Ethical Dilemmas in Studying Family Consumption

Introduction

There is a growing interest amongst marketing scholars in studying family consumption and identity through qualitative research approach. Interpretive family consumer researchers have contributed to our understanding of how family relationships and identities are created, shaped, and transformed through consumption of market related goods and services (Epp and Price, 2008; Cappellini and Parsons, 2012). Despite increased attention to this area, the conversation about the ethical issues arising from doing research on family consumption remains limited. Since studying families involve entering an intimate area of participants' lives (McGraw *et al*., 2000), the task may be replete with ethical tensions and issues (Etherington, 2007; Notko *et al*., 2013).

In line with calls to incorporate greater reflexivity in interpretive consumer research (Thompson, 2002; Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton, 2009; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008), this paper aims to contribute to the methodological discourses in studying family consumption in two ways. First, we provide insight into the types of ethical challenges researchers may face when studying family consumption. Second, we offer three strategies on how scholars can improve reflexivity and deal with ethical issues arising in the field. We introduce the concept of micro-ethics in family consumption research to provide a tool for researchers to address reflexivity. According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), micro-ethics is a process of reflexive thinking to address "ethically charged moments" – what we regard as ethical dilemmas – while in the field (p.262). We provide a reflexive account of five ethical dilemmas we experienced in two research studies conducted on family food consumption. We call these: display, positioning, emotional, practical and consent dilemmas. By illustrating these dilemmas and ways of addressing them, we show how to do micro-ethics (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Etherington, 2007) in family consumption research.

Our guiding research questions at the core of the study are therefore: What are the types of tensions, dilemmas and challenges researchers face when researching family consumption? How do researchers deal with these dilemmas? We chose two research projects we were independently involved in to build on our experiences and reflexive thinking. Both of the projects focused on different aspects of family food consumption. Project 1 adopted interviews to study family morning routines during breakfast, while project 2 adopted participant observations to study creation of dinner routines in new families. We identified ethical issues arising from both our projects separately, then combined and classified them together. While we do not claim that these dilemmas arise only within interpretive family consumption research, we argue that it is relevant to investigate how they manifest in this context to improve reflexive thinking within this scholarship. Since qualitative research involves the researcher as instruments of data generation (Ruby, 2000), reflections on part of the researcher's role, function and challenges can aid in administering a more critical approach towards understanding the context in which knowledge is produced (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

The paper will be organised as follows. We begin by providing a brief literature on micro-ethics and reflexivity, and our approach to reflexivity in practice. We then provide an outline of our two research projects on family meals. Our findings illustrate the five types of ethical dilemmas encountered in the field. The last section discusses how we overcame these issues, offering practical solutions.

From Ethics to Reflexivity

Borrowing the term from bioethics, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) adapt the concept of micro-ethics to describe the everyday ethical issues arising in qualitative research. Micro-ethics comprises pivotal day-to-day decisions on ethical issues that develop while in the field, "ethically important moments" or dilemmas the researcher is likely to encounter (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, p.261). Micro-ethics is different from procedural ethics, which is understood as the preliminary work done to comply with the requirements of the research ethics committee (Rossman and Rallis, 2010; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). However, micro-ethics is not prescriptive, as it requires the researcher to deal with the mundane, yet relevant ethical issues experienced in the field. When carrying out qualitative family research, we are in a particularly close interaction with participants in their private life worlds (Notko *et al.*, 2013). Family researchers may encounter unpredictable yet important ethical moments that require their attention (McGraw *et al.*, 2000; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). In order to address these moments, we need to adopt a reflexive way of thinking (Etherington, 2007).

Reflexivity is not a new concept. Marketing literature has engaged with the concept of reflexivity, from categorising the epistemological complexity of reflexive thinking (Joy *et al.* 2006) to exploring possible reflexivities according to ontology and power (Bettany and Woodruffe-Barton, 2009). Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) for example, discuss how reflexivity on the role of the researcher can improve the research process. Takhar-Lail and Chitakunye (2015) discuss how sharing multi-person reflexive experiences can develop deep insights. Similarly, Jafari *et al.* (2013) and Downey *et al.* (2007) reflexively explore researcher emotions in studying vulnerable consumers and argue that the context may also affect the researcher. Our paper contributes to this growing literature by focusing on reflexivity in action, as a way to connect ethics with the practice of research. Since interpretive researchers aim to understand consumer's lived experiences through entering their life world (Tadajewski, 2006), we need a reflexive way of thinking to address ethical matters that may arise in context (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). Such aspects of doing research often go unacknowledged in publications. Ethical processes often move as if all ethical issues can be foreseen and managed before fieldwork commence (Rossman and Rallis, 2010). However, as Gummesson (2007) notes, there are fewer reflective accounts on interactions in the field, especially interactions between "our inner self and accumulated experiences" (p.132).

In the following analysis, reflexivity is adopted as a process of self-awareness to highlight the ethical dilemmas we faced as researchers. Borrowing from Finlay (2002), self-awareness is a component of reflexivity as it "involves a shift in our understanding of data collection from something objective that is accomplished through detached scrutiny of 'what I know and how I know it' to recognizing how we actively construct our knowledge" (p.532). Such scrutiny is essential to track the challenges faced while in the field, as well as to account for "the ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process and impinge on the creation of knowledge" (McGraw *et al.*, 2000, p.68). To us, understanding the different variations of micro-ethical dilemmas is a way to enhance the authenticity of a study, demonstrating how the researcher has been immersed in the field (Hogg and Maclaran, 2008). By applying a reflexive process to micro-ethics in family consumption, we aim to use a critical approach into *how* we collected data, paying attention to the ethical decisions we took as well as how our role influenced the narration of our findings. We aimed to understand the nuances of ethical dilemmas we can face while studying family consumption, and if we can map them out. In this reflexive process, both the medium - the research method - and the researcher are identified as "instruments of data generation" (Ruby, 2000, p.152). Thus, in this process we account for our challenges and

impasses, for the data we did not manage to generate, for the expectations we had from the methodology and for how we learned from those tensions.

Overview of Methodologies

We chose two research projects in which we have personally been involved in from the design phase to the final interpretation to build on our reflexive thinking. These two projects focused on different aspects of family food consumption. Thus, we reckoned both studies are likely to raise related ethical issues, which is useful to compare our reflexive experiences. The first project (conducted by Author 2) focused on family morning routines and family display at breakfast. Interviews were conducted with 34 participants to understand, from consumers' accounts, if breakfast was considered a family meal, and if family beliefs and ideologies affected this understanding. The second project (conducted by Author 1) used participant observations to explore how family dinner routines were born, and in turn how collective family identities emerged in newly cohabited couples. The research design consisted of a 6 months participant observation with 13 newly cohabited couples residing in London. The researcher visited each couple once a month to accompany them to grocery shopping trips, stayed at their house to see how they planned and prepared their meals, how they ate, and how leftovers were utilized. As part of the observations, audios of the speech-in-action were recorded, supplemented by interviews and pictures. Both these research projects gained ethical approval from Royal Holloway University of London and were granted voluntary participation.

Since both projects adopted different qualitative research methods to understand aspects of family food consumption, we could analyze and compare the ethical dilemmas arising from both methods. Although we experienced all five dilemmas in both our projects, certain issues manifested more in certain methodologies adopted. The interviews were useful to analyse issues arising from the spoken collective, which is a sense of family retained by the individual. On one hand, these accounts of family explore the meanings individuals imbue in doing family; on the other, they illustrate the idealisations individuals retain of certain family performances. In narrating their roles and expectations, individuals often reflect and update their accounts based on feedback from others and the stories in which they reside (Orbuch, 1997). Interviews were thus more likely to generate display and positioning dilemmas, reflecting how the display work of the researcher affected the families studied. Instead, observations captured the tensions arising from witnessing tacit behavior and unintentional slips (Arnould, 1998). Since observations required the researcher to be immersed in the social world of the participants over time, it can capture various revelatory moments (Saunders *et al*., 2009). As such, the investigation generated more emotional and practical dilemmas, for example when witnessing family disputes in action.

Author 1 and 2 independently identified the ethical issues arising from their own projects. In a second stage, these issues were combined and classified, using, where possible, the support of existing literature. Although our research journeys were independent, following Jafari *et al*. (2013), we reflected on shared tensions in our experiences which fostered our collaborative project. In doing so, we "moved beyond our individual perspectives and attempted to find convergence", in order to contribute to knowledge production (Jafari *et al*., 2013, p.1187). As a result, the analysis identified five ethical dilemmas that are relevant to family consumption research, which we label as: display, positioning, emotional, practical and consent dilemmas. These dilemmas are not mutually exclusive, as they can overlap with one another. For example, as we will show, display can also have repercussions for emotional dilemmas. However, all five of them have moral implications. By organising ethical dilemmas underneath these five

labels, we provide a reflexive tool on how to do micro-ethics in family research. We will now illustrate a reflexive account of each of the five ethical dilemmas, offering theoretical grounding where possible.

Findings: Five types of ethical dilemmas

Display dilemmas

Display dilemmas refer to the display work of the researcher, and to the researcher being on display. Displaying is part of an emotional work that the researcher does to establish empathy, or to look for a common ground with the participants (Abell *et al.*, 2006). This display work starts from the first connection with participants, as it requires a negotiation of what can be shared, but such display can also prolong through time. To unpack the micro-ethics of display, we look into the problematisation of self-identity disclosure.

The researcher's display of her role and identity questions what can be shared and to what extent, problematizing self-disclosure (Pezalla *et al.*, 2012). The vulnerability exposed by the researcher starts with the subjective voice adopted in interpretive research, and it continues in every decision taken about power relations with the participants (Etherington, 2007). In our analysis, both authors decided to be open about their personal life in order to establish friendship and empathy with participants (Oakley, 1981). However, one episode made Author 2 particularly aware about how much she was on display in front of her own participants, to the point of becoming the object of research herself. The author initially contacted a Conservative Catholic movement to source family members for her interviews, but after an initial positive reply, the communication dropped. The spokesperson later clarified that they had screened her private social media profile and connections, and deemed her LGBT acquaintances to be inappropriate. Following this episode, she felt that exposure, like vulnerability, doesn't mean that anything personal goes, as "it has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, nor exposure for its own sake" (Behar, 1996, p. 14). Thus, Author 2 decided not to disclose her own gay background to the families unless it was openly asked, being wary of how she could be 'othered' by some research subjects and of how her identity could be interpreted (Bott, 2010). In concealing her sexual identity, she was therefore faced with dilemmas of if and how to establish friendship and empathy with the families.

Similarly, Author 1 faced display issues but in terms of her display work as a researcher. Since the research was conducted over time where she met the participants over several months, she had to perform her recollections of the participants' experiences. For example, in many instances of observing newly cohabited couples' dinner practices, the researcher witnessed conflicts and arguments over time. Although the conflicts were verbal in the form of bickering, the researcher was aware of the sensitivity of the context which posed challenges for her (Jafari *et al.*, 2013). Such that as time passed, the participants may have forgotten their arguments, but the researcher still had memories and audio recordings of them. Thus, as she stepped out and into the field again (O'Reilly, 2012), following ethical and ethnographic guidelines of natural inquiry (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), she had to conceal her memory of their repeated arguments through time. This posed an ethical and emotional issue for the researcher, as she displays and performs (Finch, 2007) her memory and identity. However, the researcher kept reflexive diaries to develop her reflexive awareness (Finlay, 2002), an aspect which will be discussed later. Display dilemmas were common to both researchers, with differences linked to different methodologies adopted, but they equally pose ethical tensions.

Positioning dilemmas

Positioning refers to how the researcher is perceived by participants, and to the relationships established between researcher and participants. Positioning is influenced by a wide range of personal characteristics, "such as gender, race, affiliation, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, personal experiences, linguistic tradition, beliefs, biases, preferences, theoretical, political and ideological stances, and emotional responses" of the researcher (Berger, 2015, p.21). These characteristics impact participants' willingness to share their data, the relationship formed with the researcher, but also how the researcher constructs and interprets the field (Berger, 2015). Reflecting on the related ethics in practice, we contend that these dilemmas are directly linked to displaying, as the display work of the researcher can condition the trust built with participants and their own display of family identity. When accounting for family practices, participants are involved in two kinds of display: the display of their identity as a member of the family, and the display of family in relation to dominant family discourses (James and Curtis, 2010). By positioning ourselves as family researchers, we triggered in participants the fear of being judged against an ideal family practice. Our positioning thus directly impacted our interaction with participants.

Firstly, we observed how our positioning was affected by how we got in touch with participants. For example, having common acquaintances helped break the ice more quickly, allowing for development of richer data. This first in-person contact with participants is particularly relevant for those methodologies where participants are met only once. Accepting a cup of coffee or complimenting the participant's house helps to break the ice, making respondents more comfortable with a stranger asking about their personal life. However, we noticed how little we recorded what happened at the early stage of our relationship with participants. Often, while still setting up the recorder, participants prompted the researcher with questions about the project, the scope of it, but also about the personal involvement behind it. Unfortunately, this kind of positioning work took place before the recording, therefore it was never considered a context for the interview, nor as a reflexive element to understand interviewees' outcomes. But such personal exchanges could have had direct ramifications for the interview (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Secondly, we realised that the researcher can become an unwilling bearer of a normative gaze, conditioning the interviewees in justifying their own practices. Idealisations of family life occur because being on display as a family, or as a family member, is never neutral, as it implies being judged against family norms and expectations (Heaphy, 2011; Harman and Cappellini, 2015). This is shown by Francesca, a stay at home mother in her 50s, who was introduced by her husband in the project run by Author 2:

> Francesca: My mother-in-law feels inadequate if she cannot feed. Now that she fell sick, she says, "I can't cook for you" as if it was necessary. That's nothing. I don't even wake up in the morning to prepare breakfast, my son wakes up at 6, I can't make it…
> Author 2: Have you ever thought you should?
> Francesca: [pause] No, maybe I try and make up for it in other ways, like spending some time with him in the afternoon, maybe I will prepare him a snack, to have some time with him and chat.

Francesca interlaces her motherhood skills with those of her mother-in-law on the ground of being a good feeder. Despite asserting that always being the feeder is unnecessary, Francesca quickly reverts her narrative to 'the good mother' when asked about not waking up to prepare breakfast. Rather than confirming her lack of interest in preparing breakfast, she enforces her

attention to afternoon snacks, displaying the compensation of what could be interpreted as sloppy behaviour. A prompting question from 'the family researcher' makes her pause and rephrase her experience in terms of what is expected from the feeder in the family. Even if the comment was not meant to evoke in Francesca a sense of duty towards her own son, the lack of intimacy between researcher and researched elicited a fear of being judged. Albeit the shift noticed is minimal, it is still possible to observe how a normative gaze accidentally emerged through interaction. Reflexive self-awareness is important to consider how positioning affects the organisation and the process of the research interaction (Abell *et al.*, 2006).

Reflecting on positioning reveals how different accounts can arise from the different relationships family members have with the researcher. These differences lead to possible discrepancies of meanings between family members. This is the case of Tania, a personal connection of Author 2, who participated with her newly-wed husband Fabio. Fabio did not know the researcher personally, and he described family breakfast as a recent practice they developed together, as a sit-down meal with healthy food. However, Tania has a different view on it:

> Tania: Maybe it's not very nice to say but we have the kind of breakfast I was having before and he just picked it up. We have rusks with jam, a bit of juice and that's it. When I was good, I was also having a fruit but then I let myself go.

According to her, this kind of breakfast is not a habit that generated from them as a family, but rather a routine he adopted from her. To have breakfast together, she had to find a common ground, letting go of the fruit that made her feel a better version of herself. Tania is compelled to begin her account by stating that this is not 'nice to say', but she nevertheless feels comfortable to share her honest opinion of having contaminated his habits. Despite not being an issue of confidentiality, the researcher is facing a discrepancy that can be connected to a different experience of the meal, as well as with the different degree of familiarity participants have with the researcher.

Emotional dilemmas

With emotional dilemmas, we refer to the management of emotional tensions arising both in the researcher and in the researched. One of the key emotional challenges emerged during witnessing family conflicts, which had implications not only for the families themselves, but also for the researcher. In many instances, the families expressed emotions of stress during the arguments, followed by feelings of embarrassment after the conflict. Take the example of Olivia and Alex, where Author 1 witnessed one of their impromptu fights during cooking of the meal in their 3rd month of cohabitation:

[I was at their house for Olivia's individual interview [..] They asked me to stay for dinner, as they were preparing pasta with tomatoes that day. Olivia had work - she therefore runs through the steps with him and then leaves. While he is cooking, Alex talks through his Mom's cooking with me, while also talking through what he is doing [adding what now, why, etc.]. At times he doesn't remember what she said, so he goes ask her for clarification in the living room. At one point, after seasoning the sauce he calls her into the kitchen to 'come have a look'. As she enters, she was shocked with he did].
    Olivia: What are you doing? Why did you do this? Pasta is cooked separately!
    Alex: I don't know ... I wasn't thinking … I was speaking with her [points at the researcher]
    Olivia: Ok, it's fine, it's fine.
    Alex: See, this is why you should make pasta.
    Olivia: But Alex, you know how to make pasta [laughs in disbelief] Ok, take it out. Very bizarre ... like a soup ...
    Alex: I've never cooked pasta with tomato.

> Olivia: What are you saying? [quiet pause] Alex, I'm really shocked with this. I think he was just genuinely distracted [turns to tell me].
> Researcher: I'm sorry if I –
> Both: No, no …
> Alex: You don't need to –

Here, implicit and taken for granted meanings of what is a sauce and how it should be made, and competences of how to make it, becomes explicit in action and is a source of conflict when cooking together. However, such performance of conflict caused a stressful experience for both members as they were themselves in the process of doing their new family and learning about each other's practices. The presence of a third party (the researcher) caused an even more stressful experience, as they were unable to successfully display their new and good relationship (Heaphy, 2011; Finch 2007). They therefore attempted to justify their conflict in front of the researcher to have a rationale for their disrupted display of doing their family script. As Alex explained he had 'never made pasta with tomato before', but the researcher's role and participation in the situation also caused a distraction.

However, in observing conflicts in action, the researcher may personally face emotional challenges too. The emotional tensions researchers face when conducting qualitative research have recently been discussed, especially when they touch upon sensitive topics (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Bahn and Weatherill, 2013). However, majority of studies exploring researcher's emotions were conducted on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Sherry, 2013; Jafari et al., 2013). As family researchers, we enter the intimate worlds of participants to collect data, and often do so through establishing trust and friendship (Edirisingha et al., 2017; Oakley 1981), yet there is less exploration of the emotional dilemmas faced by researchers when we enter the family consumption scape. Although the emotional challenge of doing ethnography was present throughout the whole fieldwork process (gaining trust, prolonging relationship, maintaining access, etc.), one of the key emotional tensions faced was when witnessing family conflicts in action. As an active participant in the moment and in reflecting on ethics in practice, the researcher had to analyze her emotions and display in the situation. For example, when caught in the moment of Olivia and Alex's argument, Author 1 felt a range of emotions - from joy, excitement and discomfort, to guilt. This can be observed in the reflexive note, written directly after the conflict observation:

> I just witnessed a fight between Olivia and Alex! He had gone to call her to come take a look at the pasta meal he was making, as it was her dish. But when she entered the kitchen, she was so shocked about what he did, as he boiled the pasta in the same pan as the sauce. He kept justifying his action by blaming that he was 'distracted'. At first, I didn't think she was serious, and so I tried to laugh it off, but then I managed to keep quiet after realizing they were seriously arguing. So, I let them continue their argument all the while standing there, controlling not to show my excitement. I didn't take any pictures because I think it would've been rude. But I was trying to keep the microphone near them […] I felt bad though… because he was talking to me as I was trying to make conversation.

Such emotions perhaps stemmed from her observation of conflict between this couple for the first time. Being a novice researcher, Author 1 was excited about the prospects of her research, and how this conflict could provide her with rich data. She was goal-oriented, however, she was also uncomfortable and did not know how to act in the situation. For example, she was muddled on which 'role' to perform (Hoffmann, 2007) - should she be a listener and keep quiet while they argue, should she be a friend and help them by laughing it off, should she be a researcher and take pictures because it's very good data, or should she be the fixer and apologize for being the distraction? As she is encountering a sensitive moment of the new family, it is distressing for her as well as she is watching them in stress and does not know how

she 'should' act or react in the situation (Watts, 2008). She must work on her emotion-management (Hochschild, 1979) and be careful on how she displays her emotions and behavior in the moment, which adds to another layer of discomfort.

Practical dilemmas

Practical dilemmas refer to the ethical issues generated when the researcher is asked to take a position on tensions and fights arising within the family studied. Many times, family members would also try to justify their sensibilities about their habits to the researcher, and the researcher experienced practical dilemmas about her role in their family negotiation. Take the example of Ted and Elias, Author 1 witnessed their conflict at the supermarket checkout counter during their 6th month of cohabitation. The situation is described in the field note excerpt below:

[At the checkout counter, Elias starts to bag the items bought then Ted says to him, 'no I'll do it'. They mumble to each other in Hebrew, subtly arguing during check out. Both were trying to exert their opinion over the other, I couldn't hear much. Later, while we were walking to the bus station to go to their home, I asked them 'what was the argument about'].

> Ted: While we were packing? Just about how to organise … First of all, there is a logic of cold and not cold, and then just not to squash the more vulnerable vegetables … so, the things that are cold, like the yoghurt and stuff has to be inside first, we just had different attitudes towards how to be more protective [of the fruits and vegetables]. And it ended up being squashed -
> Elias: No, they were squashed before –
> Ted: I didn't put the cucumber on them.
> Elias: No that's exactly the opposite. I said, 'you need to put them last' [the raspberries], and he said 'no, they're not that light.'
> Ted: I said it didn't need to be in my pack because I didn't want them to squash the tomatoes.
> Elias: You think raspberries can squash tomatoes? [turns to me] You understand how …?
> Ted: [changes his tone] What response is this. It's about how they are in the thing [the bag].
> Elias: Such a 'Shakshuka' [Hebrew word]. Now he realised his mistake, but he won't admit it [teases].

Like many couples, Ted and Elias tried to justify their sensibilities and meanings in storing items using the basic language of science, but also tried to convey it to each other through the researcher's presence. In many instances, other couples have used words like 'see?', 'right?' looking for validation from the researcher to legitimize their practice to each other. At times, one partner would insist on their opinion, calling for the researcher to side with them. Here, the researcher plays a role in asking them to replay their thoughts by questioning, 'what was the argument about?' in order to get a better understanding of their differences, as they would often change their language, communicate in non-verbal language or postpone the fight, when the researcher is present. Therefore, in order to get a better understanding, the researcher asks them to explain their conflicts. In doing so, she has to understand her role as a third party in exaggerating their conflict and negotiation, as they indulge in justifications of their reasoning through her even more.

The researcher's positioning as a third party in witnessing the family negotiations posed a dilemma for her. She understood that her presence influenced the way the participants act and negotiate. However, without interfering and asking them to explain their conflict, she would be caught up in trying to make sense of such conflict observations, as sometimes she was not able to understand such non-verbal communications or change in language. By asking them to explain their conflict/reasoning, she also played a role in forcing them to become more reflexive in narrating and making sense of their own, individual habits. In doing so, the researcher perhaps need to be aware of her role in forcing the previously tacit meanings to become explicit and articulated through justifications. In understanding and reflecting on her

role in the process of negotiating their family practice, the researcher emphasises her epistemological position that she is not trying to capture one true reality or the true identity of the family, but that researching family is itself researching its multiple representations (Denzin, 1997). However, we can try to represent the family's voice from their frame of reference as much as possible (Spiggle, 1994). Through having the audio of speech-in-action and the reflexive diaries, the researcher was able to capture her role and influence in the process of them becoming a family.

Consent dilemmas

Consent dilemmas refer to the tension between procedural ethics and the relationships developing in the field. Consent dilemmas include the implications of sharing intimate details, and the role that the research is allowed to take. Despite the effort to plan the potential ethical issues emerging during data collection, it is almost impossible to anticipate what interactions will happen. Thus, nor the researcher neither the participants know exactly what consenting to the research, or carrying it out, implies in micro-ethical terms. In fact, capturing and writing about conflict within families is an ethical issue, as it can raise concerns about exploitation of their situation for the research gain (Watts, 2008). However, on one hand, it can be argued that participants have consented to take part in the study and understand that they can withdraw at any time. Thus, they still hold the power of deciding when to close off their conflict. On the other hand, we, as researchers, need to be wary that the privilege of being able to witness conflict is built on trust and establishing rapport over time (Edirisingha *et al.*, 2017). When reflecting on the ethics in practice, we need to be mindful of the implications that derive from consent and a lack thereof.

The interactions may also create unexpected meanings for the people involved, with the probability of participants to deem therapeutic value in the research (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2007). Schouten (2014) notes how "ethnotherapy" – a term he uses for combining consumption ethnography with therapy – can reveal people's inner selves and help them understand their problems. For the families too, talking about their differences, idealizations and expectations with a third person present may parallel a therapeutic effect. For example, for the couples in Author 1's study, it could have felt like therapy to talk through what they do and how they do it differently in order to 'let off their steam' in front of the researcher. Perhaps such conflicting moments can allow them both to feel empowered rather than vulnerable (Gilbert, 2000). However, in understanding ethics in practice we need to be wary of assuming the roles we are not trained for, nor able to realize for our participants (Birch and Miller, 2000; Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, what also contributed to our dilemmas were the ethical implications of potential outcomes, arising from in-depth interactions carried out in the intimate sphere (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002).

Dealing with ethical dilemmas

The aim of this paper is to provide an understanding of the types of ethical dilemmas researchers may face when studying family consumption, and to understand how we can deal with such ethical implications arising in the field. In illustrating these dilemmas, we applied a reflexive thinking to micro-ethics, which allowed us to organize ethically important moments in display, positioning, emotional, practical and consent dilemmas. In this section, we will suggest three strategies that researchers can adopt to deal with ethical dilemmas while carrying out fieldwork in family consumption.

Using multi-method, interdisciplinary research design

Despite being the most common method to study family consumption, interviews alone might have some limitations. Firstly, studying family practices through interviews allows to focus on individual meanings referring to a collective practice. However, interviews fail to catch the negotiation of conflicting meanings and how the consolidation of a shared practice comes about. Even if the accounts provided by one's experiences are still valuable, the emergence of the collective is always filtered by subjective experiences and narratives of the self. Albeit in-depth interviews provide a rich understanding of consumers perspectives (Stokes and Bergin, 2006), these perspective are always mediated by intentional displays, failing to observe family in the making. On the other hand, participant observation allows the researcher to witness the negotiation of meanings and practices, exposing them to practical and emotional dilemmas arising from being 'caught in the moment'. Rather than advocating for the superiority of one methodology over the other, we align with other marketing literature that fosters multi-method (Palakshappa and Gordon, 2006) and possibly interdisciplinary research design (Joy *et al.*, 2006). A multi-method research design, including but not limited to interviews and observations, can combine accounts and performances of family practices, providing a detailed view of consumption in family life.

Developing empathy

Following feminist principles of ethics of care, we see empathy as key to address ethical decisions (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002). Empathy has been described as a shared feeling of "connection with others that […] communicates an interest in and care about them" (Watts, 2008, p.9). It has been associated with genuine interaction, active listening, compassion and shared experience (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). One of the ways Author 1 was able to establish empathy with the couples was through sharing experiences. As the researcher herself was in a new relationship during the fieldwork, she understood how it feels to negotiate with a partner in front of somebody. Thus, at times, she could reveal a similar conflict (if any) she has with her partner after they have closed off their arguments, which allowed her to communicate her empathy and reduce power hierarchy in the research (Oakley, 1981; Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). We also found that neutral, active listening was the most efficient way to deal with emotional and practical dilemmas. Researcher being caught in the moment has to learn to display her neutrality and play the role of the unbiased compassionate listener that knows how to remain equanimous during the conflict. In remaining neutral in the situation, the researcher can also be wary of blurring her boundaries. As such, researchers should equip themselves with contact information of therapeutic support sources before commencing fieldwork (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, keeping a log of encounters is a good reflexive practice (Berger, 2015) not only to record participants' behaviors but also for feelings arising from the interaction. This is particularly helpful to document the first interaction with participants, such as during recruitment and pre-interview, which usually go unrecorded but that contribute to the development of empathy.

Including the researcher in the 'we' of the collective family practice

Our research should always imply that the 'we' studied in family research is never only the family, but it shall include the researcher too. We remark that collecting qualitative data demands displaying and being on display, both from the side of the participant as well as of

the researcher. Goffman's (1959) seminal work on the representation of the self can be useful here to understand the interactional display between the researcher and the participant. According to Goffman, every individual is a 'performer' in society. Like stage actors that perform in front of an audience – whenever we come into contact with others, we always try to perform ourselves (our behaviour and identity) in order to 'give off' a certain kind of impression to others. This is because we like to control or influence how others will think and behave towards us. In qualitative methods, the researcher and participant are also performing and displaying versions of who they want to be seen as in order to control what goes on in the interaction, as we like to control the "definition of the situation" (Goffman, 1959, p.4). Thus, display work is necessary in order to establish a smooth interaction, prompting both researchers and participants to 'do' emotional and practical displays appropriate for the situation (Hochschild, 1979). Our analysis highlighted how both the accounts and the performances of family always rely on the researcher, on her private and professional display as well as on her emotional work (Hoschchild, 1979; Kleinmann and Copp, 1993).

Concluding Remarks

By introducing the concept of micro-ethics (Guillemin and Guillam, 2004) into marketing research, this paper looked at the ethics in practice of research on family consumption. Although there is increasing interpretive research on family consumption, there is less acknowledgement of the ethical issues that arise as we enter an intimate sphere of participants' everyday lives (Notko *et al*., 2013). Through our personal experiences in the field, we illustrated five most common types of ethical dilemmas and challenges researchers face when studying family consumption. We label these as: display, positioning, emotional, practical and consent dilemmas. We showed how these were related to display work, vulnerability, role and emotions of the researcher. By illustrating these dilemmas and how we addressed them, we show how to do micro-ethics (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Etherington, 2007) in family consumption research.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, we provide an understanding on the types of ethical challenges common to studying and researching families. Second, we offer three strategies on how researchers can improve reflexivity and deal with ethical issues arising in the field. In doing so, we hope to answer the agenda on reflexivity in marketing and consumer research (Hogg and Maclaran, 2008; Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton, 2009). We agree with Joy *et al.* (2006) that "situated knowledge requires a deeper understanding of consumers, their contexts, their networks of interactions and their different points of view" (p.357). However, we argue that reflexivity is not only a way to pick up what went 'off script' (Goffman, 1959) in researching family, but mostly a way to reproduce the integrity of knowledge produced in inductive research (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008).

We highlight how reflexive analysis of display, emotions, consent, positioning and role of the researcher within family research allow a deeper critical understanding into the context and situations in which knowledge is produced. We showed how practices of reflexivity that concern emotional and practical tensions in the research process (Finlay, 2002) are necessary to study family life and consumption, as well as to grasp the 'we' that is generated in the field. Reflexivity contributes to producing better data on family consumption, but also accounting for the real collective in which this data is produced: the family and the researcher. We recommend researchers working in the field to be mindful of such dilemmas and work through them to gain richer understanding of the family practice. Given the reflexive nature of our insights, we believe such an approach can be applied to a wide range of marketing research,

improving the recognition of underlying assumptions and the criticality of inductive consumer research. Nevertheless, while providing some useful insights, this paper has some limitations. First, we did not evaluate how two methodologies within the same research context can provide different data, but we provided a close-up interpretation of accounts from two projects on family consumption. Thus, rather than offering an evaluation of pros and cons, we focused on challenges, ethical implications and potential solutions.

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