-selected as representing the most memorable. Discussion is structured within an analytical framework composed of the six dimensions provided to guide the

respondents' reflection: nature of the occasion of the meal; fellow diners who made up the company with whom they dined; characteristics that contributed to the atmosphere; food eaten; overall setting and the service provided. Of particular significance is that all the dimensions highlight issues that present insights into the emotions involved. Conclusions can be drawn that emphasize the multi-dimensional nature of meals and the service encounter, and complex influences on contemporary young people relative to culinary taste and consumption as expressed within home and commercial environments. Their relevance for hospitality business management is investigated.

Occasion

Table 10.1 summarizes the main categories of occasion selected, associated symbolism and indicates the numerical breakdown. Given the age group of the respondents it is hardly surprising that 18th and 21st birthdays dominate. This is followed by the 'kith and kin' motivation for hospitality where close and geographically distant family had the opportunity to bring the generations together to celebrate and mark special events. The next category illustrates the rewarding gift of hospitality by family members and close friends to celebrate achievement. For example, this took the form of completion of

Occasion	Symbolism	Number of respondents
Birthday	Coming of age	13
Family reunion	Kith and kin	12
Achievement	Rewarding gift	10
Holiday with friends	Childhood to adulthood	7
Holiday with family	Sharing the moment	6
Cultural/religious ceremony	Routines and rituals	6
Life course change	Demonstrate care	4
Staff night out	Politically driven	3
Romance	Communicate love	2
Total		63

Table 10.1 Most memorable meal occasions

outdoor endurance test, collecting the Duke of Edinburgh Award at Holyrood Palace, being accepted for university, and, rather paradoxically, winning a weight loss bet! The respondents who selected a meal while on holiday with friends did so in that it was symbolic because for most of them it was the first holiday without their parents. It let them 'be ourselves', representing a freedom from parental guidance, and marked a transition from childhood to adulthood. In contrast, the holiday with the family tended to be symbolic in that it was the last, or that it freed family members from the stresses of working life, providing the family with a rare occasion to sit round a meal table together sharing the moment.

The cultural/religious ceremony reflected a cultural diversity in focusing on celebrations associated with the Chinese New Year and Christmas in various European countries. This revealed the routines and rituals that guide and order such traditional events. The life course change occasion emphasize the respondents' stage in life which involved them in a gap year, or leaving home and friends to go to university. The staff night out represented a deliberate arrangement to move employees from a work to a social environment to facilitate their socialization within the organization. This indicates in the respondents a desire to establish a sense of belonging; a potentially politically driven motive. Finally, there is the occasion of romance where the meal is chosen as a means to communicate love.

Implicit in the self-selecting nature of the meal occasion, is exclusion of others. In addition, the characteristics of the sample means that dining experiences may be limited, with few respondents being in a position to have experienced anything other than family/friend meal events. Furthermore, few will have yet participated in business or professional meal events. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority of the respondents chose meal occasions that held symbolic emotional value associated with rites of passage and/or separation and reunion (Gillespie and Morrison, 2001). Often these were found in combination, where the celebration of a rite of passage was given an extra emotional *frisson* because it involved imminent separation from, or reunion with, family and close friends. Cullen (1994) suggests this may represent a

response to prevalent social trends that tend to undermine communal meal occasions, thereby conferring value by their exception. It would appear that there is a dominant social expectation that life events are be marked in a way that includes some sort of communal meal occasion. This may well be a response to how the respondents think they should be seen to behave according to prevailing fashions, images and conventions (Finkelstein, 1989; Wood, 1994). Significance is defined and reinforced because of the celebratory nature and emotional charging of such occasions, and provides an insight to contemporary social values. For example:

> The reason that everyone was there, was to celebrate the marriage of two people, which in its own right made the day a very special day; or in today's society, many people will never know or experience fifty years spent with one person, so what better way to celebrate than with your family.

Thus, traditional and prevalent social trends and conventions influence social behaviours, and contribute to the intensity of the symbolic emotional value associated with the selected meal occasions. These factors appear to directly shape and enhance the overall experience, setting it apart from those of a less memorable nature.

Company

None of the respondents described a meal eaten alone. Only three referred to the involvement of two people and this tended to refer to encounters of a romantic or courtship nature. The majority described occasions involving relatively large numbers of people. The company element could be divided into core and peripheral. Primarily the core company was variously composed of family, close or longstanding friends, and ages that crossed generations. This provides evidence of the perpetuation a social reproduction of the family to reinforce a coherent ideology of it through social structures (Charles and Kerr, 1988; cited in Bell and Valentine, 1997, p. 62). Furthermore, the composition of the company served to signify who is family or close friend and who is unfamiliar or an outsider to the

described social group. Where the members of the company were unfamiliar, it was acknowledged that by the end of the meal the sharing of hospitality had turned *'strangers into friends'* (Lashley, 2000). For example, relative to the category of 'staff night out' (Table 10.1), it allowed new members of staff to *'break the ice'* and forge better relations that fostered a sense of belonging and security. The peripheral company to the core was recognized as co-producer in the creation of the meal experience, and was identified as being composed of restaurant hosts, service staff and other customers including visiting celebrities.

It is apparent that a sense of security, social cohesiveness, belonging and trust derived from the established interpersonal relationships, particularly but not exclusively within the core company, contributed positively to the potential for each individual to enjoy the meal. A dominant finding was that the core company *'let me be myself'*, and *'did not put me under pressure'*. It allowed getting drunk in public, and disregard for spoiling the enjoyment of other restaurant customers through relaxed social behaviours, such as loud hilarity and singing. This indicates the existence of a 'social group comfort zone' that connects with a quest for the satisfaction of emotional needs. These appear to be perceived as more important than those of self-esteem and status derived from, for example, romantic/sexual encounters. This could be taken as a reflection of the changing attitudes and relationships between young people compared to those of earlier generations. An alternative interpretation may be that there has been a change in cultural values as contemporary young people draw self-esteem from traditional values of kinship and friendship as an antidote to challenges of living in the modern world (Elias, 1978). Thus, with so-called traditional family boundaries and emotional securities being eroded and replaced with increasing uncertainty, the symbolism of the communal/family meal occasion takes on heightened meaning. As suggested by Giddens (1990), it becomes valued as an object, employed as a means to re-embeded social cohesiveness and belonging in an increasingly fragmented and fragile social world. Thus, it attracts high cultural value as a means of stimulating social cohesion and reinforcing traditional values contributing to the construction of their

social worlds. In many ways meals perform the community meeting point which Adelman et al. (1994) suggest are becoming an increasing feature of service in cities where many people live an individualized existence.

Atmosphere

Atmosphere is defined as the tone or mood conveyed by place, the attributes of which are influential as they interact with and influence the diners who subsequently contribute to the atmosphere themselves (Riley, 1994). Constituents may be the tangibles of interior décor and the intangibles of the meal occasion and service encounter, the interpretation of which will reflect the respondents' personal socialization experience. Constituents provide a holistic architecture to frame the place, which houses the expression of certain emotions and which is instrumental in their manufacture (Finkelstein, 1989). Consequences of a positive atmosphere were identified as a spirit of enjoyment between the members of the company that promoted a feeling of sharing, belonging and togetherness in a socially relaxed environment. In addition a sense of celebration and conviviality was conveyed through conversation, laughter, singing, dancing, and the sharing of jokes. Further unique features of atmosphere by category (see Table 10.1) included: romantic within 'romance'; sexual frisson within the company of the 'holiday with friends'; wanting to cherish the moment not present in the 'staff night out'; and a feeling of anticipation and excitement for the future within the 'life course change'.

A significant feature of atmosphere identified was a feeling of being 'at home'. This was experienced by all categories except the 'holiday with friends', as they were celebrating the very freedom from all connection with the concept of home. Connotations associated with atmosphere as warm, homely, cosy, traditional and friendly where highly valued, and contributed to the overarching desire for comfort and a sense perhaps of a knowable and non-threatening environment. However, it is of note that the circumstances that support these interpretations do not always superficially at least suggest these feelings, for example, décor is variously described as modern, exotic, fancy, prestigious, grand, splendid, stylish,

magnificent, and elegant. While these adjectives are perhaps reflective on the special and memorable nature of the occasion, this is something of a conundrum in that they do not obviously seem to complement an atmosphere of 'being at home'. Furthermore, respondents could be reacting to a set of stereotypical signs (Johns and Howard, 1998) that are more varied in their accommodation of increasingly global mediated values, to reproduce a set of conventional cultural myths within the dining out repertoire. This demonstrates the power and widespread acceptance of symbolic signs to which consumers respond with a sense of genuine pleasure (Featherstone, 1991).

However, a more dominant dimension was identified as a contributor to atmosphere that influenced the emotions of the respondents. Value was placed on the qualities of those service encounters which facilitated the creation of a relaxed and comfortable environment. In this respect, those respondents who preferred to choose meal occasions hosted in the home provide insight. Their appreciation of the meal experience often stemmed from their perceived freedom from the restaurant environment and its rigid protocols, behavioural constraints and *'pompous waiters'*.

This may further support the proposal that for the meal occasions chosen in commercial premises the perceived emotional satisfaction experienced by respondents may stem from the replication of an 'at home' atmosphere. An 'at home' atmosphere has been achieved, and the service encounter managed in a way that overcomes atmosphere erosion through protocols and formalities. Certainly emphasis was placed on the familiar, fun relationships shared with service personnel, and on their enthusiastic attitudes. This in part may relate to the needs of younger diners, with the nature of the service encounter successfully reducing levels of self-consciousness and potential embarrassment (Goffman, 1969). Whether this approach to service was conscious or unconscious on the part of the service personnel is unclear. Nevertheless, it would appear to have contributed positively to promoting an atmosphere of relaxation and comfort within a commercial environment, perhaps indicating a means by which emotions are transformed into commodities for consumption (Finkelstein, 1989; Leidner, 1993; Wasserman et al., 2000).

Food

All respondents took for granted that the concept of the 'meal' constitutes an event with formal structured courses, that includes some element of hot food and some complexity of elements, rather than a snack. Few made comments on the value for money ratio, which may seem unusual given their presumably limited disposable income. Bourdieu (1984) provides a partial explanation to this finding in that it may be more important for the respondents to exhibit their cultural, rather than economic, capital in their display of good taste. Throughout the narratives, the position of food in the meal experience is subordinated to other dimensions, and this is common across both domestic and commercial environments. There are few examples of descriptions that go beyond basic level food knowledge, and they tend to imitate the character of menu descriptions or restaurant reviews, for example, '*Very nearly all of the food on the menu is one hundred percent fresh, local produce. Fresh seafood ranging from salmon caught by local fishermen, then smoked or pickled by the head chef, to prawns and lobster also caught locally. Fresh vegetables are cooked in such an original way they could be placed alongside those served in the Ritz'*. Where food does receive attention it is in relation to its ancillary functions such as: stimulating nostalgia for family, home and friendships; recalling links between individuals and points in time; and mediating across generations (Giddens, 1990).

The origins of the most dominant types of cuisine experienced by the respondents in their meals were Italian, Chinese and American. Cypriot and Swiss were experienced on holiday, Bulgarian and Danish by respondents of these countries of origin, African following the completion of charitable work, and camping food at the end of an outdoor endurance test. There was limited reference to food of British origin either in the home or in restaurants, and this was limited to those respondents who had been nostalgic for family and home while abroad, and those celebrating a traditional Christmas. This emphasis upon foreignness as attractive in food is not entirely unexpected (Randall, 1996; 1999). The respondents' choices reflect the cultural expectation that foreign foods are more desirable than British, and are regarded as more exotic, mystical

and luxurious (Said, 1985). This represents a form of invented tradition or myth that underpins the conception of a memorable meal occasion for respondents, promoting the bourgeois ideology (Barthes, 1973).

Within the family reunion, cultural/religious ceremony, and life course change categories (see Table 10.1) there are instances of food being prepared by female family members in the home, particularly in families of Italian origin. These meal occasions were used to communicate a respect for family, and often involved traditional recipes, for example, *'brodetta di pesce, bistecca alla pizzaiola and zuppa inglese or totellin a l panna e prachuto* [sic] (*tortellini alla panna e prosciutto*)', which had been passed from one generation to the next which helped to reproduce embedded identities (Lupton, 1996). Others demonstrated the power of food to stimulate a string of nostalgic memories of love and belonging, such as from memories of a grandmother's cooking back in an immigrant's home country, or a reminder of home from something that a mother would traditionally make for Sunday dinner. This also may be taken to demonstrate an authentic expression of hospitality and reciprocity (Finkelstein, 1989), the symbolic importance of which is often signalled through the likes of table settings that employ the best of crockery, cutlery and glassware owned by the family member.

Dominant in the narratives was the recollection of overindulgent consumption of food and drink and an evident belief that good meals can include food and drink not normally included in the diet due to concerns about body image, health and prohibitive cost. This suggests that the 'specialness' of the meal occasion can legitimize the temporary suspension of normal concerns and the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure (Bell, 1976). For example:

> The calorie count was high but I'd been starving myself all day for this meal, I intended to enjoy it, I usually don't drink any sort of alcohol when I am eating a meal as it puts me off the meal, but since this was a special occasion I felt I had to, and so I ordered one too many Vodkas and Cokes, but who was counting!

The apparent recognition of the unusual nature of such consumption may result from cultural conditioning which imposes

excessive concern for body image and over forms of social conduct (Elias, 1978, 1982).

Setting

Specific types of settings included home, holiday home, restaurants, hotels, golf clubhouse, ferry, and mention of a private/pseudo domestic room within commercial outlets was made in a few cases. The recall of meals in both domestic and commercial settings provides insights into the perceptions of authenticity and inauthenticity touched on by others (Asforth and Tomiuk, 2000; Warde and Martens, 1998). Though some find difficulty in seeing the relevance of domestic hospitality to commercial applications (Slattery, 2002; Purcell, 2002), others propose that it provides an insight into the nature of genuine hospitality which has obvious implications for managers in the hospitality industry (Lashley and Morrison, 2000; Morrison and O'Mahony, 2002; Scarpato, 2002). The respondents tend to support the view that the nature of hospitality is different in domestic and commercial settings. That said, a rounded understanding of the emotional impact of hospitality provision, despite the fact that the motives for provision are likely to differ depending on the setting, would be of benefit to those in industry.

The use of the domestic environment as a setting was most dominant in the categories of culture/religious ceremony, and life course change (see Table 10.1), where it was felt that the familiar nature meant that members of the company were freed from any rules about acceptable social behaviour that may restrict their enjoyment in a public, commercial setting. Warde and Martens (1998) explained this preference in that it conferred a special status on the guest being welcomed into the home, and the occasions had more chance of being relaxed, convivial, and informal than in restaurants as the host had greater control over the event. In contrast, dining in the commercial environment is seen to embody a degree of public display, however casual the occasion might be (Finkelstein, 1989). Comment was made of the social requirement to 'dress up', which contributes to the 'specialness' of socializing in a setting out with the home. This uncovers the diversity within

the research sample, with some respondents enjoying the status and prestige associated with the participation in more formal ritualized events in public, while others prefer to engage in what they perceive to be more authentic emotional events in domestic environments. This reveals a complex interactive process between domestic and commercial settings. A common denominator is that both forms of meal occasion involve expressions of kinship and friendship (Bell and Valentine, 1997). Where the distinction lies is that an important function of commercial provision is the sale of commodified emotions of status and prestige (Finkelstein, 1989), through reproducing traditional protocols and formats ransacked from the domestic/family setting (De Vault, 1991; cited in Bell and Valentine, 1997).

A further aspect of setting identified refers to the scenic beauty associated with geographic settings and physical location. This is particularly emphasized in the holiday with friends and family categories (see Table 10.1) where the unfamiliarity of the location adds to the meal experience. It tends to involve what might be considered classically iconic romantic sites, such as: in view of the Manhattan skyline; beside the River Rhine; in an Italian Piazza; next to an illuminated swimming pool; and in sight of Edinburgh Castle. Aune (2002) refers to this as the conferment of 'enchantment', an aura of fantasy and feelings that enhance emotions and transcend the meal experience. Certainly, respondents indicated that the geographic and physical location of the setting directly improves the atmosphere and thus the meal experience. In addition, it would appear that in these cases, they experience an extra *frisson* of pleasure and excitement derived from the accumulation of social status and cultural capital that dining in such locations can bring, as noted by Finkelstein in her commentary on the fête spéciale (1989).

Service

The respondents are confident and articulate in their belief that much of the responsibility for constructing the atmosphere conducive to a successful meal resides with service personnel. In the home there is clear evidence of a gender division of labour with service performed predominately by female

family members in a manner that is dedicated to ensuring the satisfaction and nurturing of all members of the company. While the gender division does not appear to translate to service in the commercial setting, the concept of guest satisfaction and nurturing perpetuates and appears to be more valued than technical aspects of service, such as silver service skills and menu knowledge. It is the 'soft skills', described as 'attentiveness', 'attention to detail', and 'desire to serve' that dominate. For example, *'The staff that evening were very attentive, although not suffocating, and seemed to have a genuine interest in helping the guests to enjoy their evening'*. This may indicate a contemporary informalization of rules of appropriate conduct traditionally associated with maintaining social order in public dining places (Warde and Martens, 1998). In particular, communication and interpersonal relationships figure strongly, such as: the genuineness of the welcome on arrival and guest/name recognition; being made to feel special and 'at home'; personalized, friendly and interactive social connection during the meal; and an expression of appreciation of the custom prior to departure. The prioritization of these aspects appear to relate to the development of self-esteem and personal prestige, but the data also suggest that the respondents had experienced something akin to the authenticity of the welcome associated with domestic settings. For example, *'From the moment we entered the establishment we were treated wonderfully and the host of the restaurant was extremely hospitable'*.

Woven implicitly and explicitly throughout the narratives were chains of meanings that suggest a recognition that service in the provision of hospitality involves the management of emotions. In particular, was the emotional engagement of both guest and service staff in the quest for enjoyment and entertainment, and the need to make the guests feel at ease or 'at home' and special while still respecting their social space. Johns and Howard (1998) refer to this as the service attribute of 'emotional comfort'. Insightfully, there is specific reference made by one respondent to: *'the staff's successful emotional management of the customers'*. This concern for the emotional dimension of the service encounter may represent a key critical factor contributing to the success of meal occasions, yet there is limited systematic understanding in the field of hospitality

management (Hochschild, 1983; Leidner; 1993; Asforth and Tomiuk, 2000; Lashley, 2001). This finding underlines the role of guest contact with employees as an integral part of the commercial product. Working in such an environment requires more than technical abilities. As Burns (1997) argues, this places an emphasis on 'soft skills', such as amiability, flexibility and tolerance that support high-touch service businesses. At root it requires emotional intelligence among frontline service staff and their management (Stein and Book, 2000).

Conclusions

Through the systematic analysis of the personal accounts of the young peoples' meal experiences and service encounters, the mythologies, values and meanings employed to construct their social worlds have been revealed. The findings are heavily context dependent on variables including: the symbolic significance of the occasion; socio-demographic profile of the respondents; and the degree of socialization and cultural conditioning inherent in the dining experience. It seems that the level of symbolic significance attached to the meal occasion influences the degree of emotional engagement of diners. It is this form of engagement and the resultant immersion in the experience which combine to confer status on the meal as a powerful cultural medium that transcends its obvious tangible value.

The choices of meal occasions may reflect the age and limited dining experience of these young people, in that it primarily draws on kinship and friendship groupings associated with rites of passage, life transitions, and family and friends separation or reunion. The use and reproduction of cultural mythologies surrounding the concepts of 'family' and 'home' are evident. Strong attachment to this ideology is demonstrated through the use of words, such as, 'cohesiveness', 'belonging', 'security', 'trust', 'tolerance' and 'emotional satisfaction'. The inherent expectations of social order, conformation to social conventions and norms, and stimulation of nostalgic associations and memories appear to be embraced to anchor and create their social worlds. This may be explained by prevalent social trends at work in an increasingly uncertain world that

could be eroding family boundaries, communal eating patterns, and emotional securities.

Thus, the meal experience represents an event containing symbolic and emotional components, and it is multidimensional in nature. A dominant perspective presented was that when the event is produced in a domestic setting then the emotions associated with the meal, home and family will combine to offer a certain authenticity. On the contrary, production in a commercial setting is to transform a 'natural' commodity into one that is manufactured. Thus, emotions such as enjoyment, pleasure, enchantment, romance, sexual frisson, and excitement move from the spontaneous to the deliberately derived when in a restaurant setting. Furthermore, preconceptions of home and family are used as an authenticity baseline when comparing and contrasting domestic and commercial environments. Authenticity indicators include welcome and friendliness, security and freedom from threat, comfort and warmth, tradition and the familiar, privacy, and freedom from protocols. Commercial environments can be seen as unfamiliar, bound by rules and social expectations, requiring public displays of social status, and is described variously as 'exotic', 'prestigious', 'foreign', 'mystical', 'elegant' and 'grand'. These findings are important in that they represent a form of mental tool kit that these young people delve into to construct their interpretation of which hospitality experiences live up to their version of the authentic. Moreover, it emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between domestic and commercial environments and the manner in which knowledge of domestic hospitality can be used to the benefit of commercial management.

Specifically, it is proposed that in the quest for the most 'authentic' manufactured meal experience, commercial operators are best advised to get closer to consumer's mythologies to expose values, meanings and emotions of import from which new, lucrative market opportunities for service design and marketing activities may emerge. This is particularly salient to operators active in market segments that promote the special, emotionally charged meal experiences that are appropriate for kinship and friendship groups. Finally, the significance and role of the service encounter has been emphasized throughout this chapter. It places considerable weight on 'soft' over 'technical'

skills, and here again the qualities valued in the home and family can be employed to satisfy and nurture restaurant customers. This is particularly relevant to the youth market with limited dining experience. By creating environments which are characterized by their familiarity and informality, and in which your people can feel self-confident, restaurateurs can engage their customers in truly satisfying meal experiences.

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