

**Summaries of Selected Sessions from the  
2008 AMA Winter Educators' Conference  
(Austin, TX)**

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## 6.4 Marketing and Society (Special Session)

### **New Approaches to Understanding Young Consumers: Food Marketing to Children and Youth Obesity**

#### Chair:

*Brennan Davis, University of California, Irvine*

#### Discussant:

*Debra M Desrochers, University of Notre Dame*

#### Participants:

Youth Obesity and Fast-Food Placement around Schools: A Test of Relational Third Place Theory

*Brennan Davis, University of California, Irvine*

*Cornelia Pechmann, University of California, Irvine*

*Christopher Carpenter, University of California, Irvine*

Hurry Up and Clean Your Plate: How Time Pressures and Past Experiences Influence What Parents Feed Their Children

*Deirdre T. Guion, North Carolina Central University*

'Advergaming' and the Online Marketing of Food to Children: Advancing a Research Agenda

*Elizabeth S. Moore, University of Notre Dame*

**Session Summary Writer:** Kristin Scott, Oklahoma State University

How does marketing influence obesity in children? These three presentations show that there are many different areas to examine concerning food marketing and childhood obesity. This session concentrated on the social component of this issue by focusing on how children use fast food restaurants to socialize, the influence of parents in children's eating behavior, and using websites to connect kids to the product and each other.

The first presentation centered on how children use fast food restaurants to socialize. Previous findings have suggested that children who live near fast food restaurants have higher obesity rates and that children who are more social have lower obesity rates. Do these two relationships influence one another? The proposed research suggests that they do. Thus, when children are not very social, the fact that they live around fast food restaurants does not influence their obesity rates. However, if children are highly social and live near fast food restaurants, they have higher obesity rates than if they did not live near fast food restaurants. These findings suggest that children who are highly social are using fast food restaurants as a meeting place, or third place, in which to socialize.

The second project explored an under researched topic: the influence of parents on children's eating behavior. To explore the influence of parents on children's eating behavior, this study interviewed families about their eating behaviors. Findings showed that parents were time pressured and didn't like to spend time in the kitchen, creating anxiety about the meal preparation process. Parents knew what they should do for themselves and their children – but did not do it. For example, parents knew that they should eat together as a family but since it was easier to let their kids eat in front of the TV, they allowed them to do so. Parents' previous experiences regarding eating practices also influenced how they fed their children. If a parent was forced to eat his or her vegetables as a child, they did not force their children to eat theirs because they did not want to put their children through what they considered a bad experience. This research suggests that measures to counter time pressures should be considered as well as acknowledging that parents' past experiences influence their behavior regarding their children's eating behavior. Also, more emphasis should be put on socializing around eating.

A third area related to childhood obesity that deserves attention is the influence of food marketing on the Internet. This is an important topic because children spend more time on the Internet viewing advertising than they do viewing advertising on TV. Internet advertising also provides unlimited ad exposures because there are no limits as there are with advertising to children on TV. Researchers need to determine how children process online marketing and if they can distinguish

between advertising and other content. In a content analysis of major food advertiser's websites, 85% of brands had websites targeting children. In addition, 73% of websites included games, 97% of which included logos, characters, or packages embedded in them. These advergames were fun to play and included mechanisms to encourage children to play again. These websites also encouraged children to communicate with one another about a brand, called viral marketing. For example, 64% of websites used email to stimulate word-of-mouth. Websites have also connected purchases with special access to sections of the website, encouraging repeat purchases. Additional research is needed to understand the implications of this new type of children's advertising and potential website protection for children.