6 The contextual basis for food acceptance, food choice and food intake: the food, the situation and the individual

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6.1 Introduction

Research on determinants of food acceptance and food choice has emphasized sensory and other properties of the food, as well as psychological and physiological aspects of the person. In recent years there has been increased attention to the eating environment or context (Rozin and Tuorila, 1993; Hirsch and Kramer, 1993; Meiselman and Kramer, 1993; Bell and Meiselman, 1995). Until recently, there has been little attempt to organize contextual variables affecting food acceptance and choice; Rozin and Tuorila (1993) have suggested three potential organizing principles for contextual variables. They suggested a distinction between variables that are simultaneous to eating and variables that are separated in time (both past and future), which they called temporal. Second, they also noted that a distinction by reference unit could be used, distinguishing a single food exposure (e.g., bite) from a meal and a pattern of eating. And third, they noted that contextual variables could be distinguished as food or nonfood. In their review of context, they used a hybrid of these three organizing principles, although they emphasized the simultaneous–temporal distinction. Their paper represents an early and important attempt to organize contextual research. Bell and Meiselman (1995) have also very recently organized contextual variables. They divided variables into those which are antecedent to food choice and those which are present at the food choice situation. The former ones bring to the eating environment, for example, expectations, prior experience, habits, etc. The latter exert their influence directly during the eating experience, for example, social facilitation and physical variables of the eating situation. Thus, Bell and Meiselman emphasize the temporal dimension, also emphasized by Rozin and Tuorila.

In the present review and organization of context, I will try to include the dimension of application of food context research. I suggest that the three main application areas for contextual research are food product development, food service or catering, and diet and health. Food product development deals with everything from simple fruit juice drinks to complex packaged meals with dozens of ingredients. Product development also in-
cludes packaging and labeling. A number of recent texts have dealt with product development methodology but have not emphasized contextual issues. Perhaps the closest is Moskowitz (1993), who moves from traditional sensory evaluation to include a broader consumer research perspective. Moskowitz also directly deals with issues of food and package and label, that is, the food and its immediate context.

Food service or catering includes the entire range of restaurant, factory and business feeding, as well as institutional feeding (hospital, military, etc.). Catering ranges from one time to long-term, three meals per day, and ranges from very simple to very luxurious. Food service or catering has often been omitted from food research, relative to product development and diet/health. Yet, catering represents the environments in which many foods are consumed. Meiselman (1992) called for greater research on real foods in real environments as one strategy for better prediction of food-related behavior. Meiselman, Bell, and colleagues have carried out several studies in catering environments, but there is generally little use of the catering environment for research.

Diet and health have been main concerns related to food for the past 20 years or more. Diet and health concerns relate to nutrition and its influence on the incidence of various diseases and to long-term patterns of eating rather than to individual foods or meals. The perspective in health and diet issues has moved from very brief snapshots of behavior to longer-term patterns of behavior. The 24 h recall has given way to longer observations of diet. By examining the influence of these longer-term effects on the relationship of eating context to diet, we can understand how one’s pattern of eating is maintained. These include the physical and social eating environment.

The issues concerned with food product development, food service/catering, and diet/health can be related to the organizing continuum of bite/meal/pattern of eating suggested by Rozin and Tuorila as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product development</th>
<th>Bite</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food service/catering</td>
<td>Meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diet/health</td>
<td>Pattern of eating</td>
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</tbody>
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Most product development usually deals with testing of bites or sips of products, rarely with entire multicomponent meals or longer-term patterns of eating. Food service/catering is concerned with meals, but not usually with patterns of meals, which is the interest of the diet/health area. In this chapter the author would like to suggest that an alternative organization for contextual research could be the following: the food, the situation, and the individual. Although no one organizing principle results in a completely clean separation of context variables and principles, it is important to explore a number of organizing principles while contextual research is relatively young. Such an organization could be useful for understanding