

Negotiating Taste

Food Market Research in the Hagley Library

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With the growth of the food industry and the establishment of global food systems, studies have documented how corporations increasingly shaped what people ate, as well as why and how they ate (see for example Belasco and Scranton 2002, Nuetzenadel and Trentmann 2008). Other work has determined that consumers have continued to exercise enormous influence on their food choices and how food comes to the table (see for example Horowitz 2005, Wilk 2006). How, then, do we balance the relative influences of producers, advertisers, marketers, and consumers?

This research note points to the potential contribution of food market studies to understanding rituals of cooking and eating, the construction of cultural knowledge, and identity formation through the lens of foodways. Here I argue that marketing research can serve as a way to comprehend not only corporate initiatives but also the political and cultural constructions of eating and drinking habits and interrelations between producers, distributors, and consumers. Provided scholars take into account that marketing companies and their studies are not “value-neutral,” but have biases and are affected by cultural and social circumstances, research on consumption patterns and market climates can reveal the intricacy of power relations between the industry and consumers. My particular focus is two major collections held by the Hagley Library (Wilmington, Delaware), the leading business history library and archives in the United States ¹: the Seagram Company, Ltd. collection and the papers of Ernest Dichter. ² These collections contain hundreds of market studies, principally from the 1950s through 1970s, that include marketing strategies of food companies, consumer attitudes toward various products, and opinions of retailers and wholesalers. I first discuss the Seagram papers, which include primarily alcohol marketing studies. Then, I focus on market research pertaining to food and drink contained in the Ernest Dichter papers. These market reports provide important analytical tools for scholars from various disciplines.

Seagram Company, Ltd. Papers

The Hagley collections documenting the history of the Joseph E. Seagram & Sons Company, Ltd. run to almost 1,000 linear feet. These records trace the company’s transformation from a small business to a diversified multi-national corporation. Seagram commissioned thousands of market surveys to understand consumer attitudes towards alcoholic beverages, food, and other consumer products. The company also assessed brand preferences and the impact of advertising among different demographic and regional populations. These studies begin in the 1950s and are strongest from the 1960s through the 1980s.

Although the Seagram research reports remain virtually untouched by scholars, they have the potential to vastly widen our understanding of the place of alcohol and drinking both in American life and overseas. They promise to extend the growing number of studies in the last decade exploring the

multifaceted traits of alcohol as commodity, food, a social marker, and a public discourse. For example, historians of colonial America and the early republic, such as David W. Conroy (1993), Peter Thompson (1999), and Sharon V. Salinger (2002), examined the political, economic, and social role of the tavern as a public space while Lori Rotskoff's *Love on the Rocks* (2002) traced the construction of discourses about alcoholism in the twentieth century. Rotskoff described the "engendering" of alcoholism that reflected and reshaped ideologies and norms of masculinity and femininity from the 1910s to 1960s in the United States. To further understand the significance and complexity of drinking culture, we need to consider drinking habits in relation to larger social and historical changes and to other countries, as well as the relationships between administrative policies, public representation of drinking, and alcohol distribution and consumption patterns.

Attention to market research surveys, such as those in the Seagram collection, has the potential to augment directions in recent scholarship to look more closely at drinking habits and socio-economic practices from production to consumption. The Seagram papers at Hagley include more than 400 consumer research reports and related materials, including correspondence, minutes from marketing meetings, advertisement posters, and magazine and newspaper clippings. Since Seagram's headquarters was located in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, the majority of research targeted Canadian and United States markets. But there are also international market reports on twenty-two countries and regions. While some include a detailed analysis of the data from interviews and statistics, others are only raw data regarding alcohol sales and consumption, retail prices, market shares of the company, consumer brand preferences, and brand awareness. The consumer studies were conducted by prominent advertising agencies including the Gallup Organization, J. Walter Thompson, and Institute for Motivational Research. They offer consumer profiles and attitudes toward different types of alcoholic beverages, including beer, whiskey, rum, vodka, gin, brandy, and wine. Scholars can also benefit from the sheer volume of interviews with distributors and retailers. Some of the most important themes in these reports are summarized below.

The Social Geography of Drinking

A number of consumer studies in the Seagram papers discuss social and political influences on drinking habits in different geographic settings. They consider the ways in which political control over alcoholic beverages affected distribution and consumption of alcohol, as well as the connection of national, regional, and ethnic identity to drinking patterns and attitudes toward alcohol. These sources illuminate how the alcohol consumption practices reflected the impacts of politics on everyday lives and, reciprocally, how people responded to their political and social situations.

In Canada, the political climate of the 1960s through 1980s concerned Seagram greatly. The development of Canadian identity and social and political movements such as the nationalist Quiet Revolution in Quebec played crucial roles in establishing modern Canadian society after World War II. Social transformation and political awareness had a significant impact on eating and drinking habits in the country. In addition, many of the Seagram studies on Canada distinguished between French-Canadian and English-Canadian populations to determine cultural impacts on drinking patterns. Their

Canadian consumer surveys were mostly conducted province by province rather than in a national market. For example, “A Motivational Research Study of Attitudes, Expectations, and Unsatisfied Needs in the Liquor Environment” (Analytical Research 1974) evaluated the extent to which cultural and social changes affected the current attitudes and practices of Quebec Canadians toward various types of alcoholic beverages. The report is primarily based on interviews with 200 respondents (68% male and 32% female), and includes questions on their attitudes toward alcohol in general, preference for different kinds of drinks, expectations for liquor qualities and advertising, and the importance of a “Canadian” label (domestic or imported) to their choices. This study shows the relationships between social changes and everyday lives, specifically the drinking habits, of individuals and groups of people.

In the United States market, Seagram extensively surveyed alcoholic beverage use in thirty-three states from the east to west coasts, as well as Hawaii (TRC 1970-1985).³ These state surveys amount to thirty-nine linear feet and have seven linear feet of supporting records, including raw completed questionnaires and demographic information. To create these studies, Trade Research Company, the firm hired by Seagram, conducted interviews with 100 to 500 retailers every two or three years from the early 1970s to the early 1980s in more than four cities in each state. These studies explored consumption trends and market climates in different places, asking restaurant, bar, and store owners about their impressions of consumer attitudes toward different types of liquor; pricing and discount policies; bottle displays at stores and bars; special holiday packaging; and the impact of political and social issues, such as fair trade laws and other legislation, relating to the alcoholic beverage industry. The reports are quantitative as well as qualitative: they include data on sales, market share, and consumption, along with retailers’ comments on political and cultural situations in their locale. Moreover, appendixes attached to each report include detailed information about sales, consumption, retailing, and promotion.

For example, Southern California reports include surveys, conducted in 1971, 1972, 1974, 1975, 1976, and 1981 among 540 to 635 retailers in Metro Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange County, Ventura County, Santa Barbara, and Riverside-San Bernardino (TRC 1971-81). The studies inquired about consumption trends by racial and ethnic groups (“white,” “black,” and “Hispanic”) and alcohol consumption by women. Among other studies, the 1974 Southern California report featured the effect of a wholesaler strike and proposed legislation which included elimination of the fair trade laws, doubling of liquor taxes, and lowering of the drinking age to eighteen in the state (TRC 1974). Concern with the political situations and impact of fair trade bills was not limited to California. Studies of such states as New York, Tennessee, Delaware, Indiana, and Maryland also looked at how legislation affected the alcoholic beverage industry. In addition, the Delaware and Indiana studies aimed to determine the significance of out-of-state business and the percentage of customers coming from neighboring states.

Examination of political and social conditions in different states provides a larger framework for understanding the development of corporate marketing strategies and the dynamic relationship between politics, culture, and economic activities. These regional studies can also be used to determine alcohol consumption by demographic categories. By juxtaposing the geographic distribution

and concentration of certain populations (or communities) with alcohol sales and consumption in a particular region, scholars would be able to map the geography of alcohol purchasing patterns by class, race/ethnicity, and other social characteristics. Moreover, these state surveys can be useful to investigate the role of distributors and retailers in the alcoholic beverage trade. It has been difficult for scholars to learn about the attitudes and activities of these traders, even though they have had a significant impact on both sales and consumption of products through their role as mediators between producers and consumers. Extensive interviews with retailers and distributors in the Seagram studies present essential aspects of marketing activities that scholars have rarely investigated.

In addition to geography shaping drinking habits and cultural associations with liquor other studies were more concerned with the influence of the manufacturing origins of alcoholic beverages. "An Exploratory Study to Determine Consumer Response to Country of Origin Labeling" (E. J. Wolf Associates 1983) examined United States consumer perceptions of two labels: "imported" and "imported from Canada." The report concluded that consumers preferred a label with a clear indication of a country. Because many respondents had positive feelings about other Canadian beverages, including beer and whiskey, the country's name on the label served as a marker of "good" liquor (E. J. Wolf Associates 1983rff). The close relationship between alcoholic beverages and geographic origin illustrates the importance of production sites that acquired a connotation of alcohol quality. This commercialization of geography is one of the most important aspects of the interrelations between production, distribution, and consumption of alcohol.

Alcohol and Globalization

As domestic competition intensified along with the global expansion of networks of companies, people, and goods, many alcoholic beverage producers saw that expansion into overseas markets was fundamental for corporate growth. Teresa Da Silva Lopes' comprehensive study, *Global Brands* (2009), identified the 1960s as the moment when aggressive international expansion took hold in this industry. As Lopes argued, the globalization of alcoholic beverages required "marketing knowledge, alliances in distribution, and different forms of corporate governance" to make expansion of national brands into new markets feasible and profitable (2009:2). This form of globalization required corporate managers to understand not only financial costs and benefits but also cultural and political factors in foreign land, as well as the dynamics of business partners and competitors.

The market research studies commissioned by Seagram can add essential information about the international alcoholic beverage market to our knowledge of globalization. In addition to the Canadian and United States research, the firm conducted market studies on every continent from the late 1960s to early 1970s. ⁴ The objectives and contents of these studies depended on the market. In many European and South and North American countries, as well as Japan where Seagram already was selling its products, its studies were principally intended to determine consumer brand awareness, drinking habits, the influence of advertisements, and the market share of Seagram brands. In nations where Seagram was evaluating how to create a new market for its products, the company conducted

consumer research to understand the character of the demand for alcoholic beverages and the advertising, bottle designs, and packaging that were most likely to succeed.

A somewhat typical study of liquor consumption conducted in New Zealand explored drinking habits, brand awareness, images of Seagram, and the role of liquor in the country to develop future marketing strategies (J. Inglis Wright 1978). Interviewing 100 men and women in four cities, the report focused more on the social roles played by alcohol and consumer attitudes toward drinking than on statistical data on sales and consumption. According to the study, liquor was “an integral part of the New Zealand way of life” and was considered as “a social leveler” that could enhance social conformity (J. Inglis Wright 1978). Meanwhile, New Zealanders’ attitudes toward liquor were changing as a result of the liberalization of liquor licensing laws, the extension of hotel drinking hours, and the growth and development of the local wine industry.

Not all international market research analyzed the social meanings of alcohol and drinking occasions in a particular culture; many focused just on consumer responses to a product with little reference to cultural significances. Nonetheless, by closely examining reports in different countries and regions, scholars can benefit from these international studies in understanding the development of new markets and the expansion of the alcoholic beverage business. Besides, consumer research in different countries points to geographical differences in alcohol drinking habits and networks of alcohol production, distribution, and consumption that defied national boundaries.

Gender, Race, and Age

Obviously Seagram was interested in using market surveys to learn more about who was consuming, and not consuming, their products. Along with looking closely at geography, many studies in the Seagram papers show alcohol consumption trends by different consumer profiles, including gender, race/ethnicity, and age. Even studies not specifically concerned with race or ethnicity include a breakdown of drinking habits by “black” and “white,” and in some cases, “Hispanic” categories.

Advertising agencies also undertook market research that focused on specific groups. For instance, “Advertising to Spanish Speaking Americans,” conducted by J. Walter Thompson (1974), covered not only a demographic profile of the Spanish-speaking market, but also these consumers’ social values and culture, differentiating between Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and South Americans. African Americans were another group whose preferences Seagram specifically targeted. “Profile of the Black Consumer,” a study conducted by Daniel Starch and Staff, Inc. (1973), explored the specific household and personal purchasing habits, spending intentions, and consumer attitudes among African Americans. As this report was concerned with lifestyle choices, rather than alcohol consumption per se, it covered consumption of a wide range of goods, such as beverages, diet foods, insurance products, laundry soaps, and automobiles. Moreover, Seagram’s files also include reports, generated by Black Enterprise and Ebony, magazines primarily targeted at an African-American audience (see Earl G. Graves 1974). Many of these studies are subscriber surveys and detail the alcohol consumption patterns. Seagram also carefully crafted its advertising campaigns to appeal to different racial and ethnic groups. A 1981 study

evaluated consumer responses to three Chivas Regal (Scotch whiskey) advertisements that featured “white models,” “black models,” and a “universal” image to determine which Seagram should use (PRS 1981).



Photo 1: White Models.

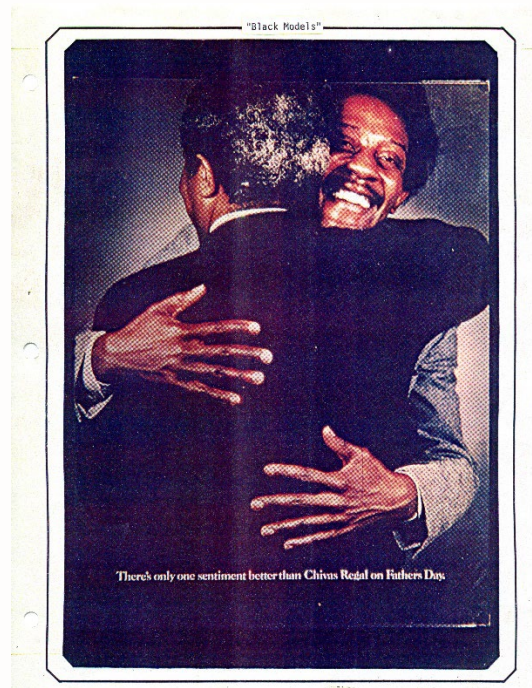


Photo 2: Black Models.

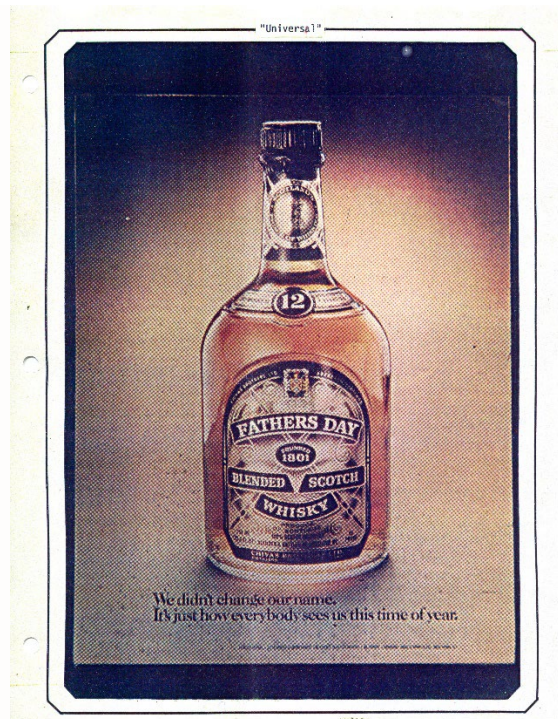


Photo 3. Universal.

The Seagram papers include reports specifically on female consumers, such as the Ladies' Home Journal subscriber surveys, "Alcoholic Beverages and Women" (1967; 1972). These studies examined women's drinking habits, preferred types of drink, purchasing patterns, and their role as hostesses in home entertaining. Similarly, other studies on female consumption of alcoholic beverages include women's usage of alcohol for cooking as well as their drinking and purchasing patterns. "A Study of the Liquor-Buying Habits of Women" (Life 1967) and "Special Reports on 'the Decision Maker'" (Fawcett 1967) evaluated the impact of advertising on women, the effectiveness of alcohol advertisement in women's magazines, and the importance of wives in brand selection. Women are mentioned in other studies as well, although not as consistently as distinct racial and ethnic groups.

Seagram was very concerned about the attitude of young people toward its brands and commissioned a number of market studies to address those concerns. Among others, the Gallup Organization, Inc. conducted "A Second Annual Market Investigation of Alcohol Beverage Consumption among Young People Ages 18-29" (1972) to explore young adults' drinking habits of wine, beer, and distilled spirits. In this study, 1,078 interviews were conducted with college students and 806 with people aged 18 to 29 not attending college. Based on the interviews, Gallup concluded that "mass social wine consumption grew out of the youth revolt" of the 1960s, and wine consumption, unlike distilled spirits and beer, had a relatively strong relationship to counter-cultural attitudes and behavior such as drug use (Gallup 1972). Young people's drinking patterns, however, had changed further by the early 1970s. According to this report, wine consumption became prevalent among a broad spectrum of young people and they were less likely to make the strong association between the establishment and all alcoholic beverages. The report insisted (Gallup 1972) that a "general softening of sex roles and definitions" was one of the

most essential impacts on youth drinking behavior, thus indicating new social values were significantly affecting the alcoholic beverage market.

The segmentation of the market reflected changes in consumer behaviors and preferences, as well as in social values. To develop effective marketing strategies, advertisers aimed to identify primary consumers of particular brands in certain areas. These market studies reveal one company's cultivation of potential market sectors as well as the changing conceptions of drinking among different groups of people.

Ernest Dichter Papers

Ernest Dichter was a Vienna-trained psychologist who came to New York in 1938 to escape the Nazis. He became a pioneer in the development of motivational research, a marketing tool that used psychological techniques to probe consumers' desires and responses to market products (Schwarzkooph and Gries 2010). His extensive papers held by Hagley include more than 480 marketing reports related to food and beverages and cover more than 45 food items, dating from the 1950s to 1980s. These studies cover food shopping habits, changes in retail merchandising practices, and consumer attitudes toward food characters/brands such as Betty Crocker, Duncan Hines, and Sara Lee. Dichter also conducted research on packaging, including cartons, cellophane, and paraffin containers. In considering a package as "a bridge between a consumer and the content" and as the "emotional identification" of the product, Dichter analyzed consumers' purchasing habits and attitudes toward different food items in relation to their packaging (IMR 1951a). As his studies show, the development of package designs resulted from a process of interaction between producers and consumers, with the eventual final package serving as a communication tool between the two. ⁵

Dichter's reports offer an historical and socio-economic analysis of the data from interviews with consumers and retailers, consumers' comments on different food items and their eating habits, and his recommendations for marketing strategies to his clients.vi To an unusual degree, his research also provides opportunities to explore the internationalization of food preferences. These studies covered geographically varied markets, mostly the Americas and Europe, including Canada, Mexico, Australia, England, France, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, as well as the United States. Dichter investigated the social and cultural significance of various food products in different countries, cultural barriers against certain foods, and acceptance of new eating habits. While the primary objective of Dichter's research was to determine the current market climate for a certain brand and company, the scope and depth of his analysis were not limited to the volume of sales and consumption or the market share of a particular firm. Dichter focused on psychological dimensions of consumption patterns. By probing the "deep psychological motives" behind his interviewees' attitudes and habits, he aimed to understand "the real significance and function of the product" within contemporary culture (IMR 1951b). In market research conducted for Diamond Crystal Salt Company, for instance, Dichter emphasized the historical importance of salt in the United States and, more generally, its significance as a seasoning for cooking (IMR 1955a). Another study on beer consumption in South Africa developed an encompassing framework geared toward understanding the psychological and practical reasons why people purchased,

consumed, and drank beer in a certain way (IMR 1964). For Dichter, eating habits were not just an individual's mundane practice of choosing anything edible, but about aspects of their social and private life that include identity, home, and family.

While Dichter's marketing research offers valuable primary sources on food and eating habits in different places and time, it is essential to bear in mind the cultural and social context in which Dichter undertook his research. During his formative years (1940s-1950s) the male-dominated marketing industry assumed that women were supposed to fulfill their roles as homemakers and make most of the purchases for the family. Dichter shared this bias. And similar to others in mid-twentieth-century market research, he was decidedly western in his cultural assumptions. In his study of tea drinking habits in the United States, for example, Dichter compared tea with coffee because he considered the latter as "a direct competitor" of tea (IMR 1951c). This may be true in the United States and some other countries, but coffee and tea are not always "compatible." In many Asian cultures, some types of tea were, and still are, regularly served during meals, rather than as an after-meal drink, and thus were not in the same cultural category as coffee. With both its mine of marketing information and cultural limitations, Dichter's research can be valuable to scholars with a wide range of interests and varied research agendas. In the following sections, I explore four research topics relevant to the Dichter papers.

Industrialization and Modernization

"The decline in the taste of our food began more than a century ago, and has turned into a catastrophic depression in recent years," John Hess and Karen Hess wrote in their 1972 book, *The Taste of America* (1972:2). The authors decried the rise of the food industry and its impact on the American palate. Since then, a number of food studies scholars, environmentalists, journalists, and consumerists have unveiled the darker side of the food business and called for the need to rediscover "real" food and taste. Thirty-four years after the publication of *The Taste of America*, Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006), a book that restated its main theme, became a bestseller in the United States. As state-of-the-art technology developed varieties of "artificial" food products, including genetically modified foods, the impact of industrial food production on the environment and the human body increasingly gained attention from both scholars and the public.

Dichter was well aware of the "modernization of the American way of life" in the mid-twentieth century (IMR 1957a). He saw the change in the kitchen as "the most revolutionary" in the past generation (IMR 1957a). According to his observation, "increased income, more leisure time, greater sophistication in both aesthetic and sensory expectations" were important factors that contributed to changing American people's taste (IMR 1957b).

The American public did not necessarily accept "modern" products without hesitation or resistance, even before the "organic food" movements of the late twentieth century. In his studies, Dichter found "a paradox of consumption" (IMR 1952). On the one hand, more consumers took pride in the great machinery made available through an advanced technology. Dichter noted that mass-produced items

retained “their rightful place in the constellation of consumer needs” (IMR 1957c). On the other hand, consumers became more anxious about the “conveyor belt product” and the trend toward personalized products (IMR 1968). Even guilt feelings and nostalgia haunted those users. There was also an increasing resentment against the rushed, tense, unhealthy atmosphere of the modern meal. In a study of breakfast cereal, many respondents stated that dry cereal was the symbol of “the resented [sic], hurried, streamlined breakfast” (IMR 1955b). While his report indicated female consumers’ growing appreciation for convenient foods and appliances, including frozen foods, baking mixes, and canned foods, Dichter detected ambivalence in consumers’ reaction to factory-made, de-personalized commodities and rushed lifestyles.

Diet and Health

Dieting is one aspect of eating habits and has been a source of recurring interest to many scholars. Approaches range from the examination of (white) women’s self-images of their bodies and eating disorders in *Fasting Girls* by Joan Jacobs Brumberg (1988) and Susan Bordo’s focus on the ideological construction of the female body in *Unbearable Weight* (1993) to Susan Yager’s *The Hundred Year Diet* (2010) that explored people’s preoccupation with diet and weight loss in the United States. Although Dichter’s research does not discuss dieting as his primary focus, his interviews with consumers and his analysis offer rich information about the social and cultural influences on acts of eating and non-eating.

As Marion Nestle revealed in *Food Politics* (2002), the food industry played a crucial role in creating a discourse about diet and nutrition by lobbying federal agencies, funding research on food and nutrition, and marketing their products to the public. For Dichter, issues of diet and health-conscious trends became important analytical factors especially after the late 1950s. In the following decade, an increasing number of his reports mentioned people’s tendency to be “healthy.” His 1954 study of the rye cracker “Ry-Krisp” suggested that because the product signified abstinence and even “self-punishment” in a public image, it had failed to attract many consumers (IMR 1954a). The “psychology of diet of modern men and women,” observed Dichter, was changing and sales of low-calorie foods were steadily expanding (IMR 1954a.). He interpreted these findings to mean that modern consumers were seeking to avoid extremes both of self-deprivation and self-indulgence and instead were striving for a more relaxed moderation and balance. The psychology of dieting was, however, contradictory and complex. In one of his studies about store-baked cakes, Dichter reported that in spite of the growth of calorie-consciousness, the market for decorated party cakes had increased in the United States in the late 1950s (IMR 1957b). People’s tastes for food were not developed purely by biological needs or physical concerns. Idealized lifestyles and family relations also conditioned consumer choice. Dichter’s research thus helps us understand not only how advertising firms negotiated popular worries about diet to increase sales of their products, but also how cultural discourses influenced concepts of health and diet as well as selections of food.

Gender and Food

Dichter's marketing studies point to a social and cultural construction of ideal womanhood and the role of advertising as a taste-maker that could influence women's behavior. Female consumers, specifically housewives, were important subjects of Dichter's studies. In fact, many of his studies involved products for which women were primary purchasers. The advertising industry at the time regarded women as irrational consumers who were easily swayed by emotional appeals. As Daniel Horowitz pointed out (1986-87:54), Dichter's view of a female's central role as the homemaker was closely related to the larger intellectual context in which Dichter worked.

For some time, constructions of "proper" femininity and gender roles have been an important subject in food studies. Among the best known are Laura Shapiro's *Perfection Salad* (1986) and *Something from the Oven* (2004), both crucial works on the politics of constructing gender roles and transforming women's roles and status inside and outside of the home. *Kitchen Culture in America* (Inness 2001) and *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies* (Avakian and Haber 2005) examined the relations between food and gender from various perspectives, especially through such themes as gender roles, industrialization of kitchen, food business, and identity. As these books asserted, food has been an integral part of women's lives in terms not only of the widely assumed, sometimes imposed, role as a housewife, but also of construction and confirmation of their identity by themselves through provisioning the household.

Dichter's reports exemplified how food marketing drove the naturalization of ideal womanhood. His analysis encompassed women's attitudes toward their own roles at home, transformation of women's lives and the surrounding environment, and his assumption about women's roles. As Horowitz insisted in his essay, Dichter "reconstructed" American womanhood in the postwar United States by classifying three types of women: career woman, pure woman, and balanced woman (1986-87:55). The third category, what Dichter called the "modern housewife," became the primary target of his study and of food advertising. "As a result of intensive postwar education in appliances, packaging, processing, and merchandising," argued Dichter, the modern housewife was "psychologically prepared for almost anything" (IMR 1957b). In considering the fact that roughly 60% of married women in the United States were working outside the home, he recognized that the modern housewife could be simultaneously a wage-earner, mother, wife, hostess, household planner and organizer, and a community figure in more than one social organization. While acknowledging women's negative responses to standardized products as discussed above, Dichter concluded that "modern" foods and home appliances had "a built-in psychological attractiveness" to women who would wish to fulfill their multiple obligations (IMR 1957b). He further argued that the housewife had learned to feel that convenience factors in food preparation enabled her to heighten her self-image as modern and progressive. While Dichter's analysis was problematically entangled with social assumptions about gender at the time, respondents' comments in his interviews also showed how consumers themselves considered, and sometimes took for granted, the association of food with proper gender roles.

For Dichter, gender was also closely related to the symbolic nature of food. He insisted that foods retained "personalities with a definite sex" (IMR 1955c). In his report, "Sex of Rice," Dichter identified

rice as “a strong female,” because it was considered as young and healthy and was also blessed with great fertility (IMR 1955c). One of this study’s goals was to determine whether or not there was a personality conflict in Uncle Ben’s Converted Rice based on the “sex of rice.” Dichter’s interviews indicated that this African American character was considered as “a household retainer, the helper of the woman” (IMR 1955c). Thus Uncle Ben’s masculinity represented “no competition with femaleness, nor a clash of authorities” (IMR 1955c). In addition, the modern woman accepted the attenuated and friendly authority of an uncle, which connoted “good-will, friendliness,” and “authority, based not on power but on experience and mutual understandings” (IMR 1955c). Bringing race into his assessment, Dichter concluded that American consumers accepted the image of “the nice old colored man as assuming a preponderantly feminine role” (IMR 1955c). Thus, according to his analysis, Uncle Ben did not make rice any less feminine than it is generally felt to be. But, warned Dichter, “he [Uncle Ben] should always remain the helper and not the person who takes over the woman’s place” (IMR 1955c). Uncle Ben needed to be seen as the person who would assist, or serve, women in the kitchen than the person who actually cooked. Dichter’s analysis of Uncle Ben may have been legitimate for a food company at the time to promote its brand. For food studies scholars, however, it is important not only to question whether the character’s personality threatened the brand, but also to reexamine the development of Uncle Ben and the public acceptance of the brand. ⁷ The very image of “Uncle Ben” embodied conceptualizations of gender and race: the woman’s role as a homemaker, feminization of non-white men, and white male authority. Creation of the Uncle Ben brand and Dichter’s analysis in itself epitomizes the way advertising has contributed to constructing, reiterating, and naturalizing concepts of gender and race in the United States.

Feeding Others

Food consumption is often imagined as an individual act, when in fact the act of feeding others is one of the central aspects of human culture. Looking systematically at the decision-making process of why certain foods are selected, prepared, and then served to other family members can offer significant insights into understanding eating habits and concepts of food in many different cultures. In *Feeding the Family*, sociologist Marjorie L. DeVault (1991:12) argued that women were recruited into the “work of feeding” at home because the production of a family as a socially organized material setting required particular kinds of coordinative and maintenance activities. While DeVault looked at the home, anthropologist Daniel Miller (1998) observed women who were shopping for food. In Miller’s view (1998:15), the act of selecting particular items could be understood as “making love in supermarkets” because of the way purchases reflected social relations within the family rather than individual preferences. As these valuable studies demonstrate, we can better understand patterns of food consumption and purchasing in a family setting by looking closely into this area of our culture.

The Dichter papers contain important studies on the psychology of feeding and could contribute to a significant expansion of the historical dimensions of food studies. His research on commercial baby foods specifically analyzed women’s psychological concerns about feeding their children: their attitudes towards breast- and bottle-feeding, commercial baby foods, and women’s appropriate relationship with a baby. In a study for Clapp’s Baby Food (IMR 1962), female respondents tended to

consider commercial baby foods as safe and nutritious. Although they cited medical doctors as the authority on a baby's overall physical development, the respondents had confidence in their own judgment regarding the specific feeding routine and food choices for their babies. These "modern mothers," Dichter explained, regarded the baby as an individual with its own behavior and feeding patterns. Thus, women had confidence in their own choices and accepted baby food products as part of routine family food purchases (IMR 1962). Besides infant feeding, the husband and older children were keys to the role of the housewife in preparing meals. The preferences of family members clearly were an important element that affected women's purchasing patterns. Dichter often underscored the role of children in the determination of brand preferences, especially such products as cereal, milk, and processed meat. For example, his study of breakfast cereal uncovered emotional conflict between mother and children (IMR 1954b, 1955b, 1957d). Children were aware that mother did not willingly approve of their eating some cereal brands just because "advertisers had bribed them with premiums" (IMR 1955b).⁸ Mothers felt they ought to serve children "more nutritious, more wholesome and more honest" types of cereals as part of a substantial mother-prepared breakfast (IMR 1955b).

The interactions and conflict between mothers and their children examined by Dichter complicate the notion of the family as a place of acculturation. Pierre Bourdieu asserted that the rules and norms of good taste are not "generally inculcated in systems of formal schooling, but rather within the home" (1984:56). Echoing his argument, Deborah Lupton (1996:38) explored family meals as an important site for the construction and reproduction of the contemporary family in western culture and the emotional relationships and power relations within the family. Dichter's studies suggest, however, that the acculturation of taste was an intricate process. While the family still functioned as an important educator of taste for children, parents were not the only ones who provided "taste education." Advertisements also taught children about "good" products. Moreover, the authoritative power of parents sometimes yielded to media influences on their children. Hence, market research on family feeding and brand selections raises questions about who has the power to decide product and brand selections and to influence the consumption patterns of others in the family.

In analyzing Dichter's studies, we can learn how altruistic motives, as well as such factors as nutrition, convenience, price, and flavor, stimulated purchases of certain brands. These marketing reports also indicate ways in which the purchase and preparation of food were intrinsic to gender, class, and family relations. The nature of these reports as advice to food manufacturers, as well as Dichter's own assumption about gender roles, mean that he did not investigate how and why the popular discourse naturalized women's role as caretakers at home. To fully benefit from these Dichter papers, scholars will need to historicize his studies and to interpret them within larger historical and social frameworks.

Distinction: Class, Religion, and Nation

Dichter was, in his own way, aware of food's place in demarcating differences by class, race/ethnicity, gender, and religion. His research reports can be read, then, to develop Pierre Bourdieu's well-known work on taste and distinction (1984). For instance, Dichter's studies of kosher food show not only the relations between eating habits and religion, but also the intricate, sometimes contradictory, role of

food as a marker of taste. Many advertisers increasingly promoted “Kosherness” as healthy and safe both to Jewish and non-Jewish consumers (see IMR 1961a, 1963). These reports suggest that differences marked by food were both exclusive and inclusive. Appreciation of certain food required economic and cultural capital while drawing a line between those who have and those who do not. On the other hand, the commercialization of religious practices, such as kosher food, distinguished some products from others. At the same time this differentiation of foods won over a wide range of health-conscious consumers regardless of their religious beliefs.

Dichter’s studies also explored the complicated influence of national identity on food preferences. A particular food’s association as traditionally American or as a foreign import was an important factor in its acceptance. Cake mixes “duplicated the most standard and popular of American cake” with the intent of encouraging “acceptance on a basis of familiarity” (IMR 1961b). Other kinds of food, including gourmet items, benefitted from their association with “the exotic and foreign” (IMR 1961b). It was their difference from traditional American fare that attracted consumers. Such distinctions between “American” and “foreign” evoke a sense of authenticity and nostalgia, as well as novelty. Consumer responses to certain brands and food elucidate the construction of new markets through the process of differentiation from other food cultures.

Conclusion

The marketing studies in the Seagram and Dichter papers add fresh and diverse perspectives to ongoing interdisciplinary discussions on issues of morality, health, sociability, religion, and identity. Not only does the Seagram collection help foodways scholars to understand consumer responses to certain types and brands of drinks within and outside the United States, but it also allows them to access influential intermediary activities, including retailers’ perceptions of and reactions to consumers, and businesses such as wholesalers. Meanwhile, Dichter’s qualitative market research illuminates cultural influences on consumption and avoidance of particular foods, the role of marketing as a “taste-maker,” and the relationships between food, technology, and material culture such as packages. The interrelations between producers, advertisers, and consumers, exposed by these market reports, bespeak the development of taste as a process of negotiation.

The marketing studies found in both collections articulate how corporate business activities are closely related to political, economic, and cultural conditions. Social situations moreover are not static nor confined within one country or community but are always changing and influenced by other societies. To fully understand the dynamics of global exchanges of information and goods, it is essential to employ various approaches and methodologies across disciplines. While one of the objectives and missions of scholars is to “fill” a gap between scholarly understandings, academic activities are more like oil painting than a jigsaw puzzle: we paint and re-paint a picture on a canvas with different colors and tools over and over, rather than finding a particular piece whose “right” place is predetermined and fixed. Only if scholars come together from a variety of disciplinary locations, will we be able to create more intricate pictures of food and drink histories and their roles in society. The Hagley

collections can help foodways scholars pursue this goal and contribute to deepening and expanding our understanding of eating and drinking cultures as well as of society at large.

Notes

1. For more information about the library, see <http://www.hagley.org/library>. The library sponsors conferences and seminars and offers research grants to researchers.
2. Records of the Seagram Company, Ltd., 1907-96, Accession 2126; Seagram Museum Collection, 1880-1990, Accession 2173; and Ernest Dichter Papers, 1936-1991, Accession 2407, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware. All the Seagram and Dichter collections discussed in this essay are held by the Hagley Museum and Library unless otherwise noted. These collections include published and unpublished documents, pamphlets, posters, and product samples. This essay covers only a part of the Seagram and Dichter papers.
3. These states are Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington D.C., and Wisconsin.
4. These international markets are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, England, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom, and Venezuela (International Market Studies, 1962-80). Some reports are written in languages other than English.
5. The Irv Koons collection at Hagley is another rich primary source for studying packaging and industrial design. Irv Koons Papers, 1946-96, Accession 2132.
6. Interviews were mainly undertaken with consumers in many of Dichter's studies, but some research includes interviews with retailers, such as restaurant and retail store owners, and distributors.
7. For the relations between race, gender, and food, see Doris Witt's *Black Hunger* (1999).
8. In addition to feeding the family, Dichter's studies on pet foods reveal another aspect of feeding work, including the role of the pet food industry in constructing the relation between pet animals and human beings (see IMR 1953; 1955d).

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