

Interview with Marcia Pelchat

[RB] You mention in your paper that alternating access and then restriction may contribute to those who desire non-palatable foods (food addiction in humans); does this explain the desirability for exclusive foods, such as caviar, truffles, etc.?

[MP] Of course there are huge 'top-down', cognitive-cultural influences on food desirability, so making things expensive or exclusive makes people like them more. Yes, I think that, in part, that could be part of the desirability of these foods, as well.

[RB] So, do those factors over-ride biological functions? What I'm looking for here is the tension between culture and biology. So we have this whole other gamut of food, such as natto and lutefisk, Casu Marzu, Alaskan stinkheads and balut – weird foods – why do people do it?

[MP] They are also associated with your family, home and childhood.

[RB] But you really have to overcome a huge disgust barrier in order to get there though...

[MP] My father is a fan of stinky cheeses. I still find the smell of them to be horrendous. I was willing to try anything once, so I did try these cheeses. ... [Rambled on into an anecdote].

[RB] So, are we wired for novelty? You've spent quite a lot of time researching menu fatigue...are we designed in such a way as to need to explore and to try new things?

[MP] Almost everybody has some desire for novelty. There are some extremely restrictive eaters who, for example, might only eat five different foods. I've always found those people fascinating. [...anecdotal...]

[RB] It does seem as though breakfast is the least varied of the meals in terms of repertoire, is that universal?

That's a very interesting question and I would like to know the answer to that...so, some people are more neophobic than others. So, there are some people who travel to explore new things, and there are other people who travel and bring their flavours of home with them.