ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION | May 23, 2018

ORCID NUMBER: 0000-0003-2114-5965

DOI: 10.1108/EJM-10-2017-0749

Ben Kerrane
Senior Lecturer in Marketing
Lancaster University Management School
Lancaster, LA1 4YX

Figuring the pecking order: emerging child food-preferences when species meet in the family environment

Journal:	*European Journal of Marketing*
Manuscript ID	EJM-10-2017-0749.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Children, Family Life, Food, Animals, Singularization theory, Netnography

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"The animals of the mind cannot be so easily dispersed"

Why look at animals? (Berger, 2009, p.257)

Introduction

The way child food preferences develop within families towards *meat and animal food products*[1] is surprisingly rare (Ruby, 2012). Predominantly located within sociological studies of veganism/vegetarianism, existing research largely focuses on how educational, media and marketing discourses create a normality around animal food product consumption that, they argue, children are largely unable and unlikely to resist (Cole and Stewart, 2016). Little is understood about negotiations within the family, particularly regarding triggers of children's decision to refuse animal food-products (or otherwise) or the contexts within which this occurs (Bray *et al*., 2016). We suggest that research focusing on macro-discursive forces is undoubtedly useful, but as it prefigures a lack of child agency, and does not examine the micro-negotiations within the familial setting, is inadequate to explain the development of children's animal food-product consumption preferences.

Using the burgeoning hobby of urban stock-keeping, or "*petstock*" (Charles, 2014), this research utilises singularization theory (Kopytoff, 1986; Epp and Price, 2010) to model the negotiations, agencies and resistances of children, parents and petstock as they work through what (and whom) is available to eat, (and eat from), within the boundaries of the family home. We conclude that keeping petstock within family settings can help to

[1] Hereafter "*animal food-products*" for brevity, and following Charles (2014) we use the term animal when referring to nonhuman animals while recognising that, of course, human beings are part of the animal kingdom.

understand how children develop agency around the eating of animal food-products and the mode through which they conform to, and resist, familial and cultural norms.

Parental food influence and child food-choice agency

Food preferences exhibited during adulthood are shaped by childhood experiences (Hughner and Maher, 2006; Marshall *et al*., 2007) and are fairly obdurate throughout life (Laing *et al*., 1999). The family, and more specifically parents (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013), are believed to be the most influential agent for the developing child's cognitive and social understanding around food choices (John, 1999). Parents affect children's consumption behaviours through a number of models, including their socialization style (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988) and family communication pattern (Carlson *et al*., 1990).

Parental food socialization studies focus on parental *control* over children's food intake (Moore *et al*., 2017; Tarabashkina *et al*., 2017) including control of available resources (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). Research has explored, for example, correlations between parent's knowledge of nutrition and the nutritional intake of their children, highlighting difficulties parents face in deciphering whether a product is healthy (Hughner and Maher, 2006) and problems parents encounter with food access (Dawson *et al*., 2008); ethical/organic food intake within the family setting (Davies *et al*., 1995); and issues surrounding childhood obesity and snacking (see Marshall, 2016). Work that examines the 'family dinner' context is, however, rare (Alm *et al*., 2015), as are studies of specific food socialization practices surrounding certain food types/provenances (Tarabashkina *et al*., 2017).

Children's food choice within families is often seen as a site of conflict (Nørgaard and Brunsø, 2011) and whereas parental control of food is seen largely positively, child food-

choice agency is couched in rather negative terms, such as *neophobia* (the rejection of new or unfamiliar foods) (Russell *et al.*, 2015) and child food *pickiness* or *fussiness,* leading to poor nutrition and/or obesity (Cardona Cano *et al.*, 2015). Researchers argue that the more choice children have, the less healthy they tend to be (Papaioannou *et al*., 2013). *Positive* child food-choice agency studies, therefore, seem to be a missing element from this literature, thus our understanding of the role of the child in the development of their own gustatory habits seems limited.

Consumer preference development regarding the non/consumption of animal products lies largely within the sociology of meat eating (Bray *et al*., 2016; Paul, 1996); studies of vegetarianism (Hussar and Harrris, 2010; Beardsworth and Keil, 1991); and radical vegan/vegetarian studies (Adams, 1990/2010; Cole and Stewart, 2016). Animal products carry cultural baggage around their superiority as foodstuffs (Beverland, 2014), and as indicators of class and gender (Stevens *et al*., 2013). However, very few studies directly research how *children* develop into consumers of animal food products. Bray *et al*.'s (2016) study highlights that although parents cite the importance of children knowing 'where meat comes from', they struggle with that conversation, comparing it to the 'facts of life' type discussion. Given that in most Western cultures animal slaughter is considered contentious, even taboo (Heinz and Lee, 1998), this is perhaps unsurprising. Parents feel their own dissonance acutely during this engagement with their children, over the 'meat paradox' of seeing animals as both *friend* and *food* (Bastian and Loughman, 2017) and the 'moral schizophrenia' (Joy, 2009) of keeping some animals as *pets* and others for *consumption*.

This challenges adults, struggling to reconcile their children's relatively straightforward moral compass with their own rationalisations (Herzog, 2011; Serpell, 2009). Parents worry about their children judging them (Paul, 1996) and about their children standing out (i.e. seeing vegetarianism as a problematic alternative identity) (Bray *et al*.,

2016; Stevens *et al*., 2013). In this literature, rather than child food-preference agency being seen *negatively*, it is reported to be minimal, even non-existent, with adult vegetarians recalling the suppression of this desire to avoid animal food products in childhood (Beardsworth and Keil, 1991). A keynote study of child consumption of animal food products (Cole and Stewart, 2016, p. 78) shows how educational, media and marketing discourses create a normality around animal product consumption that children are unable and unlikely to resist:

> *"Both the rhetoric and imagery of food for children is therefore well established by the time children become more active participants in expressing their own food preferences; the extent to which they can exercise agency has been largely foreclosed by both gustatory and discursive habituation"*.

The literatures above indicate a hiatus within the understanding of child food-preference agency, either pathologising it as leading to health problems or arguing children have little agency within the Western cultural ubiquity of animal food product consumption. Little is understood about the psychology of children in terms of this type of consumption, nor the negotiations that surround it (Gale *et al*., 2007). Therefore, studies that examine the contexts where these negotiations occur are required to understand how children develop into animal food product consumers (or *vice versa*).

Parents, children and petstock

Animals kept within the family environment for food production have been labelled "*petstock*" (Charles, 2014), "*pseudo pets*" (Cole and Stewart, 2016) or "*pets with benefits*" (Bloom, 2012). We prefer 'petstock', as it signals these animals' uneasy ontological status between pet and product within the family (Wilkie, 2010; Cole and Stewart, 2016). Families keeping petstock (e.g. poultry, bees, rabbits, sheep and goats) for food production is a

growing trend in Western societies (Bettany and Kerrane, 2011; Moore and Kosut, 2014)[2]. Food programmes detailing the slaughter of animals in popular television programmes *The F Word* (2005–2010) and *Jamie's Great Italian Escape* (2005) (see Parry, 2010; Cole and Stewart, 2016) along with the growth of consumer interest in provenance (Filimonau *et al.*, 2017) and food sourcing mistrust (Jackson, 2010), have led to a burgeoning interest in this activity, even within urban environments (Moore and Kosut, 2014).

There is a growing academic interest in the role of animals in the lives of families and children (Myers, 2007). Scholarship in sociology (Arluke and Sanders, 1996; Charles, 2014) has highlighted the emotional significance of human–animal relationships (Hamilton and McCabe, 2016). However, much of the important work in this area focuses on pets, or *companion animals* (Cheetham and McEachern, 2013), seen as highly important for the lives and development of children (Grier, 2006). Children think of pets as important social actors in their lives, endowing them with as much significance as human kin and identifying with them due to similar social positioning (Tipper, 2011). Childhood is deeply animalised (Melson, 2005) and animals in Western cultures are seen as important teachers of children (Bone, 2013) enabling deep learning (Gee *et al*., 2010) and imaginative play (Serpell, 2000); and influence positive relationships with others into adulthood, fostering responsibility, kindness and empathy (Bone, 2013). Children see themselves as "*friends and kin*" to animals rather than mirroring the speciesism of wider society (Weitzenfeld and Joy, 2014) and animals within the home environs are viewed as a facilitator of non-judgmental and comforting environments (Friesen, 2010). Melson (2005) argues that animal companions

[2] We do not make the distinction between keeping animals for meat/keeping animals for food products. Following Adams (2010) we note that female animals kept for food production (e.g. cows and chickens) often suffer the most instrumental relationships, as they are subjected to churn as their productive lives end, and thus, although imbricated within a more subtle process, it can be argued that they are largely subjected to the same instrumentality, purpose and ultimate sacrifice as animals kept directly for meat. This was underpinned by our data, where respondents reported the regular culling of egg laying flocks, and the acceptance that children were encouraged "not to get too close to" food producing animals.

offer a space within the family context where emotional relationships are played out, practiced and refined; supporting children's learning of care, affection, supervision, discipline and grief that foreshadows those encountered in their human–human relationships within the family and beyond.

Petstock animals present children with an extended array of possible relations. Hirschman and Sanders (1997) identify three categories of animals presented culturally to children: (1) 'utility animals' (farmed or working animals) who are portrayed as objects, not individuals, mainly for food use; (2) 'wild animals' beyond human control and representative of forces of nature; and (3) 'pets' who are the most analogous to humans in fictional narratives, seen as friends. Petstock animals collapse the binary of "*food or friend*" (Serpell, 2009) and thus act as 'boundary objects', animals that shift across categories in complex familial and cultural negotiations (Bettany and Daly, 2008; Syrjälä *et al*., 2016). This makes them uniquely interesting to study as part of familial and cultural networks, as their status is constantly being produced and reproduced throughout their engagements with their significant others.

The way consumers rationalise the moral paradoxes around eating animal food products, explained above (Herzog, 2011), has been theorised as due to a break in indexicality between animals and food (Beverland, 2014), the so-called "*absent referent*" (Adams, 1990/2010; Cole and Stewart, 2016). This is a narrative break in the biography of animals becoming food that, while consuming animal food products, "*permits us to forget about the animal as an independent entity"* (Adams, 2010, p.304). This supports other studies mapping detachment within Western cultures between consumers and food animals (Charles, 2014; Berger, 2009), the state of post-domesticity (Bulliet, 2005) and the contemporary lack of agricultural literacy (Worsley *et al*., 2015). It is the *absent referent* that is thought to underpin children's adoption of animal food product preference as a ubiquitous

norm (Cole and Stewart, 2016). However, petstock as a context opens the space of the absent referent to research scrutiny, allowing exploration of familial negotiations over reconnected indexical relationships between animal and food with commensurate developing child animal food-product preferences. Our first research question therefore asks: "What happens to children's animal food-product preferences when there is no absent referent?" In addressing this question, we aim to make an empirical contribution to the understanding of child preferences vis-à-vis animal food-product consumption, and further the understanding of the influence of animals outside the pet context on developing children *per se*.

Mapping the cultural biographies of petstock: singularization theory

The debates above suggest singularization theory (Kopytoff, 1986), a theory for mapping shifts in value across cultural biographies, to begin to model how children, parents and petstock work through what (and whom) is available to eat (and eat from) within the family environs. Singularization theory models shifts between commoditized status (i.e. something the same as the others of its kind) to decommoditized status (or *singularized* status – something more special and unique than the same of its kind), over an entity or object's lifespan, offering a cultural explanation of the value of commodities beyond mere exchange value. It has been used to examine, for example, the biography of a dining room table in the family context (Epp and Price, 2010); food objects within the slow food movement (Lotti, 2010); and how people and things become singularized within the context of gift giving (Belk and Coon, 1993).

Kopytoff (1986) applies singularization theory to a range of human and nonhuman entities, beginning with the example of the slave, an ambivalent entity within the family environs between subject and object, and subjected to shifts in their

singularized/commoditized status over their lifespan, mirroring the servant-like, highly ambivalent status inherent in petstock (Sahlins, 1976). Epp and Price's (2010) extension of singularization theory, for example, highlights familial forces converging to shape an object as it shifts in "*meaning* and *use"* across its lifespan, and thus explain the cycle of singularization/de-singularization. (Epp and Price, 2010, p. 833). This approach, then, seems useful to theorise the shifting animal-human relations over time in the petstock context, helping to understand developing child attitudes towards the eventual consumption of them as food. However, we also suggest an extension of that theory. The absent referent (Cole and Stewart, 2016; Adams, 2010), for example, implies a hidden space of transformation that can be explored through mapping the cultural biography of petstock in this manner. However, this is a space of *radical transformation*, that is, not just in terms of *meaning* and *use*, but ontologically, in terms of *kind* (i.e. animal to food). In the context of petstock, the cultural biography of those two things is connected and becomes one, albeit complex, cultural biography. Thus, our second research question is: "What happens to the theory of singularization when an entity *radically transforms* (that is not just in *meaning* and *use*, but also in *kind*) as in the cultural biographies of petstock?"

Methodology

Parents, as gatekeepers of children's food consumption (Musher-Eizenman and Kiefner, 2013), were chosen as key informants in this study. Given calls in ethnographic research to conduct multi-site, multi-method observations (Pentina and Amos, 2011), we employ two methods of data collection in this qualitative, interpretive study: (1) netnography and (2) ethnographic, in-depth interviewing.

Data were collected through netnographic engagement with relevant Facebook groups (n=12) and sustained online discussions (n=90) with group members (conducted 2016/17). A participatory form of netnography was adopted, involving direct interaction with community members (as well as a deep observation of their (online) world) (Kozinets, 2002). We closely followed the guidance offered by Kozinets (2010) in relation to *entrée*, *data collection*, *data interpretation* and in particular *ethical standards*. Following ethical research standards of consent and transparency, entrée was negotiated with the Facebook group moderators, the gatekeepers of the groups, through a clear articulation of the identities and affiliations of the researchers and the purpose of the study. Following their permissions, an entrée post on each group page reiterated this information, introduced the researcher, outlined the purpose of the research project and offered a grand tour question (McCracken, 1988) to stimulate discussion. Participants who replied were invited to continue their online discussions with the research team in a less visible forum (private messenger), although most participants continued with their open, online conversations – helping to bring in other members of the community who freely joined/departed our online interactions. We adhered to the guidance offered by the Association for Internet Researchers (Markham and Buchanan, 2012), clearly articulating our role and purpose in engaging with participants throughout, and using pseudonyms to anonymise the data gathered.

Data were also collected through more traditional in-depth, ethnographic interviews with people keeping petstock (n=11) as part of a larger multi-site ethnographic study of urban stock-keeping. Research encounters primarily consisted of in-situ interviews in respondents' homes. Participants were recruited through personal contacts initially, then followed by a snowball sampling approach (Dusek *et al*., 2015). As with the netnographic element of our project, informed consent was obtained from participants, consent to record the conversations captured, and participants were told that they could withdraw from our discussions if they

wished (without giving a reason). In our findings section we draw on illustrative quotes that exemplify common narratives across our complete data set, and Table 1 offers details of contributing participants.

Name	Country	Children number and age	Relationship to children	Reported spirituality/religion	Type of petstock	Purpose of petstock
Donna	USA	Not reported	Not reported	N/A	Poultry	Meat and Produce
Bob	UK	18mths, 3yrs, 8yrs	Father	N/A	Poultry	Meat and Produce
David	USA	7,10,13	Uncle	N/A	Poultry	Produce
Mary	USA	4,6,7,8	Mother	N/A	Poultry	Meat and Produce
Laura	USA	9,8	Mother	Christian	Poultry and Pigs	Meat and Produce
Patty	USA	4	Mother	N/A	Poultry and Rabbits	Meat and produce
Petra	USA	Mixed age children with disabilities	Teacher	Native American influences	Poultry	Meat and produce
Michelle	USA	6	Grandmother	Nature based spirituality	Poultry	Produce
Jane	Canada	3,5,6	Mother	N/A	Poultry	Meat and produce
Betty	USA	7, 10	Mother	Nature based spirituality	Poultry	Meat and produce
Bertha	USA	Mix of adult to young children	Mother	Christian	Poultry and rabbits	Meat and produce
Anne	USA	10,14	Mother	Christian	Poultry and rabbits	Meat and produce
Marjorie	USA	8,6,4	Mother	Native American Influences	Rabbits	Meat and produce
Aileen	USA	Not reported	Mother	Christian	Poultry	Meat and

						produce
Kate	USA	3,6	Mother	N/A	Poultry, rabbits, goats	Meat and produce
Dorothy	USA	4	Mother	N/A	Poultry	Meat and produce
Anna	USA	9,11	Mother	N/A	Poultry	Meat and produce
Pauline	USA	3	Mother	N/A	Poultry	Meat and produce
Jo	USA	8, 11	Mother	Secular	Poultry	Meat and produce
Tamara	USA	6,12	Mother	Native American influences	Poultry	Meat and produce
Sharon	UK	7,9,12	Mother	Secular	Poultry	Meat and produce
Jackie	USA	4,6	Mother	Secular	Poultry	Meat and produce
Frankie	USA	4,5,7	Mother	N/A	Poultry	Meat and produce
Molly	UK	6,8	Mother	N/A	Poultry	Meat and produce
Roberta	USA	7,10	Mother	Nature based spirituality	Poultry, goats, sheep	Meat and produce
Karen	AUSTRALIA	11,13	Mother	N/A	Poultry	Produce
Elizabeth	USA	11	Mother	Secular	Poultry	Produce
Dan	UK	10,13	Father	Secular	Poultry	Meat and produce

Table 1: Contributing research respondents

Data were analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic process. Both authors closely read field-notes and datasets, and developed a shared understanding of emerging themes. The data analysis was inductively the key driver of the theoretical and interpretive focus of the study, as the themes emerged and the research focus shifted accordingly.

Findings

There are three parts to our findings: (1) the overall purpose and benefits of keeping petstock, as relayed to us by parents, in terms of their children is introduced; (2) the actual practices undertaken by parents as they communicate and negotiate with their children these purposes/benefits is outlined; and (3) the range of child responses (as reported by parents) as children resist, conform and challenge their parents' strategies within what we term a "contestation zone" (see Figure 1) is explored.

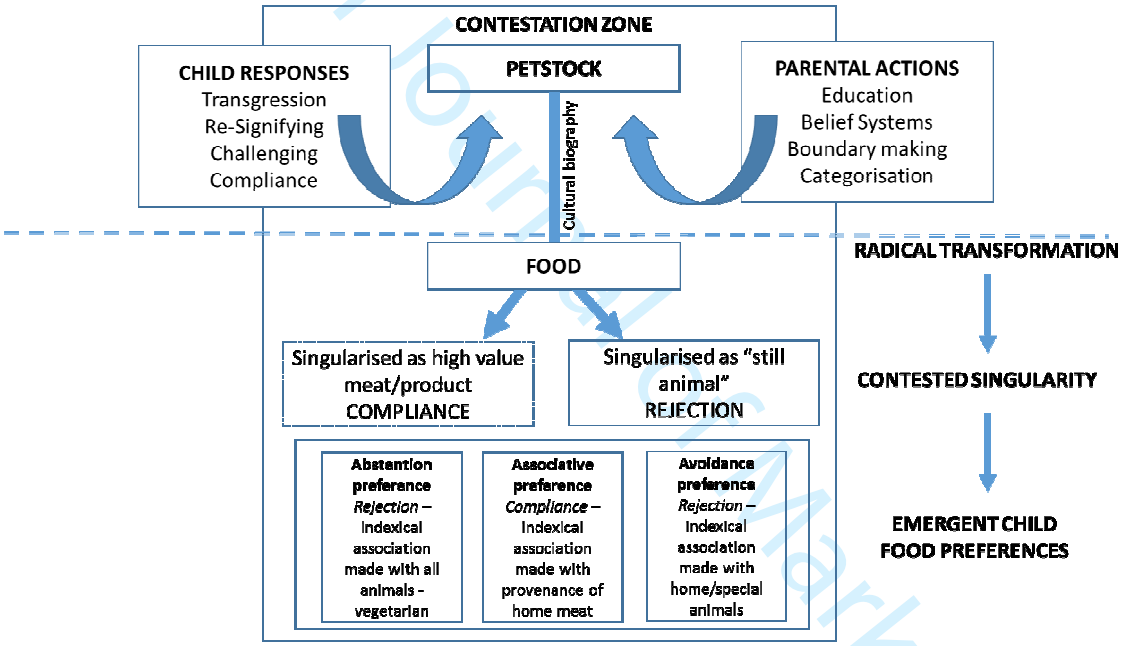

Figure 1: Model showing the parent/child contestation zone of *radical transformation* and *contested singularization* leading to child animal food-product preference in the context of petstock

(1) Purpose and function of petstock: parental explanation and justification

Petstock animals are seen by parents as strong socialisation agents and educators, recruited to teach children about the realism of life – particularly in regards to where food comes from - as Donna bluntly highlights: "*Simple. It teaches them where food really comes from*". This

was an almost ubiquitous parental motivation within our dataset. However, petstock was also reported to have a further, more sophisticated, role, helping parents to teach their children about: "*the important categories of life, the world and everything else*" (Bob).

Parents recounted romanticised notions of nature *vis-à-vis* the child (Murnaghen and Shillington, 2016), and the need for children to commune with nature amid rapidly technologized homes (Silva, 2010): "*To my thinking, it's better if parents would let their children observe nature ... instead of taking them to gaming centres and other such places!*" (David). Our participants reproduced the idea that children need exposure to nature, and lose some of their childhood 'essence' if they are not – what has been referred to as the myth of the "endangered natures child" (Louv, 2010) - with self-fulfilment afforded through communion with, what they see as, the 'natural world' (Franklin, 1999; Thompson and Troester, 2002), as Mary illustrates: "*mini-farming has given my children a window onto the natural world that they would not have had otherwise".*

Parents used to keep petstock as synecdochic with 'the natural', a common and powerful trope to normalise how to behave (and be) across a whole range of moral categories (Haraway, 2008) including what it is to be human (and nonhuman) and their place in the universe (Oliver, 2009). Laura, for example, underlines a common theme, supporting the view that keeping animals for food (or even as pets) is part of what makes us uniquely human (Ruby, 2012; Herzog, 2014):

> *"The only "pets" are the dogs and cats and even they serve a purpose (and risk pet status if they start killing animals, which has happened). Even animals who aren't intended for dinner are utilitarian and won't be kept if they don't fulfil their purpose. We treat all animals with kindness and respect, but they are still animals, not humans with a soul"*

Parents signal the utilitarian relation of animals to their children, instilling the sense that animals help us (as higher order beings) to fulfil our purpose, with meat seen as culturally

necessary for human health and survival (Acari, 2016), as Patty describes in teaching her daughter "*that we must eat to stay alive and we raise rabbits to eat for energy so we can live and be strong"*

Parents used petstock to reiterate their control over nature and thus highlight their control over not only food, but overall (Pollan, 2011). Great respect was, however, offered to the animal 'sacrifice', coined 'retrograde humanism' by Adams (2010), (see also, Singer, 1975), as Jane explains:

> *"My kids understand now the sacrifice (albeit involuntary) an animal makes when it graces our table. We say a thank you before we slaughter. They understand an animal is an entire unit … no waste allowed. I'm not sure whether it's coincidental or not, but chicken has now become hands down my children's favourite meat and it wasn't always".*

Positioning animal food-product consumption as part of a broader ideological way of being in the world is similar to how non-meat-eaters characterise their decision to reject meat-eating (Lindeman and Sirelius, 2001) and provides insight into how food choices *vis-à-vis* animal food-product consumption are closely linked to broader personal (and familial) significance and identity formation. Further to this, animal food product consumption was even couched in spiritual and quasi-religious terms (Serpell, 2006), "*we've taught my granddaughter from the beginning about the circle of life. She fully understands where chicken on the dinner table comes from, where the eggs come from*" (Michelle) and even "Native American" ideology, as Petra explains: "*I tell the kids I practice the Native American approach, we raise them with respect and honor the animal at all times during its life and death for its sacrifice for our sustenance".* This link between the spiritual and petstock even related to particular breeds of petstock, thus reinforcing the naturalness of their particular 'order of things': *"we tell our children that the birds we harvest go to Valhalla. Since these are Icelandic chickens brought to Iceland more than a thousand years ago by "Viking"*

settlers, we share are lot of Viking references and names for our birds. I thank mother earth, myself" (Betty).

Children privilege moral choices over norm-based choices (Hussar and Harris, 2010), and, as such, rendering the consumption of animal food-products in this way is incredibly influential to the developing child. Although animals were kept largely for human consumption (with secular purpose), participants revered such acts of consumption (ascribing sacred properties to animal food products). Parents also underlined the ultimate purpose of animals using survivalist narratives – in addition, playing into dominant neo-liberal ideologies of self-responsibility (Jarosz, 2011) - teaching children to become self-reliant through keeping petstock, as Bertha illustrates:

> "*They have been involved with harvesting animals for food their whole lives. They dispatch all the types of animals we have. They understand that our animals are for food. I am confident that my children will be able to provide themselves with food as adults".*

Petstock animals also emerged in terms of their role in teaching children emotional literacy (Hamilton and McCabe, 2016). This included how to feel, towards whom, and when/where appropriate. This goes beyond the emotion work researchers have reported in the case of companion animals as friends, and instead (perhaps surprisingly) relates emotion work to the processes of converting animals to meat. Here, even relatively young children reportedly made the link that they could simultaneously love something *and* then eat it, as Anne explains:

> *"My boys, 10 & 14, help feed, water, cull and butcher. All of our animals are treated like pets until they become food. We play, cuddle, pet and name our animals. The first cull was hard for all of us as it was the first time any of us had taken a life. It helped that it was a mean rooster".*

This emotion work here reflects Hamilton and McCabe's (2016) study of slaughterhouse inspectors. Rather than utilising a simple emotional on/off switch (Arluke and Sanders, 1996), their participants exhibited a range of emotionality in relation to food animals, and as with our respondents a shifting vista of emotionality across the animal's biography:

> *"My kids love raising rabbits for meat. At first there were lots of tears but once they tasted them they were happy for butcher day. They also know what rabbits are breeders and what are for meat. On butchering day they give each rabbit a kiss and thanks for their meat. They closely watch the whole process. Having them involved in meat raising, breeding and butchering has taught them where food comes from and that if they are loved and cared for properly then their becoming food is not a bad thing" (Marjorie).*

Parents, thus, accredited a great deal of agency to petstock in terms of being important co-educators of children (Bone, 2013), and this section illustrates this in teaching children about where food comes from; nature and the natural, ideological, emotional and spiritual order; and what it is to be animal/human (i.e. the pecking order). More presciently, petstock offers to parents an exemplar and illustrative case in the "facts of life" discussions around consumption of animals (Bray *et al*., 2016).

(2) Negotiating petstock's purpose: parental categorisation and boundary-making practices

Critical animal studies argue that animals are usually defined according to the form of utility/disutility relationship they have with humans (Cudworth, 2008) and that work of categorisation is often used to rationalise the underpinning distinctions that make this sensible (Wilkins *et al.*, 2015).

Parents utilise a repertoire of strategies to construct boundaries – both physical *and* psychological – between children and animals, attempting to mark clear distinctions based on the perceived utility of the animal to humans. Parents work to socially construct "other" animals in ways in which legitimate human uses of them, with 'utility animals', adopting

Hirschman and Sanders' (1997) term, portrayed as objects, rather than individuals, easily slaughtered without the need for remorse/mourning (Thompson, 1983).

Spatial designation was one marker of such distinction. Most participants allocated space for each type of animal: typically, the house for pets; a pen for animals kept for food products (e.g. chickens for eggs) and/or breeding; and a separate, often sparser, pen, usually located further away from the family home for animals kept for meat:

> "The coop for the meaties does not have a roosting bar, the coop is literally just an empty room. No pen or run attached … The layer coops contain roosting bars, small attached runs, nesting boxes, and crate set ups mainly for broodies or integrating small chicks" (Mary).

Some adult hobby-farmers have been found to similarly enact a spatial boundary between themselves and the act of slaughter, for example, getting another to do the job or sending animals to be 'dispatched' at an external slaughterhouse (Wilkie, 2010). Within our sample, slaughter was *sometimes* undertaken elsewhere, but usually conducted by participants themselves, albeit at some distance from the family home. Aileen, for example, recalls: "*we don't keep "pets" out in the barn; they are there for a purpose"*.

In terms of animal slaughter, our participants operated in different ways in terms of enrolling children in to the act of dispatch. Some parents kept children separate from the kill but often never far away, as Kate explains: "*We don't make her actively participate in the dispatch and processing but she is out playing in the yard and helps us bring the meat in to the house"*. Other children were, however, actively involved in killing the animal; and most helped perform butchery post-killing, as Patty reports: "*absolutely. She watches me kill, skin, gut etc and rinse it in the sink. I cut up the meat and then she puts the pieces in the pot to cook"*. Children (even very young children) reportedly understood that the food they ate at the family dinner came from the family petstock.

Naming practices also emerged as a boundary marker. Absence of name is one of the key elements of the absent referent (Adams, 2010). Cole and Stewart (2016) also contend that the naming and withholding of names is elemental in the economy of subjectification/objectification, with certain petstock (often assuming subject/pet status) granted the privilege of name, as Dorothy comments: "*we don't eat certain ones. They have names (the cast of my little pony) and are spoiled. They are pets. They wander the yard with her and garden with her. She will dig up worms for them"*. Where names *were* given to petstock destined for the pot, this was a clear marker of the inevitable finitude of the animal, often with animals named using the food labels they would later become, as Laura and Aileen respectively describe:

> *"We raise some of our animals for eggs, some for breeding, and some for meat. We try to establish from the beginning which will definitely end up on the dinner table. We just got four pigs recently and the two girls (who are breeders) are Penelope and Petunia and the boys (a barrow and young boar who will also be castrated) are 'Porky' and 'Bacon Bits' because they are going to be dinner".*
>
> "*We have meat chickens that were named 'nugget' from the word go*".

Misnaming of animals when meat enacts the absent referent (Adams, 2004); however, our respondents misnamed that animal while *still* animal - a *radical* exposure of the absent referent. Through such naming actions parents open up the absent referent to their children, with the animal's clear purpose connected across its life course.

Parents in their boundary-making activities drew on the *essential characteristics* of petstock (i.e. personality and temperament) to help them. Animals with "*bad character"* or "*lacking intelligence"* were deemed by parents as suitable to be killed. Often this was underpinned by the specific breed or species of animal that legitimizing them as valid for eating, as Anna helps explain:

> *"Cornish cross are remarkably stupid. The girls have been present when I had to fish them out of the feeder, or when I had to put extra marbles in the waterers because*

they found a new way to try to drown themselves. Just holding the chicks the wrong way can freak them out to the point they stroke out and die"

Parents, through this practice, socialize their children in to a world of social values, with "*naughty*", "*stupid*" and "*aggressive*" petstock legitimately killed, and bounded away from more docile, friendly stock: "*He understands that the birds with undesirable traits get culled for food - hostile or aggressive, being male when we already have enough males, lameness, etc. We slaughtered one goose because it was very aggressive and also liked trying to drown goslings in the stock tank"* (Jo). Some animals, thus, by means of reference to their essential characteristics, were seen as more/less worthy than others – a state inextricably linked to their ultimate fate.

Destiny fulfilment was another distinction recounted by parents. Parents often spoke about animals in terms of a "just-so story" (Serpell, 2009) i.e. explaining to children the order of things, and the pecking order (some were to be eaten/others not – that was "*just the way it is*"). Petstock to be killed/culled were often spoken of in terms of "*we are doing them a favour, dispatching them*" (c.f. the above quote from Anna), as Pauline also illustrates: "*Some people think they are doing them a favour by "saving" them but realistically they're not. They start to have serious problems with growing out of their body and overweight problems as they were bred to consume lots of feed and become a real meaty character not to lay eggs"*. Other participants commented that animals had come to the end of their natural (i.e. *productive*) life - often age-related - legitimizing an appropriate dispatch: "*She will use them for broth when they grow too old for laying. She sees them as needing meaningful purpose and is only saddened by a wasteful death"* (Tamara); or that dispatch helps designated petstock to fulfil their ultimate destiny in the world in a better (more humane) way than

animals reared in industrial, intensive-farming settings (see Taylor and Twine, 2014), as Sharon comments:

> *"My girls [chickens] have a much better life than the carcass you just blindly pick up from the supermarket fridge without questioning the conditions they've been reared. The kids know that, where their food comes from, they know it was once running around our garden, but had a much better life than a battery chook".*

This common theme, that keeping petstock helps animals to fulfil their ultimate destiny, *but in an ethical and humane manner*, allows parents to communicate to their children laudable animal welfare motivations and thus deflect their own and their children's moral dissonance.

(3) Children's responses: transgression to compliance

Part three of our findings outlines children's responses to parent's actions and beliefs; ranging from transgression to compliance. Four child responses are identified: (1) spatial transgression; (2) re-signifying the essential characteristics of petstock; (3) child resistance; and (4) child compliance.

In *spatial transgression*, children demonstrated their own developing agency through contesting the boundaries established by parents - and thus the categorical fates parents ascribed animals. Children were reported to contest this by moving certain petstock to 'safer' areas (i.e. earmarked for pets/breeders/animal produce, but not meat), as Frankie comments: "*one meat chicken…'mysteriously' ended up in the layer pen*". Children would also bring petstock in to the sanctity of the home where *pets* are located. Jackie, for example, described how her 4 year-old would constantly bring hens from the backyard into the home:

> *"He used to eat them [chickens] often. Then he put two and two together! I offered them for lunch one day and he was so completely disgusted with me. "No eating chickens Mom" was his exact words … he thinks it's hilarious when I get at him for bringing them into the house".*

Children also worked to *re-signify the essential characteristics* of petstock. Recall from part two of our findings that parents would explain to children why certain animals

would be slaughtered (e.g. the '*old*', '*stupid*', '*aggressive*'). Some children understood the importance of changing the status of certain animals, to challenge their parent's designations. For example, Tamara recalled the "*stupid turkey*", earmarked ("*like all turkeys should be"*) for the pot. However, her son formed a unique bond with the bird and took steps to re-signify it as a pet:

> *"My son is developmentally delayed and has a huge heart. The turkey is maybe just by nature stupid. So my son must watch after this poor bird who follows him around like a puppy. We got a hatchery hen to be the service hen for this turkey - leading the turkey to shade and water on hot days and showing the turkey where the good food is in the gardens … this turkey isn't food".*

It is culturally seen as a distinction of being human that we uniquely have other animals as pets (Herzog, 2014), and Tamara's son affords the turkey higher status within the pecking order, not only as his pet, but also through the service bird (into a pet-like relationship with the turkey). Not only was the turkey resignified as 'pet', but also the chicken (service bird) that was brought in to the pen to help look after the turkey was ascribed quasi human-like qualities. This displays a very sophisticated awareness of the power of resignification, beyond what might be expected from a child, and supporting studies arguing that children that resist consumption of animal food products display high levels of objectivity and reflection, and even higher IQ (Gale *et al*., 2007).

In terms of challenging parental belief systems, children often *questioned* their parents (with the ubiquitous "*why*?") as Molly highlights: "*They've started to question what we do now …They've started to refuse to eat the chicken. They start to ask things like "why this one? Why not that one? Why not Marjorie?"* Displays of negative affect and "inappropriate" emotionally were also common, as Roberta reports: "*my youngest used to sob over every animal that was slaughtered. He would mourn and refuse to eat it. We gave him room to*

process his grief but we didn't sugar coat it, didn't try to distract him or pretend the meat we eat came from somewhere else".

Some children displayed *child resistance,* reported as refusing to eat petstock altogether: "*My daughter no longer eats chickens because we have them as pets"* (Karen) and "*My son is 11 years old and has had a favourite pet chicken since he was 3 years old. He hasn't eaten meat of any sort since then, but he is especially sensitive about people eating chicken around him" (*Elizabeth). One unexpected finding related to the consumption of eggs by children who had observed hatching. Whereas most children were reported to enjoy collecting eggs and eating them as special food, a minority were reported to have refused eggs on the basis that they had seen chicks coming out of them, displaying a high level of understanding the connections between animal and product. In some cases, child resistance led parents to actually question their actions through a process of reverse socialization/intergenerational influence (Moore, Wilkie and Lutz, 2002). "*We are heading towards full vegetarian"* (Karen) was a minority, but not uncommon finding. Whilst children as young as three years old (Paroche *et al.*, 2017) use learned categories to help develop their food preferences (Birch and Anzman, 2010), here children often resisted the categories formulated by parents, making their own choices.

Other children, however, happily *complied* with the actions of their parents, fitting with the norms and adopting their belief systems: "*She watches me kill, skin, gut etc and rinse it in the sink. I cut up the meat and then she puts the pieces in the pot to cook … the cuter and fluffier they are, the better they taste"* (Patty). Parental boundaries/categories were mimicked by children: "*My daughter was eating this particularly mean chicken and she looked at the plate and said: "see I told you I was going to eat you!"(*Dan) and *"Yes we talk about it and she definitely understands. We had a mean rooster that we processed and when we made dinner (the rooster) she ate a big mouthful and proclaimed "That mean rooster is soooo*

delicious!" (Jane). Compliant children were reported as having little qualms about eating petstock: "*If I make chicken for dinner, she talks to her chicken. She says "nice", she then pets it and hugs it, then shoves it in her mouth, and says "mmmm good"* (Patty).

Throughout the netnographic study particularly we were repeatedly shown photographic evidence for this theme, for example videos showing children interacting with dead animals, and photographs of children preparing food, indicating how proud parents were of their child's adoption of their practices. This very much supports other studies that highlight the disruption within families when children refuse parental food ideologies (Beverland, 2014; Nørgaard and Brunsø, 2011) and, given the amount of work and effort involved in petstock, suggests that it may be an enhanced case of this phenomenon.

Locating child food preference agency in the context of petstock

The interpretive findings above, as shown in the model (Figure 1), describe a zone of contestation, as children, parents and petstock work through what (and whom) is available to eat (and eat from) within the family environment. Focusing on the context of petstock we demonstrate what happens in the absence of the '*empty referent'*, the break in indexicality in the biography of animals transforming into animal food products seen as key to the socialisation of children into consumers of animal food products (Cole and Stewart, 2016; Adams, 2010). We interpret how the unbroken cultural biography (Kopytoff, 1987) of petstock is managed through categorisation and boundary-making practices by parents developing and communicating complex belief systems (Serpell, 2009) to convince children of the validity of petstock in feeding the family. These stories often outline a higher ideological purpose to petstock as parents struggle with their own moral ambiguities around the use of domestic animals for food (Bastian and Loughnan, 2017; Joy, 2009). Further, we

describe how children respond to these parental practices, displaying a range of child agencies from complete rejection of parental norms to full compliance. This shows, we suggest, that connecting the hitherto hidden cultural biography of animals as they radically transform into animal food products, thus exposing the empty referent, shows developing child food preference agency vis-à-vis animal food product consumption in a complex and novel light.

Applying singularization theory (see Figure 1), our data shows that despite radical transformation within the cultural biographies of petstock those animals' cultural biographies are carried forward into the animal food products, albeit with varying outcomes. We evidence, through our data, that removing the absent referent (Adams, 2010, Cole and Stewart, 2016) results in a *range* of outcomes. This suggests an extension of singularization theory, following this *radical transformation*, offering a stage of *competing singularization,* rather than the shift between singularization and de-singularization. Effectively what emerges is either a valorisation of the product as animal (and thus rejection of it as food) or a valorisation of the product because it once was animal (and thus consumption of it as special, even sacred, food). This state of *competing singularization* is commensurate with consumer studies, albeit related to more macro contexts, that show how disruptive transformations can result in a 'discursive scramble' (Giesler and Thompson, 2016) to re-establish order and stable categorisations (Humphreys and Thompson, 2014). This can reshape consumers' conditions of possibility and can lead to often unpredictable emergent agencies (Karababa and Ger, 2011).

Building on Epp and Price's (2010) rendering of singularization theory that incorporates co-agency into biographies of shifting value states, we further add that in the context of petstock the contested singularization of the animal food product co-produces child food-preference agency towards an array of three different food-preference outcomes (Figure

1): (1) *Abstention preference*; (2) *Attributive preference;* and (3) *Avoidance preference*. Our extension of singularization theory thus allows for an analysis of the child food-preference agencies that emerge as a result of the complex contestations implied in the radically transformative petstock context.

(1) Abstention preference

Abstention preference, the least common preference, relates to rejecting the home-produced animal product, and thus the value of the product lies in its indexical association with the animal it once was *as animal*. Children with this food preference outcome also made indexical associations with *other animals* as a result of their interaction with petstock, and preferred to become 'independent vegetarians' (Hussar and Harris, 2010).

Of concern within our data was the common theme that children often expressed this as their first food preference in their interaction with petstock, and due to parental negotiations, eventually started to eat the home-produced animal products. Although the three food preferences carried across all types of petstock encountered throughout our dataset, child abstention preference *mostly* resulted from families keeping petstock for food products (i.e. hens for eggs), and seemed least likely to endure where children had been exposed to keeping animals for meat – an interesting finding that tends to counter the argument for the absent referent itself - that children eat meat due to *not* being exposed to this relation. While engaging with the practice of keeping animals for meat, parents seemed more resistant to the idea that their children become independent vegetarians, although, as we have demonstrated, some children in this context *did* endure with this preference. It seems children expressing (and enduring with) this preference exhibit less parental control and more autonomy, and it

was not uncommon in families to have one child out of a sibling group who uniquely exhibited this preference.

(2) Attributive preference

Attributive preference relates to the food choice of eating the product as made from a valued animal. Thus, the value of the product lies in its indexical association with the animal as it is now *as product*. This was the most common preference, and was often related by parents as part of a reducitarian ethos (Dagevos and Voordouw, 2013), of eating less animal food-produce, and preferring food with a known and approved provenance. This was a theme reported as readily picked up by children with many accounts recalled of children's (and parents) pride in the home provenance foods, and their part in producing them.

Children expressed this preference in moral terms (our animals are treated well, and have good lives), ideological terms (our animals/ourselves are fulfilling our destinies), in terms of taste (our food tastes better) and distinction (our food is different from that eaten by unfortunate others). Parents reported that within this food preference outcome children were less 'fussy and picky', and wanted to eat the 'whole animal' to show respect (with minimal waste). It could be argued that children expressing this preference have high levels of parental control and influence, and so conform to the norms set by their parents, adopting the belief systems (Serpell, 2009) of their elders.

(3) Avoidance preference

As with abstention preference, avoidance preference relates to the food choice of rejecting the home-produced animal product, and again, thus the value of the product lies in its indexical

association with the animal it once was. However, in this surprisingly common preference, the child rejects *known* animal products, instead preferring *anonymous* animal food-products (i.e. meat bought from a supermarket). This again disrupts the theory of the absent referent somewhat, as exposure to the production of animal products here does not prevent consumption of animal food-products *per se*, but instead directs food preference towards anonymous, and even perhaps factory farmed, animal products. Perhaps this outcome is not wholly surprising as Wilkie (2010) found in her study of hobby farmers that often they would not consume their own produced meat. However, they still retained a preference for food with good provenance, unlike in some of our respondents' accounts.

This outcome seemed to baffle parents, whether in a context where animals are kept for meat or food products only, this surprisingly caused *more* disruption within parent-child interactions than did the abstention preference. Parents felt disappointed with their children, and often spoke disparagingly about children preferring to eat "junk" over their (in their view) superior home-produced product. Perhaps this is not so surprising, given that the other two preferences at least share the ideology that eating has a higher purpose, albeit with very different expressions. Here children display low levels of parental control and higher levels of autonomy, but with a very different outcome. "We don't eat our friends" was a common expression of this preference, but eating those who are the same as, but not our friends, seems acceptable.

Conclusion and future research

Our objective was to examine developing child food preferences vis-à-vis animal food-products within the context of petstock. We theorise petstock as having complex cultural biographies emerging as a result of the negotiations between parents, children and petstock in

the contestation zone, as they work through what (and whom) is available to eat (and eat from) within the family environment. To do this we address two interlinked research questions: firstly, the empirical question of what happens to children's animal food-product preferences when there is no *absent referent*; and secondly, the theoretical question within singularization theory, of what happens to the theory when an entity *radically transforms* (i.e. not just *use* and *meaning,* but also in *kind*) as in the conversion of animal to food. We extend singularization theory to demonstrate that when an entity radically transforms, it retains the biography of the thing it once was, resulting in a state of *contested singularity.* The indexical association with the animal in both cases, contra the broken indexicality of the absent referent, leads to a contested value state – a contested singularization - with three distinct child food-preferences, *abstention preference, associative preference* and *avoidance preference,* emerging from this contestation.

Future research directions highlighted by the contributions and limitations of this study fall within three key areas. The first relates to the finding that when children initially gave an abstinence preference, this did not endure. Beverland (2014), for example, calls for research that examines how families deal with disruption around the refusal to eat animal products, and asks how marketers/educators might support younger consumers in particular who indicate plant-based diet preference (see also, Salonen *et al*., 2012). This also supports Cole and Stewart's (2016) suggestion that children are exposed to the possibility of alternative diets through age-relevant books and other 'edutainment' means. Health has been found to be a more socially acceptable excuse for avoiding meat than moral reasons (Ruby, 2012) so edutainment to children could focus on giving children better narratives (i.e. around health) to help them become independent vegetarians (Hussar and Harris, 2010). Social or policy marketing research here might focus on how children respond to different narratives in terms of their developing preference agency, or perhaps how social marketing narratives vis-

à-vis plant-based diet preference help to foster commitment, which as Harris (2012) argues is the key determinant of independent vegetarianism in children.

A further research trajectory relates to the notion that the majority of our respondents are women, which despite the fact that the feeding of children has been well theorised as a female-coded activity (Harman and Cappellini, 2015), sits somewhat counterintuitively with the idea that animal products, particularly meat, are culturally-coded male (Stevens *et al.*, 2013). This suggests research that examines the constructions of gendered parenthood emerging from the context of petstock could be useful to understand emerging trends in gendered feeding practices. Somewhat allied to this, as seen in the findings (and underpinned by information in Table 1), some respondents linked cultural, religious or spiritual beliefs to their practices of keeping petstock, viewing this activity as either a secular or a sacred practice. As such, this suggests a rich vein for future research linking the relation between petstock keeping and child food preference development to macro forces of identity construction (e.g. gender, religion, nationality, culture).

Future research using the theoretical developments presented in this paper might, for example, use the extensions of *radical transformation* and *contested singularization* to look at other contexts where products, or other entities, are radically transformed, and help to understand consumers fields of *contested singularization* (i.e. not just *whether* something is special or not, but contested views of *how* it is special). Examples might be as broad as prosumption, where products are co-developed by users and producers without a clear product outcome; product hacking, where products are radically transformed by users, post-purchase; and finally could be used to theorise the very topical area of the development of alternatives (i.e. plant-based 'meat') to animal food-products, and even the struggle against food waste, to understand the symbolic and material contestations involved (Moore and Kosut, 2014; Cappellini, 2009).

Our research makes a clear contribution to understanding the development of child food-preference agency vis-à-vis animal food-product consumption using the context of petstock. While, as researchers adopting a neutral stance towards this issue, our research suggests that keeping petstock, whatever the food consumption outcome, may positively develop children's agency in relation to such consumption – it at least opens the usually foreclosed issue *as a question* within the family context. As our opening quote suggests, *the animals of the mind are not so easily dispersed* (Berger, 2009), and this indexical connection children made was shown to affect their developing food-preferences, albeit with a range of perhaps contradictory outcomes. Of particular interest, it shows, contra negative and deterministic readings, how child food-preference agency, particularly around animals, is often underpinned by quite complex reflections, a phenomenon deserving of academic, marketing and policy consideration and respect, as children work through what (and whom) is available to eat, (and eat from), as they become adults-in-the-making.

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Figuring the pecking order: emerging child food preferences when species meet in the family environment

We would like to thank both reviewers for their very positive and helpful comments on our manuscript. We have completed the minor revisions required in full, and present the details below.

Reviewer 1 (Recommendation – minor revision)

A great paper, which makes a clear contribution to the special issue and to the wider marketing and consumer research literature by shining a light on the agency of (young?) children in determining their animal food-product consumption preferences. The research context under study is that of raising livestock (the authors suggest the term petstock is more appropriate) for family food consumption and in focusing on this context the researcher is able to study the indexical relationship between animals and food hence drawing meat's 'absent referent' into empirical presence. Kopytoff's conceptualisation of singularisation is used to theorise the changing animal-human relations which articulate the biography of petstock from animal to meat and, in some cases, back to animal again. In so doing the author identifies three emergent child food preferences. These are namely; (1) a child's rejection of the family's practice of eating the animals they have reared and the adoption of a vegetarian diet, (2) a child's compliance with the family practice of eating the animals reared, often accompanied with a perception of the animal meat as sacred and special or (3) a child's rejection of the family practice of eating the animals reared precisely because of the perceived sacredness of those animals and a preference for shop-bought meat wherein there is no connection between the child and the animal. The paper also makes a theoretical contribution by extending Kopytoff's singularisation theory to also include the state of 'contested singularisation' (illustrated by the identification of the three food preferences outline above). Contested singularisation occurs in the process of radical transformation wherein entities transform in kind (i.e. from animal to food) not just in use and meaning (i.e. changing values and/or identities).

The paper is methodologically robust, but would benefit from clarification in terms of the sample and the ethical standards followed. With regard to the sample, it would be useful to have information concerning the number and ages of children in each family, the country and/or religion of participants and the types of animals they keep, both for the families interviewed as well as for those participating in the netnographic research (perhaps in the format of a table). This would help to provide at least some suggestion in respect of the age at which animal food-product preferences begin to develop, socio-cultural factors (there are hints of cultural beliefs that ought to be teased out and discussed) and clarification as to whether different animals give rise to different food preferences.

Re: the sample. Thank you for raising this point, we agree wholeheartedly that this information should be presented in the paper, and have inserted a table on page 10/11, as you suggest.

Re: ethical standards. We have added some further clarification on the ethical standards followed (page 9). We have reviewed a number of recent papers published in European Journal of Marketing that utilise a similar methodological approach, particularly those that follow netnographic procedures. We are confident that we now align with work published in EJM and we thank you for rightly signalling that more detail was required.

We have also added some further detail on the importance of underlying cultural/religious/spiritual beliefs for our study, referencing the table (page 10/11) in the future research directions section (page 29). We agree that the relation between petstock, child food-preferences towards animal food-products and, macro-factors like gender, nationality/cultural group, and religion/spirituality are in need of further, more in-depth investigation(s) within this context. Thank you for this advice.

In terms of keeping different animals giving rise to different food preferences, different emerging child food-preferences carried across all categories of petstock. One difference, which we have now outlined in the text, is that parental responses towards adoption of abstention preference (i.e. not eating meat and/or animal food products at all) were more accepting within families that kept animals for produce only (e.g. hens for eggs) – where animals were kept for meat there seemed more parental resistance to adoption of an abstention preference, and less likelihood of children enduring with it – although, as we have demonstrated, some children did endure with this. Avoidance preference (eating only anonymous meat/animal food products) was resisted by parents across all categories. Thank you for raising this point, we have added additional consideration of this to the discussion (page 25)

Minor points for consideration:

1. In the abstract and on the 3rd line of page 2, 'non-human' can be removed – the footnote on page 1 is sufficient to clarify that humans are part of the animal kingdom.

2. Check for consistency when listing references in-text (see lines 1 and 2 on page 2).

Both these points have been addressed. We have checked the manuscript for consistency with our referencing conventions. Thank you for spotting these inconsistencies.

3. On page 7 line 33 – clarify use of the term "worked up" – is this a quote from literature cited in previous sentence?

We agree that this may confuse the reader. We have altered this sentence to provide clarity.

4. p21, line 49 – difficult to understand the point being made here – is 'chimes' an incorrect term or have I misunderstood something here? The suggestion seems to be that your data is in contrast to that of Beverland (2014)?

Thank you for highlighting that this is somewhat ambiguous. We have altered the wording to improve clarity.

Reviewer 2 (Recommendation – Minor Revision)

Well done. I really enjoyed reading this and thought that you introduced complex material with impressive clarity. The paper is hard to find fault with and extremely well written. I have one suggested revision for the very first paragraph of the introduction. The opening line states that "The way child food-preferences develop within families is ill-understood". I take your point, but think it could be expressed more delicately. This is an extensively studied area. It may be more appropriate to say something along the lines of that despite being widely researched and theorised the way child food-preferences develop within families remains nebulous. I think this would avoid unintentionally antagonising food sociologists with the first line of the paper.

Thank you for this comment which we totally agree with, the opening sentence does seem potentially antagonistic and has been removed and the passage reworked accordingly (page 1).

Additional Questions:

1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?: Yes. The paper focuses on the particular development, deployment and negotiation of petstock processes - which are not well understood.

2. Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?: Absolutely. The breadth of literature cited in impressive and the theoretical framing is excellent. I have one small suggestion for the opening paragraph, but that is all.

3. Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?: Yes. The methods are well explained and are appropriate to the research questions. As stated above, the theoretical material is excellent.

4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?: Yes. The integrations of literature into the results, rather than a discrete discussion section, works really well here. The concluded sections directly address the research questions.

5. Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?: Yes. These are explicitly outlined and justified in the conclusion. There is no ambiguity.

6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the fields and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: Yes. The standard of written English is excellent and all terms are appropriately defined and explained.

Thank you both for the consideration of our work, and the advice given.