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Meals in science and practice: interdisciplinary research and business applications

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Meals in science and practice: interdisciplinary research and business applications

Abstract

This is the book for those of us who subscribe to the maxim 'People don't eat nutrients, they eat food!' Underlying all of our nutrition science is the simple fact that people eat combinations of foods at certain times during the day in a multitude of cultural, social and physical contexts. They eat meals. If we are to have any chance of influencing people's food choices we have to understand meals. This is no mean task and Meiselman and his highly expert fellow authors have spent much of their working lives tormenting themselves trying to make sense of this most fundamental of human activities. They would probably be among the first to say that the task is far from complete, but this book certainly tells us where we are on the journey of discovery.

Keywords

practice, meals, interdisciplinary, science, research, business, applications

Disciplines

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BOOK REVIEW

Meals in Science and Practice: Interdisciplinary research and business applications

Edited by Meiselman HL. Woodhead Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2009, 704 pages, \$315, ISBN 9781845694036

This is the book for those of us who subscribe to the maxim 'People don't eat nutrients, they eat food!' Underlying all of our nutrition science is the simple fact that people eat combinations of foods at certain times during the day in a multitude of cultural, social and physical contexts. They eat meals. If we are to have any chance of influencing people's food choices we have to understand meals. This is no mean task and Meiselman and his highly expert fellow authors have spent much of their working lives tormenting themselves trying to make sense of this most fundamental of human activities. They would probably be among the first to say that the task is far from complete, but this book certainly tells us where we are on the journey of discovery.

This book is truly a smorgasbord. The reader can dive into any of its 28 chapters without reference to the others. Meiselman has tried to provide some organisation, but in this multidisciplinary field this is difficult. The result is that the content of the eight sections is highly varied and sometimes a little idiosyncratic. For example, Peter Williams' chapter on the food service perspective in institutions is in a different section to Edwards and Hartwell's chapter on institutional meals. But this arbitrariness is a minor distraction and really does not detract from the joy of reading this book.

The eight parts of the book include: Part 1, an *Introduction*, which contains two excellent overviews by Meiselman, one outlining the interdisciplinary character of meals research, the other, key phenomena such as styles, meal patterns, snacking and grazing among others. Part 2 *Defining meals social and foods service perspectives* includes two chapters by Makela on social perspectives and Williams on food-service. Part 3 *The study of meals* includes lessons from Nordic studies (by Kjaernes *et al.*), sex aspects, institutional meals, studies of meals in the home and in the laboratory. Part 4 *Eating together and eating alone* – Pliner *et al.* on eating alone; McIntosh *et al.* on the American family meal; an equivalent chapter by Fjellstrom on the family meal in

Europe and, sex perspectives on the sole restaurant customer by Jonsson and Ekstom. Part 5 is titled *Teaching through meals*. It includes Chrzan's family meal as a culturally relevant nutrition teaching aid and Gustaffsson *et al.*'s culinary arts and meal science as an interdisciplinary university curriculum. Then follows Part 6 on *Meals world wide*, which includes chapters on packaged military meals, French, Italian, Brazilian, Indian, Thai, Chinese and Australian meals (I can not see why Kosher and Halal meals and Revisiting British meals in Part 8 were not included here). Finally, Part 7 on *Meals in Practice/Meals as Art* and Part 8 *Further perspectives on Meals* complete the book.

What are the highlights? That depends on the reader! For me, the Australian contributions are highly pertinent – Peter Williams provides a scholarly, concise look at food service and David Cox's thorough study and analysis of the meal practices of a group of Australian women points the way to larger studies in the future. The chapters on the various national cuisines are fascinating; in particular, Grignon and Grignon's historical overview of French meals is both instructive and optimistic, despite the incursions of Anglo-America French meals will be around for a long time! Similarly, Marshall's contribution on British meals brings us up to date with recent sociological and marketing studies and also provides evidence that the British do more than graze their food. Moscowitz and Reissner's methodological chapter on creating concepts for meals suggests ways to develop more complete assessments of meals types (in their case via application of conjoint utility analysis). This, and other chapters, may well enable the development of a general theory of meals in the future.

Even in this age of billion dollar stimulus packages this book is pricey! However, if you are seriously interested in the study of meals, this book is a very convenient tool for increasing your understanding. It is an important reference for food and nutrition researchers and practitioners.

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