



Original Research Article

## **The role of alcohol in Canadian family food practices: Commensality, identity, and everyday tastes**

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### Abstract

The authors use an anthropological lens to examine the role of alcoholic beverages and their consumption within everyday food practices of contemporary Canadian families. Anthropology and anthropologists have a long history of interest and fascination in the ceremonial and ritual use of alcohol within a diverse range of societies and cultural groups. The focus has typically been on the positive social and cultural values of these practices. In this exploratory study, the authors draw on data gathered from a cross-Canada project exploring Canadian family food practices. As part of this study, participants were asked to take photographs of images they felt represented their everyday family food practices. The authors examine participants' discussions of photographs they took containing images of alcoholic beverages. Findings represent three themes which suggest the diverse and changing roles that alcohol may have within a contemporary Canadian context: commensality and the taste experience; everyday tastes; and taste and identity change.

**Keywords:** alcohol, family food practices, photographs

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DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v6i2.334

ISSN: 2292-3071

## Introduction

Alcohol is a fundamental component in the food and drink practices of Western culture (Anderson, 2010; Gately, 2008). Since humans first discovered the results of grain and fruit fermentation, alcohol production has been an important agricultural by-product and its consumption an important source of calories and nutrients for adults and children (Chrzan, 2013). However, through the development of large scale distillation and its growing role in economic trade, alcohol and its place in family food practices began to change in the 19th century. As Chrzan noted, “for the first time in history alcohol was cheap and concentrated enough to encourage intoxication on a regular basis” (2013, p. 7). Scholarly research and writing on alcohol's role in family food practices reflected that change as well.

Early 19th century scientific and health fieldwork, research, and literature focused on the social problems and deviant behavior caused by alcohol consumption. For example, alcohol consumption to the point of drunkenness was seen to represent a failure of human will (Valverde, 1998). Alcohol overconsumption was medicalized and the label *alcoholism* emerged with an understanding of this disease as an addiction; in turn, as a disease, medical interventions were deemed appropriate for treatment. Negative experiences of alcohol consumption contributed to first wave feminist and temperance movement discourse which labeled alcohol as a societal evil; limiting alcohol distribution and consumption became an important part of these social movements (Chrzan, 2013; Trenholme Cole, 1913).

With shifting attitudes towards alcohol in both Europe and North America over the past century (Gately, 2008; Standage, 2005), including the concept of drinking moderate amounts of alcohol for pleasure (de Garine, 2001a) as opposed to a societal evil, many scholars struggled with distinguishing positive and negative aspects of alcohol consumption (Valverde, 1998). The negative aspects of alcohol consumption in terms of health and social problems are well documented in scholarly publications such as *Alcohol, Research & Health* (Bloomfield et al., 2003; Paradis, Demers, & Picard 2010) and the *Journal of Mixed Methods* (Ames et al., 2009).

In contrast, Mary Douglas, in her seminal edited volume titled *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology* (1987) suggested that anthropologists working in different societies had documented places where alcohol and alcohol practices were not primarily viewed as problematic or pathological. Douglas proposed that consumption of alcoholic beverages was better understood as possessing symbolic meanings for different cultures. Furthermore, these symbolic meanings within a culture may vary according to one's gender, age, religion, education, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, and in turn influence people's alcohol consumption. What continues to be underrepresented in the literature are examinations of how people view and talk about alcohol and its consumption in relation to their everyday food practices. The term "everyday" in the context of this paper is not meant to imply that participants consume alcohol every day but rather that the consumption is considered part of a normative food/drink consumption pattern.

This paper addresses this gap in the literature by exploring the roles alcoholic beverages have within everyday food practices of contemporary Canadian families as revealed through qualitative interviews and photographic images. Using data from a cross-Canada qualitative study exploring Family Food Practices (Beagan et al., 2014), this paper, written from an anthropological perspective, seeks to learn more about literal and symbolic meanings that alcohol and its consumption have for individual participants and their families. An anthropological lens contributes to broader food studies concerns on how food and drinks function as symbolic objects that are used in everyday performances of identities, in unique sociocultural contexts both within the home and in more public contexts, to illustrate individual and familial social locations.

### *Alcohol consumption and commensality*

Douglas (1987) called for anthropologists to take up the study of alcohol and its use as a primary research objective. She suggested that traditional historical accounts lacked the necessary structured approach and symbolic analysis required by anthropologists. While Douglas' suggestion reflected her own theoretical approach, it is significant for presenting a platform for the discipline to engage with alcohol and its consumption. She proposed that alcohol and alcohol consumption could be a medium for constructing people's social worlds and that those social worlds vary for different people in different places: "Sampling a drink is sampling what is happening to a whole category of social life" (1987, p. 9). The recognition that categories of social life fluctuate is important when investigating the alcohol practices of a place such as Canada, which is generally not recognized as having a distinctive drinking culture (Kairourz & Greenfield, 2007) despite a colorful 350-year history of beer production and consumption (Winn Sneath, 2001).

Heath (1987) built on Douglas' anthropological approach by presenting a summary of a decade's worth (1970-1980) of cross-cultural, interdisciplinary studies. Heath emphasized the construction of different social worlds between and within the various societies examined. Significant for our paper is Heath's view that alcohol and its consumption are often associated with everyday behavioural norms in many societies and not always related to deviant behavior.

De Garine (2001a, 2001b) continued developing an anthropological perspective through a framework for examining why humans drink. De Garine's framework describes four styles of drinking alcohol: 1) seeking mild inebriation to enhance pleasure at social gatherings; 2) everyday alcohol consumption accompanied by food consumption; 3) binge drinking, characterized by youthful exuberance or rites of passage; and 4) deliberately seeking intoxication or despair drinking. He emphasized that each culture may have its own drinking behavior, often marking social and economic status. While the negative aspects of alcohol consumption (alcoholism, associations with crime and family abuse) must be recognized and addressed, de Garine noted that drinking alcohol is also associated with upbeat social activities and events, such as during meals or festive events. This approach to examining the social role of alcoholic

drinks is echoed by Chrzan (2013), who traces shifts in sociocultural value of alcohol in different times in the United States from a cause of social ills to positive perspectives on moderate, quotidian consumption.

Black and Ulin (2013) fully embrace Douglas, Heath, and de Garines's call for anthropology to place alcohol (specifically wine) at the center of exploration in social and cultural issues around the production and consumption of wine. Themes of power, politics, and place are presented within historical, ethnic, and geographical context, from well-established vino-cultural areas such as France and Spain, to places where wine growing is more recent including Australia, Chile and the United States. A strength of this book is the inclusion of places arguably less familiar to contemporary wine cultures such as Georgia and Lebanon. Calls for "doing anthropology at home" (2013, p.4), of blurring boundaries between "field" and "home" resonate with our work and approaches, as we, as Canadian anthropologists, take on the challenge of turning a critical gaze to explore drinking cultures within a Canadian context.

Also of relevance to our framework for examining drinking cultures are notions of commensality, specifically its role in the construction of food and drink practices shaping individual and group identities. Commensality goes beyond its literal translation of eating at the same table to the sharing of food and drink as a necessary component of social organization, as a way to bond participants to an experience (Fischler, 1988, 2011). Arguably, taste preferences are formulated through commensality, in turn shaping identities and notions of self and other. We suggest that participants' inclusion of alcohol and its consumption in their stories and photographs may represent, among other issues, commensality: a belief, acceptance, or desire that alcohol consumption, as part of their everyday family food practices, may convey a sense of belonging, sharing, and celebration that transcends the standard annual holiday or special event. Thus, building on anthropological understandings of the social value of alcoholic drinks, our objective in this paper is to explore literal and symbolic meanings of alcohol and its consumption among study participants who resided in distinct places and regions within Canada.

## Process

Data for this paper was drawn from the Canadian Family Food Practices Research Project (Beagan et al., 2014). The purpose of this cross-national project was to illuminate how various social and geographic environments may shape individual and family eating habits and dynamics around food choices. There were ten research sites across Canada, with rural and urban locales sampled in the following provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Ontario. Nine to 11 families were recruited from each site. The inclusion criteria for participating families specified that each family needed to have at least one adult and one teenager willing to participate, were comfortable speaking in English, and had lived in the community for at least two years. Purposive sampling was employed in order to obtain diverse cultural representations of social class, defined by education and income. Each participant was interviewed twice with

the second interviewed centered on discussions of photographs that they took. Further details on the general methodology are available in Beagan and colleagues' text (2014).

This paper focuses on the data from the adults' second interview when participants' photographs that represented their everyday individual and family food habits and preferences were discussed. To avoid any potential conflicts arising from underage drinking of alcoholic beverages, only adult participant interviews and photographs were analyzed for this paper. A list of suggestions, such as *foods and drinks you really like or dislike*, and *meals that you eat at home*, was provided to the participants to serve as a starting point for photo-taking. This photo elicitation technique was used to engage the participant in the research process, to encourage reflection on the photos, to promote discussion, and to allow the interviewer to ask probing questions to get at deeper meanings behind the photographs (Power, 2003, Sharma & Chapman, 2011). Participants were asked to describe the photographs that they had taken and to explain why they took them. For the purposes of this paper, all transcripts from the adult second interviews of the Canadian Family Food Practices Project were queried using Atlas.ti 5.2 software with the "Alcohol" code as the selection criteria. This code was applied to interview text that included discussions on beverages containing alcohol, such as beer, wine, coolers, mixed liquor drinks, and/or the consumption of those beverages.

In addition to the "Alcohol" text queries, all participant photographs (N=4205) were examined and coded for images representing alcohol or alcohol consumption. Ninety-two photographs were identified and coded "alcohol." The corresponding passage from the interview was consulted to verify if the image was discussed or referenced by the participant as alcoholic. If the discussion in the passage did not verify the image as being coded "Alcohol" or discussed as related to alcohol, the photograph was not included in this analysis. Eight images were eliminated resulting in 84 photographs, from 39 families representing all ten research sites, examined for this paper. Our inductive analysis revealed three main themes around the consumption of alcohol and everyday family food practices: 1) commensality and the taste experience; 2) everyday tastes; and 3) taste and identity change. We selected three photographs, and participant discussions about them, from three different families to provide a snapshot of these main themes. Brief discussion examples from other families are used to further illustrate each theme.

## Findings and discussion

### *Commensality and the taste experience*

The first thematic example comes from the parents of a participating family located in the urban locale of Vancouver from the British Columbia research site. The photograph (Figure 1) and accompanying story feature a wine storage area located in the participant's home basement with six cardboard wine boxes lying on their side and partially filled with wine bottles.



**Figure 1:** Commensality and the Taste Experience. Wine storage area.

The conversation describing the image featured the father (F) and mother (M) of the family along with the Family Food Practices study interviewer (I). The father begins to describe what the image represents:

F1: That's another aspect of our lives that we enjoy. I'll just speak for myself. Which is yearly we go into the Okanagan and we buy maybe ten cases of wine. Or more.

M1: [laughing]

F1: Is it more?

M1: I don't know.

F1: Fifteen cases? I don't know.

In this passage the father describes an annual family trip to the Okanagan region of south-central British Columbia which is approximately a five-hour drive from Vancouver. The Okanagan region is home to the second largest wine producing region in Canada, having been established as a commercial producer in the early 1980s (Aspler, 2006). The father describes the pleasure of drinking wine at the start of his story when he stated, "That's another aspect of our lives that we enjoy" and acquiring the wine is strongly associated with memories of family trips to a scenic part of the country. This aligns with de Garine's (2001a) suggestions of the social symbolic values of alcohol. These memories include place, in this case the Okanagan, as a literal and symbolic marker of a broader family taste experience. A *taste experience* is a multi-sensorial concept where a product has the ability to elicit physical elements of a place—geography, geology, climate, and weather—and then more importantly, the people, their customs, traditions, and their ancestral heritage within a physical and temporal space (Trubek, 2008). The taste experience conveys knowledge. For the parents, this nondescript image of six cardboard boxes lying on a basement floor (you cannot even tell the exact contents of the boxes from the image) invokes the sharing of that experience and bonding with their sons, a form of commensality.

The large quantity of 10 to 15 cases purchased on the annual yearly trip to the Okanagan arguably becomes infused with the memories of this wine producing area. The laughter and

banter between the mother and father concerning the uncertainty of the number of cases they purchased further suggests that they perceived this to be a pleasant experience that is in no way representative of deviant behavior. The father continues to elaborate on the pleasures of owning these bottles of wine:

F1: And that's enjoyable as an event and it's very nice not to have to go to the liquor store. Anytime you want to buy, or drink something rather, you go down and you consult your—what you've got the basement.

In this passage, the father reiterates that the trip to purchase wine was both "enjoyable" and an "event." Arguably, the pleasant memories of the family trip affected taste experiences months later. The mother reinforces the father's comments and adds to how their values link to family commensality and the taste experience around alcohol consumption practices:

M1: Yeah, exactly. It's also nice to go and experience the landscape where the wine is from. It means more.

F1: And also, the boys are really interested in that too. That's a really great part of their year.

M1: Although it's awful that they won't let kids taste wine. They are allowed to taste it at home, but they are not allowed there.

I: Okay. So the boys come along with you?

M1&F1: Yeah.

The mother's comments on how the physical landscape of the Okanagan contribute to their overall travel and taste experiences, "It's also nice to go and experience the landscape where the wine is from." This wasn't an exclusively adult experience, for "the boys are interested in that too." The family trip was more than simply going there on holiday to purchase an alcoholic beverage. The sharing of the taste experience and commensality promote a sense of family bonding.

The mother's comments further suggest an understanding of the concept of *terroir* where the physical and social environments of where a food or drink product is from contributes to the overall cultural knowledge and taste experience of consuming it (Black & Ulin, 2013; Trubek, 2008). The mother's comments about the boys' inability to sample and taste the wine while at the winery highlight divergences between family values with societal rules and expectations. The legal drinking age in British Columbia is 19 (British Columbia Government-Liquor Control and Licensing Branch, 2017). This would support the participants' position that under these circumstances, as part of family food practices at home, the consumption of alcohol is representative of a pleasurable and positive experience and not of deviant behavior, even for underage drinkers. The interviewer then prompts the father to continue with the story:

I: So they have a selection you can taste type thing and you decide from there?

F1: Yeah. So that's, and it really is just a lovely thing to share with [the mother]. To discuss you know, shall we try, you know I don't know the [brand name] something or other for this meal or you know. So, it's not that we're wine snobs or even very expert at it all, but we ...

M1: No, and I've got a terrible memory for taste. But, it's just another way to fit pleasure into life. Yeah.

I: It certainly would be a pleasure to walk downstairs and see that, stacks of wine.

M1: [laughs]

Here, the father states that the sharing of the wine in social gatherings is an important component of alcohol consumption and commensality as suggested by de Garine's (2001a) first component of his drinking framework (alcohol consumption as part of the pleasure of social gatherings). The pairing of a certain wine "the [brand name] something or other for this meal" reflects the connection that some alcoholic beverages can have with food as part of a regular diet as suggested by de Garine's second style of drinking framework (food consumption regularly accompanied by alcohol). The mother concludes their story by reinforcing their belief which supports Heath's (1987) position that alcohol and alcohol consumption can represent positive and pleasurable behavior within their family food practices, "it's just another way to fit pleasure into life."

Another example that illustrates commensality, connecting and bonding through food and drink comes from a family in the urban Nova Scotia site. When the interviewer asks the mother if she gets the kids involved in meal preparation she responds:

M4: I do get the kids involved - that's when it's so much fun. And when my [partner] does it, I mean I love on a weekend when we get a glass of wine and we just chop food. We just do it together, it's so wonderful. It's so meditative, it's so relaxing, and then we have our meal.

This brief passage illustrates that the consumption of alcohol is part of a broader taste experience that involves the children and meal preparation. It also speaks to Fischler's (2011) notion of commensality by referencing "fun," "together," "meditative," and "relaxing" to convey a positive family experience.

### *Everyday tastes*

The second thematic example of alcohol consumption, as part of a everyday family food practices, is represented in the example from the father of a family in the Toronto neighborhood of South Parkdale, part of the Ontario research site. South Parkdale was selected as a research site to represent a community of low socioeconomic status when compared to North Riverdale,



another Toronto neighborhood (Beagan et al., 2014). The father's photograph (Figure 2) displays a glass sitting on a desk that is half full with beer. In front of the glass is a paper napkin with some almonds sitting on it.



**Figure 2:** Everyday Tastes: beer and nuts

The beer and almonds are situated beside a visible keyboard of a computer. The participant's accompanying short story provides some context to the image and speaks to de Garine's (2001a) quotidian nature of alcohol consumption within everyday family food practices:

F2: Right, right. So the first one, I was sitting at night after dinner late in the evening working and I had a beer and some almonds, and you said take food and it's food so that's what I did. I like beer and almonds. So that's it.

I: You normally would have them together?

F2: No, not necessarily. In fact I hardly ever have snacks with beer but I was hungry that night and there were some almonds there. We don't eat snacks that often.

I: Were you working on the computer did you say?

F2: I was, yeah.

I: Oh, okay. So it's -

F2: Late in the evening. That's why the computer is there, yeah.

The first interesting observation is the father's suggestion that he considers beer a food, or at the least beer and almonds as food, and that he enjoys the combination, "I like beer and almonds." The participant quickly clarifies that he seldom has a snack with his beer, suggesting that this is an alcoholic beverage that he regularly enjoys on its own in the comfort of his home. His simple and direct response, "You said take [photographs of] food ... So that's it." suggests that the practice of having a beer in the evening after dinner is part of his regular food and drink practices. This supports Anderson (2010) and Chrzan's (2013) position that alcohol *is* food in some instances and aligns with de Garine's (2001a) second consumption style: alcohol consumption accompanied by food consumption.

This image and description may also suggest, although this short story does not provide any direct evidence, how the computer and working at home may replace going out to the local pub as a new convenient and cost effective way to combine alcohol consumption with a snack food without leaving the comforts of your home (Foster, Reed, Karunanithi, & Woodward, 2010).

Another illustration representing convenience, everyday tastes, and the casual nature of alcohol and food practices comes from a mother in the Alberta urban site of Edmonton when describing the contents of the photograph depicting her kitchen and dining area in her home:

M5: Our wine rack lives there. We usually have quite a few bottles hanging around. Which is funny, we don't drink that much wine but it's nice if someone invites you somewhere [for dinner], just grab a bottle and take it, or someone will bring you a bottle.

This short passage conveys the everyday or quotidian nature of the role that alcohol can play within family food practices. The mother references the inanimate object of a wine rack “living” on her kitchen counter as if were a natural and convenient feature. She acknowledges the volume of wine in the rack as simply “hanging around” to suggest they are part of the regular occurring visitors to her home along with the “someone.” And even though they do not drink much wine anymore, the casual quotidian nature of the practice is reinforced by her comments, “just grab a bottle and take it.” This suggests how the sharing of food and drink forms a necessary component of social organization (Fischler, 1988, 2011).

A third example representing everyday tastes comes from the urban site of Halifax in Nova Scotia. The mother of the family is discussing a photograph she took of a pasta salad:

M6: It was just a family dinner. There'd be salad there as well. Wine and milk of course.

The quotidian nature of the practice is exemplified by the phrase “It was *just* a family dinner.” The combination of wine at the family dinner with milk and the expression “of course” suggests that these are both regularly consumed beverages for this family.

The discussions accompanying these three participants' photographs illustrate the causal everyday nature of the role that alcohol can play in family food practices. The simple images and their brief descriptions reflect how alcohol may be used to construct their social worlds (Black & Ulin, 2013; Chrzan, 2013; Douglas, 1987) and represent positive experiences.

### *Taste and identity change*

This third thematic example of alcohol consumption as part of family food practices, is represented by the father of a family in Athabasca, the rural locale of the Alberta research site.

This example is notable as it represents a significant change in the father's alcohol consumption practices as they relate to their changing family preferences and identities as illustrated through food practices. This change in practices first came to light in the first phase of the research process during a photo elicitation activity (Beagan et al. 2014, p. 248). The father responds to a stock image representing a meal laid out on a table with wine visibly present:

F3: Sunday dinner, yes. With the wine and everything else.

I: With wine?

F3: Yeah. My wife and I.

I: Ok - was that something you've always had? You as a parent? The two of you?

F3: No - we have - this routine we started probably since Christmas. I got into wines heavy. [Laughs] I've started to learn a lot about wines and read about wines and built myself up a cellar.

In this passage the father explains that drinking wine with food is a recent alcohol consumption practice having begun the past Christmas; this interview took place the following July. The father goes on to explain how the change came about when he was given a wine book for Christmas which created a new interest for him, providing an alternative alcohol consumption practice:

F3: Yes. I'm a beer drinker - I've drunk beer all my life. I love beer, and I love - not just beer to get all plastered up with the boys- but micro-brews and brew tastes. And the beers around the world I really like. So I can sit and drink beer all the time. So they said, "Try some wine." I can't even remember who gave me the book -it was just laying under the tree. And then I started reading it. This one I got really interested in - it was very well-written. For a person like me that's learning, trying to learn about wine-tasting is tough, it's hard.

This shift in alcohol consumption practices, from beer to wine, and self-identification "I'm a beer drinker," may be viewed through a lens as a marker of change in social status (Bourdieu, 1984), that wine consumption represents a sign of distinction, a taste of luxury whereas beer consumption represents the taste of necessity for the lower social classes. However, the father makes it clear in the passage, that he is not just interested in alcohol consumption for the reason to "get plastered" which would represent de Garine's (2001a) fourth style of deliberately seeking intoxication or despair drinking. Instead, the father explains that he likes to drink beer to experience the different tastes from around the world and the beers of the micro-brewers. This would fit with the current trend of some beer drinkers preferring the flavors and taste experiences provided by craft beers and small specialized brewers which may now be considered a marker of higher social status among conventional beer drinkers in Canada (*Financial Post, Retail and Marketing*, 2015). This marker of change is further supported by the

father's expressed desire to learn something new, to acquire knowledge that he did not possess before.

The previous two passages also serve to foreshadow the second phase of the research process where participants were asked to take photographs of images that they felt represented their everyday family food practices and father (F3) spoke to one of his photographs (Figure 3):



**Figure 3:** Taste and Identity Change. Wine Selection.

F3: Yeah, my wine selection. I've actually got them on the floor in the basement, cos I haven't built wine racks yet, because as I was telling you I just got into this over the winter and didn't start collecting till the spring.

I: So this is in your home? Your own collection?

F3: Yeah. I've got a few bottles down there. I'm trying to buy reds and whites, Chardonnays and that sort of thing that will age because, of course, with wines, as you probably know, what you're paying for a lot of times, there is of course good wineries as well but you're paying for them to hold onto the bottles as well, if its good wine. I'm trusting people with this. Like reading wine books, and also on the internet. And I go by what some experts who know a lot more than I do say about wine. And if it's a good value, I'll buy it and save it. I'm not a real expert to say, "Boy, that's going to be a real good wine!" Because it's something I'm still learning.

Here the father explains that since he received a book about wine as a Christmas present he has shifted his alcohol consumption practices and knowledge acquisition to that of wines. He speaks of storing wines in his own cellar and aging them, as well of the cost factors that are involved. He also reiterates the role of knowledge to the taste experience (Trubek, 2008), "I'm still learning."

Then the father shifts his discussion to the role of his alcohol consumption connected to his and the family's food practices, as illustrated in this passage:

I: Now one of the things you mentioned is that you like to pair it with food. That's one of the things you can even research and look for?

F3: I do rate them myself and I keep a book on it. I write down if I find a good one – if it's something that has a nice solventy varsol smell, I'm not going to get two [laughs]. But at the same time, if I do find a good one I will mark it down in my book and I'll also put in there what we had it with, that sort of thing. I'm still learning about that – it's a wide open field. It's still – it depends what you would like to have it with. A lunch person might like with bison a Merlot and the next person might like a Chardonnay. Nobody says it has to be this way or that way. It's the way you want to drink it. And that's what's nice about wine.

I: Do you think with your interest in wine, has it made you want to try different foods?

F3: Yes, it has. Well, when we were on the coast, I ate some lamb. And that's something – I've never got into the sheep end of things. I'd like to a little more. And some of the cheeses, I think cheeses I've never tried. We've been the traditional Alberta cheddar and mozzarella eaters and havarti, but not the real crazy cheeses. I'd like to try that paired with wine – I don't know if I'd just like to sit down and eat cheese like that, I'm not a big fan of cheese anyways, but with wine, maybe, and with some of the sausage.

In this passage we see how the father engages with wine as a way to explore new foods, “I've never got into the sheep end of things” and “cheeses I've never tried.” The passage also illustrates connections to place: “when we were on the coast” and “traditional Alberta Cheddar” which suggest an embodied taste of place (Trubek, 2008). The father is associating food products and activities with a place that represent a new experience compared with his perception of a traditional food and practice from where he lives. The pairing of foods and wine may function as a primary marker of social status, as in a foodie, or elitist in the Bourdieu sense. These passages illustrate how drinking and eating may shift from sustenance to a statement of values (Johnston & Baumann, 2010; Trubek, 2008). However, these values do not always aligned with the notion that wine is perceived as a luxury good which confers high status on the consumer, but rather can reflect that consumers (such as one from rural Alberta) are increasingly aware of cosmopolitan food and drink behaviors and choose to incorporate into their own everyday family food and drink practices in ways that are meaningful to their own values (Black & Ulin, 2013).

## Conclusion

Early fieldwork, research, and literature have tended to focus on alcohol as problematic and representing deviant behavior within communities (Douglas, 1987; Heath, 1987). The rationale

for this paper was built upon Douglas's and Heath's call for anthropologists to take up the study of alcohol and its use as a primary research objective, and on De Garine's (2001a) category of "permanent everyday alcoholisation," which is commonly accompanied by food consumption and is the most relevant for our analysis of the cultural variability in meanings of quotidian alcohol consumption in contemporary Canadian society.

For this exploratory study, the discussions around photo images participants took to provide qualitative examples of what and how participants represent and describe alcohol and alcohol consumption within their everyday family food practices. The stories they told around their photographs suggest that alcohol and alcohol consumption may be part of regular and positive practices and not representative of health problems or deviant behaviors. This would support Douglas's premise that alcohol and alcohol consumption practices are variable and need to be studied within the cultural context of what it is that people actually say about these practices.

In the examples presented in this paper, the consumption of alcohol, primarily wine and beer, is considered part of the participants' everyday food and beverage practices. The low incidence of non-wine or beer photographs (approximately 10 percent of those examined for this paper) might reflect that other alcoholic beverages (spirits, ciders, coolers, etc.) are not considered part of everyday family food practices. The fact that alcohol and its consumption was not specifically addressed or elicited as part of the larger Family Food Practices study would support the notion that the participants who spoke and took pictures of wine and beer considered them as positive and part of their regular food and beverage habits. This supports Heath's view that alcohol and its consumption are often associated with everyday behavioural norms in many societies and not always related to deviant behavior. However, we recognize that participants in such a study would most likely be reluctant to take photographs of alcohol and then describe them in terms of negative or problem behavior. We understand that alcohol and its consumption is not always pleasurable and positive, and in fact may represent negative and deviant behavior.

It is also important to acknowledge that the 84 photographs examined for this paper represent only 2 percent of all the photographs taken (4205) and 39 families out of the 100 who participated in the larger Family Food Practices study. While the three themes identified for this paper were representative of those 84 photographs and accompanying discussions, they are not meant to be representative of all participating families' perceptions and experiences of alcohol within their everyday family food practices. Nor do we claim that these three themes are representative of all Canadian family food practices. The data explored for this paper did not allow for an in-depth analysis of all socio-cultural factors contributing to identity and the social construction of family food practices for the study participants.

Our purpose in this paper was to use an anthropological perspective in the study of alcohol and its use as a primary research objective. The examples represented speak to the social acceptance of alcohol consumption outside of the traditional holiday celebrations (Kairouz & Greenfield, 2007) and reflect some of the reasons why people are consuming more alcohol at home, such as convenience and cost, rather than drinking outside of the home at restaurants or

pubs. This social acceptance and participants' clear expressions of the pleasure and joy that alcohol consumption plays in their everyday family food practices may be reflective of a democratization process that is occurring within contemporary Canadian food practices.

Further research on this topic with a larger sample size would be needed to add weight to this theory. The three themes we chose to represent: commensality and the taste experience; everyday tastes; and taste and identity change illustrate a general principle that eating and drinking practices may reflect changes in meanings behind those behaviors and practices (Johnston & Baumann, 2010). The sharing of food and drink, and now the experiences and knowledge surrounding those foods and drinks, are necessary components of social organization for the study participants.

This research seeks to gain a greater understanding of the literal and symbolic meanings that alcohol and alcohol consumption may hold for individual participants. How is this meaning represented within the family context, and does this meaning transmit markers of sociocultural identity? Future in-depth examination and analysis of this data may reveal various attitudes and practices that speak to gender, age, religion, education, socioeconomic status and ethnic differences across the different regions or between urban and rural components of Canada.

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