"We Gather Together": Consumption Rituals of Thanksgiving Day

MELANIE WALLENDORF
ERIC J. ARNOULD*

Thanksgiving Day is a collective ritual that celebrates material abundance enacted through feasting. Thanksgiving Day both marks and proves to participants their ability to meet basic needs abundantly through consumption. So certain is material plenty for most U.S. citizens that this annual celebration is taken for granted by participants. Not just a moment of bounty but a culture of enduring abundance is celebrated. This article draws on ten data sets compiled over a five-year period. We interpret the consumption rituals of Thanksgiving Day as a discourse among consumers about the categories and principles that underlie American consumer culture. That is, Thanksgiving Day is read as an enacted document orchestrated symbolically and semiotically through consumption. The cultural discourse of Thanksgiving Day negotiates meanings and issues in both the domestic and national arenas that are difficult for many to acknowledge, articulate, and debate verbally. Through the use of multiple perspectives and sources of data, we attempt to elucidate both the emic and etic meanings of this holiday.

Thanksgiving Day is a national holiday celebrated in the United States on the fourth Thursday in November. The day is set aside by decree of the national government so its citizens can give thanks for what they have. Thanksgiving commonly is celebrated by eating what participants regard as a traditional feast featuring a whole stuffed turkey as the main meat dish. Prototypical consumption of the meal occurs within nuclear- and extended-family units in private households. Televised morning parades and afternoon football games bracket the repast taken in early or mid-afternoon. Many regard the day as opening the holiday season (Myers 1972), which extends to Christmas one month later and then to New Year's celebrations the following week.

Thanksgiving Day is a collective ritual that celebrates material abundance enacted through feasting. We interpret the consumption rituals of Thanksgiving Day as a discourse among consumers about cultural categories and principles. We read the holiday as a discussion and negotiation carried on symbolically through consumption. Like other holidays (Caplow and Williamson 1980), the cultural discourse of Thanksgiving Day negotiates larger meanings that are difficult, if not impossible, for many participants to acknowledge, articulate, and negotiate verbally. Unlike the personal rituals described by Rook (1985), more universal themes of American culture are emphasized. Unlike the annual rituals of conflict described by Dirks (1988), Thanksgiving Day celebrations both mark and prove to participants their ability to meet basic needs amply through consumption. So certain is material plenty for most U.S. citizens that its annual celebration is taken for granted, unlike the harvest celebrations of some groups (Cohen and Coffin 1987; Mennell 1985). Not just a moment of bounty, but a culture of enduring prosperity is celebrated.

Systematic study of Thanksgiving Day celebrations can aid our understanding of contemporary U.S. consumer behavior in at least four ways. First, it provides a vehicle to explore the ways consumption actively constructs culture. Consumption is not treated here as a passive response to exogenous cultural factors, as the relationship between culture and consumption is depicted in most consumer-behavior textbooks (for an alternative treatment, see McCracken 1986). Instead, consumption is viewed as an active force in the construction of culture. Second, study of the Thanksgiving

*Melanie Wallendorf is associate professor, Department of Marketing, College of Business and Public Administration, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721. Eric Arnould is assistant professor, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Colorado at Denver, Denver, CO 80204. The authors thank Helen Anderson, Ann Carl, Bob Kafes, Jane Courtland, Deb Heisley, Sheldon Fishman, Marjorie Lyles, Grant McCracken, Heather McManus, Gayathri Mani, Bob Netting, Lisa Penaloza, Dennis Rook, John Sherry, David Snow, and Jerry Zaltman for their generous insights and helpful comments on earlier portions and presentations of this work. The authors would most especially like to thank their 100 junior collaborators, who were students in Professor Wallendorf's marketing research classes in the fall term of 1988. Their openness, eagerness to learn, and hard work made it possible to study Thanksgiving Day celebrations in situ.

Day celebration opens the possibility of developing an understanding of the linkages and ellipses between self-conscious consumer ideology[1] on the one hand and observed consumer praxis[2] on the other. Third, studying the celebration of Thanksgiving Day adds to our understanding of the meanings attached to material abundance and satisfaction through consumption. Finally, the study of Thanksgiving Day challenges us to unravel the complexity of the notion of tradition and the role of manufactured products vis-à-vis homemade ones. Despite being a major holiday, Thanksgiving Day, for the most part, has been ignored by social scientists (for an exception, see Linton and Linton 1949) and consumer researchers alike.

METHOD

This article presents an interpretation of contemporary meanings of the consumption rituals surrounding the celebration of Thanksgiving Day in the United States. Two senior coauthors and 100 student collaborators contributed to this multimethod ethnographic study. Their respective roles are elaborated in the next section.

Data

Ten data sets are used in this interpretation and analysis. Three data sets were primary in the analysis, and seven provided supplementary, historical, and comparative material. Multiple types of data were collected so we could more comprehensively address various facets of the celebration.

Primary Data Sets. Because they provide rich, qualitative detail concerning the ideology and praxis of Thanksgiving Day, three data sets are given primacy in this analysis. The first data set consists of depth interviews. These interviews document normative expectations of behavior and the ideology attending Thanksgiving Day celebrations and provide emic[3] perspectives on ideology.

A second data set was constructed by student field-workers who simultaneously completed participant-observation research on their own Thanksgiving Day celebrations held throughout the United States. They did so with the express permission of other feast participants and used no disguised observation.[4] Students were told to write detailed notes on everything they observed and to check the notes' completeness against a printed guide of topics prepared on the basis of our previous data collection efforts (see below). The students' participant-observation data reflect the practice of Thanksgiving Day as specific ritual enactments recorded at the level of detail of who ate jellied cranberry sauce at the Williamses' house. The fieldnotes contain sequential descriptions of action and interaction as well as context. Each student field-worker also wrote a journal commenting on this research process and his or her reactions.

To supplement fieldnotes, junior collaborators photographed their celebrations and arranged the photographs sequentially to document the temporal flow of events, as well as the unfolding proxemics[5] of relationships among participants and between field-worker and participants (Collier and Collier 1986). Some of these photographs represent an idealized "snapshot" version (Chalfen 1987) of Thanksgiving Day, while others provide more backstage (Goffman 1959) or panoramic content. Photographers wrote a log of what they saw in each photograph, a form of unguided autodriving as described by Heisley and Levy (1985). To convert the photos to computer text files for retrieval and analysis, we wrote a log that inventoried persons, objects, behaviors, proxemics, locations, types of shot, and our own reactions as a supplement to the logs written by the junior collaborators.

Participant-observation data from junior collaborators provide details on feasts of households with college-age students, as well as a few households of older college students. Most feasts were held in homes; a few were held in restaurants or by groups of students. This data set, however, misses the potluck Thanksgiving Day meals that are common among single adults and the meals of elderly people who fill restaurants on this day. Also underreported, but not entirely overlooked, in this data set are the activities of individuals such as alcoholics, substance abusers, and homosexuals, whose lifestyles challenge the particular family ideology celebrated. Similarly, other forms of family dysfunction are most likely underreported, although not entirely overlooked.

Student field-workers provided more data on specific ritual enactments than senior researchers could have obtained without such collaboration. We justify our reliance on native field-workers in this research on the basis of the temporal cycling of the event; this reliance is not meant to imply our broader approval of this research practice for consumer research.

Because of our commitment to firsthand immersion in the phenomenon and to add another perspective, we (i.e., the senior collaborators) gathered the third data set from participant observation at our own separate

[1]Consumer ideology: Consumers' beliefs and doctrine about how a consumption event should be.

[2]Praxis: Habitual or established practice or custom.

[3]Emic: That which reflects the consciously available perspective of individual informants.

[4]Completion of the participant-observation assignment was worth 3 percent of the student's grade in a marketing-research course in which participant-observation methods are one substantive topic in the curriculum. Express permission to use students' data materials in this research was obtained from students at the end of the course with no impact on their course grade. All names of individuals and places have been changed to protect anonymity while preserving gender, ethnicity, and regional distinctions. The ethnicity, gender, and age of informants and field workers is denoted by abbreviations.

[5]Proxemics: The study of the social use of space.

Thanksgiving Day celebrations for three years. We documented rituals enacted with our own families as well as celebrations attended with other families where we were invited as guests and researchers.

Supplementary Data Sets. Seven additional supplemental data sets provide historical, longitudinal, and comparative material. The first three supplemental data sets are structured surveys. Personal interviews were conducted approximately two months prior to Thanksgiving Day in the fall of 1984; two later sets of personal interviews were conducted in the fall of 1988. The first survey focuses on feast-group composition and the foods to be served. The second survey focuses on the respondent's *ideal* Thanksgiving Day. The third survey, conducted simultaneously, asks parallel questions about a separate samples' thoughts about what they regard as their *typical* Thanksgiving Day. A 20 percent subsample of each survey was validated by phone. These three data sets were collected to assess quantitatively the differences between ideology and praxis as reported in surveys. In addition, these three data sets provide a large demographic sample from which the variance in certain practices could be estimated. From the ideas generated in this exploratory-survey research, more definitive and in-depth understandings were tested in later depth interviews and participant observation.

The fourth supplemental data set consists of nonparticipant observation of a household's everyday dinner, a task that was completed by 90 of the student field-workers in households other than their own. This empirical evidence permits informed comment on the ways Thanksgiving Day meals differ from American households' ordinary evening meals.

Through our own participant observation, we gained access to photographs from some family albums depicting previous Thanksgiving Day celebrations. This fifth supplemental data set permits commentary on the stability of celebrations in particular families over the years and generations, as well as historical comparisons between the celebrations of the families of marriage partners.

To provide another historical perspective on Thanksgiving Day, we assembled a sixth supplemental data set of two-dimensional artwork and historical and fictional writings focused on Thanksgiving Day. Reliance on this artwork as a data set (as suggested by Belk 1986) represents changing historical images of Thanksgiving ideology.

The last data set consists of our own observations of public celebrations at restaurants and community events, such as the meals provided for homeless and impoverished individuals. Because of the demands on our time on Thanksgiving Day, we only briefly observed and photographed these events to contrast with the home- and family-centered celebration observed by the junior collaborators and ourselves.

Although recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), we did not request an audit because we felt the size and variety of data diminished the need for and possibility of completing it. We conducted member checks by requesting commentary on an earlier version of this article from three sample members. One person who conducted a member check is a junior collaborator who provided data materials. The second is a senior social scientist whose family included one of the senior collaborators in their Thanksgiving Day celebration. The third person was a part of the depth-interview sample. While not supplanting an audit (as Hirschman [1986] implies through her usage), member checks provide a control on the interpretation. Sample members participating in this check were asked whether the interpretation seemed reasonable or, alternatively, farfetched. The three people conducting member checks indicated that the interpretation went beyond their prior understanding of the meanings of Thanksgiving Day behaviors, but it was credible, interesting, and they had learned a lot. Each provided suggestions for improving the manuscript that were incorporated into a later draft. As a further check, with the exception of photographs taken by junior collaborators, disguised data sets are available for inspection by scholars interested in verifying the adequacy of the material for our interpretation. Permission to make photographs available to others was not requested from junior collaborators because of the impossibility of preserving anonymity in such materials.

Details concerning these ten data sets are given in Exhibit 1. The remainder of the discussion of methods focuses on the varied perspectives provided by the data sets.

Perspectives from Depth Interviews

Our interpretation is grounded in all of the data. Two data types, namely, depth interviews and participant-observation materials (fieldnotes and photos from junior collaborators and senior researchers), provide most of the illustrative materials included. To explain their heightened importance to our interpretations, we next discuss the kinds of insights gleaned from these data.

Depth interviews provide a *perspective of action* (Gould et al. 1974; Snow and Anderson 1987). Depth-interview informants explain their perspective of action they recall and its meaning to them. As with surveys, this perspective of action is distinct from action observed. Depth-interview comments are about how things are remembered (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989).

In the depth interviews about Thanksgiving, perspectives of action were evident in five different motifs. The first concerns the *ideology* of Thanksgiving Day, beliefs and doctrine about what the holiday should be. A second depth-interview motif is a description of *what "always" happens,* whether or not this is factually true.

EXHIBIT 1

DATA RECORD

1. Depth interviews, $n = 77$ ($n = 72$ conducted by junior collaborators, $n = 5$ conducted by senior researchers):
   Fieldnotes
   Journal
2. Participant observation at junior-collaborator feasts in 1988, $n = 91$:
   Fieldnotes, with guideline for completeness
   Journal
3. Photographs in sequential order: chronologically arranged series of 8–84 photos, averaging around 27 photographs per series, for a total of almost 2,500 photographs
   Student photograph log
   Researcher inventory of each photograph
4. Participant observation by senior researchers at feasts:
   Fieldnotes
   Journal
   Photographs
   Photograph log
5. Survey in 1988 about ideal Thanksgiving, $n = 181$
6. Survey in 1988 about typical Thanksgiving, $n = 235$
7. Survey in 1984 about feast group composition, $n = 418$
8. Nonparticipant observation of a household dinner, $n = 90$:
   Fieldnotes
   Journal
9. Families' photographs of previous Thanksgiving feasts
10. Art works depicting Thanksgiving
11. Observation at public Thanksgiving feasts:
    Fieldnotes
    Journal
    Photographs
    Photograph log

A third motif in depth interviews is stories about vivid and *unique experiences.* In this regard, a depth interview expands the sample beyond the current year; the interview samples recollections across people's lifetimes. A fourth depth-interview motif concerns *childhood recollections* and nostalgic idealizations (Davis 1979). Partially because the emic ideology of Thanksgiving Day concerns family togetherness, these (usually) fond remembrances may or may not accurately reflect the nature of past events. A fifth kind of story obtained in these depth interviews concerns *reflections on the passage of time.* Given their longer history of participation in the holiday and their focus on a life-review process (Erikson 1959), elderly informants provided such commentary most frequently. Unlike the specific incidents detailed in childhood recollections, reflections on the passage of time are personal interpretations of the difference between holidays past and present.

Perspectives from Participant Observation

Participant observation also provides certain insights and kinds of information about the celebration of Thanksgiving. Rather than recording memories as do depth interviews, participant observation records the field-worker's experience of action, conversations, and context. Participant observation in a naturalistic setting provides a *perspective in action* rather than a perspective of action as in the depth interview. Ideally, participant observation includes both perspectives as the field-worker moves between observing and recording others' actions and asking questions about the action.

Despite emic understandings that gloss Thanksgiving Day enactments as stable over time, participant observation captures change as it is actively negotiated year by year. For example, decisions about whether to serve buffet style or have the host/hostess serve food individually negotiate the level of individual choice permitted and encouraged in the family and the meaning of choice in the culture generally. In these and other transactions, people construct culture rather than merely respond to it. This construction process, like much of social life, reflects the disagreements and disharmony that threaten social order. The task of ritual is to overcome these disagreements in a way that affirms the possibility of patching the cleavages, if only temporarily. Participant observation is uniquely suited to explore this bargaining process, because its subject is praxis rather than ideals.

As collaborators in this research, student field-workers provided helpful insights that only a household member could capture. These insights would have been inaccessible to senior researchers, even if we attended the feast and produced the fieldnotes ourselves. As natives, student field-workers provided commentary based on their knowledge of the everyday behavior of other participants at the celebration. However, because ritual commands attention and deflects questioning at the time of its enactment, it is a challenge for the native field-worker to get beyond taking for granted (Wirth 1964) what is or is not happening and record the details.

Comparing across data sets and within the student participant-observation fieldnotes, it appears that five kinds of behaviors are underreported in students' fieldnotes, probably because they are a part of natives' taken-for-granted world of Thanksgiving Day celebrations (Wirth 1964). The fact that people typically have the day off from gainful employment was infrequently mentioned explicitly. However, the presence of all household members for the entire day and explicit mentions of who had to work can be used as a basis for drawing the inference. A second phenomenon likely to be underreported is the female host or mom who will not sit down. When the food is being served, photographs typically show other family members filling their plates and sitting down before the preparer of the labor-intensive spread does. A third event that is probably underreported is the fact that conversation often stops while the meal is being eaten. Also underreported is the desire to "get up and walk around" after eating the dinner. Finally, when subgroups form for conversation or other activity, fieldnotes may indicate that "we all sat around and talked" when the photographs indicate that this was done in gender-segregated groups. Our reliance on multiple data sets in the analysis diminishes the impact of such underreporting in one data set.

Perspectives from Photographs

Photographs supplement what is included in fieldnotes as well as record action that went unreported. Two analytic procedures were used. As we identified emergent themes from other data, we recorded more detail about them in photographs. For example, more details were noted about butter service, clothing, pets, pies, table settings, and proxemic behavior of all group members, especially of stepfamily members. In a second procedure, we used a computer program to conduct searches on key words contained in the photographic inventories. The program counts and writes key words occuring in context on text files for examination as a set. We constructed files of terms capturing themes (e.g., velour, sweatshirts, butter, turkey, Jell-O, nowhere else to go, family) to look for patterns.

Reading Thanksgiving

Conventional social science writing glosses social phenomena as linear and epigenetic[6] (Becker 1986; Van Maanen 1988). However, a fundamental premise of postmodern inquiry (Clifford and Marcus 1986) is that holistic social facts are neither linear nor epigenetic (Thompson et al. 1989). This poses a dilemma in writing about natural social phenomena since language, unlike society and culture, is composed in linearly strung-together fragments. As a result, contemporary writing about culture adopts multiple strategies and voices to expose various aspects of an elusive, allusive, and illusive whole. The reader will find that our presentation weaves rather than strings thematic elements, steered by the complexity of naturalistic data rather than directed by a linear logic imposed on the data by theory or method.

THE MEANINGS OF THANKSGIVING DAY

Five conceptual themes are used to organize our interpretation of the meanings of Thanksgiving Day: (1) negotiation of abundance; (2) extensiveness of inclusion; (3) resolution of universalism and particularism; (4) negotiation of values, such as cleanliness, not wasting, and hard work; and (5) negotiation of the role of produce and branded food products vis-à-vis tradition and homemade foods. In this discussion, we organize data materials around these five conceptual themes rather than chronologically as they might appear throughout the day.

Thanksgiving Day Consumption as Negotiated Abundance

Thanksgiving Day ritual is guided by no written liturgy; the details of its celebration, like the past and future, are actively negotiated among participants, and not always harmoniously. Emic understandings revealed in depth interviews gloss Thanksgiving Day enactments as stable over time. Yet active negotiation of change and variation over the life cycle as well as across historical epochs (Appelbaum 1984) in making "the plans" and celebrating the holiday are apparent in participant-observation notes. Meanings and emotions, beliefs and values are the emergent artifacts of this ritual process, not all of which are recognized by informants.

In particular, Thanksgiving Day ritual negotiates the presence and meaning of abundance to the household and more broadly to the culture. In this section we discuss the way elements of the ritual are employed in negotiating abundance.

Abundance Embodied. Since Thanksgiving Day is a celebration of material plenty, participants deliberate to insure that everyone agrees there is abundance. In conformity with Puritan tradition (Farb and Armelagos 1980; Mennell 1985), the primary focus is the quantity of food rather than its quality. It tends to be wholesome but plain and simple rather than complex. The amount of food, rather than elaboration and delicacy, is foremost in people's minds (Mennell 1985). More dishes are served at the observed feasts than at everyday dinners. Jokes, a telling cultural form (Freud [1905] 1960), are made. Someone facetiously asks whether 14 potatoes will make enough mashed potatoes for six people, yet preparations in the kitchen continue.

The abundance celebrated on Thanksgiving Day resonates (McQuarry 1989) across many components of the menu. "Stuffing" and "loading" are redundant at the meal. The turkey is stuffed. Mashed potatoes are loaded with butter and then topped with gravy. The relish tray contains stuffed green olives and pitted black olives that children stuff with their fingers, despite parental disapproval. Pie crusts are filled with fruit or flavored custards and topped with whipped cream, ice cream, or meringue. The themes of stuffing and loading in food are echoed in other elements of the feast. The table or buffet is loaded with serving dishes. The house is filled with people who crowd around the table to eat. Sometimes there is a cornucopia centerpiece filled with the harvest's abundance. Even variations resonate with the theme; a hostess of Italian descent delivered the correct metonymic[7] message by choosing cannoli, a pastry filled with cream, for dessert.

Thanksgiving Day abundance is also represented on the plates of participants. Photographs show plates so loaded with food that they are difficult to balance while walking from buffet to table. Unlike the typical service of one main course and two side dishes at everyday dinners (Douglas 1972), Thanksgiving plates are filled with so many different foods that they run together.

[6]Epigenetic: Necessary temporal sequencing such that structural elaboration occurs that can only arise from a prior stage or event.

[7]Metonym: A figure of speech in which a word is used to reference or evoke a related idea or bundle of meaning.

To insure that the feast represents abundance to everyone, an almost universal topic of after-dinner conversation is that everyone has overeaten and is painfully full. Men's postures are noticeably different from that before the meal. Stuffed bellies feel more comfortable outstretched, with hips forward on the chair seat and arms sometimes resting overhead on the back of the chair. This contrasts with the more upright before-dinner posture.

So important is it that the group come to consensus about the experience of surfeit that when—but not if—to serve dessert takes a particular form, as in Dave Hawthorne's fieldnotes:

> No one ate dessert for at least an hour and a half after dinner ended. During this time I took a walk with my brother, my brother-in-law and his two-year-old son (and my dog). We talked about how much we had eaten and I made a bet with my brother-in-law on the outcome of the college football game. After we returned, the dishes were being completed by my mom, dad, and my sister-in-law and two sisters. . . . Everyone just sat around and rested their stomachs until my mom announced dessert. There were three pecan pies and two pumpkin pies. (I told my mom the day before that there was no way we would finish them all, but she still wouldn't let me eat a piece before Thanksgiving Day.) All pies were homemade by my mom.

When the hostess first offers dessert, participants decide to wait because they are "too full." Instead of feeling rejected, the hostess feels successful in feeding them well. The time-lapse between dinner and dessert varies from a few minutes to clear the dishes to several hours.

Unlike everyday dinners, Thanksgiving Day celebrants verbally negotiate consensus about the experience of material abundance. Physical pain is commonly evoked, but people are proud and pleased to have "eaten too much." Semiotically, they embody[8] (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1962, [1942] 1963) the material surplus and ability to meet basic needs that will be taken for granted the rest of the year. To preclude later questioning of whether surfeit abides, they prove decisively and even painfully its universality. Not even one participant should voice continued hunger. Diners meet urgings to eat just one more small serving of a preferred dish with the insistence that they are stuffed. During the meal, some may say that they want to "save room for pie," but later confess to having no more room. It would feel good to wait a while before proceeding. Their personal storehouses, like the granaries of the agriculturally based consumer culture they each metonymically echo, are charged with the basics. Food at this moment reflects more than personal preferences; it unconsciously mirrors social relations and processes. Fullness will endure (Barthes 1975; Mennell 1985). By negotiating consensus about a desire to delay having dessert, participants agree on their fullness. Lest there be any doubt, they then stuff themselves once again with dessert and later with leftovers, proving that threats of future material scarcity are quickly and easily held at bay.

Abundance is also embodied by pregnant women, who guarantee familial continuity. As reflected in excerpts used later in this analysis, pregnancy is salient in depth interviews. Participant-observation notes show some families making special mention of welcoming a new family member at the meal-opening prayer or toast. Pregnancy assures a sufficient quantity of family members and in this way is connected to the Thanksgiving Day celebration of abundance. The pregnant woman is a living cornucopia, a metaphor of continued abundance, the ritual message of Thanksgiving Day.

Forgetting as a Consequence of Abundance. The Thanksgiving Day celebration is so complex and semiotically dense in number of foods and people that very often not everything goes according to the host and hostess's plans. Since there is no written liturgy to insure exact replication each year, sometimes things are forgotten. Participants regard forgetting as unusual in their emic perspective. However, an etic[9] perspective based in reading many sets of fieldnotes indicates that forgetting something and resolving this minor disruption through forgiveness is a common part of the event. Reading the fieldnotes, we learn that this family forgot to say the prayer and that hostess forgot to prepare the rolls. In the emic perspective, forgetting is an understandable consequence of the abundance of the feast; there is "just so much" to do, eat, and remember that something was forgotten. From an etic perspective, resolving this incident negotiates the importance of abundance and defines what is really important. Resolution is guided but not dictated by the emic ideology of Thanksgiving Day as a celebration of family togetherness, a theme that was revealed in depth interviews.

In an impressively flexible and loving family comprising a divorced mother and her three grown children, Mom forgot to put the evaporated milk in the pumpkin pie, as her daughter Debbie Bryant (wf, midtwenties) recorded in her fieldnotes:

> The first thing my mother tells me when I arrive is that she forgot to put the evaporated milk in the pumpkin pie and it's the most horrible pie ever. Well, when I saw it, it was two-thirds gone. It must not have been that bad. As it turns out, my brother thought it was the best pie he has ever eaten and he was happy that he could eat it before dinner. He said, "It's better this way. You can actually taste the pie. Instead of being so full from dinner and eating dessert when you can barely breathe, if you eat the pie before dinner, you can really taste the flavor!"

Reassurance by other participants that all is well in spite of something being forgotten is important. The lesson made visible is that, even when striving to achieve

[8]Embody: To make tangible or represent through the body and bodily sensations.

[9]Etic: That which reflects the interpretation of the researcher.

abundance, omissions and human failings are ordinary and acceptable. Forgetting condensed milk did not produce a cleavage in this family. Abundance is important, but omissions are accepted.

When functioning properly, the ritual, like the family it represents, is robust and tolerant of variation. When functioning improperly, forgetfulness may construct or resurrect intolerance and lack of acceptance. Thus forgetfulness, when accompanied by acceptance and forgiveness, reinforces the core familial values associated with the ritual. The emic perspective that forgetting is unusual and tangential differs from but contributes to the emergent etic perspective. Because forgetting is emically regarded as unusual, it is actively discussed and resolved. This leads to the etic interpretation that forgetfulness is a widespread and ordered part of the negotiated ritual message that celebrates and enacts abundance and family togetherness through consumption.

Mealtime Hush as a Consequence of Abundance. As we also found in our own fieldwork, fieldnotes written by some junior collaborators mention that conversation during the meal dropped to little besides occasional requests to pass condiments or a serving plate or compliments on a particular dish, as in Bob Pritchard's (wm, early twenties) notes on his 22-participant family feast:

> The atmosphere surrounding dinner and dessert was very relaxed with minimal conversation. Norma is a very good cook and everyone was too busy eating to be talking. After dinner took an even more casualness to it. Several people headed outside for some fresh air and to walk Gloria and Sam's dog.

There is just so much food that people focus on incorporating its abundance rather than on talking during this period of time. However, the notion that people are too busy eating to talk glosses the choice they are making, an emic perspective reflected in other sets of notes as well. Despite being instructed to include it, other student field-workers omit mention of the conversation during the festive meal, an indication by exclusion of what was happening. An etic contrast emerges between fieldnotes on everyday dinners, when families talk to each other about the day's activities, and fieldnotes on the Thanksgiving Day meal, when a hush falls over the group as they eat. As each person chooses to concentrate on consuming without self-restraint, there is no talk (Mennell 1985).

Taking a Walk as a Consequence of Abundance. In a number of instances, after the meal is finished and sometimes before dessert is served, participants decide to take a stroll. When this action is suggested, almost everyone agrees that it would feel good because they are so full. Some may claim to be too full to do anything but take a nap on the sofa. When a walk is taken, there is usually no destination in mind, and length and pace are determined by local weather. Because it takes place after the integrative meal, the walk may include a mixed-gender group as well as a mixed-age group. It is an activity that draws a boundary around the group rather than within it. Subgroups may form for conversation during the walk, depending on the size of the group walking. Where the walk is taken outside the house, particularly if accompanied by other people and/or a pet, it is included in fieldnotes, as in the earlier excerpts from Dave Hawthorne's and Bob Pritchard's notes. Where it was confined to stretching or walking around inside the house, it is less frequently reported. In deciding to take a walk, as in the decisions to delay dessert or take a nap, participants affirm their agreement about experiencing abundance (satiety). Through these actions, they prove abundance to themselves.

Type of Abundance Celebrated. The kind of surfeit proved at Thanksgiving Day is not an abundance of fun and frivolity or elaborate luxury. Instead, foods served are plain, not highly spiced. They are simple unities (green beans) rather than complex blends (green bean souffle with ginger). Dorothy (jf, 42) was teased by her husband for serving a tureen of pumpkin soup to his midwestern family the previous year. The dish, although creative and well prepared from a recipe in *Gourmet* magazine, did not match the simplicity expected of Thanksgiving Day foods. Like baby food, the food at Thanksgiving is served baked, boiled, and mashed. Its soft texture and plain flavor is safe for young and old alike. Foods such as sweet and white potatoes remain close to their agricultural form and are not transformed into elaborate gourmet cuisine. Yet this plain food is served on the best china; Jell-O on Royal Doulton china eaten using Reed and Barton silver. It is not the food that would be served on the same china to dinner-party guests. On this day, the best china (form) celebrates (contains) plainness and a surplus of the basics (contents).

Because it is a celebration of abundance of the basics, in most households Thanksgiving Day is not associated with heavy alcohol consumption. When asked, 91 percent of survey respondents indicated either that little or no alcohol or a moderate amount of alcohol is consumed. Participant observation confirms this self-report data. Where alcohol is served, it is usually white or blush wine. Only occasionally do photographs show displays of spirits bottles. The theme of serving items that retain closeness to their agricultural form (rather than a distilled form) is echoed.

The Role of Fasting. In order to prove decisively the ability of the group to provide a profusion of life-sustaining basics, Thanksgiving Day requires that participants come together in a state of hunger. This is partially accomplished by consuming the meal in early to midafternoon, sufficiently later than the customary midday meal, so as to make inquiries about the turkey's progress and expected time of completion routine. Not uncommonly, people said they fasted for a period of time prior to the meal, so they could save their appetite

for the feast. In one household, no appetizers are served so everyone will save their hunger for the meal. In other households, women diet for a period of time, perhaps a week prior to the holiday. And in several households, fathers and college-age daughters made a pact to eat nothing on Thanksgiving Day prior to the dinner. Few males mentioned dieting or fasting, although many skipped lunch while waiting for a midafternoon meal. Fasting, then binging, enables even those participating in the ideology of thinness (Nichter and Moore 1990) to be included in negotiating the importance of abundance, if only at one meal.

Abundance of Basics Echoed in Clothing. Clothing also reflects the theme of plainness and modest origins. Enticing sequins and lamé are reserved for New Year's Eve; Thanksgiving Day clothing is unadorned and ordinary. Two prototypical styles of dress are shown in photos. The first more refined style of dress is reminiscent of Norman Rockwell's art. This style recalls the bygone practice of attending church before the Thanksgiving Day meal; women in boiled-wool jackets and plaid skirts with plain stockings and low-heel pumps accompanied by men in grey suits and white shirts can easily move from Episcopalian church services to the meal. Children are dressed to resemble small adults. This pattern of dress, retained in some upper-class families, appears to be diminishing in prevalence. Only 8.2 percent of survey respondents strongly agree that "Everyone at our Thanksgiving celebration dresses up and is concerned about manners and etiquette."

For most people, dress is more casual, including jeans and sweaters, fleece sweat suits, and running shoes. Adults dress like large children. Soft fabric (fleece linings or velour finishes) and elastic gathered waistbands are described as more comfortable; they recall the contemporary one-piece, all-purpose infant garment, sometimes known as "Dr. Dentons." This is clothing that can move from mealtime to playtime to naptime without a change.

Abundance of Plainness as Infantilism. The related metaphors of abundance and simplicity reinforce our notion that Thanksgiving is not a holiday like Christmas that reifies childhood delights (Caplow et al. 1982); instead, Thanksgiving Day satisfactions are more closely linked to infancy. Despite its deeper historical roots, Thanksgiving Day is mythically connected to the infancy of the nation. For Americans as individuals, oral gratification at Thanksgiving allows each participant to return to the contentment and security of an infant wearing comfortable soft clothing who falls asleep after being fed well. Sitting in relative silence, each participant is fed plain soft foods by a nurturing woman and then is taken outside for a walk. Some participants even mash their food together, as indicated by Priscilla McPhee in a depth interview conducted by Veronica Verbaere:

> V: Does everyone at the table like stuffing?
> P: Yes, my entire family does; it's almost better than the turkey. My brother is a bigger freak about it than I am. My dad is pretty happy with it. We all like to take the mashed potatoes and the stuffing and kind of mush them together. Dad even adds turnips to it. Yeah that's gross. I don't eat turnips. So we just mush everything together. I tend to make a mess out of my plate; most of my family is a little more neat about it. Slop it all together. Sounds gross, and it looks gross.

By "smooshing" their food together, participants enact an infantile pattern and use their food to mirror the family togetherness celebrated on this holiday. In so doing, they also reduce their food to a substance resembling the food fed to infants.

Thanksgiving Day is the cultural equivalent in the ritual calendar of Freud's oral stage of development in an individual's life. Epigenetically, Thanksgiving Day as oral stage must precede rituals that occur later in the American ritual calendar. Greed and retentiveness are culturally negotiated at Christmas, as is hedonic sexual fulfillment on New Year's Eve. In this way, the ritual calendar annually takes the culture through oral, anal, and genital stages of development before completing the holiday season and returning the culture to the everyday world of adult instrumentality.

Extensiveness of Inclusion

Depth interviews reveal that informants think of Thanksgiving Day as a day of family togetherness. Yet, who is to be included in the family circle, how inclusion is enacted, and the roles of each participant are actively negotiated through consumption. These negotiations and inclusion actions are discussed in the following sections.

Negotiating Life-Cycle Changes. Change and variation over the life cycle are negotiated year by year in making and carrying out "the plans." Decisions about whether grandmother is getting too old to handle having the festivities at her house involve deliberations about the degree of productivity expected of the elderly in American culture and the relative productivity of the middle generation. The holiday is an occasion that demands discourse and a decision that negotiates the relative roles (care givers/care receivers) of family members in the domestic cycle.

Many of the student field-worker data come from households at the domestic cycle stage when the children are in college. The issue of what to do with boyfriends and girlfriends, especially ones who may later become spouses and thereby extended family members, becomes a focus of negotiation. When girlfriends and boyfriends are from the same town, it is often resolved by including them in a part of the dinner. It is safe to have them come by for dessert, the peripheral course of the meal, after they eat the main course (and sometimes also dessert) with their own families. Boyfriends

and girlfriends who have families in different towns may elect to go together to the family of one or the other. This situation is more difficult if it involves incorporating the nonfamily member into the family for more than a few hours or a day. Those students who were the overnight guests of their boyfriend's or girlfriend's family reported anxiety and nervousness, while typically adding that the host family is nice. The situation and the task of inclusion seem to account for their feelings more than their relationships with the particular people involved. Ideally, this is a time when differences between two families are made visible to the young couple and the possibility of resolution affirmed.

For a growing number of families, divorce forces the negotiation of new family roles and struggles over new ways of enacting the Thanksgiving Day ideology of family togetherness. This challenge is met creatively by many families. It is often resolved by requiring the offspring of divorced couples to consume two feasts in sequence. From an etic perspective we note that, through the children, divorced couples are connected tangentially on this ritual occasion.

Inclusion in Adult World through Advice. The domestic cycle stage characteristic of the households of many of the student field-workers sets the scene for discussions with college-age students regarding progress in college and possible graduate schools or jobs. Males who are fictive (e.g., godfathers, honorary uncles) or distant (e.g., uncles) kin initiated discussions with some college-age students about job plans. Some even suggested that the student should call on them to set up interviews when the time came. Thanksgiving Day events have as one of their foci the incorporation of college-age students into the corporate world of grown-ups. Helpfulness on the part of the parental generation reconnects the migrant college student to family and friends who are likely to be geographically close to the parents. Such help may increase the chances that the college student will move "back to Michigan" or "back to Chicago."

Enacting Togetherness by Viewing Photographs. Strategies chosen by intact families for enacting family togetherness are patterned. Many families spend part of the day looking at old family pictures, constructing togetherness by reviewing and rehearsing their understanding of a shared past. Especially at feasts that include new or potential family members (such as girlfriends or boyfriends), re-viewing a family photo album includes the newcomer in stories and myths that charter inclusion in the group. Participants do not think of photoviewing as a compulsory part of the ritual in the way that serving turkey is, nor is it linked ideologically to a feast held by Pilgrims and Native Americans (Appelbaum 1984; Greninger 1979). Nonetheless, viewing old family pictures together is a fairly common activity for families. Emically, it is regarded as an individual and unique choice. Etically, it is interpreted as an activity that holds the cultural contents of the ritual. It defines the scope and legitimacy of the group by anchoring it in the past.

Constructing Togetherness through Storytelling. Topics of conversation during the day are somewhat consistent across households, although these patterns are not emically recognized. Stories are often repeated and, like photographs, are regarded as unique to the family. Frequently the stories are told while the whole group is assembled at the table after eating has finished. They could be termed stories of bad times, as with one repeated by Maggie (f, 38) in a depth interview with Lynn:

> L: What are some of your best memories of Thanksgiving?
> M: Probably my first Thanksgiving with Tom because we were married on October 27, and Thanksgiving was the first big holiday in our new house. Then the second Thanksgiving, I was pregnant with Christie. I was really big like Fergie. I remember I was taking the turkey out of the oven and dropped it on the floor. Tom and his boys heard a big bang and ran upstairs. I was four and one-half months pregnant and looked nine. I looked like I had a big turkey under my shirt as my stomach. I started crying because my beautiful turkey was ruined. My stepson scooped up the turkey, put all the stuffing back in the turkey and acted like it was all O.K. because pregnant women get very moody. They ate it and said with a smile, "This floor is clean enough to eat off of."
> L: What were your feelings after this?
> M: That nothing's really more important than the people you cook Thanksgiving dinner for, relatives and family. I know Thanksgiving must be a very lonely holiday if spent on your own.

This story captures a pervasive theme of disaster solved by family togetherness. Family cleavages, especially within the blended families created by serial monogamy in the United States, are sutured.

Some stories about unique, unpleasant events are told to encourage laughter at the past crisis, as with a story told by Angela Hogan (f, 26) in a depth interview:

> A: I remember one time when I was seven, my brother was eight, and my sister was about the same age. My mom had just gotten a divorce, so she had this boyfriend and she invited him over for Thanksgiving. She worked so hard all day to make things go perfect. I think the problems kinda started when my brother spilt his milk. Then at the table he asked my mom if she was going to have a baby. My mom said, "No, why?" And my brother pulled out of his pocket some birth control pills and said, "Because I found these." He didn't really know what they were for, just that they said birth control on them. My mom started crying at the table and told him that he ruined her whole Thanksgiving. Then my brother got up and dropped his cranberry sauce on the white carpet. He didn't do it intentionally, he was just a klutz.

Another informant referred to "the year the homemade rolls tasted like baseballs" and then laughed. Louise

Wolfenberg (wf, 37) recalls her mother telling the story of the time one-month-old Louise made a particularly malodorous and messy bowel movement just as the restaurant meal was served, thereby ruining the new suits of clothing Louise and her mother were wearing, as well as the experience of the meal. When successfully told, the point of the story is that, in telling of the disagreeable experience, listeners and storyteller alike (usually who were both present for the original event) are connected in laughing it off, as in one story told by Brian (wm, early twenties) about a pet:

> B: Another year, it snowed even harder. We were up there and had some other people over from the neighborhood after Thanksgiving dinner. Alfred, the Moore's white poodle, went outside. It was really snowing hard and people were drinking a lot and having fun. No one noticed that the dog was still outside. This went on all night. No one heard the dog whining at the door to be let in. About four hours later when the neighbors were leaving, we opened the door and found the dog frozen stiff, barely alive. We used blow-driers to defrost him! It was rather traumatic at the time. But now we look back and think it was pretty funny.

Unpleasant incidents are co-opted to support the value of a strong family. This is culture constructed.

However, such stories are not always successfully told. Intrafamily hostilities and long-term feuds can be rekindled. When stories are told and subsequent collective laughter is discouraged or the punch line about the power of love is omitted, such stories recall prior feelings of alienation and disappointment. This element of family ritual then fails.

Stories about prior holiday consumption experiences are a part of household or family charter, joining listeners in membership and its meanings (Levy 1981). In this regard, it is interesting to deepen our interpretation of the spilt-milk story. It recalls the folk saying, "There's no sense crying over spilt milk." Learning and relearning this moral are sufficiently important that this story has evidently been rehearsed and retold many times prior to the interview. It is now among the repertoire of stories that serve as charter myths for that family. Does this young woman actually recall the event in such detail, even though she was only seven years old when it happened? Did the event happen in exactly this way? Perhaps, but more likely the story has been polished and refined as it has been retold at many Thanksgiving celebrations in her family.

Stories such as these are often retold on Thanksgiving Day, as with a story retold by Margo Renault's grandmother during food preparation:

> (Grandma stuffing turkey and Grandpa watching.)
> Grandma: . . . And one year Johnny (my dad's brother) would not eat turkey. (laughter) We killed his pet. You know we used to raise turkeys. (I've heard this story every year that I have been here for Thanksgiving.)
> Grandpa: We raised three turkeys, you know!

As in this family, the response to such stories is typically amusement, as if shared laughter settles the issue. Such stories might be about bad Thanksgivings, such as the year the turkey did not defrost in time or the year the pit-roasted turkeys were spoiled by one bad one. Other bad stories told on this day are about other times, such as the time little brother lied to his parents about wrecking the car. In some stories, the oldest generation tells how hard life was many years ago, as with one grandmother who immigrated from Hungary in 1911. By recounting stories of family origins or painful events, such as the recent death of a family member, the family proves to itself that it withstands such shocks (Levy 1981). Participants do not regard storytelling as a prescribed part of the celebration, yet etically we see it as a common event that delivers an important ritual message about endurance and togetherness.

Inclusion of Pets and Those with "Nowhere Else to Go." Another activity that is fairly common, although regarded emically as unique, is the inclusion of pets by serving them part of the festive food. Unlike aspects of the holiday that may be systematically avoided in photographs, this is one that commands a photograph, along with remarks about how "cute" it is. This act expresses values of inclusion and generosity. The whole family participates in the holiday, even animals who, by consuming the same foods, are designated honorary family members.

The inclusion of pets echoes the frequent inclusion of unrelated singles or others described as having "nowhere else to go." This action resolves the culturally problematic position of persons whose families cannot accomplish the togetherness required on this day. It also allows other families to demonstrate generosity and abundance by constructing fictive kin for the day.

There are limits to inclusion, however. Pets are not served at the family table. Like children who eat their feast at a separate table, the pet is fed its share of turkey separately.

In summary, Thanksgivings arrange the re-collected past through stories and photographs, solidify the present through a collective hush while eating and then through a collective walk, and arrange the future through advice and other rituals of inclusion. From an etic perspective all of these events can be regarded as part of the common modern praxis of Thanksgiving Day, although emic ideology would see them as unique.

Resolution of Universalism and Particularism

Thanksgiving Day celebrations are regarded by many participants as being the same for everyone; to them Thanksgiving Day represents cultural universals. That which is universalistic is the same for all; it does not express individualism (Parsons 1951).

Emic understanding of this holiday assumes universality of participation for all Americans. Not only does

this ideology assume that all do the same thing on this day ("turkey and all the rest"), but also that the meal has remained unchanged over the years. People go about the preparations as if the Pilgrims and Indians ate (Butterball) turkeys with (Pepperidge Farm) stuffing and (Ocean Spray) jellied cranberry sauce. They understand the celebration as universalistic and unchanging, although evident in the data are many features that are historically and socially particularistic.

Emic understanding of Thanksgiving as universal led many informants to express surprise about the focus of the research project. Some declared that other holidays, such as Christmas, are more interesting and more exciting. When asked what is served at their holiday table, the surprisingly common response is that theirs is the same as everyone's. However, when pushed for further details, evidence of behavioral particularism embedded in a universalistic ideology accumulates in an etic perspective. Particularism, the opposing pattern variable to universalism (Parsons 1951), is expressive of special individual position or ties. In examining the praxis of Thanksgiving Day, we see that behavioral elements regarded as universal are augmented with little traditions that are particular to a family, time period, geographic area of residence or origin, class, gender, or age group. After discussing universalistic elements, we discuss each of these six forms of particularism in the sections that follow.

Universalism in Cuisine and Service. There are some (almost) universal elements of these celebrations. Survey data reflect nearly universal participation, with 93.3 percent of the first 1988 sample and 98.3 percent of the second reporting that they celebrate the holiday. Turkey is featured in all of the feasts recorded in the participant-observation data, including the boyfriend and girlfriend who prepared frozen TV dinners for themselves while studying. Survey data from 1984 indicate that 91 percent of households usually serve turkey as the entrée. In this regard, "all" are the same.

Particularism Reflected in Little Traditions. Beyond certain focal points, the details of the meals reflect differences regarded as traditions by particular families. What is conceptually important about these little traditions is the way they are embedded in universalistic ideology, as is evident in the following excerpts from the participant-observation fieldnotes of Daniel Ford (wm, early twenties), Rosa Quinto (hf, early twenties), and Karen Celestino (wf, early twenties):

> D: Our meal consisted of the traditional smoked turkey done on the grill along with ham, potatoes, corn, cranberry sauce, and pastries and pumpkin pie.
>
> R: The food served was the traditional Thanksgiving meal. It consisted of cranberry, sweet potatoes cooked in pineapple juice, and homemade biscuits. The turkey, which was basted, was very big; it weighed about 23 pounds, and, of course, the stuffing was plenty for all.
>
> K: Thanksgiving dinner is very traditional at our house, that is, there is hardly any deviation from the original menu. Always turkey with gravy, stuffing, green beans with french-fried onions, mashed potatoes, yams, pistachio fluff, homemade bread, butter, cranberry sauce, soft drinks, water, and wine. . . . The cranberry sauce served was Ocean Spray from a can. . . . Desserts consist of apple crisp, chocolate-chip cookies, pecan pie, and nut bars.

In addition to smoked turkey, sweet potatoes with pineapple juice, and pistachio fluff, other "traditional" inclusions mentioned were the sweet-potato pie, the Jell-O salad, the sweet potatoes with marshmallows and pecans, the blackberry salad, Grandma's homemade noodles, and the fruit salad with whipped cream. The definite article linguistically marks the definitive ritual article. When planning their celebration, one woman explained to her brother-in-law (wm, midthirties) that this year they would not have a "real" Thanksgiving. When further queried, she said, "We won't be having the broccoli casserole." Tara Wardley (wf, midtwenties) and her stepfather decided that he must make another trip to the store for crushed pineapple because he had previously purchased chunk pineapple. The lime Jell-O dish Tara was preparing is "always" made with crushed pineapple. She and her father did not want to deviate from that pattern while her mother was at work.

In each of these foods, tradition and continuity are celebrated, but in ways that are particular to certain families. Through the consumption of foods regarded as traditional, participants partake of their collective past (Cohen and Coffin 1987).

Ideology of Stability and Historically Particular Praxis. Celebrants also make assumptions about the timeless character of larger national traditions and the little traditions of families. In the United States, universalism at Thanksgiving is connected to a timeless sense of patriotic nationalism and unification (Caplow and Williamson 1980). Contemporary Americans tend to believe that the holiday was invented by the Pilgrims in 1621 without any historical precedent in their native lands of Holland or England. This nationalistic myth persists despite alternative historical sources for Thanksgiving Day in ancient holidays such as the Hebrew celebration of Sukkoth, the Feast of the Tabernacles; Greek festivals honoring Demeter, the goddess of harvests and grain; the Roman festival of Cerealia held in honor of Ceres, the goddess of grain; the midautumn and harvest festivals in the Orient; and even Native American tribes' harvest festivals, such as the Vikita ceremony of the Tohono O'Odham (Hayden [1937] 1987). The American meaning of Thanksgiving Day is thought to be so universal that, during World War II, a celebration for U.S. troops was held in Westminster Abbey (Hatch 1978).

The timelessness of traditions extends to emic understandings of family little traditions. Fieldnotes from

participant observation and depth interviews frequently refer to things that a family "always" did or does. While pointing out emically meaningful patterns, this material likely also indicates some mythic distortion of memory over time as well as a counterpoint to the fascination with change and newness in contemporary consumer culture (Campbell 1987). Reference to "always" looks no further back than the grandparent's generation. This explains how Thanksgiving Day praxis may change relatively rapidly through time, a kind of moving average of central themes and differentially shared (class, regional) elaborations, while being protected by an ideology that glosses the celebration as stable. This ideology of stability deflects questioning about actual changes in Thanksgiving Day consumption.

Yet, several changes have occurred in American Thanksgiving Day celebrations in their more than 350-year history. Few households now serve mince pie, a onetime tradition. The focus on hunting and wild game is reduced (Ramsey 1979); the emphasis on the bounty of agriculture has increased. Churchgoing is now rare. Prayer persists for some but is combined or replaced with a more secular meal-opening toast for many. The home-centered, active family games that were once prevalent (Applebaum 1984) are often replaced by the passive spectacle of professional sports and nationally broadcast parades hosted by department stores and filled with commercial floats. Hosting by the grandparent's household is giving way to hosting by the middle generation. And, most directly important for an understanding of contemporary consumer culture, a profusion of branded products rather than foods produced by the household are consumed. Through taken-for-granted acceptance of changes, participants perceive universalism in their celebrations when in fact the praxis of their feasting is particular to contemporary times and household groups.

Particularism Reflected in Regional Differences. Other particularistic elements reflect regional differences, especially in the stuffing. One family with eastern roots always has oyster stuffing, while a southern family has cornbread stuffing, evoking the New World crop adopted from Native American agriculture (Tannahill 1988). A Western family with a Greek heritage includes pine nuts in their stuffing. A Korean-American family substitutes rice. Metonymically the turkey represents a universalistic shell filled with ethnic and regional differences in contents. All are Americans on the surface; participants nonetheless differ in their core heritages and regional loyalties. If decreasingly evident, they are still present. Such regionalism is rooted in the history of the holiday, more firmly anchored in New England than in the South (Greninger 1979).

Particularism Reflected in Class Differences. Also represented in the praxis of Thanksgiving Day are American class divisions. These are vividly illustrated in participant-observation fieldnotes and photographs alongside comments that "we do what everyone does." Upper-middle- and upper-class feasts are more formal in etiquette as shown in the table setting and food service. Greater attention to sets of matching objects such as china and silver eating utensils establishes a form of universalism across participants at the feast. However, there is simultaneously greater individualism as opposed to collectivism in the food service. Color and pattern coordination of dishes, beverage containers, napkins, tablecloths, and floral centerpieces is evident. Sometimes there are placecards. Upper-class feasts feature food products more carefully separated from their branded packaging; butter is molded into shapes and served individually on china bread plates with silver butter knives.

In lower-middle-class families, we find less formal table settings and food service, with fewer utensils per person and increasing informality of beverage service. The aesthetic becomes more cluttered, with mixtures of sets of dishes and glassware providing a less universalistic visual portrait. Some beverages are served in cans. Paper napkins appear on colorful tablecloths. Increasing collectivism is evident in the bowls of Jell-O salad rather than individual molds on individual matching china salad plates found in higher class families. As we move even further down the social class hierarchy, foods are more likely to be served buffet style from their cooking pots, rather than transferred to serving platters placed on a sideboard. In some cases, celebrants do not all sit down together but rotate places at a table that is too small to accommodate all simultaneously.

Butter or margarine service is one of the most consistent class markers. At one pole are decoratively molded individual pats of butter served on individual matched china bread-and-butter plates. At an intermediate point, we see butter passed on a central china plate, then carved and transferred by individuals to their own bread and butter plates. Further down the hierarchy, a stick of butter or margarine on a decoratively laid out buffet is transferred by individuals to the edges of their china dinner plates. At the opposite pole, there is a plastic tub of margarine, a collective knife laid across its perimeter. From the tub, individuals transfer the margarine onto the foods on their plates. Thus, although all are together, feasts held by members of different classes reflect different levels of collectivism and individualism, a form of particularism, in the service and selection of foods.

Particularism Reflected in Age Segregation. Another form of particularism enacted within the household on this day is age segregation. Both before and after the meal, age-segregated groups of participants form on the basis of work obligations or play interests of each age group. Groups of children may play together, while teenagers help or participate in Ping-Pong tournaments in blended families. The meal, however, brings

age groups together. It temporarily homogenizes gender and age distinctions that have organized the day's interactions up to this point. Participants usually eat at the same table, a pattern reported by 65 percent of the survey respondents. In other cases, all may eat at the same time; but children, or those so regarded for the day (as with some unmarried teenage and young adults), may sit separately. This pattern was reported by 38 percent of survey respondents attending celebrations with children. Haley Rouse (wf, early twenties) remarked about her photographs:

> The dining room table wasn't big enough for all 19 of us, so the hostess divided us up into the "adults" table and the "children's" table. All of the seats at the adult table had wine glasses and only three seats at the child's table did.

These "children" ranged in age from high school students to young adults.

One woman recalled sitting at the kids' table at her mother's sister's house in Minnesota. She enjoyed this "because you didn't get yelled at for not having any manners." She ate only her two favorite foods, rolls and whipped Jell-O, her family's little tradition. However, a depth-interview informant, Carl, described a different perspective to Jeff on the experience of eating at the kids' table:

> C: Well, the kids always got the paper plates and normal silverware because we were slobs. The adults always used the nice china and the silver. I used to think that using the china was a dream come true. I remember I couldn't wait to get old enough to sit in the adult room and use all of the good silverware and dishes. But that time never came.
>
> J: What do you mean?
>
> C: Well, my parents got divorced and everyone just drifted apart.

Although the meaning of sitting at the kids' table is different for these two people, they reflect two commonalities pervading childhood recollections in depth interviews. The first common element in these recollections is a fond reconstruction of the past, characteristic of nostalgia (Davis 1979); the second is the recollection of age segregation at a feast ostensibly celebrating togetherness.

Particularism Reflected in Gender Segregation. The most widespread and vivid segregation during this universal feast of togetherness is based on gender. Although regarded as a day of rest by men, in most households Thanksgiving Day is a day of both ritual and physical labor for women. Frequently, food shopping and meal preparation begin several days prior to the feast, culminating on Thanksgiving Day with women attending to last-minute details. On the feast day women are bound closely to the kitchen by basting and other chores. Almost half (42.5 percent) of women surveyed said their major Thanksgiving Day activity is cooking for others, while less than one-quarter (23.9 percent) of men so indicated ($\chi^2 = 8.357$, $df = 1$, $p = .003$). Further, a third (30.5 percent) of women considered it to be a hurried day, while only one-sixth (17.85 percent) of men considered it to be so.

Women students who were principal cooks (often for the first time) and field-workers (also for the first time) were exhausted at day's end. Tara Wardley's journal is filled with such feelings:

> This assignment required a great deal of work. . . . My mother had to work Thanksgiving morning, so I knew that I would have to prepare a great deal of the food. . . . I felt a little special. This dinner was going to be prepared mostly by me and Dad. I miss Mom not being here, but we do things so differently that it's best that both of us are not in the kitchen at the same time. I'm a perfectionist and Mom tries to get things done as fast and simple as possible. . . . I found myself paying very close attention to what was being said in a way that I had not listened before. . . . I noticed how quiet my father is while he is doing something and how my brothers seldom do anything in the way of "women's work." I found that my mother really enjoys her role of preparing the food during Thanksgiving. She felt left out and a little lost when there was nothing for her to do in the kitchen. She complains every Thanksgiving about all the hard work and that she wishes she could get some help. When the responsibility was taken off her shoulders, she did not know how to handle herself. . . . By the end of our meal I was completely exhausted and full of thoughts and ideas. . . . I wish I could be like my brothers. They don't have a care in the world today. They haven't done a thing all day long and I resent that. If they were in the kitchen they would be in the way, but why does it have to be that way? Why can't I be the one laying on the couch instead of in the kitchen and doing a project. . . . I can't wait for this day to be over. I want to capture every event and in trying to cook and do this project, I am wearing myself out.

When the meal is finally served, the fact that the mom will not sit down but instead continues working to insure that all are served is testimony to the day not being a workfree holiday for everyone. That the hostess's continued work goes unnoticed in fieldnotes even when present in photographs highlights the widely shared expectation of such service. The fact that the hostess is frequently the last to sit down enacts her conventional role as family caretaker and caterer, as in remarks made by Paula Lefkowitz (wf, midtwenties) to Horatio Lewis (wm, midtwenties):

> My [Polish] grandma would always try to serve the food while everyone else was eating. We would all tell her to sit down, but she never seemed to listen.

Men's role at most feasts is to be served or, in some households, to "help" but not assume primary responsibility for planning, preparing, and presenting the feast. In many households, men's help is in the form of symbolic labor, such as lifting the cooked turkey from the

oven or carving it. Enacting a stereotyped hunter-gatherer gender distinction unsupported by the ethnographic record (Leibowitz 1986), in typical Thanksgiving feasts the man presents the "hunted" bird (actually purchased in a supermarket after being raised in a feed pen), while the woman presents the gathered berries (from a can) and cultivated vegetables (also purchased in the supermarket). Seldom were men shown preparing side dishes or working on dishes other than the focal point of the meal, namely turkey and stuffing. Their symbolic labor, especially the carving, is a public event that is often watched by an audience and recorded in ordinary snapshots. Unlike the days of hidden labor that women put into ironing tablecloths, polishing silver, and molding gelatin salads, men's symbolic labor is public, focal, and worthy of historical documentation in photographs, a finding that parallels those concerning men's typical involvement in childcare (Hochchiel 1989). Differences between men's and women's labor in producing the feast event highlight gender distinctions that operate the rest of the year. However, on this one day, women's domestic labor, taken for granted most of the time, is celebrated.

Thanksgiving Day gender segregation occurs in households organized around sharp gender lines as well as in those that are typically more creative about the division of labor. Cleaning up after the feast is usually either women's work (as reported by 44 percent of the survey respondents) or, like other postmeal activities, performed by a mixed-gender group (53.1 percent). When a group of students got together, Nancy Spring (wf, early twenties) prepared the food and cleaned up after cooking for her roommate and her roommate's boyfriend. She was privately bitter by day's end:

> I was a little frustrated on Thanksgiving because I had to do everything. My roommate couldn't cook so I had to do it all. . . . No one was helping me. . . . I didn't have much time to socialize with the others since I was cooking. . . . The pictures showed how tired and busy I was. They also showed how little the others participated in the preparation.

Both gender and age segregation diminish after the incorporating ritual meal, because, when successful, the meal homogenizes such distinctions in a moment of universal connection or *communitas* (Turner 1969). After the meal women are freer to watch a televised football game with men despite its usual association with males (Arens 1981). Women may also nap on the sofa, play games that underscore group cohesion (even highly competitive games of Monopoly), take a walk with others, or join any conversation. Similarly, men are freer to assist in cleanup than in preparation. Thus, the Thanksgiving Day feast both enacts and resolves gender distinctions.

In summary, Thanksgiving Day ideology affirms universalism while praxis reflects, maintains, and constructs pervasive social differences. From an etic perspective, Thanksgiving Day celebrates both the universalistic ideology of American society, as well as its particularistic divisions by time period, family, region, class, gender, and age. Thanksgiving Day celebrations use consumption to replicate relatively enduring elements of social structure by constructing several varieties of behavioral particularism within a prevailing ideology of universality. Encapsulation of the celebration in family groups deflects questions about the paradoxical coexistence of universalistic consciousness and particularistic praxis.

Negotiating the Values of Cleanliness, Not Wasting, and Hard Work

In preparing, consuming, and cleaning up from the Thanksgiving dinner, several important cultural values traceable to Puritan, if not Pilgrim, ancestors are made visible. Thanksgiving Day enacts values placed on cleanliness, frugality, and hard work.

Cleanliness is enacted through washing and polishing the serving utensils and dishes employed during the meal. Although they do not claim to enjoy cleaning the dishes, only 7.8 percent of survey respondents strongly agreed with the statement, "To make things easier for everybody, it seems fine to me to use paper plates on Thanksgiving." Rather than simplify the burden by using paper plates, servers are shown in photographs using a great many dishes in the preparation, service, and consumption of the meal. Even the gold-rimmed china and the delicate crystal that "must be" washed by hand are used in quantity. In some households, seldom-used dishes and silver are washed and polished in the days before the holiday. Linens may be washed and specially ironed. Discussions of when and how much cleaning to do negotiate the importance of this value in the household.

Similarly, the feast and its surrounding events enact a belief in the value of hard work. Although a few celebrants say it is easier to order from a caterer, and many elderly people do go out to restaurants, only 1.8 percent of survey respondents indicated they prefer to spend their Thanksgiving Day at a restaurant. A few informants complained that a catered meal failed to provide the appropriate Thanksgiving Day spirit. Through the ritual labor of preparing the meal at home, the beliefs that hard work pays off and cleanliness is next to godliness are enacted (Tannahill 1988). It is the unpaid domestic cooking and cleaning usually associated with women rather than professional cooking at restaurants associated with men (Mennell 1985) that is honored.

After working hard to prepare so much food, women puzzle over how and where to store the leftovers. Unlike potlatch harvest rituals among Native Americans of the Northwest Coast in which material surplus is ritually destroyed (Codere 1950), the Thanksgiving Day surplus is encased in plastic wrap, foil, or Tupperware containers to be used later, as shown in the following excerpt

from notes about the Bernini/Feldman households' feast:

> After everyone was finished eating, the women began the thankless task of putting up the leftovers. The appetizers were left out in case someone got hungry later and needed something to niggle on. The soup was all gone because it was tasty. The bread was wrapped up in cellophane along with the side dishes. The roast beef, turkey, and stuffing were placed in a Tupperware-type container (separately) and refrigerated for later consumption. . . . The after-meal cleanup was handled by all the ladies, but the Bernini's daughter, Chloe, did most of the work.

In many households, even the turkey carcass is saved for soup. Through the careful wrapping of the leftover food, the early-American belief in frugality is dramatized. It is curious that the encasing of leftovers in plastic is done near a waste can filled with packaging from the purchased food products. Packaging waste is tolerated, while wasting food is not. What is saved are the remnants of the sacred "labor of love" and what is thrown away (cans, bottles, etc.) represents waste from profane commercial concerns (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989).

Negotiating the Role of Produce and Branded Food Products

Emic descriptions of Thanksgiving Day frequently refer to food dishes that are "made from scratch" or "homemade." This is an interesting etymological[10] reference to scratching the soil to plant a seed to grow food that is then transformed into edible dishes at home. This linguistic expression in fieldnotes is accompanied by photographs showing women basting Butterball turkeys, adding diced celery to Pepperidge Farm bread cubes to make stuffing, stirring cans of Swanson chicken broth into Butterball turkey drippings to make gravy, gently removing Ocean Spray cranberry sauce from the can, stirring ice cubes with Jello powder to dissolve it and then adding Dole canned pineapple chunks, and filling Pet-Ritz frozen pie crusts with Libby canned pumpkin that will later be topped with Kool Whip dessert topping. These practices raise a dilemma posed by contemporary consumer culture: How do mass-produced, commercially processed and delivered food products come to serve a ritual purpose? How is it that women are perceived to be doing all of the cooking when in fact they are collaborating with a predominantly male-managed manufacturing process in this endeavor? Our final theme then, concerns the processes through which a celebration of material plenty and agrarian cultural roots is created using produce and branded food products purchased in urban supermarkets.

[10]Etymological: Historical derivation or origin of a word.

Quintessential Foods. One solution to the problem of sacralizing commercial products is the use of quintessential holiday foods (Belk et al. 1989) that are so connected with the holiday that they come to represent it. Turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, and pie are such essential ingredients and universal symbols of the tradition of Thanksgiving (Appelbaum 1984) that some refer to the holiday as "turkey day." However, mincemeat pie is no longer commonly served, evidence that even quintessential elements of tradition are negotiated over time.

Temporal Separation. Temporal separation marks ritual foods by distinguishing them from everyday ones, as in Rosemary Dunleavey's notes from her sister's boyfriend's fictive kin's celebration:

> Jake (wm, seven): "What is this?" (He says as he points to a yam.)
> Danielle, Jake's aunt (wf, thirties): "That's a potato."
> Jake: "Why is it this color?"
> Ma, Jake's grandmother (wf, sixties): "Because it's a special kind of potato. It's a sweet potato."
> Jake: "Well, I don't like sweet potatoes."
> Danielle: "You liked them last year, Jake."
> I find something rather interesting in the above conversation about sweet potatoes. If sweet potatoes are so special, as Ma said, then why did they only eat them once a year? Is that what makes them so special?

For most households, roast turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, and perhaps butter are rarely consumed at times other than Thanksgiving or Christmas. Turkey is made particular to the holiday in part by temporal anomaly. Interestingly, turkey was less frequently incorporated into the Thanksgiving Days of previous times when foods used were actually homegrown or hunted, as indicated in a depth interview with Clarence, an 81-year-old man:

> C: All the food was fresh. We grew up on a farm so everything we ate came from our farm. We didn't raise turkeys so we either had chicken or a roast. The pies were homemade and the vegetables were fresh.

As reliance on purchased food products has increased, turkey produced on industrial farms (Sherpell 1986) has become more "traditional," not because of its historical lineage, which also includes both deer and chicken pie (Appelbaum 1984; Hechtlinger 1977), but because of its temporal separation.

Packaging. The transformation involved in cooking and serving branded products purchased in supermarkets is key to the creation of a ritual with unique meaning for participants. Decommodification and singularization (Kopytoff 1986) or sacralization (Belk et al. 1989) of commodities is required for them to serve expressive ritual purposes (Cheal 1989). The transformation process begins by discarding packaging materials and price tags. The price tag, but not the label showing quaint vineyard scenes, is scraped off wine

bottles. Turkeys, unlike shirts or jeans, are not permitted to bear external brand marks (Sherry 1986). Hence, turkey wrappers are disposed of and cranberry sauce is removed from the can. Pie boxes may be kept backstage or put in the garbage. Relish trays are constructed from the contents of an array of bottles and cans, none of which are displayed on the table in middle-class homes. For some products, the transformation process ends here.

Special Ingredients. For other products, the transformation process continues. Recipes combine special ingredients to transform and decommodify purchased products. Through recipes, tubers, turkeys, and grains become "homemade" in the emic sense, although they are not literally produced by scratching the soil to plant a seed. Special ingredients (purchased in a supermarket) are added to further particularize branded products (also purchased). Turkeys are basted with canned pineapple juice, frozen orange juice, or canned chicken broth. Regional markers are added to stuffing mix, such as oysters or chestnuts, as are other ingredients such as mushrooms or wine. In fact, stuffing, as well as particular kinds of basting juice and procedures, is the most common method of decommodifying the main course. The additions sacralize the purchased commodity and transform it into a little family tradition. As is also true of the pies, particularized contents are used to fill a universal container. This transmutation brings commercialization under control by the firm hand of tradition exercised by the female guardians of family values (Greer 1970).

Jell-O–brand gelatin is appropriate to the Thanksgiving feast because of its ability to deliver several messages. Oddly, it is not disguised but is referred to by its brand name. It supplants the homemade puddings typically prepared for early-American Thanksgiving Days (Appelbaum 1984; Hechtlinger 1977). Jell-O is loaded with particularizing additions: black-cherry Jell-O with Bing cherries in one family, lime Jell-O with pineapple and miniature marshmallows in another. Then it is molded into a special form and, like the turkey and the pies, is offered as a whole from which each person may partake. Ordinarily, Jell-O is regarded as proper for children or for those with gastrointestinal illness but not for adult dinner parties. At Thanksgiving, the congealed mass represents both the transmutation of a mass-produced consumer product into an element of tradition and the congealing of family differences into a bounded, molded whole.

Root vegetables such as tubers that are inexpensive unbranded bulk staples provide a conventional message about the common agrarian roots of America. They celebrate humble origins and reflect working-class eating patterns (Mennell 1985; Salaman 1949). They are less commodified at the point of purchase than are branded food products but are nonetheless singularized with special ingredients. These modifications usually use other staple ingredients such as butter, eggs, milk, and sugar that load the food product with meaning as well as additional calories. Miniature marshmallows load yams in a way that is equivalent to whipped cream on pumpkin pie. The omnipresent addition of milk and egg products echoes the message of this as a celebration of (mother) earth's bounty (Myers 1972).

Butter or margarine is a special ingredient added to almost every dish. Noteworthy is the frequent use of butter rather than the margarine used in everyday dinners. Butter increases the richness (both in dollar value and cholesterol) of the Thanksgiving Day meal. Instead of resulting from the more recent health concerns about cholesterol, margarine's everyday popularity over butter can be traced to branding, advertising, and the distribution management skills of margarine manufacturers. Butter, traditionally produced at local dairies, remains a product category with only one national brand (Consumer Reports 1989). Butter is "natural," unlike margarine, and recalls the country's agrarian roots. Frequent use of butter on this day delivers a message about the triumph of nature over commerce. Using butter also proves the family's power over the commodification and homogeneity represented by branding, at least within the ritual context.

The addition of special ingredients to branded food products implies that a cultural process besides sacralization is occurring. As part of the ritual, the preparation of foods brings some aspect of life firmly under control. Nationally branded food products have the capacity to deliver the same uniform product to all, protecting consumers from seasonal fluctuations in availability (Mennell 1985). But they also have the capacity to obliterate individual difference and familial uniqueness. By co-opting mass-produced branded products in creating a ritual meal, the food preparer proves familial values can triumph over the powerful homogenizing influences of consumer culture.

The meanings associated with noncommodified domestic culture (Kopytoff 1986; McCracken 1988) rather than commercialized mass culture prevail on this day. Having negotiated and proven values that are invisible most of the time, Thanksgiving ritual then permits the service of dessert to be bound by fewer strictures than the earlier service of the relish tray and main course. By the time dessert is served, familial values have been proven and solidified such that the appearance of Kool Whip or Redi-Whip in its branded packaging is not a threat to the ritual message.

Service. Serving the meal on special dishes is another solution used to convert processed food products into ritual foods. So served, the food products partake of the meanings congealed in the serving dishes and flatware inherited from family ancestors (McCracken 1988). This traditionalizes foods, even those purchased in the supermarket. For example, most people rarely consume cranberry sauce, which lacks a referent in the

natural everyday world of most participants. (Who knows what a cranberry bog is, where they are, and the type of plant on which cranberries grow?) Because of this, jellied cranberry sauce can be served with can ridges intact, as if it were naturally made that way. Served on silver or crystal dishes rather than directly from the can, it is reclaimed from the world of manufactures and particularized. Served whole and intact, jellied cranberry sauce resonates with the whole bird, whole pies, and molded gelatin from which all partake and metonymically rejoices in the ideal, intact family.

Reappropriation. Why do people both use manufacturers and work so hard to disguise them? The answer lies in the way food preparation enables the household to symbolically reclaim the production process taken over by manufacturers in the historical separation of production from consumption (Aries 1962; Dholakia 1987; Durkheim [1893] 1933; Ewen and Ewen 1982; Forty 1986). Lara Larson (wf, midtwenties) was instructed by her mother, Jan, in the use of frozen pie crusts:

> After lunch we returned home to make pies. She took out the Oranhoe pie shell and placed it into a country pie plate. Then she began to take another pie shell and cut it into slices, at the same time placing them over the stamped-out shell. She told me a story about the shell procedure. It went like so:
>
> J: "So I made the pie crust . . . (using) . . . the frozen pie crust, and, when Nana [my grandmother—her mother] saw the pie crust, she said, 'Is that fresh or is it frozen?' I said, 'What do you think? This is a real pie crust. What are you talking about?' and she said, 'Oh, no, I can always tell the difference.' "
>
> L: "So now you're covering up the part of the pie shell that you can tell is already premade, and covering it up with a piece of the pie crust that makes it look like it isn't premade. Why do you do this every year?"
>
> J: "The reason I do this is because they [Oranhoe] make as good a pie shell as anybody can, and I want to make a bigger pie than the shell makes. So I make a bigger pie shell by adding to the edges. But why should I make the pie crust when Oranhoe can and I'm working. They're just sitting around making pie crusts for me to go right out and buy."
>
> L: "How long have you been, or has Oranhoe been, making pies?"
>
> J: "Since I went to work, Oranhoe has been making the shells. I've been making pies for Thanksgiving for 25 or 27 years. We always shared pie making. Mimi [my father's mother] made D.D.A.P. [deep dish apple pie]. I always made pecan and chocolate for you kids."
>
> L: "We better get this done before Nana comes."
>
> J: "By the time she gets here, it's gonna look so homemade, she's gonna say, 'How did you have time to go to all that trouble?' "

Through elaborate preparations using manufactured food products, families make a claim about the immanent productive potential of the household, a claim often frustrated in an economy where the product of wage labor is usually only indirectly relevant to household needs. The more food dishes prepared, the more tableware to be washed, and the more manufactured products transformed, the more evocative and powerful this message.

CONCLUSIONS

Ethnographic study of Thanksgiving Day celebrations informs our understanding of U.S. consumer behavior in several ways. First, it illustrates how Americans use ritual consumption to construct culture. We have shown how informants vigorously recollect past meanings, negotiate future meanings, and assemble present meanings of family, regionalism, material abundance, gender, and age through Thanksgiving Day consumption rituals to construct a model of social life.

Second, this study explores the linkages and cleavages between consumer ideology on the one hand and consumer practice on the other. Our etic reframing of the varied experiences of universal and particular practices brings into focus the contradictions between emic representations of action and behavior itself. We unpack notions of "always" and "from scratch." We explore the ways people cope with the facts of divorce, separation, and disharmony in the face of an ideal of family togetherness. We assimilate the emic particularism of "forgetting," bad stories, delaying dessert, and not talking much while eating, to the universal.

Third, our study of Thanksgiving Day celebrations contributes to our comprehension of the meanings consumers attach to material surplus and satisfaction. Many consumers associate the satisfaction of basic wants with an ideal of household form, both of which reference ideas of the pooling and redistribution behaviors of agrarian, even preindustrial, households. There is a further association of satisfaction and abundance with an infantile stage of development. The epigenetic center of later holidays celebrating other aspects of materialism, such as the Christmas dialectic of generosity versus retentiveness, and the New Year's dialectic of adult hedonism versus moral restraint, lies in the Thanksgiving Day celebration of basic abundance.

Finally, people actively reappropriate a sense of satisfaction from manufactures through decommodifying actions. Rather than reconstruct the agrarian traditions celebrated, ritual preparers co-opt manufactured products to deliver the message of familial solidarity and productive potentiality. Most important for consumer research, the study of Thanksgiving Day assists us in unraveling the notion of "tradition" and the role of manufactured products vis-à-vis homemade ones from both emic and etic perspectives. We show how branded food products are reclaimed from the world of commodities and reassembled into little traditions through varying household actions. But these processes are not limited to Thanksgiving Day. Through such transformation processes, households define their immanent

productive power, their ability to produce abundance for their members. Through the consumption rituals of Thanksgiving Day, households make visible their values and deliver a cultural message about the meaning of abundance.

[*Received January 1990. Revised September 1990.*]

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