

Iconicity Over Time: Myths, Practices and the Mulino Bianco Family

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Daniela Pirani, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented is entirely of my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniela Pirani". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Abstract

This research aims to improve the understanding of iconicity by looking at how it is emplaced and updated over time, and how consumers make sense of it. Branding literature suggests that iconicity is achieved when brands can convey compelling symbolic narratives, but does not provide an in-depth understanding of how iconicity is sustained. The empirical context is provided by Mulino Bianco, an Italian bakery brand whose iconicity is related to white, nuclear and middle-class family iconography. This research asks how Mulino Bianco updated its iconicity between 1975 and 2017, and how consumers interpret this in relation to their experience of family and domestic practices.

These questions are answered with a novel methodological approach that combines archive research with critical visual analysis and consumers' interviews. First, the socio-historic analysis of archive documents identified four Mulino Bianco's iconic phases and advertising campaigns, subsequently analysed to unpack the visual and material narrative of the brand. Then, these campaigns primed 34 interviews with heterosexual and lesbian consumers, discussing their sense-making of the brand along with family practices.

Empirically, this research showed that, even if the 'family campaign' was interrupted 20 years ago, consumers have a homogenous memory of the ideals of the brand, regardless of their consumption rate. The first novel theoretical contribution is that iconic brands can create new practices. Along with symbols and materiality, Mulino Bianco articulated its iconicity by reinventing breakfast as an Italian family practice. Second, that the update of a brand's myth is possible through the reorganisation of brand archetypes, primary symbolic elements that constitute a myth. The brand archetypes here observed are family and nature, featuring in each Mulino Bianco's iconic phase. Finally, archetypes provide iconic brands with a symbolic ambiguity that facilitates the transition between iconic phases, engaging consumers' interpretation of a continuity within brands' narratives.

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I dedicate this thesis to myths, that trap us and keep us going.

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1. Introduction: A never-ending myth

Twenty years ago saw the end of what historian John Dickie called ‘the most successful campaign in the history of Italian television’ (Dickie, 2007, p.3). It featured a smiling family, two parents, two children and a grandfather, moving from the polluted city to the peaceful Tuscan countryside. Their everyday adventures and discoveries were celebrated around the table, joyfully gathered around the bakery products of the Italian food producer Mulino Bianco; literally, White Mill. Their idyllic middle-class lifestyle (combined with the perfect breakfast) created an image of the Italian consumer that found a place in the heart of popular culture and became emblematic of the middle-class heterosexual family. Mulino Bianco had managed to conjure up the Italian equivalent of the ‘cereal packet family’ (Leach, 1967), a characterization invented to label any generic portrayal of a normative, heterosexual, nuclear family as depicted in advertising.

However, as cereal packet families go, Mulino Bianco’s was far more enterprising because, from its beginnings in breakfast advertisements, its influence was felt much further afield: it is still referred to today in connection with social and political ideas regarding family and gender performances. For example, the Italian senator Monica Cirinnà, who campaigned for the rights of same-sex couples, pointed out that ‘there are no Mulino Bianco families’, so her bill on civil partnerships aimed to protect real-life experiences of family (Caputo, 2017). The meaning Cirinnà intended is now the most commonly held image of this family: it is simply too perfect, and its normativity is claustrophobic (Dalli, Romani & Gistri, 2006). This fact of being mentioned in a political speech shows to what extent the brand conveys ideological meanings about what families are and should be beyond the marketplace (Shepherd, Chartrand & Fitzsimons, 2015; Holt, 2004). In times where the reproduction of that ideal is limited, and Italian society is positioned between old and new models of the family (Saraceno, 2017), the portrayal of the nuclear family is no longer an ‘overlooked image’ (Frosh, 2002), because it now has ambivalent and controversial implications. However, it is not the visual power of the normative family that makes this case interesting, but rather the fact that it is attached to a brand. In other words, Mulino Bianco has branded the normative family, and the brand cannot shed this symbolic association.

Having grown up in Italy, I can personally relate to the long-standing popularity of the Mulino Bianco family. Although the campaign was broadcast when I was too young to remember, I still recall it and can make sense of it. The idiom persists in everyday language today, especially in parody and satire. In recent years, along with the legal discussion of civil partnership and step-child adoption, the Mulino Bianco family has been ever-present in the media, becoming a parody of the heterosexual family based on marriage, laced with conservative connotations. What makes Mulino Bianco such a fascinating case is that it covers a scenario not yet addressed in the branding literature, namely when a myth detaches from a brand/product over time and takes on different meanings without losing its iconicity. This iconicity of the brand is thus preserved along with its cultural value (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006), but with different connotations. This research looks at the articulation of iconicity in Mulino Bianco from the launch of the brand in 1975 to the 2017, when the last campaign observed ended. To do so, this research looks at how the company has managed the brand launch and its subsequent establishment, also looking at how consumers understand it now, and how they experience Mulino Bianco's symbolic narrative in their own domestic sphere. Consumers were asked to reflect on the brand's iconicity by looking back at the different iconic phases at that particular moment in time, rather than by addressing these moments in the here and now. By looking at how consumers' make sense of the shifting, or persisting, symbolic narratives of Mulino Bianco, this research problematizes the theory of iconic brands (Holt, 2004), and explores how iconicity is emplaced and updated.

The importance of the Mulino Bianco family is two-fold: on one hand, as discussed, it highlights an unstudied branding issue. On the other, it examines consumers' perception of family display (Finch, 2007), gender performativities (Butler, 1990), and the gap between idealised and real family life (Castiglioni & Zuanna, 2017; Saraceno, 2017; Sassatelli, Santoro & Semi, 2015). The present study looks at consumers' interpretation of gender and family representations in light of their personal experiences and beliefs. The focus on an iconic brand makes this case of particular interest as previous research has shown that branded food is rich in symbolic value (Moore, Wilkie & Lutz, 2002) and is crucial for 'the social reproduction of home and family identities' (Moisio, Arnould & Price, 2004, p.362). Through archive research and interviews with company employees,

I will demonstrate how Mulino Bianco created breakfast in Italy as a new practice and re-shaped it as a family occasion.

Cultural branding theories, according to which brands achieve iconic status when they become ‘symbolic salves’ (Holt, 2004, p.8) in times of turmoil, soothing consumers’ insecurities, provide the overarching theoretical frame of this research. In the context of the Italian marketplace, Mulino Bianco is an iconic brand whose status has been confirmed by other marketing and non-marketing scholars (Vercelloni 2015, Dickie, 2007, Arvidsson, 2003). A brand is considered iconic when it has a prominent place in the mind of consumers, to the point of marking a national penchant, as Cadbury’s has done with Britons’ love for milk chocolate (Corkindale, 2009). Iconic brands stand out as landmarks in consumer cultures because they survive fluctuations and profound changes, adapting their symbolic narrative, or myth, to emerging social tensions. Acute contradictions between national ideologies and real-life experiences generate potential myth-markets that become marketing opportunities (Holt, 2006b; 2004), and brands can manage to address these disruptions by adopting a compelling symbolic narrative that has to be continuously updated and worked on to maintain its cultural relevance (Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017; Heller, 2016; Holt, 2006a, 2004). Critics of this theory have pointed out that consumers do not always welcome iconic brands as tools for their own identity projects (Arsel & Thompson, 2011) and that materiality participates in the articulation of iconicity just as much as the symbolic narrative does (Kravets & Orge, 2010). However, research has not looked in detail at the process of myth updating: more specifically, at how myths can be updated while staying consistent, and what makes the updating successful. Mulino Bianco therefore problematizes existing assumptions on iconicity, since it presents the possibility of a brand sometimes being unable to transition towards a new myth, trapped inside the old one.

1.1 Research questions, aims and objectives:

Two research questions guide this project:

- How does Mulino Bianco, as an iconic brand, try to update iconicity over time?

- How do Italian consumers interpret the Mulino Bianco iconicity in relation to their family and domestic arrangements?

The theoretical aim of this research is to understand how iconicity is emplaced and managed by a brand, and how consumers contribute to iconicity with their sense-making. Thus, there are two objectives. Firstly, the research follows the brand from the company's perspective, looking at how Mulino Bianco became iconic, and has managed its iconicity from its launch until now. Secondly, the research monitors consumers' sense-making of Mulino Bianco's campaign, and how the brand is embedded in everyday practices. This theoretical aim is pursued through a socio-historical analysis that takes a new methodological approach, since it combines three different sets of data: archive material, visual analysis, and interviews. The intentions and perspective of the company are investigated through archival research, interviews with company members and visual analysis of the three most iconic TV campaigns broadcast to date. At the same time, consumers' sense-making is tackled by applying reader-response theory (Scott, 1994) to 34 semi-structured interviews with Mulino Bianco consumers with different levels of engagement with the brand, using the campaigns analysed in the first part to elicit consumers' memories and reflections. The thematic analysis of these data shows that iconicity articulates not only at the symbolic and material level (Kravets & Orge, 2010; Holt, 2006b, 2004) but also at the level of practices, and all three of these levels contribute to the persistence of given imagery.

The first theoretical finding of this research is that iconic brands emerge as being able to reshape practices, investing them with new meanings and material implications. This ability of iconic brands has not been described before in relevant literature, and thus features here as a novel contribution to the study of iconic brands. In the case observed, Mulino Bianco re-invented breakfast, transforming it from a declining practice to a family food ritual. As consumers perform practices in their everyday life, this research shows the extent to which iconicity relies on consumer memories and interpretation of the brand. The second theoretical contribution concerns the persistence of symbolic elements in a brand's myth, elements that shape how the symbolic narrative of the brand is updated, while simultaneously guaranteeing its consistency.

The empirical aim of this research engages with the representation of gender and family in advertising, and how they relate to consumers' everyday practices and displaying of domestic intimacies. Family and gender are core themes of this research, as they are intertwined with the symbolic narrative of the brand and connect it to broader social debates. Knowing that consumers' ideological background affects the reading of advertising portrayals (Scott, 1994), this research looks at how interpretation changes according to consumers' beliefs. The objective was, therefore, to study how participants' personal experiences and ideas about family influence their interpretation of the Mulino Bianco family, and of the 'Miller Campaign' that came after.

For this reason, loyalist and non-loyalist consumers were recruited according to different ideological perspectives on family, sampling them both from conservative Catholics and lesbigay activists.¹ This polarisation of the sample reflected the ongoing social debate happening in Italy at the time this research was designed, when family rights and the division between conventional and unconventional families was being widely discussed. The idiom 'Mulino Bianco family' became emblematic in Italian popular culture of the heteronormative family supported by conservative institutions. Examples are images modified by anonymous users and circulating in social media, such as Figure 1, a picture of the right-wing politician Alessandra Mussolini modified to make her hold a t-shirt defending the 'traditional family' resembled by the White Mill. This image alludes to the friction between her political statements against 'immoral' same-sex marriage and the fact that her husband had been found guilty of having paid an underage prostitute. Mussolini had been active in refusing family rights to the LGBT community in the name of a family 'tradition' based on heteronormativity and Christian values. Even more tellingly, in Figure 2 the White Mill is attacked by LGBT forces represented by a pink tank with a rainbow flag. The choice of these two very different sample groups was dictated by the wish to mirror this debate in which the brand was enmeshed, as well as various experiences with and of the brand.

¹ The term lesbigay is derived from Carrington (2013) to define respondents that identify with lesbian or gay identities.



Figure 1: the politician Alessandra Mussolini

Figure 2: the lesbian movement taking over the White Mill (artwork)

The first empirical finding is that, unlike in other interpretive research with similar sampling strategies (Borgerson *et al.*, 2006), the heterosexual and the lesbian sample groups both had a very similar interpretation of the normative family, finding it oppressive and dismissive of the everyday efforts and performances of ordinary family life. However, only the lesbian sample referred to the Mulino Bianco family as a symbol of the visibility they aspired to achieve. The second empirical finding was the ambiguity of the final Mulino Bianco campaign observed here, which was broadcasted between 2011 and 2017 and featured a lonely miller with a hen. This portrayal was read as inclusive by both samples, confirming the positive outcome of this strategy in updating a myth and transitioning towards a new symbolic narrative.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

In the first chapter I unpack cultural branding theory, focusing in particular on the symbolic dimension of iconic brands and how this is transmitted in advertising, but also on brand practices. The focus on practices links to the literature on family, theorized as collectively produced as a form of doing rather than being (Morgan, 1996). By exploring theories on family and intimacies, I argue that they are grounded in practices and routines, and members' account of these. Families thus also rely on forms of internal and external recognition, as well as on visibility, reassumed here under the concept of family displaying (Dermott & Seymour, 2011; Finch, 2007). Since family is constituted by gendered beings, the literature review then turns to gender theories, focusing on the notion of gender as performative (Butler, 1990), a concept which will ground the understanding

of gender in the whole text. Butler's theory is relevant also in understanding the friction between normative gender performances and individual desires.

This heterogeneous theoretical corpus will inform the second chapter in which I present an overview of the literature on gender portrayals in food advertising, published as a book chapter in *The SAGE Handbook of Consumer Culture* (Pirani *et al.*, 2018). This systematic overview of interpretive consumer literature highlights how the relationship between gender, collectives and practices produces limited and recurring representations, and how little is written about representations of collectives other than family in domestic spaces.

The methodology chapter illustrates the research design of this socio-historical research. In line with other studies on brand iconicity (Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017; Heller, 2016; Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013; Holt, 2006a, 2004), this work explores the development of an iconic brand, contextualising it in the social and economic scenarios in which it developed. The data set includes archive material, advertising campaigns, interviews with Mulino Bianco staff members ranging from archive managers, marketers and advertising consultants, and 34 interviews with Mulino Bianco consumers. This corpus was analysed through socio-historical and thematic analysis, adopting a hermeneutic approach (Thompson, 1997).

The first chapter of findings covers the development of Mulino Bianco's iconicity from the perspective of the company, with part of it in press for a special issue in the *European Journal of Marketing*. The study of the brand's development begins with the launch of Mulino Bianco, and it proceeds through three iconic campaigns contextualised in their own myth-market: the Happy Valley (1978-1987), the Perfect Family (1990-1995) and the Miller (2011-2017) campaigns. Each of these is unpacked through visual analysis, aiming to highlight the recurring themes as well as the portrayal of the brand's myth. Access to the company's archive revealed that the symbolic element of iconic brands does not account for the complexity of iconicity. I therefore introduce the idea that iconicity develops on three levels, symbolic, material and practice-based, and I show how this applies to the case of Mulino Bianco.

The second chapter of findings proceeds by looking at how consumers make sense of the Mulino Bianco family, and how this icon serves as a term of comparison for their own family narrative. Thus, consumers' address their understanding of the symbolic narrative of Mulino Bianco, but also how they experienced the material and practical level of the brand. Breakfast, in particular, is the field in which idealised and experienced family practices are compared, revealing how the brand becomes part of familial narratives as well as of gendered expectations. This chapter clarifies that the iconicity of the Mulino Bianco family is the result of consumers' projections and gaze, through which the myth of the quintessential traditional family is portrayed. Although heterosexual and lesbian respondents share the same reading of the Mulino Bianco family, they relate to it differently: while heterosexual families refuse to be labelled as traditional, some gay families would like to have the same recognition traditional family has.

The third chapter of findings unpacks the most recent Mulino Bianco campaign, designed to deliver a new myth, and looking at consumers' interpretation of it. Unlike the previous iconic one, this campaign did not feature a family, and for the first time, it used a celebrity as an endorser. Seen as an inclusive portrayal of caring masculinity and unconventional domestic intimacies, this campaign received a positive response from both samples. This chapter illustrates that a brand can escape a cultural impasse through ambiguity, because ambiguous portrayals allow more scope for the projection of consumers' hopes and desires.

In the discussion, I look across these three chapters to point out how the advertising campaigns and their interpretation come together to highlight recurrent leitmotifs that characterise Mulino Bianco's myths. These leitmotifs, which I call *brand archetypes*, are nature and family, and while their interpretation might change, they still resist cultural disruption. I borrow the term archetypes from Carl Jung's corpus to describe persisting symbols that are the primary elements of myths. The notion of brand archetypes is a theoretical contribution that develops cultural branding theory by looking at how iconicity is constructed, not only through constant updating of a myth, but also through the continuity of symbolic structures.

2. Literature Review: A branded tale of family and gender

The literature review is articulated in two chapters. In this first chapter I will explore the three themes - brand, family, and gender - on which this research develops. The order in which these themes are explored reflects the structure and design of the research. Brands and sociocultural branding provide the main theoretical frame that orients the query of this research. Mulino Bianco is explored as an iconic cultural brand (Holt, 2004), situated in the gender and family practices experienced in everyday life. Since Mulino Bianco is associated with the icon of the normative family, this chapter also addresses the current literature on family. This theme emerged during data collection, and it was expanded upon and consolidated thereafter. To help in exploring the micro-dynamics that underpin family life, this chapter includes a discussion of gender theories and sexuality. The second chapter of the literature review will proceed with a systematic overview of scholarship on gender representations in food advertising, looking at collectives, practices, and gaze. Together, these two chapters look at how brands deliver tales of gender and family through their symbolic narratives, tales that contribute to the understanding of what makes a family and what makes it intelligible.

2.1 Brands and cultural brands

This research is inspired by consumer culture theory, 'a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings'(Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p.868). As consumption is a part of almost every practice (Warde, 2005) and culture and consumption mutually generate each other, consumer culture theory is a framework that helps to explain both collective and individual actions, choices, and beliefs. Consumer culture is situated historically and geographically (Trentmann, 2017) as it changes according to the century and the places in which it is observed. In this specific case, I frame Mulino Bianco as developing in Italian consumer culture after the Second World War (Arvidsson, 2003). This literature review focuses on how brands reproduce meanings that interlace with social debates, circulating through advertising and marketing campaigns. However, understanding our lives as consumers means also to understand our relationship with materiality, as 'things

are not only bearer of meanings in a universe of communication' (Trentmann, 2017, p.17). Thus, the role of materiality in brand culture will be unpacked in greater detail within the analysis of Mulino Bianco.

This research focuses on the cultural codes of branding (Schroeder, 2009). Mulino Bianco is considered a cultural brand because of the relevance it achieved in Italian popular culture. However, there are different theoretical frameworks to study branding and there is no univocal definition of 'brand' (Stern, 2006). As Stephen Brown put it, 'the merest glance through the textbooks reveals that marketers can't agree on what brands are, exactly, much less what they mean' (2005, p.44). This semantic confusion around brands (Stern, 2006) reflects different theoretical frameworks as well. A strand of marketing scholars agrees in defining a brand through properties that can be entirely governed or quantified by brand managers: brand identity, brand knowledge, brand awareness, and brand equity. According to this view, brand identity is understood as the values and individuality devised by the company for the brand (Nandan, 2005). Brand knowledge, instead, is what consumers know of the brand, or 'the personal meaning about a brand stored in consumer memory, that is, all descriptive and evaluative brand-related information' (Keller, 2003, p.596). Brand knowledge is the combination of brand image and awareness, where the first refers to consumers' perception of the brand, often in relation to how a brand is positioned in the market (Nandan, 2005), and the latter is the ability consumers have achieved to recognize a brand among others in different conditions (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). Brand awareness includes brand recognition and recall, the acquired ability to discriminate a brand seen before and generate it from memory (Keller, 1993).

Keller (2003, 1993) describes brand equity as the effects of marketing on consumers' behaviour. These effects are exclusive to a certain brand. Brand equity can be estimated in monetary value or in marketing potential (Keller, 1993). It is the value a brand retains for its consumers, and what pushes consumers to choose for the branded version of a product instead of its unbranded version (Kamakura & Russell, 1993). Even if usually interconnected, brand value and brand equity can be theorised as separate. According to Raggio and Leone (2007), brand equity is 'the perception or desire that a brand will meet a promise of benefits' (*ibid.*, p. 385), based on evidence or hope, but intrinsically retained

by consumers. Brand value, instead, is formulated among companies depending on the capacity of the owner, or potential owner of the brand, to leverage the available brand equity. Unlike brand equity, brand value is affected by sources that are not directly linked with consumers, as patents and trademarks (Raggio & Leone, 2007).

While these definitions are widely used in marketing literature, they are inadequate to fill the theoretical space between brand identity and image as they theorise brands as entirely or partially manageable by marketers, regardless consumers' socialisation. This research aligns with consumer culture literature, which has criticised the limitations of these definitions, and it investigates brands from a sociocultural perspective. Brands are here understood as communicative devices that help organisations competing by their ability to say who they are and what they stand for (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006). Cultural brands connect consumers and producers through beliefs, values, collective memories (Thompson & Tian, 2008) and emotional engagement (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006; Kates, 2004; Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003), while differentiating the product or service offered onto the marketplace. Their importance goes beyond individual consumption, as they 'get transformed into repositories of cultural myths and ideals, historical events, achievements and aspirations, particularly when traditional cultural symbols become problematic' (Kravets & Orge, 2010, p.207). Based on shared cultural codes (Schroeder, 2005), brand's resources and meanings emerge only in the socialisation process (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Hence, consumers can create new meanings, contradicting those initially intended by the company for the brand, as shown by doppelganger brands created as a backlash by former loyal customers (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006).

The ownership and authorship of brand content and value is ambiguous, as it engages both consumers and brand managers (Harwood & Garry, 2014). Brand communities have a high degree of co-authorship, as they are independent and able to generate value without the assistance from companies (Cova & White, 2010). Within these communities, the creation of affective and cultural values is sought by personal curiosity, but it ends up using the brand as a virtual platform that aggregates staff and passionate consumers, making the brand a shared cultural property (Cova & White, 2010). Observing social media and how consumers cluster around a brand, Arvidsson and Caliandro (2015) have

questioned if the interaction among consumers is essential to brand communities. They argue that the crowds gravitating around a brand do not require to share values and meanings, but only mediation devices such as hashtags (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015). According to their theory, a brand can be conceptualised as a ‘public’, ‘a discursive phenomenon, not a form of interaction’ (p.16)’, because the involvement of consumers in the meaning-creation of a brand is very limited. This research acknowledges these two positions, but it rather focuses on how brands become collectively, and not only individually, relevant. By looking at the theory of iconic brands (Holt, 2004), this research looks at how brands’ narratives are relevant on the individual and collective level.

2.2 Iconic Brands

Douglas Holt developed the theory of iconic brands in his book ‘How brands become icons: The principles of cultural branding’ (2004). According to this theory, iconic brands are those that convey a cultural story (or myth) that speaks to socio-economic contradictions, becoming symbolic salves for individual and collective anxieties. These myths are ‘simple fictions that address cultural anxieties from afar, from imaginary worlds’ (Holt, 2004, p.8). Myths are stories about the wisdom of life (Campbell & Moyers, 1991) cherished as palliatives that can mitigate contradictions and paradoxes (Levi- Strauss, 1963). Marketing literature also developed an interest in myths, as ‘these narratives, including consumption stories, shape both the structure and content of the culture’s story stock’ (Stern, 1995, p.165). Other scholars have used similar definitions, such as allegory, to define the symbolic story that informs the brand (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003). While the myth is a story that consolidates and motivates a set of values, acquiring the status of truth, the allegory contributes to the figurative and metaphorical representation of this story (*ibid.*). Both allegory and myth can offer plotlines able to guide consumers’ aspirations, beliefs and morality, as well as consumption choices. Albeit morality and myths are not consistently related, consumption myths can achieve a moral undertone, so that consumption choices can take virtuous connotations (Luedicke, Thompson & Giesler, 2010).

The theory of iconic brands states that cultural brands can become iconic when they produce myths that can target consumers' anxieties arising from ideological crises (Holt, 2004). These crises generate at a national level, when socio-political factors contradict a shared ideology, and they become relevant at the individual level, as citizens tend to re-organise their values and beliefs, often experiencing new desires as well as new anxieties. These anxieties represent a myth market for which different cultural products, like music, books or brands, compete. The company does not produce compelling myths, but they come from imaginative 'populist worlds', a term used by Holt (2004) to define communities or consumption contexts that are not directly governed by the marketplace. Populist worlds are contexts that consumers do not experience in their everyday life, but that nevertheless provide a resolution to personal crises through the value and ideals they endorse (Holt, 2004). Examples include the hipster myth behind 'indie consumers' (Arsel & Thompson, 2011) or the rebel myth pursued by the owners of Harley Davidson motorcycles (Holt, 2004). Rather than producing myth, brands amplify them, taking the role of ideological parasites, 'when they tag along on emerging myth markets led by far more potent cultural forms' (Holt, 2006a, p.374). Through this parasitical relationship, commercial redeployment of myths manages to locate brands and goods in culturally resonant stories, but it can also reinvent collective memories that are relevant to the brand, privileging certain representations of events that make a specific version of the past the prevailing one (Thompson & Tian, 2008).

2.2.1 Archetypes

The theory of iconic brands looks more at the circulation of myths rather than at how they originate. However, it is useful to take a short digression from iconic brand theory to consider the work of other cultural branding scholars who look at the relationship between myths and marketplace through the concept of archetypes. Stern (1995) observed how the structure of myths affects the meaning each myth delivers, clarifying that a myth is a structured narrative, while archetype is its underlying symbol: 'When archetypal patterns achieve narrative expression in waking life, they are ordinarily called myths (p. 165)'. Thus, archetypes provide the symbolic material to myths, that is then re-worked in the plot each myth unfolds (Stern, 1995). The relationship between archetype and myth is

that the first provides the symbolic contents for the latter, and the structure of myths depends on the relationship between archetypes (Hirschman, 2000). Consumer culture scholars (Thompson, 2004; Hirschman, 2000; Stern, 1995) share the belief that archetypes draw from primordial cultural meanings that supersede contextual peculiarities, but are updated through their application in mythical narratives, ‘old as humanity, yet constantly renewed to fit contemporary life’ (Stern, 1995, p.183). However, it hasn’t been clarified how archetypes are woven into myths and how they operate in commercial mythologies.

Other branding scholars considered archetypes as fully developed symbolic narratives, acting as systems of management of meanings useful to inform brand’s narratives, to ‘achieve deep and enduring differentiation and relevance’ (Mark & Pearson, 2001, p.11). According to this perspective, archetypes provide intangible meanings that mediate between consumers and products, evoking deep feelings and resonances (*ibidem*). Thus, successful brands are those that manage to have the right fit with and to embody the traits of an archetype, usually understood as 12 symbolic personas or archetypal figures² (Muniz, Woodside & Sood, 2015; Lloyd & Woodside, 2013; Megehee & Spake, 2012; Mark & Pearson, 2001). Examples of this literature are work such as ‘the Hero and the Outlaw’ where Margaret Mark and Carol Pearson (2001) promise to build extraordinary brands through the power of ‘12 major archetypes’. More recently, Margaret Pott Hartwell (2012) produced a similar work, also intended for advertising strategists, also adopted by the creative agency that developed the most recent Mulino Bianco campaign. These 12 archetypal figures are loosely based on the work of C. G. Jung, who developed the concept of archetypes in psychoanalysis. Jung himself did not code and list these figures, which emerged as later simplification. Branding literature adopted them as symbolic characters that can help inform the personality of a brand, or to motivate the success of movies and TV shows (Hirschman, 2000). This strand of literature, though, does not explain the relationship between myths and archetypes, opening a gap this research will address.

² These 12 archetypal figures recurring in this literature are the Innocent, the Regular Guy/Gal, the Hero, the Caregiver, the Explorer, the Rebel, the Lover, the Creator, the Jester, the Sage, the Magician, the Ruler.

This overview of the marketing literature on archetypes intended to include different perspectives on brands' symbolic narratives, ranging from myths to archetypes. Notably, all the strands of scholarship listed here assert that these symbolic narratives are delivered through advertising. Commercial mythmaking and advertising are interdependent, because brands need advertising to deliver their symbolic imagery and 'advertising and mass media freely draw from mythic archetypes and plotlines to create compelling stories, characters, and promotional appeal' (Thompson, 2004, p.162). Going back to the theory of iconic brands, iconicity relies on a handful of effective advertising performances (Holt, 2004) cemented through the intersection with other media (Holt, 2006a). Advertising tries to get rid of residual feelings of guilt and uncertainty in consumption (Sassatelli, 2007), while delivering campaigns responsible for 'resolving contradictions and reproducing consuming subjects' (Williamson, 1978, p.20). Because of this power of reproducing consumer culture and delivering commercial myths, advertising holds a normative and transformative power. It is normative because it contributes to providing norms, solutions, and aspirations that implicitly sanction who falls out of them, even if they are not the intended target (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). The normative power of advertising will be further unpacked concerning gender and family norms, as they emerged as distinctive themes in the Mulino Bianco campaigns.

2.2. 2 Materiality

Although advertising is crucial in delivering the symbolic meaning of a brand, iconic brands cannot be reduced only to their symbolic narratives. Brands also need materiality, and their iconicity relies on the 'thinginess' (Miller, 2005) of the objects of consumption they are associated with. With materiality we tend to focus on objects, perceived as artefacts we experience in their final form, calling consumption any further transformation they might undergo (Ingold, 2012). Ingold (2012) advises to widen the understanding of materiality by focusing less on the objects but rather on the material flow that generates them. Materiality is not only affected by the flow of materials, but by the flow of usefulness, as the relation between objects and practices changes over time (Rinkinen, Jalas & Shove, 2015). Thus, studying of materiality means to look at consumers interaction with material substances and with their design (Ferreira &

Scaraboto, 2016). Pierre Bourdieu (1977) already argued that objects have the ability to implicitly condition our lives, as they provide the setting of our daily activities, especially those we don't pay attention to and we almost give for granted. Notably, Miller (2005) stated that materiality is central in how we understand ourselves, and that our identities are conditioned by the material environment surrounding us. Materiality and practices, including consumption ones, are tightly connected. This research will often mention practices and experiences, that are here understood as the 'intertwining of a person's flesh and the materiality of things encountered in the world' (Allen, 2002, p.518). Thus, it is important to consider what are the meanings already embedded in the object we encounter, and the assumptions over consumers' behaviour implied in their design (Borgerson, 2013).

The material aspect of a brand refers to 'its physical make-up, its functional characteristics' (Ligas & Cotte, 1999, p.610). The physical make-up includes the products, the packaging and all the tangible manifestation of brands, that contributes to consumption practices but also to consumers' identities. Materiality is also very important in the immaterial process of iconisation, as it safeguards the symbolic density of a brand through tangible performances (Kravets & Orge, 2010). More generally, the process of investing materiality with special meanings, what Miller (2005) defines as appropriation, is not limited to mere possession and the object per se, but it extends to those cultural practices that are allowed by a material presence. As it will be shown in the case of Mulino Bianco, the tangible extension of the brand is key in producing the experience of breakfast, that is invested with family feelings. Hence, the study of Mulino Bianco will consider the role of materiality in the iconisation process, but also in generating family relationships (Epp & Price, 2010), and in enacting family-related myths.

2.2. 3 Iconicity over time

Iconicity is not static, and it can be temporarily or definitively lost. Drawing from literature on iconic brands, Testa et al. (2017) claim that a brand can lose its iconic status in two cases: if the brand culture loses grip with the socio-cultural context or if its management decisions are not aligned with it. To keep its iconicity a brand has to

constantly update its narrative with changing myth markets, and Holt (2004) identifies four ways of doing so. The first one is to consider the myth as a proper form of storytelling, developing plot and characters that would allow a serial reiteration while staying true to the core value of the story. The second is to sample new popular culture to revive the existing myth, chasing after the codes emerging from an already explored populist world. The third way, instead, suggests moving away from a populist world when it gets overcrowded, because other brands' involvement might spoil the myth authenticity and the brand's cultural grip. The final way is to push the myth's boundaries by subverting the formulas invented through previous campaigns and fostering more liberal interpretations of the myth. These four ways imply that the update of iconicity relies entirely on brand managers. More, they suggest iconic brands need to sustain ambidexterity, the ability to balance consistency and relevance (Beverland, Wilner & Micheli, 2015). Thus, the process of updating an iconic brand requires that the symbolic narrative takes a new relevance while keeping consistency.

Consistency and relevance in iconic brands have not been equally explored. In fact, Holt (2004) remarks that a myth shall be updated, and potentially never wholly overturned, to keep its relevance. However, while he explained how to keep a myth relevant, he did not explain how to keep it consistent. Indeed, in Holt's analysis, iconic brands transform quite freely in new versions of the myth, adapting to the emerging cultural inputs, so the Volkswagen Bohemian Myth becomes the Indie Myth (Holt, 2004). It is important to remark that the latter is a reinvention of the first, so they are the same myth. Some scholars have mentioned how 'the return to (its) identity traits' (Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017) is what grants an iconic brand some resilience in its constant attempts towards a renewed allure, or, in other words, the tool for consistency. However, as the line between renovation and complete renewal is very subtle, there also exists knowledge on brand iconicity that argues that brands are compelled 'to construct new myths and narratives that conform to the new order' (Heller, 2016, p.560). Observed between myths or within the same myth, consistency is still an understudied aspect of iconicity and hence it needs additional exploration.

2.2.4 The Role of Consumers

Further critiques and advances on the theory of iconic brands concern the reception of myths and the role of consumers in their development. For example, Arsel and Thompson (2011) claim that consumers can experience a brand's myth as a trivialization of their interests, preferring to demythologise their practices rather than devalue their choices. This detrimental value of the myth is triggered when practices of consumption are associated with adverse aspects from which consumers want to distance themselves. For example, indie consumers do not want to be labelled as hipsters, as this would connote their 'indie consumers' choices in ways to which they do not relate to (*ibid.*). Scholars have also taken an interest in the interpretation of myths, as it would be hard to imagine that the same myth would be interpreted consistently by various audiences. Brown et al. (2013) show that the most meaningful myths are malleable: they can mean different things to different people, and they do not rely on a specific set of propositions as much as on a set of values that consumers can arrange. The ambiguity of myth combines itself with the ambivalence of advertising, as the attitude towards advertising may change in content and context, opening the text to different interpretations (O'Donohoe, 2001). The experience of advertising is likely to be ambivalent and polysemic (Puntoni, Vanhamme & Visscher, 2011; O'Donohoe, 2001), as there is no textual determinism by which readers are already directed into the advertising text (Sassatelli, 2007), and consequently into a single interpretation of a myth.

Ambiguity becomes malleability, implying that brands can engage in everyday practices and evolve in relation to them: 'if brands come to life through stories, this brand is animated, grows, and gains vigor through the multimedia chronicling of tales that are woven into the lives of its users and its large population of engaged fan' (Diamond *et al.*, 2009, p.122). Malleability interferes with meaning creation, since 'it is impossible to determine where the brand creation begins and ends' (*ibid.*, p.131). The materiality and experience of the brand are elements that generate its meaning, leaving to brand managers the role to orchestrate a synergy between the multiple elements related to it (*ibid.*). By placing brands into a cultural network, the authorship of a brand is to be thought of as shared, reflecting on the possibility that brands have decentralised meaning creation by delegating it to consumers (Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017; Parmentier & Fischer, 2014)

However, the study of iconic brands rarely focuses on consumers' voices, which is surprising, considering the impact that such brands have on consumers' identity projects and tensions. This is not to say that consumers are entirely absent from this scholarship, but that the only voices represented in research on iconic brands are those of the 'enthusiast consumers', highly involved with the brands (Holt, 2006; Diamond, Sherry, Muñiz, *et al.*, 2009; Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013). This approach is evident in Holt (2004), who develops his theory from *the followers* who are 'the consumers who identify strongly with the brand's myth [...]. Followers do form the nucleus of the icon's customer base, for they find the greatest values in its myth' (p.141). Holt (2004) himself confirms that his analysis operates a simplification that overlaps the totality of consumers with the followers, while the vast majority of consumers, in fact, are *the feeders*, 'consumers that thrive vicariously on the identity value that icons produce for their followers' (Holt, 2004, p.147). The literature that follows more closely brand genealogy, the method devised by Holt (2004) for the study of iconic brands, tends to include only the contribution of the followers. There are some exceptions, such as Testa *et al.* (2017) who included both enthusiast (owners) and non-enthusiast (non-owner and not particularly interested) consumers in their investigation of the car manufacturer Alfa Romeo. This research follows this same approach, as if brands are to be named iconic, it is reasonable to expect that their influence, visibility, and resonance extends way beyond enthusiast consumers.

The focus of this research project picks up from here, looking at how Mulino Bianco has been interpreted and experienced by consumers over time. Arvidsson (2003) was the first scholar who studied the poignancy of Mulino Bianco in relation to its cultural context, studying its development according to qualitative marketing techniques. In an overview of Italian brands, Vercelloni (2015) established a clear connection between the iconic brand theory and Mulino Bianco, underlining how the commercial success of the brand had ideological roots. Both scholars identified rurality as the myth that determined Mulino Bianco's iconicity. However, it was Dickie (2007) who highlighted how the family theme became prominent after the campaign run between 1990 and 1995:

'The old building was given a coat of white paint and a new mill wheel powered by an electric motor. In a short time it was ready to receive the imaginary family of owners.

Dad was a square-jawed journalist; Mum a pretty but prim teacher; their children, Linda with a curly hair and a bonnet, and Andrea in slacks and tie, were smart-but-casual as their parents; a marshmallow-eyed grandfather completed the group. This, as the website would have it was ‘a modern family who leave the city and choose healthily by going back to nature’. Their story, to be told in a series of mini-episodes, was to embody the second-home aspiration of millions of urban consumers.’(Dickie, 2007, p.2)

The theme of rurality is still relevant, as the modern family chooses nature. Recently, the family theme has become more salient for the brand because of the association between Mulino Bianco and the heteronormative family in the social discourse. This research enriches the discussion looking at how Mulino Bianco's iconicity is constructed and understood in relation to this ‘representational crisis’ in which the brand got caught. The rest of this chapter, then, will address theories on family, gender and sexuality, providing the theoretical framework to this discussion.

2.3 Family

The words of Dickie (2007) showed how the iconography of family has entered the Mulino Bianco myth, making the ‘Mulino Bianco family’ iconic in popular culture. Current social debates around family policies have taken advantage of the popularity of this iconography, revamping the association between Mulino Bianco and family. A theoretical discussion of what does it mean to be and be seen as a family will provide useful background to the meanings acquired by the brand in relation to ideas around the family. The literature on family can be categorised according to the principles on which family is defined, that are aims or practices. The first strand tends to consider family as an objective entity defined by norms: ‘a social unit that is primarily concerned with the reproduction and the transmission of social values through socialisation, and which normally involves common habitation in a household’ (Turner, 2004, p.289).

This research, instead, looks at family as a set of practices and meanings people sustain, at the ‘doing’ rather than the ‘being’ (Morgan, 2011, 1996). The focus on family practices helps to avoid an abstract concept of family and to focus instead on the roles enacted

within, to the situated behaviours and to the everyday family living, because ‘there is no such thing as “The Family”’ (Morgan, 2011, p.3). The understanding of family practices requires the investigation of gender and sexuality within the family, as well as the analysis of the role consumption and materiality has in these practices. Consumption practices provide the settings for brands to participate in life narratives of sex, family and gender: commodities are ‘sexed’ into a world of practices (De Grazia & Furlough, 1996), while consumption experiences can themselves be described in relation to sexuality and romance (Brown, 1998). Brands have gender as well (Ulrich, Tissier-Desbordes & Duboi, 2011; Grohmann, 2009), and this means that brands iconicity can deliver, along with myths, stylised gender roles, plotlines, and clues.

In line with the brand observed, this research will focus on how food practices contribute to creating family meanings (Marshall, 2005; Hogg, Folkman Curasi & Maclaran, 2004; Bell & Valentine, 1997; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). Family is done through a variety of practices, from extraordinary ones such as planned holidays (Hogg, Folkman Curasi & Maclaran, 2004) to more mundane ones such as viewing television together (Chitakunye & Maclaran, 2014; Epp & Price, 2008). Consumption practices can contribute to intergenerational bonding: for example, shopping together develops children’s negotiation skills with their parents (Marshall, 2014a), or it creates collective memories of special shopping excursions (Diamond *et al.*, 2009). These practices change in quality and intensity according to each collective and context, so there is no quintessential family or family aims that can serve as a comparison to the others. The attribution of family roles and position depends on how family members validate other family members, a process also known as the family gaze (Morgan, 2011). The family gaze ‘is referring to a kind of relation of the observer to the Other in such a way that the former consumes or construct the Other within a particular frame of reference’ (Morgan, 2011, p.93). The family gaze, then, needs the Other to validate family identity and roles, which makes it substantially different from the ‘familial gaze’ of media representations where family is validated by ideological beliefs (Hirsch, 1997).

Another useful concept to describe family is the one of displaying (Finch, 2007). Like the family gaze, displaying family involves the Other in the construction of family identities and relationships. Displaying family is:

‘the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute ‘doing family things’ and thereby confirm that these relationships are ‘family’ relationships’ (Finch, 2007, p.67).

In Goffman's terms (1979) displays are ‘readable expressions’, but Finch (2007) uses the term ‘displaying’ to signal the process of producing and recognising these expressions in mutual accountability. Consequently, family practices are not ‘family’ if members do not interpret them as such, and they vary by intensity according to circumstances. For example, Christmas dinner requires intense family displaying, while bedtime stories have no displaying at all. It is precisely this latter example that Finch (2007) uses to suggest that all family practices are done, but not all of them are displayed, as the system of meaning in which they are articulated does not require it (Morgan, 1996). This research project will adopt the notion of displaying family to assess how family practices are valued in the articulation of family meanings. Brands, their materiality and brand-related activities are here valued as symbolic resources derived from the marketplace that contribute to the generation of family meanings (Epp & Price, 2008).

The concept of displaying needs nevertheless to be problematised. In fact, relationships and relational displays have different forms of validation (Heaphy, 2011). As clarified by Finch (2007), the differences in families change the need to display. In fact, displaying intersects with the social notion of visibility, understood as both perception and recognition, that interrogates ‘what is worth being seen at which price – along with the normative question of what should and what should not be seen’ (Brighenti, 2007, p.326). Although displaying family implies claiming to be a family, such claims are validated differently by society (Heaphy, 2011). Class and sexuality, for instance, affect the access and recognition of family displaying, that is never free of a normalising gaze (Gabb, 2011). This means that displays can only validated families if these displays are accepted, as ‘family recognition is a privilege’ (Heaphy, 2011, p.32) and family displaying sits in a flow of power that makes displaying both creative and constraining.

Consumption practices are available scripts for family doing and displaying (Epp & Price, 2008). The notion of family as a consuming collective, where family rituals are based on

consumption, is a situated construct that has been established in parallel with the idealisation of the nuclear family (Gross, 2005; Adams, 1997) validated as the ideal moral unit (Cheal, 2008). As we will explore, family meals have a crucial role in reproducing this ideal, and their idealisation is located in a Western ideology, that consolidated after the Second World War (Cinotto, 2006; Bell & Valentine, 1997). Domesticity became fundamental to reproduce this unit, as ‘a specialised site for the family's consumption, child-rearing and private life’ (Cheal, 2008, pp.15–16), where food was important to define roles and status. Hence, proper families had to eat ‘proper meal’ (Wilk, 2010; Cinotto, 2006; Bell & Valentine, 1997). The same is true also in the Italian context, where during the economic boom that followed the Second World War, housewives contributed to socialise other family members to domestic consumption (Asquer, 2012; De Grazia, 2005; Arvidsson, 2000). In the mid-70s, the sociologist Chiara Saraceno confirmed that Italian families still identified a ‘decent lifestyle’ with augmented consumption:

‘the private dimension is then enlarged in the effort of including all the aspects of consumptions that are socially thought to be necessary for a decent lifestyle, like toys for the children, wholesome food, leisure activities and so forth’ (Saraceno, 1976, p.124).

These words are significant also because they were written when Mulino Bianco had just reached the shelves. Being a family meant to adjust to middle-class aspiration, and consumption performances paralleled to gender and family ones to build an ‘ideal family’ status. The idealisation of family and family relationships not only conditions real-life experiences, but it ends up contradicting them, causing friction between aspirational and lived family life (see for instance Daly, 2001 on family time).

To understand how families build their own identity and negotiate ideals and experiences, we need to address the construction of domestic practices, family consumption and family displaying. Gender displays in advertising (Goffman, 1979) become real-life gender and family displaying as soon as they participate in everyday activities and relationships. This research picks up from here as it questions how family models derived from advertising become part of lesbian and heterosexual family performance, and how they interfere with domestic practices. Even if the study of family cannot be reduced to the gender

enquiry (Morgan, 2011; Flax, 1978) this research approaches this question by looking at the articulation of gender and sexuality within family life.

2. 3. 1 Family and sexuality

Sexuality refers to a subject's erotic behaviour, desires and pleasures, but it extends beyond intimacy through social expression, representation, and even repression (Jackson, 2006). Traditionally, family is conceptualised as the privileged place for adult sexuality, but sexuality as a family's premise is nevertheless concealed (Foucault, 1976), a concealment that is reinforced with the presence of children in the house (Gabb, 2001). The role of sexuality in family studies deserves greater academic attention because it recognises parents to be social–sexual subjects, and not merely mothers and fathers (Gabb, 2001, p.335). If we acknowledge family members as socio-sexual subjects, we have to question how sexuality shapes their social identity and how social norms condition the expression of their sexuality.

To answer these questions, it is useful to introduce the concept of heteronormativity and how it affects the definition of family. Heteronormativity, which is the system that accepts heterosexuality as the norm, regulates a combination of sexual and non-sexual aspects of social life, including family. Oswald et al (2005) define heteronormativity as 'the implicit moral system or value framework that surrounds the practice of heterosexuality' (p. 144), established by three binaries: the gender binary (real males and females versus gender deviants), the sexual binary (natural versus unnatural sexuality) and the family binary (genuine versus pseudo families). All three of them are organised in polar and hierarchical opposition, implying that genuine families are based on heterosexual relationships and on a biological difference. Thus, doing family properly cannot be separated from doing gender and sexuality properly (Oswald, Balter Blume & Marks, 2005). The heteronormative system is poietic of the dichotomy that builds it: the masculine/ feminine dichotomy defines heterosexuality but, at the same time, is reproduced by the heteronormative system, which affirms them as the only legitimate genders (Butler, 1990). Heteronormativity is critiqued by queer theory, which questions the binary ontological categories that are produced and reproduced through heteronormative

institutions and interpersonal interactions (Berkowitz, 2009). However, heteronormativity and queer theory are related in a continuum, so queer sexualities may still be performed along with normative genders and family.

The dominant cultural codes that reduce kinship to heterosexual, nuclear families who share the same household are reinforced by traditions that regulate the ‘thinkability of particular acts and projects’ (Gross, 2005, p.296). The regulatory effects of heteronormativity condition a diversity of social fields, ranging from the definition of heterosexual and homosexual relationships, to institutional and educational policies (McNeill, 2013), even onto the architecture of public toilets (Jeyasingham, 2010). Heteronormativity is not static, and it can continuously be reaffirmed and negotiated, explaining why normative sexuality has changed overtime (Jackson, 2006). To further unpack the concept, Allen and Mendez (2018) suggested studying heteronormativity also according to class, race, nationality, and institutional arrangements.

In fact, the boundaries of heteronormativity are shifting, now regulating relationships that were once excluded, such as homosexual married families with children, leaving out unmarried gay and lesbian couples or polyamorous parenting (Allen & Mendez, 2018). This process is named homonormativity, ‘a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture, anchored in domesticity and consumption’ (Duggan, 2003, p.50). As part of neoliberal politics, homonormativity uses consumption, along with monogamy and domesticity, to assimilate lesbians and gay men into heteronormative culture (Berkowitz, 2009). The materiality and rituals that reproduce the heterosexual imagery are the same, but they are now applied across the spectrum, because ‘normative families produced by hegemonic heteronormativity are defined by consumption’ (Allen & Mendez, 2018, p.76). Because homonormative images are the only ‘acceptable queer’ representations used in marketing and advertising (Nölke, 2017), consumer culture facilitates homonormativity, and its visibility.

Despite the power of heteronormativity in regulating social relations, heterosexual as well as homosexual identities cannot be reduced to it. This research does not aim to essentialise

these identities by constructing them in polar opposition. Instead, the choice of a double sample was motivated by how the family myth connects with the context studied, as Mulino Bianco's symbolic value had been caught in the debate over family recognition and representation. In fact, the Italian LGBT movement has been particularly active in campaigning for policies that would include alternative imageries of family beyond the nuclear, heterosexual and reproductive kinships. This is not to say that other social and political forces have not contributed to debunking the myth that connected sexuality, gender, and family. These forces, in Italy as elsewhere, are much more varied:

‘the diversification of family forms caused by a weakening of patriarchal authority over women and children, the emergence of a more complex and diverse culture as a result of mass immigration, and the sheer pluralization of household patterns and domestic arrangements: cohabitation and the decline of (heterosexual) marriage, single parenthood, the growth of people living on their own, the emergence of serial monogamy as the dominant form of sexual partnering, and the rise of non-heterosexual (and of heterosexual) ‘families of choice’ underpinned by the ‘friendship ethic’ (Weeks, 2009, p.22)

The displacement of conventional family norms, then, is here observed as a contextualised and embodied set of practices, which also questions the ‘fixed space’ of domesticity (Scicluna, 2015). This research project does not understand family identity as a disposition of sexuality, but it rather aims to look at how sexuality interplays with gender and family identity to challenge heteronormative assumptions. Only by taking in account the plurality and the complexity of experiences it is possible to ‘queer up’ the binaries of family, gender, and sexuality and to question the legitimacy of the norm (Oswald, Balter Blume & Marks, 2005). Queering up, or questioning the heteronormativity, demands adopting a reflexive position over one's own practice, but also engaging with the gaze of the Other, which influences gender and family doing.

2. 4 Gender

To understand the interplay between sexuality and gender, this chapter aims to provide an overview of gender theories, presenting them according to the verbs that define the

relation between gender and the subject: being, doing, and undoing. The order in which they are presented reflects only partially a historical evolution. In fact, even if the theories around undoing gender have emerged in the last decades, the essentialist notion of gender is still widely adopted. This research aligns with the theories of West and Zimmerman (1987) and especially with the work of Butler (1990), who respectively stated that gender is the result of doing in mutual interaction, and that gender is created through bodily acts. Thus, individual experience, context, and relations become key theoretical terms to understand gendered subjects.

2.4.1 Being

Till the first half of the 20th century, gender and sexuality were both perceived as natural phenomena, one unfolding after the other (Richardson, 2007). Gender was thought to be nothing more than the development of biological expression, making female, femininity and womanhood overlapping terms, and all were supported by the same essence. This conceptualisation of gender is explained through essentialism and the principle of consistency. Essentialism defines gender as existing prior to our perception, a true identity the subject owns (Colebrook, 2004). The principle of consistency states that sex, gender and sexuality relate in a hierarchical, congruent and coherent manner (Ponse, 1978). The inborn quality of gender was first questioned by theories such as constructionism, in which gender is seen as determined by cultural relations, discourses and distinctions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966 in Colebrook, 2004). Social constructionism broke the causal relationship between sex and gender, presenting the subject as a product of cultural conventions rather than biological determination.

2.4.2 Doing

The debate around gender pivoted radically with West and Zimmerman (1987), who first described gender as a form of accounting for one's sex category. In West and Zimmermann's view, gender cannot be thoroughly investigated without a prior understanding of sex. Sex is determined by biological criteria (genitalia or chromosomes), a notion socially and medically agreed upon. Sex category, instead, is derived from sex criteria, even if sex category and sex can be disjointed, since sex displays cannot

guarantee the linked biological criteria. For example, a beard is not incontrovertible evidence that the beard-owner will also have male genitalia. Finally, gender is the very managing of a conduct appropriate for one's sex category according to normative conceptions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, a beard-owner needs to act accordingly to what is expected from a man to be socially accepted as such. Finally, accountability is the quality of the subject of being liable and responsible for actions in conformity to norms. Doing gender is unavoidable, because institutional arrangements of gender are legitimated, sustained and reproduced continually. However, the theory of doing gender does not explain what happens when subjects do not make themselves accountable, refusing to maintain the institutionalised forms of gender.

The unanswered question is what determines the 'doing', or in other words, what is the agency of the subject in doing gender. Judith Butler (1990) addressed this issue defining gender as performative, as it sustains with a repetition of acts and gestures what it claims to reveal: 'identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (Butler, 1990, p.34). Gender identity is not pre-existing the performative act and has no ontological status, so it becomes the effect of social and political discourse (Butler, 1990). By adopting the notion of gender as imitation and repetition, the emphasis moves from the identity to the practices: there is no pre-conceived volition before the action itself (Valocchi, 2005). Concealed as the product of a virtual inner self, the subject is unaware of the construction of identity into the social discourse. This construction belongs to a specific cultural matrix (also called heterosexual matrix) already discussed in the context of heteronormativity, that acts as a 'grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalised' (Butler, 1990, p.208).

Masculinity and femininity are then produced as the only legitimate genders, built in polar opposition (Scott, 1988), revealing that 'man and women are empty, overflowing categories' (Scott, 1988, p.24). Rather than a manifestation of the subjects' identity, masculinity and femininity are the product of repetitive imitation of the normative masculine and feminine, and they are socially coded as objective and legitimate (Butler 1990). Those repetitions that confirm heteronormativity are called reiterations. However, the same repetition can produce resignifying practices, that reveals that what is meant to be natural is indeed produced continuously (Butler, 2004, 1990). Subjects who fail to

perform genders correctly, or who blur the lines between the two are exposed to social sanctioning (Butler, 1988) because their genders are not legitimate and intelligible according to heteronormative codes.

2.4.3 Undoing, redoing

The intelligibility that Butler mentions does imply not only the possibility of being acknowledged, but also the opportunity to have access to civil and social rights and being recognised as speaking subjects. The issue, then, is to understand how genders that are not aligned with the heterosexual matrix find a space for recognition into a society that uses that heteronormative grid as a compulsory reference. Undoing gender means to account for the Other in the definition of self-autonomy (Butler, 2004): we cannot adequately address our desires without longing for legitimisation and recognition, usually according to heteronormative cultural codes. Gender becomes an intrusive and oppressive norm, which needs to be disrupted (or undone) to maximise possibilities of liveable lives. However, gender as a norm is not understood as an immanent condition, but it rather produces itself while producing its field of application (Butler, 2004). Every gendered experience, from transsexuality to parenting, is normed by the heterosexual matrix. The only way to challenge gender norms is by mutually acknowledging the possibility and plurality of gender experiences (Butler, 2004).

Other scholars, such as Barbara Risman (2009), have criticised this acceptance of undoing, suggesting that it should be used only when the binary division based on sex category is radically overturned. Undoing gender refers to a post-gender society in which conventional gender norms would be meaningless, and sex categories would be applicable exclusively for reproduction (Risman, 2009). In response to this debate, West and Zimmerman (2009) claimed that changing the way gender is done is not undoing it but just redoing it. Thus, West and Zimmerman invite to research how sex category (both production and recognition) impacts the idea of doing gender and the process of mutual accountability. The need to be accountable for one's sex category affects how people negotiate conventional gender scripts and the influence these scripts have in their everyday life (Goldberg, 2013). Undoing or redoing gender does not lead to dismantling

conventional practices of doing gender, but these two options coexist. For example, consumption practices can take both resignifying and reiterative meanings (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015), always potentially leading to both reproducing or subverting gender norms.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on cultural branding, giving particular attention to the theory of iconic brands, that guides the study of Mulino Bianco. This review helped underlining the importance of symbolic narratives in the construction of iconic brands, with specific attention to myths (Holt 2004). However, other symbolic resources, namely archetypes, have been here considered for their relevance in establishing symbolic narratives through which myths, and consequently brands, build their resonance. This review also highlighted some understudied aspect of iconicity, such as how commercial myths originate, and the role consumers have in the iconisation process. Literature on family and gender has been here covered because of the relationship scholars and public opinion established between Mulino Bianco and family iconography. What it has not been addressed yet is how consumers respond to the Mulino Bianco's myth and how it has changed over time. This chapter has shown that the study of iconic brands shall focus not only on the symbolic aspect of iconicity, but also in the mundane presence that the iconicity has in everyday life, as consumption contributes to the reproduction of family and gender practices. Thus, this research observes Mulino Bianco from consumers' perspective, everyday experiences, and stratified understanding.

Consequently, iconicity is studied in the pervasive, tangible presence that unfolds into everyday practices and not only in its symbolic form. As much as iconic brands excel in their capability of providing soothing myths to everyday life, these myths are also embodied and enacted, and consequently transformed, interpreted, and perhaps become objects of parody when they enter people's lives. Thus, in the next chapter I will focus on the literature on food practices and their representations in advertising, unpacking how food, family, and gender are portrayed in their domestic enactment.

3. Literature Review: A Critical Overview of Family Representations in Food Advertising

This chapter offers a critical review of the empirical findings concerning how scholarship has described gender and family in food advertising, reviewing interpretive consumer research that addressed this topic. While chapter 2 discussed the theoretical tenants concerning gender and family performances, this chapter aims to provide the empirical tools that will guide the critical visual analysis of Mulino Bianco advertisements. Advertisements are ‘socio-political artifacts’ capable of revealing the hegemonic power of advertising (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002, p.571). As such, representations in advertising are sources of information, imagination and leisure whose meanings simplify and reinforce certain identities, influencing present and future thinking of the self and the Other in terms of gender, class and cultures (Borgerson & Schroeder 2002). Arguably, identities in advertising are often presented as natural and ‘common sense’ rather than offering contested representations suitable for a reflective understanding of diversities. Nevertheless, these representations are imbued with value (Alcoff, 1999 in Borgerson and Schroeder 2002) since bodies, roles, practices, collectives and spaces often reflect and enact stereotypes. The question shaping this analysis is: how has recent marketing scholarship analysed the representations of family and gender? This question aims to gather empirical tools derived from other interpretive research to address how visual analysis of family and gender reflect the theoretical underpinnings highlighted before. These empirical tools will help developing a considerate critical analysis that acknowledges what other scholars have done, and locating Mulino Bianco representations in relation to existing ones.

I provide a reading of the literature about the gendered representations of food practices in advertising highlighting what is known, what is unknown and what appears to have been ignored thus far. I do not pretend to provide an exhaustive reading of all articles on the topic, but my aim is much more modest and consist of delivering ‘a reflexive exploration of our own practices of representation’ (Woolgar, 1988, p.98) via a categorisation of the existing literature. By considering the academic scholarship on such gender portrayals in food advertising within interpretive consumer research, I am

considering a process one-step removed from the advertisements themselves, but nonetheless still revealing of social processes and potential biases and blind-spots.

I begin by engaging in an overview of the main theoretical concepts adopted in the relevant literature on food advertising and practices, and I proceed by illustrating my mapping of the existing scholarship. I do this by highlighting the use of a set of gender identities, predominantly in domestic settings, divided in male and female identity in which the family roles of the mother (the Domestic Juggler) and father (the Breadwinner/the Nurturing Father) are dominant. Other categories of female identities have also been individuated including the Yummy Goddess and the Hedonic Vamp. Male identities including the Domestic Divo and the Wild Bachelor have been identified. This analysis highlights how academic representations reflect the distorted mirror of advertising, highlighting some of the power relations entailed in each category.

This discussion suggests possible advancements of academic understanding of gender representations, inviting scholars to account for those elements that make certain portrayals possible. The first element that I focus on is the context, which has a crucial role in determining how gendered roles are re-constructed. In particular, I consider the role of collectives –such as family- in conditioning the gender identity displayed. The second element is the one of practices, understood as the actions, attitudes and displays that mark and distinguish certain gendered performances. Finally, I attempt to highlight how the gaze concurs in the construction of the gender categories here articulated. I argue that the gaze is always present, although often not fully unpacked, not only in the media representation but also in the academic scholarship.

3.1 Setting the table, setting the rules

The vast majority of consumer studies looking at domestic food practices took inspiration from concepts of doing gender and performativity, showing how laying the table, shopping, cooking and dealing with leftovers are enactments of gendered scripts in which specific performances are done depending on the roles individuals occupy within the family.

Domestic labour is often considered primarily to be a women's domain (DeVault, 1991) even when both partners are working (Miller, 2012) and the recurring self-sacrifice and responsibility for everyday chores is internalised as a woman's job (Sassatelli, Santoro & Semi, 2015; Cappellini & Parsons, 2012). For instance, every time food is a matter of care for others, it is women's duty (Newcombe *et al.*, 2012; Cairns, Johnston & Baumann, 2010) and more specifically of mothers' (De Vault 1991). The domestic emotional and material burden is sustained because it contributes to women's gender identification and recognition: being the caretaker in the kitchen and the pantry is a synonym for being the woman in the house (Carrington, 2013). Furthermore women's 'labour of love' has implications for the collective identity of the family, as maternal labour in the kitchen has been seen by women themselves as helping the household to get together, physically and symbolically (Moisio, Arnould & Price, 2004). While homemade food survives as a metonym for 'happy' family (Moisio, Arnould & Price, 2004), in practical terms, it is also perceived not only as a devotional act but also as a frustrating duty that someone has to do (Sassatelli, Santoro & Semi, 2015). Women's emotional work is rarely considered because women's time is thought to be more elastic and suitable to cope with the needs of the family. Thus, the needs of women are subordinate to the needs of the rest of the family (Sassatelli, Santoro & Semi, 2015; Cappellini, Marilli & Parsons, 2014).

If the discourse of female self-sacrifice dominates the practice of feeding the family, recently, women have gained more legitimisation in cooking for pleasure and gaining expertise in this area (Cairns, *et al.*, 2010). This personal enjoyment, which conflicts with the role of devotional caretaker, has usually been reserved to men. In fact, husbands and partners tend to cook in a limited, peripheral way (Swenson, 2009), choosing special occasions where they can display to others their skills (Cairns *et al.* 2010). When faced with everyday cooking, men adopt adjusting strategies, including using sexual jokes, to restore their normative masculinity (Deutsch, 2005). Such gendered scripts around food and masculinity are not static. Young single men who engage with cooking distance themselves from the stereotypical bachelor behaviour of the man who doesn't care about food (Sellaeg & Chapman, 2008). Some men *do* cook for caring purposes, and claim to be satisfied not because of their hedonic and self-assuring performance but because of the nurturing feeling, drawing elements of self-identification from traditional culinary

femininity (Szabo, 2013). Furthermore, some fathers and male partners have embraced cooking as their way of contributing to the division of domestic labour without the risk of emasculation (Neuman, Gottzén & Fjellström, 2015).

3.2 The bitter taste of commercials.

The way genders are represented in advertisements is never neutral, but it represents an intervention in our world. Advertising belongs to reality as much as the practices just listed do, but as a powerful and ideological device it shapes our visual landscape (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998) and it contributes to our sense-making of the world and confines our imagination under the rules of its commercial purpose (Schroeder, 2002). Advertising replicates and magnifies gender models, social inequalities, normative behaviours and related moral sanctioning. Food advertising is particularly telling in this respect, as it often displays extreme gender polarisation (Calamita, 2014).

The “visual analysis” work of Erving Goffman (1979) is a milestone in the study of gender advertisement. This study continues to be relevant for its methodological contributions. Goffman analysed the gender displays in ads, and how they set the hierarchy among characters. He noted that when a man deals with a woman or a subordinate man, he enacts the same strategies adopted on the child-parent relationship: mitigation of distance, coercion and hostility. These visual codes detail women subordination in a vast array of methods. For example, when the scene is set in a kitchen or living room being cleaned, men are represented as ‘engaged in no contributing role at all’ or as ‘candidly unreal (so) the competency image of real masculinities could be preserved’ (Goffman, 1979 p.36). The feminine touch, whether is hetero-directed or concerns women's own body, never grasps or firmly holds objects. Women hands are caressing, barely touching, dealing with their own body as something delicate and fragile. Although these ritualised expressions are advertisers' inventions perpetuated over time, they are connected symbolically to everyday life situations. Likewise, food in advertising can contribute to generating gendered meanings because of the symbolic associations attached.

A final remark over gender images should address the role of the Other in constructing certain identities. If in practice gender identities are done -and undone- through recognition by others (Butler, 2004), the same is true for gender representations, which often already include a certain gaze, or the eyes of the Other legitimising and co-constructing the gendered image. Like any other visual material, advertising images have already inscribed a 'way of looking' that is already gendered (Mulvey, 2009) and that allocates the power between the gazer and the gazed. The gaze reproduces gender possibilities and expected sexualities, by putting the observer in a position of power in comparison to the person that gets observed: 'to gaze implies more than to look at: it signifies a psychological relationship of power and sexuality in which the gaze dominates the object of the gaze'(Schroeder & Zwick, 2004, p.30). Because of the 'lack of reciprocity between the gaze and the gazed-upon' (Morgan, 2011, p. 93), the gaze usually is turned to women, represented as passive objects against self-assertive males. The voyeurism of the male gaze embedded in female representation has recently been re-conceptualised, opening up to power arrangements that overcome the antagonism between men as the bearer of the look and women as the passive surface for that gaze. Scholars have studied women who are practitioners themselves of a fetish gaze (Rose, 2012), men gazing over men (Patterson & Elliott, 2002), queer gazes and gazes that belong to not hetero-sexist possibilities (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004). One example is the lesbian gaze implied in fashion advertising targeted to women, where women cultivate the fantasy of being at the centre of other women's desiring look (Lewis, 1997).

3.3 From the Domestic Divo to the Hedonic Consumer: mapping gender representations

The map of gender types here presented, and summarised in Table 1, identifies salient points identifiable within scholarship focusing on gender portrayals in food adverts. As such, this analysis and the table deriving from it does not look directly at the complexity of the advertising industry, but at the mediated look of scholarship on the advertising representations of gender and food. The review is based on twelve articles of interpretive marketing and consumer research that discuss gender representation in food advertising broadcasted in Western countries. The articles have been sampled among the articles and

proceedings published since 2000 -with two exceptions- in Association of Consumer Research (North American and European), Journal of Marketing Management, Journal of Advertising, Journal of Advertising Research, Marketing Theory, Journal of Consumer Research and Consumption Markets and Culture. The sampling criteria were based on specific interest in gender categorisation in food advertising, but it also included articles on personal brands, such as Nigella and Jamie Oliver, given the intertextual reference between the world of entertainment media and advertising. Relevant articles from other disciplines have been used to support the discussion and highlighting how the literature in the marketing field aligns with findings originated in other fields, such as sociology.

The twelve articles selected have been analysed considering three aspects related to the gender observes: collectives, practices and gaze. With collectives, I define if and which other characters were in the advertising described, practices imply which actions and attitudes scholars isolate concerning gender and the gaze the 'inscribed look' identified in the adverts. These have to be acknowledged to fully describe the identity represented, because they account for the relational nature of gender entailed in interaction as well as in the legitimisation granted by the other's look. The collectives observed are three: the family, the character alone and 'company' (which means the explicit or hinted presence of other subjects in the picture). I came up with six characters here labelled according to their most prominent features. When portrayed with a family, women are Domestic Jugglers, when alone Hedonic Vamp but in the kitchen cooking for others they become Yummy Goddesses. On the contrary, men with their families range from breadwinners to nurturing fathers, when in a kitchen become Domestic Divos, and alone they turn into Wild Bachelors. These characters are associated with defining practices that distinguish them from one another, such as eating or serving others, or failing to contribute to food-related activities. In the discussion of these results, I suggest the use of the gaze as a further layer of analysis. While the collective can be easily detected in the studies I indicated, the gaze made explicit only in some of them. As such, the elaboration on gaze developed from the categories here presented is a provocative elaboration on the existing literature to keep refining the way I write and talk about gender. I now move on to outline each of the identified categories.

Table 1: gender types arranged by collective

	Women	Practices	Men	Practices
Family	<i>Domestic Juggler</i>	Devoted and Nurturing. Food is a metaphor for familial love. She never eats. Feeder (Fischer, 2000) Supermom (Robinson & Hunter, 2008)	<i>Breadwinner/ Nurturing Father</i>	Evolving role, from useless to engaged. Food is not always emotional engagement Evolving fathers (Marshall <i>et al.</i> , 2014) Useless fathers (Gentry & Harrison, 2010)
Company	<i>Yummy Goddess</i>	Seductive and Domestic. Food is her personal fulfilment and passion. She entertains the audience. The dramatisation of domesticity (Hewer & Brownlie, 2009) Staging the glamour (Stevens, Cappellini & Smith, 2015)	<i>Domestic Divo</i>	A chef in the kitchen. Food is expertise. He advises and instruct the audience. Blurring work and leisure (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007) Domestic Divo (Swenson, 2009)
Alone	<i>Hedonic Vamp</i>	Sexualized and Indulgent. Food is 'naughty but nice'. She undergoes a voyeuristic scrutiny. Carnal femininity (Stevens & Maclaran, 2008), Sexual pleasure (Coleman, 2007) Madonna/Medusa (Brown, Stevens & Maclaran, 1999) Couple: temptress (Fischer, 2000)	<i>Wild Bachelor</i>	Careless and Self-Driven. Food is a personal quest for pleasure. He doesn't compromise. The Budweiser guy (Hirschman, 2016) Couple: Narcissistic male gaze (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004)

3.3. 1 The Domestic Juggler

Domestic Juggler refers to a woman represented with her family, busy cooking, feeding the children, and setting the table for others. At the moment of eating, she is never the first to take a bite, as she holds a 'serving role' towards the other members of the family. The term Domestic Juggler has been previously used concerning women's *juggling* lifestyle, defined as 'time-pressed' and 'emotional demanding' (Thompson, 1996, p.388). Looking at the issue from a family perspective, Robinson and Hunter (2008) underline how 'mothers are more likely than fathers to be shown as buying, preparing, or serving

food items' (p.480). In her postmodern analysis, Fischer (2000) addressed how the feeder is a role against which the mother is judged by her family, making this expectation so strong that a mother is implied whenever there is a caring action, even if the other actor is absent.

3.3.2 The Yummy Goddess

The Yummy Goddess cooks for others, inspired by her own pleasure and passion, reigning over a staged kitchen. The literature on advertising doesn't directly mention the woman who cooks for indistinct others, but in the world of Nigella Lawson, media, advertising and endorsement interlace enough to have the literature about her participating to this analysis. Nigella embodies this model as the voluptuous mother who cooks while keeping her erotic charge, embodying glamour and vulnerability at the same time (Stevens, Cappellini & Smith, 2015). Not only she appeals to heterosexual male desire, but she owns her own desire and appetite. Nigella is a culinary celebrity brand on her own that offers enchantment and seduction to both her male and female followers (Hewer & Brownlie, 2013) while making the kitchen spectacular in a new version of 'doing domesticity' (Hewer & Brownlie, 2009). She represents a highly privileged woman, whose glamour has survived motherhood and whose success is highly individualised.

3.3.3 The Hedonic Vamp

The Hedonic Vamp is the woman who eats on her own, but her food consumption is always hedonic. When describing hedonic consumption, Holbrook and Hirschmann (1982) meant 'those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with products' (Hirschmann & Holbrook, 1982, p.92). In doing so, they suggested a clear demarcation from rationally driven consumption. Hedonic consumption is not based on 'what consumers know reality is but on what they would love reality to be' (Holbrook & Hirschmann, 1982, p.94). Thus, during consumption consumers engage with reality as well as with projective fantasies. In the light of the hedonic consumption theory, Stevens, Maclaran and Brown (2008)

have scanned chocolate advertising, looking at what kind of femininity is associated with sweets. Filled with associations to body, temptation and (sexual) desire, the authors have defined the femininity they isolated as 'carnal'. Oscillating between the erotic, the carnivalesque and the pornographic, carnal femininity relates to packed hedonic products, as chocolate or body lotion. The consumption of these products is enjoyed as a private moment, even if the privacy is clearly fictional due to the voyeuristic gaze implied in the ads, predominantly male. Portrayed through this gaze, hedonic vamps are overwhelmed by the enjoyment of food, as if surprised or seen in a private moment, letting desserts do that 'personal service' (Coleman, 2007, p.175) they are advertised for. Thanks to the 'porn codes' (Stevens & Ostberg, 2011) used to represent them, their appraisal for food recalls sexual pleasure, transforming the subject of the advertisement into a sexual object. However, Coleman (2007) points out that 'food is not always a metaphor for sex, but rather sometimes is depicted as being an erotic experience in and of itself' (p. 176). This discourse on female weakness enforces the 'naughty but nice' rhetoric (Stevens & Maclaran, 2008) of chocolate and sweets advertisements. The sexual tension of a femme-fatale figure can also be detected in Medusa/Madonna characters, gifted with a darker nuance and the same charming allure for the male gaze. (Brown, Stevens & Maclaran, 1999). As emerging in the analysis of Coleman (2007) and Fisher (2000), the hedonic vamp keeps her attitude also when in a romantic couple.

3.3.4 The Breadwinner/ Nurturing Father

The Breadwinner / Nurturing Father is the man within a family, whose attitude towards domestic chores has evolved significantly since the half of the last century (Marshall *et al.*, 2014; Stevens & Ostberg, 2011). The breadwinner is often portrayed with no emotional engagement in the domestic sphere in general and even less in the food one in particular, a background figure with no involvement family security (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). In the persistence of traditional gender roles, father and children are consistently being waited on, and 'the father baking cookies is literally 1 in 1000'. (Kaufman, 1999, p.456). Gradually, things have changed, showing fathers with feelings, caring partners and 'softer' masculinities that populated food advertising (Marshall *et al.*, 2014). These nurturing fathers, however, embody this caring role with some compromises. Progressive

images of masculinities are still portrayed as fit, white and often middle class, the last bastion of dominant masculinity (Marshall *et al.*, 2014). On the other hand, caring ‘Splenda daddies’ show love and commitment but only outside the kitchen (Robinson & Hunter, 2008).

3.3.5 The Domestic Divo

The term ‘Domestic Divo’ was coined by Swenson (2009) to define male celebrities in the kitchen, where chefs are literally borrowed to show off, instruct and sometimes scold everyday women who are seen as lacking skills and ideas on what to cook. Marketing overlooks this category in terms of advertising, but Jamie Oliver’s visual communication highlights some aspects of men cooking for others. In his media presentation, women are largely left out, and the focus is on Jamie's cooking for ‘others’ or his camaraderie in the kitchen, through which he presents the rhetoric claim that:

‘it may be necessary to reclaim this space, to render it inclusive, for the performance of new forms of masculine communion, dependency and intimacy. In this manner, the kitchen and its traditional associations with domesticity, sociability, nurturing, nourishment and motherhood is visualised as somewhere masculine men can be at ease’ (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007, p.241).

Men often assume the role of domestic maestro when they do enter the kitchen to cook for others. Thus, the term Domestic Devo is used to describe the appropriation of the kitchen to affirm a very masculine style of cooking’ (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007a, p.247), that oscillates between male informality and rolled-up sleeves, hard-working masculinity.

3.3.6 Wild Bachelor

The Wild Bachelor is the final male character, a man whose appetites, also alluding to sensual ones, cannot be satisfied within the domestic environment and kinship. He is also ‘the Budweiser guy’, whose presence is detected mainly in alcohol ads. These single men enjoy food or beverages as an expression of their own taste, and they have the right as

well as the means to pursue his own narcissistic pleasure (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004). Outside the marketing literature, we find the bachelor as protagonists of burger advertisements, marked by an untamed hunger for meat, unable to settle with small portions, displaying a primitive virility that needs to break loose from social (and feminine) constrictions (Buerkle, 2009). The self-appreciative gaze embedded in the wild bachelor portrays the same self-centred attitude even when the character is in a couple (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004).

3.4 Considering collectives, practices and gaze

This review shows that different forms of femininity and masculinity are emerging from literature, sometimes showing a transition within different gender models, as in the case of the breadwinner slowly turning into a caring father. Since this review discusses how academia talks about gender, the point is to examine the existing literature rather than monitor what happens in the industry. Thus, attention should be paid not only to what is said but also to what is silenced, and in the literature analysed the context of representation often is. By concealing the conditions that make certain gender representations possible and plausible in the adverts without looking at the context in which such representation takes place, scholars run the risk of talking about gender as if it is a de-contextualised category. Another problematic aspect is the silence over the fact that the adverts always portray white and middle-class characters, which gender performances are then considered universal. Not only this omission prevents any focus on the intersectionality between gender, class and race in emerging social identities, but it also obscures the avenues that advertising industry is exploring in real life in representing different classes, races and genders. This consideration brings the attention to the relationship between literature on advertising, literature on practices and industry.

I observed that literature on advertising is mirroring the available scholarship around food and gender practices, even beyond the marketing field. What is missing from academic literature, though, is a closer look at which gender identities feature in today's advertising industry, especially those that defy the conventional arrangements of gender or kinship. As a result, there is no update on how current adverts are trying to accommodate a

plurality of gender identities and relations, from queer individuals to multi-racial families to single parents. As I am about to argue, considering collectives, practices -and even the gaze- could help the scholars to unpack how certain gender identities are created, sustained and possibly transgressed. It should be acknowledged that academic literature, by nature, falls behind contemporary media by at least a couple of years due to the publishing process. Nevertheless, it has to be praised that the studies on food practices support findings from advertising literature, making this interdisciplinary field sound and cohesive on a social level as well. One example is that the chef who endorses food products legitimises the off-screen *maestro*, the everyday man untouched from the chores of non-spectacular cooking, who cooks with the same professional inspiration and whose effort is a cause of applause (Calamita, 2014; Cairns, Johnston & Baumann, 2010). Another example is Nigella, who is the celebrity version of a yummy mummy, the ‘sexual attractive and well groomed’ kind of mother (Littler, 2013, p.227) that has become a British phenomenon. However, one risk is that literature becomes too self-referential, forgetting to look at consumer practices that have not been accounted for yet and able to dialogue only with other literature. The additional risk is to adopt the same normative attitude towards gender that advertising has often been accused of focusing just on binary genders and reproducing the gender stereotypes available. Through the small sample here analysed, I suggest three elements to be considered for an improved methodical analysis of gender performances: the collective, the practices and the gaze. By applying them to the sample of existing scholarship, I aim to provide further elements on gender portrayals and how effectively literature is accounting for it.

3.4.1 Collectives

In the literature explored, the reproductive family is the ideal, if not the only possible collective where to eat together. Collectives help provide an understanding of the importance of their absence: family meals are the least common type of eating situation in food advertising broadcasted to children (Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007). But families are not the only collective possible: friendship, co-housing, couples, co-workers are all collectives where people often consume food, but that seems not to be registered in the

literature. In particular, friends or housemates eating together, especially among female characters, have not been documented.

Gender has often been assimilated to a two-sided coin, accounting only for the extreme polarities of the heterosexual spectrum, a spectrum where ‘real men’ do not cook (Parasecoli, 2005). This absence can be explained by the fact that few advertisements target non-normative domesticities and genders. In the articles here observed, genders are often portrayed as essential qualities, obscuring the visual clues and the gestures that define these genders in relation to others. The collective that surrounds the subject emerges as a condition to gender performativity: a woman can eat first only if alone, without a family and under the condition of becoming attractive to someone else. If with her family, the prime identity a woman can assume is the Domestic Juggler, who sacrifices her desires to satisfy her loved ones. If alone at home, that same woman can add a seductive twist to her domestic chores and become a yummy goddess, staging her passion for the benefit of others. Often well-groomed and put together, regardless their hectic lifestyle, the Domestic Jugglers -and to some extents, the Yummy Goddesses- are offered as an ideal version to other women involved in the same multi-tasking effort.

3.4.2 Practices

Practices are essential to distinguish a specific gender identity. While it is easy to notice how Domestic Jugglers never take the first bite when with their families, little mention is dedicated to any other practice she is recognisable for besides serving and attending one's family. This lack of descriptive connotation can be explained by the fact that not all the articles selected have a tight focus on practices on their own. Nevertheless, it would be useful to reinstate Goffman's (1979) dedication to details in visual analysis. This scrupulous account of the display (and practices) would allow commentators to draw a chronological comparison in gender portrayals, but also help to determine what makes certain characters so distinguishable. For instance, Gentry and Harrison (2010) describe the ‘horse’s ass’- the useless father at home- but they don't systematise the practices mentioned, nor account for what he does. The focus appears to be more on what he does not do: ‘If it is his ‘turn’ to cook meals for the family, they know what to expect, i.e. take-

out, delivery, or drive-through' (p. 88). Still, the articles available succeed in calling our attention to specific patterns. First, on the micro-level, certain gestures mark the characters. The masculine smirk in front of a burger (Buerkle, 2009) is the same rising on the face of the male protagonist in the article by Schroeder and Zwick (2004), and, as a real-life example, the equivalent of the one George Clooney sports in every Nespresso advert he shot between 2006 and 2017. If analysed on the macro-level, we can see how the same practices can lead to different gender roles across the collectives. A man cooking for his daughter embodies markedly different masculinity than the chef who instructs an admiring audience. A lady spoon-feeding her man with seductive intentions (Fischer, 2000) appears to have little in common with the woman who feeds her husband by putting a plate on the table. Reporting the visual clues that substantiate a given practice (such as feeding) would help to characterise better the related gender types.

3.4.3 Gaze

Literature seldom acknowledges the gaze. As the only mentions were found in relationships concerning the Hedonic Vamp and the Wild Bachelor, pointing out how the male gaze positions them in the heteronormative spectrum. This part of the discussion points out how the systematic use of gaze in visual analysis can be a powerful tool to unravel the power relations embedded in advertising images. In fact, few scholars address the gaze. In this overview, the gaze has often been inferred from the articles rather than openly articulated in them, and it is developed as a possible extension for future research.

The will to bring to attention to the gaze, as much as to the collectives and the practices, is motivated by a feminist agenda that explores the conditions that make certain representations possible, and what power relations are presented to the viewer. Research tends to focus on audience and overlook gaze. But, it should be noted that gaze does not overlap with the expected audience nor with the look. The gaze does not overlap with the audience because it is constitutive of the image, not of its interpretation. For example, Ann Kaplan (1983) claimed that the look is not inherently male, 'but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the consciousness, is to be in the "masculine" position' (p.13). Thus, the male gaze can be activated in female-targeted

images, and offered as a pre-determined form of sense-making of the image to invite the audience to adopt the pre-determined interpretation. As such, it can be redeployed by the audience itself, that might end up rejecting it, resisting to this pre-conceived interpretation. Research shows that consumers do not associate with the assumed gaze when faced with a representation that does not mirror their cultural and day-to-day experience of consumption (Borgerson *et al.*, 2006; Stevens, Lorna & Maclaran, 2003).

The regulatory power of the male gaze is evident in the romantic portrayal. When in a couple, the characters tend to be portrayed with the same gender traits of their gender of single -or 'alone'-characters (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004; Fischer, 2000). This could be justified in two ways. The first is that, in the game of seduction, genders are represented before the moment of giving in to the other, and therefore still single. The second is that the gaze is always male: she is always a temptress, and he is always a predator because they are inscribed in the image by the same power relations that define the Hedonic Vamp and the Wild Bachelor. However, the male gaze is not the only one detected. The Domestic Juggler implies a female gaze that confers to this identity a normative power: the model offered is already aligned with a social order that prescribes what a good mother should be. Other categories are at the centre of multiple gazes, such as the Yummy Goddess. Because of the entertainment world she belongs to, the Yummy Goddess is tailored for heterosexual desire, but at the same time, she is showing her glamour and confidence to women who enact their 'homey self' (Cronin *et al.*, 2014). On the same line, the Domestic Divo embodies a male gaze that grants him a 'recognisable masculinity' (Hollows, 2003), but his status as 'unofficial expert' implicitly demands the legitimisation of more gazes, such as the 'foodie'.

While some gazes are obvious, others are just difficult to detect, as if the image was built upon a strategic ambiguity. An example is the familial gaze, which allows people to read their own family members into the portrayal, but also to identify with family practices more broadly (Morgan, 2011). In light of changes in domesticities, such as the presence of egalitarian ideologies if not practices (Miller, 2011), ambiguity is a way to account and include different family and gender arrangements without openly representing them (Weeks, 2009; Robinson & Hunter, 2008; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). At times in which a family eating together is not speaking to consumers the same way it did, ambiguity is a

transitional strategy that demands no subversion of traditional gender roles. Thus, ambiguous gazes accommodate more inclusive readings of the advertising image. However, keeping an analytical focus on gaze allows monitoring if and how gender clues are changing, alone or in collectives. Since visual clues for family can be highly subjective (Borgerson *et al.*, 2006), future research should examine how familial gaze is adapted/alterd by variations in family arrangement.

Finally, we should remember that gazes not only differ according to gender, but they nuance in terms of class, desires, experiences, race and family roles, creating a plurality of gazes. For instance, the well- off Yummy Goddess appears to invoke a complicit middle-class gaze. However, not all of the gazes are equally represented. Advertising is a genre of perfection, where flawed or problematic portrayals rarely appear unless normalised and perfected, and where 'some identities are systematically excluded from marketing images, while others are represented in ethically problematic ways' (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005, p.585). Since minorities in terms of class, gender and race not only are excluded from representation but they are less implied to be consumers of advertising, it should not be surprising that dysfunctional gazes –such as queer ones- are not explicitly considered in the advertising literature considered.

3.5 Conclusion

In presenting a review of the literature on representations in food advertising, this chapter has shown how collectives influence the way in which gender categories are represented and to the practices that sustain such categories. For example, a woman eating chocolate is often portrayed as a sexy, indulgent consumer. Her self-pleasure, though, is conditioned by the fact that she is alone: if she were with her family, she would probably not be eating at all. However, previous literature has not consistently addressed the relationship between practices, gender and context, failing to point out how the same practices can take very different meanings if done within or outside a family. The act of cooking reproduces a different masculinity if the subject represented is alone, with a family or dressed as a chef. Secondly, there has been little attention to the gaze implied. While research tends to investigate the interpretation of advertising by intended targets, a

commercial image is often seen by a wider spectrum of consumers, and different gazes may apply, as based on family or sexuality. The findings of this review have been integrated to the analysis of Mulino Bianco advertising campaigns, as it will be explained in the following methodology chapter. Building on the previous literature I mentioned here, a focus on practices, collectives and gaze allowed to unpack the symbolic narrative of Mulino Bianco' s family myth, and to understand how it has progressively changed with the changing of the brand.

4. Methodology

This research is a socio-historical study on Mulino Bianco iconicity, looking at how consumers make sense of the brand over time and how the brand built and cemented its iconicity. The aim of this research is two-fold: firstly, it aims to unpack the iconisation process, looking at how the symbolic narratives of the brand have changed over time and in relation to the context in which they developed. Secondly, it aims to examine how consumers read and look back at that iconicity from one point in time, investigating their understanding of current campaigns and memories of old ones. To address this aim, the research design is informed by an interpretive approach, developing itself through a multi-methods enquiry that combines several forms of qualitative methodology; namely, archival research, visual analysis, and interviews. In comparison with methodologies used in studying brand iconicity, such as brand genealogy (Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017; Heller, 2016; Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013; Thompson & Tian, 2008; Holt, 2006b, 2004) and socio-historical analysis of brands (Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013; Kravets & Orge, 2010; Ourahmoune & Nyeck, 2007; Brown *et al.*, 2003), this novel methodological approach introduces a focus on the experience consumers have of a brand's myth, along with the study of how that myth emerged and evolved. This approach aims to include materiality and practices in the study of iconicity by incorporating consumers' memories, brand related practices, and inferred family and gender norms, along with the study of brand strategies. My interest in this topic arose by observing how Mulino Bianco had entered social and political discourses concerning family rights. Although the company had never openly participated in these discussions, Mulino Bianco was frequently used as a social metaphor of the perfect family that simultaneously raised feelings of nostalgia and exclusion. Mulino Bianco had become a 'family brand' not only because of its association with a specific advertising portrayal, but also because of its presence in everyday domestic practices. Thus, it became important to look at not only the symbolic value of this iconic brand, but also at the way it involved consumers' performances of family and gender. According to the principles of brand culture that were explored earlier, this research adopts an interpretive paradigm, as the goal is to understand how consumers experience iconicity, and how they participate in sharing and creating meanings of iconic brands.

Interpretive research relies on a double hermeneutic circle, by which people make sense of the world while the researcher makes sense of people's understanding (Prus, 1994, in Daly, 2007). The guiding research questions of this project have changed accordingly, as what I was observing differed from my expectations of the field. The hermeneutic cycle helps the researcher to avoid the practice of framing the research around theoretical gap spotting; moving from finding a gap in available literature to explain why filling that gap may be a relevant contribution (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Ladik & Stewart, 2008). The first research question, how does Mulino Bianco try to update iconicity over time, consolidated only after I could relate my experience in the research archive with the literature on brand genealogy (Holt 2006b, 2004). In the work directed towards the second research question, the neat division between heterosexual and lesbian respondents in my sampling criteria had to disappear, as the interviews revealed a more complex tapestry of beliefs and behaviours. The final version of the second research question, therefore, became how do Italian consumers interpret the Mulino Bianco myth in relation to their family and domestic arrangements. This version addresses how normative portrayals of family affect the lives of people, but also what it means to perform a myth in times of various forms of precariousness. Along with the struggles of the lesbian community, I noticed other unforeseen tensions around doing and defining family. The research question had to accommodate the fact that differences emerged not only between samples but also within samples.

4.1 Through consumers' eyes: the interpretive paradigm

This research is framed by an interpretive paradigm. The research paradigm is an organising framework (Mertens, 2010) that assists the researcher in questioning the nature of what is being examined, how to access it, and the beliefs that guide the points of research query. A research paradigm expresses a worldview, binding together a researcher's ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As I will demonstrate, it guides the research design, determines the criteria through which the project can be evaluated, and shows how the different methods can be combined together. The interpretive paradigm looks at phenomena from the perspective

of social actors, embracing their process of sense-making in contextualised settings (Gephart, 2004). Ontology is related to subjects' accounts of their experience, and therefore there is no objective truth nor immanent essence behind people's interpretation of it. Interpretive research is related to the theory of social constructionism, which argues that social reality does not exist apart from how people construct it by interaction (Esterberg, 2002). What we get to learn, then, is somewhere between perceived reality and subjective meaning-making (Daly, 2007).

The epistemological assumption of the interpretive paradigm indicates that it is not possible to access reality without considering the specific position of the researcher, who participates in the field of study. This opposes the positivist assumption that a researcher is in a neutral position and that there is a neat division between the researched and the researcher. Given that interpretivism understands reality as constructed by human actors, objectivity is replaced by a shared intersubjectivity (Walsham, 2006) that is co-produced between participants and the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, the concept of bias becomes meaningless: the background of the researcher is part of the investigation, and reality is seen as sifted by perceptions and understandings (Daly, 2007). As I will soon unpack, my position as an Italian researcher contributed to the research design and the phenomenological observation of Mulino Bianco as an iconic brand.

This research is inductive because theory emerged from the data rather than from previously held assumptions. Inductive research allows theory building to develop from data, but also to structure more compelling research questions, moving gap spotting to explain why filling a certain gap may be a relevant contribution (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Ladik & Stewart, 2008). Conversely, I did not intend to predict what consumers' thought about Mulino Bianco's iconicity, but rather to understand the meanings they related to the brand in light of social and political discussions. Because building theory requires starting from data, it shall be clarified that data are not reality but a recall of it, constructed and represented through language, as we 'do not just encounter empirical material and see where it leads us. Rather we are always doing something with it – framing and constructing it' (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007, p.1269). Language and narratives, then, participate in the interpretive process through which the researcher understands the way consumers make sense of their memories, practices and choices

(Thompson, 1997). For example, the narratives of Mulino Bianco in relation to family ideals and performances have been related to the cultural codes that define the nature of family today and what it could do to be legitimised. Inductive research valorises the complexity and the quality of the data gathered, while contributing to the process of theory building. Starting from the empirical material allows the researcher to existing problematise theories and to put the empirical work and theoretical frameworks into dialogue (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007).

A research paradigm influences the integration of different methods, as well as the criteria used to evaluate the research outcomes (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Finally, a research paradigm regulates how different methods are integrated. The validity of multi-method qualitative work cannot be evaluated with triangulation, that is ‘the epistemological claim concerning what more can be known about a phenomenon when the findings from data generated by two or more methods are brought together’ (Moran-Ellis *et al.*, 2006, p.47). Triangulation aims to converge the data obtained through different methods into a single reality, eliminating contradictions (Tracy, 2010). This aim is incompatible with the general interpretive paradigm so far, and with the specific aim of this research, in which multiple agents participate in contributing to Mulino Bianco’s popularity. Rather than looking for a convergence of methods, this research pursues crystallisation (Richardson, 2000), a process that looks at different sources of data, in this case obtained through different methods, to see how themes and clusters reverberate among different sets. Richardson (2000) explains crystallisation with the image of the triangle contained in triangulation and transforms it into a prism, where what we see changes according to our angle and to the externalities that are reflected into the prism. Likewise, the epistemological potential of interpretive research is to resonate and reverberate the complexity of the reality observed in the research process. Crystallisation suits the aim of this research, as it reflects the perspective of consumers, managers and creative directors, ensuring that all experiences and opinions emerge in the interpretation.

In qualitative research, a critical issue is how to produce an authoritative account of these different perspectives (Wolcott, 1990). This research has not tried to meet the criteria of generalizability and replicability that are used in positivist and neoclassical marketing researches (Brown, 1998). There is no interest in achieving generalisability, because

consumers' stories are always produced in a distinct cultural position and imply subjective meaning-making (Thompson, 1997; Mick & Buhl, 1992). A single case-study, like the one presented here, can nevertheless claim theoretical generalizability on 'concepts, theories, specific implications or rich insights' (Walsham, 2006, p.322), as it can contribute to the theory of iconic brands. This research has followed the criteria of authenticity, plausibility and criticality, which work as rhetorical tools to improve the soundness of interpretive findings (Hogg & Maclaran, 2008). Authenticity is about convincing the reader by producing rich accounts of the data and describing the way they were analysed. To this end, I have sought to persuade the audience of the authenticity of my report through rich data description and by clarifying the different steps of my data collection. Plausibility is a criterium that can be integrated with credibility (Tracy, 2010), as both refer to the need of providing argumentations of how the data fit the explanations. I tried to achieve plausibility and credibility by highlighting the conventionalised cultural codes that are part of consumers' stories, ensuring that the readers could relate to the context described. Finally, criticality is the effort to underline existing assumption in the interpretation process. This was best achieved through reflexivity, that I pursued by accounting and reflecting on my position and motivation, but also by acknowledging the contradictions emerging from consumers' narratives.

4.1.1 Reflexivity and queer-feminist perspective.

This research is driven and shaped by a queer-feminist perspective that looks at the micro dynamics of gender within different domesticities and at the role of consumption practices within normative assumptions of family and gender. The interpretive paradigm allows the values of the research, or the axiological level, to emerge and guide the research project without being considered as bias. Values are the drivers of the research project, as they motivate researcher's interests and subject's actions, contributing to shaping the outcome of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

A queer-feminist perspective has influenced the axiological outline of this research, problematizing the heteronormative regulation of gender and family relationships. Borrowing a definition from Marinucci (2010), queer feminism is the application of queer

notions of gender, sex and sexuality to the subject matter of feminist theory and vice-versa, where feminism brings a closer focus to sex and gender and queer theory to sex and sexuality. Feminist research is a perspective rather than a methodology (Reinharz, 1992), that aims at understanding ‘people’s subjective feelings and experiences, but also the material world and the power relations within it’ (Esterberg, 2002, p.17). On the other hand, queer theory examines ‘gender, sexuality, and family as interdependent binaries to be negotiated through human agency in the face of heteronormative power’ (Oswald *et al.*, 2009, p. 45), deconstructing the assumption of natural femininity and masculinity. Thus, the affinity between feminist theories and queer ones are to be looked in specific attention to gender, to sexuality as an institution and to its critique of compulsory heterosexuality (Jagose, 1996). Queer feminism opens an analytical path, acting as a magnifying lens that helps to ensure that power imbalances do not go unseen. Aside from some discrepancies between queer and feminist scholars (Allen & Mendez, 2018; Braidotti, 2013) I share the understanding that queer feminism can be a univocal framework that ‘attends the intersecting operations of power and privilege and the material-semiotic makings of normality and deviance, highlighting potential for uncertainty, subversion, transformation and play’ (Cipolla *et al.*, 2017, p.4).

I consider the endorsement of a queer-feminist approach as an opportunity to invest the interpretive paradigm with political concern, as ‘political intent (regardless of its actual impact) should be a priority and not an embarrassment’ (Miles, 2001, p.173) in developing social theories. Echoing Alvesson and Sandberg (2011), a feminist and queer orientation in designing research encourages problematisation and counter-thinking of existing theories. However, I recognise that it is important to clarify a researchers' position and values. The following perspective framed my inquiry and directed my interpretation: among all the possible stories I could tell through this research, I told those that reflected what it means to trouble the binaries of sexuality, gender, and family in terms of marketing representations and real-life experiences. This perspective did not condition how I framed participants' point of view, nor on how I positioned myself during the interviews. I applied a feminist refusal to sustain the hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched, letting, for instance, the person interviewed to ask me personal questions, allowing friendship and personal involvement to enter the research scenario (Oakley, 1981).

A final comment on this paradigm concerns reflexivity, which is the process of accounting for one's own position in the research, as the researcher's background contributes to the research project and its outcome. Reflexivity is essential in understanding how the process of observing, locating, selecting the data is a way to reformat reality (Daly, 2007). Through reflexivity, 'the researcher engages in an explicit, self-aware meta-analysis of the research process' (Finlay, 2002) improving the integrity of the research itself. By positioning myself in the research process, then, I acknowledge that I am co-producing, and not merely describing, the brand culture I am documenting in this research. Reflexivity is an immediate and continuing process that asks the researcher to record the ideas and connections that emerge in the process, while exposing personal feelings and silencing others (Finlay, 2002). In line with the interpretive paradigm, reflexivity refuses the idea that subjectivity corrupts an objective view of reality, while proving instead that the personal element contributes to the analysis and to the larger research project (DeVault, 1997). To sustain a self-reflexive approach, I wrote notes and memos during various stages of the research. These notes have not been integrated into the findings, but they contributed to reporting how I formed the connections between emerging themes, along with the troubleshooting of the research project.

A second important element of self-reflexivity is my positioning in relation to the research theme. I am an Italian scholar who has grown up in a middle-class environment, much like most of the participants I interviewed in this study. We also live in the same region. Like them, my relationship with Mulino Bianco evolved through my life: I grew up with it, using its products, merchandise, and cultural references. It was a result of this shared cultural background that I could contextualise memories of Mulino Bianco's marketing activities along with other brands that operated at the same time. Similarly, I could make sense of the parody and satire that participants recalled or produced in relation to the brand, particularly around the idiom of the 'Mulino Bianco Family'. At the time of the interviews Italian popular culture proliferated with satirical parodies of the most recent Mulino Bianco campaign, featuring actor Antonio Banderas as a miller. However, I was not entirely embedded in the research field: at the time of the interviews I was living in the UK, so I had to access advertisements and any other cultural media via YouTube.

Additionally, I sought more contemporary references to other advertisements or television shows that I had not been aware of. Moreover, I have never been personally an activist in the Italian lesbian movement, so none of the respondents recognised me as part of that community. I nevertheless made an effort to problematise the values and beliefs circulating in the context of study (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011), detaching from commonly held assumptions about the brand and its consumption.

4.2 Socio-historical brand research: a multi-method inquiry

This study is a multi-method socio-historical research, combining three different qualitative methods: archive research, critical visual analysis, and interviews. The focus on the use of qualitative data was motivated by the will to describe social interactions, rather than predicting them, as 'thick description surely captures a situation more realistically than a particular statistic, no matter how large the sample or whatever the level of confidence' (Levy, 2005, p. 342). The combination of these three methods is a methodological contribution to the study of iconic brands, as it includes various perspectives, even non-enthusiast consumers. These three methods were applied chronologically, as the findings of one method helped to progress with the others. Archive research showed how the brand was designed, launched and consolidated, and it investigated the marketing activities that were undertaken and the intentions that the company had for the brand. This analysis helped to qualify the three advertising campaigns that were selected, along with the launch of the brand, as milestones in Mulino Bianco's iconisation process. These campaigns were analysed using critical visual analysis to understand how collectives, practices, and gazes emerged in the previous chapter, were present in the advertisements sampled. Afterwards, these campaigns and the themes that emerged from the analysis guided the interviews with Mulino Bianco consumers. Interviews with staff members of both the company and its advertising agency complemented the archival research, contextualising the marketing and advertising strategies that had been outlined through archive research and visual analysis. The details of how I applied each method and analysed the datasets will be shared in the following paragraphs.

The socio-historical analysis described here differs from brand genealogy, the methodology designed by Holt (2004) for the study of brand iconicity. Brand genealogy requires a chronological interpretation and iteration across three levels of analysis: a textual analysis of brand advertisements, a discourse analysis of mass-culture products connected to the brand, and the tracking of the socioeconomic shifts in society. Brand genealogy is a form of historical analysis because it combines history and ideology to understand how social discourses interact with identities and consumption practices (Heller, 2016). However, scholars have not always applied this methodology for the study of iconic brands, often refusing to claim the term ‘genealogy’ for their own work. For example, Brown, McDonagh and Schultz (2013) suggest a critical/cultural perspective that owes several elements to Holt’s work (Holt, 2004, 2003; Holt & Thompson, 2004), as it requires:

‘archival endeavour and empirical investigation [...], the examination of participants’ narratives [...], while remaining sensitive to the wider social, economic, and technological developments that shape the stories stakeholders tell [...] It is a qualitative methodology that does not aspire to generalizability (except in the liberal arts sense, whereby wider resonance or meaning can be found in an individual work) but strives to use brand-specific data to illuminate broader aspects of consumer culture’ (Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013, p.600).

Despite the different names, these methods share an interpretive approach that combines the narratives of those involved with the brand, along with contextual developments, under the understanding that iconicity always requires an interaction between social beliefs and brand’s values (Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017).

Following the principles of genealogic analysis of a brand’s mythology (Holt, 2004), this analysis is aimed at highlighting continuities and discontinuities in the symbolic representation of the brand. Unlike what was suggested by Holt (2006a; 2006b; 2004), this work has looked at how these symbolic representations connect with brand materiality and practice. Thus, this socio-historical analysis combined the focus that brand genealogy has for the intended symbolic meaning of a brand, with those created over time by consumers, whose interpretations of the brand have not always followed the

company's intentions. Like other studies on iconic brands (Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017; Rokka, 2017; Cova & D'Antone, 2016; Heller, 2016; Holt, 2006a; Koehn, 1999, among others) this research has focused on a single case-study. Mulino Bianco was deemed suitable for this research due to its popularity among Italian consumers. Moreover, the company has a comprehensive archive, which I found out is a rather uncommon situation for food companies, and facilitated research in relation to brand documents. Additionally, I already had access to the archive as I had researched Barilla during my postgraduate degree previously, which overall facilitated the access to the research field as well.

I will now proceed to detail how each method and data set has been collected and analysed, while the interpretation of the three data sets will be addressed as a whole. Analysis and interpretation are complimentary steps: analysis is the process of breaking down, while interpretation works to build, from there, a higher level of analysis (Spiggle, 1994). Thus, the analysis is the process of finding a pattern in data, while interpretation is the sense-making of that pattern. The three sets of data were analysed independently as they developed in chronological order and the development of one influenced the upcoming dataset. Thus, I started with the archive research, where I applied a socio-historic analysis. The study of archival material was supported by interviews with brand managers, with this helping to contextualise the archive documents and the phases of the brand. This work primed the selection of the most iconic campaigns, on which I applied an analytical framework I will soon exemplify, developed from previous works on critical visual analysis. Finally, I sampled the zwieback advertisement from each of these iconic campaigns. These were used to prompt the interview discussions. The transcripts were then processed through thematic analysis. In summary, the analytical steps were taken one after the other, and the analytical methods changed according to each data set, accommodating the diverse nature of the data. The integration of these different datasets was carried out during interpretation. Following relevant branding literature (Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013; Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006) I interpreted this body of work through a hermeneutic approach (Thompson, 1997), iterating between individual data and emerging understanding of the whole datasets. Each analytical method will be now individually addressed, and the integration will be discussed further on in the section about interpretation.

4.2.1 Archive research and visual analysis

The first step of my data collection was researching the Barilla archive, the parent company that created Mulino Bianco, where the documents of both brands are stored. During the work towards my postgraduate dissertation, I met the curator of the archive along with the current referee for the archive. Both acted as gatekeepers to the archive and to other staff members of the company. As the archive was developed mainly around the Barilla brand, documents on Mulino Bianco are a fraction of what is available. After 1996, following a change in the company's marketing managerial board, archived documents reduced significantly. Presently, as I learned from the field, it is not common practice within the company to catalogue current marketing documents in the archive.

Analysing an iconic brand from a cultural perspective is an eclectic endeavour (Brown *et al.*, 2013) that considers multiple sources of data. The documents I used from the archive were indeed various, including:

- I. Market research studies, focus groups and consumer studies prior to the creation of the brand, but also marketing assessments of the ongoing campaigns and the brand image up until the late 1990's. These studies were produced by a variety of marketing and research companies consulting for Barilla, such as Young and Rubicam, Delfo, Imago and CER. These documents included studies on brand image, semiotic evaluations of the brand, product development research and reports by external consultants such as sociologist Francesco Alberoni;
- II. Internal documents produced by the company, such as correspondence between members of Mulino Bianco's managerial team, their meeting reports, and publication mock-ups;
- III. The digital collection of Mulino Bianco television advertising campaigns;
- IV. Mulino Bianco's promotional products, ranging from the *sorpresine* series (little toys sold with Mulino Bianco snacks), to the collectable branded products.

These documents were integrated with unstructured interviews conducted with both the curator and director of the Barilla archive, with the manager of Mulino Bianco's bakery

division at the time of its launch, with the project manager of the Italian Breakfast advertising campaign, and with two members of the staff who designed the current campaign at the advertising agency J. Walter Thompson. These interviews guided the analysis and selection of documents, integrating voids in the archive.

Inspired by the previous works looking at branding activities over time (Brown *et al.*, 2013; Kravets and Orge, 2010; Holt 2004), the socio-historic analysis of the archive documents was intended to reveal the crucial moments in the iconisation process of Mulino Bianco through which the brand reshaped cultural understanding and practices. The selection of these pivotal moments -the launch of the brand (1972-1975), the Happy Valley campaign (1978-1987), the Family campaign (1990-1995) and the Miller campaign (2011-2016)- emerged from an initial analysis of the archival documentation of the 'evolutive phases' of the brand (Guidone *et al.*, 1994, p. 300), previous critical analysis of Mulino Bianco (Dickie, 2007; Arvidsson, 2003), as well as interviews with employees.

4.2.2 Critical Visual Analysis

The second step of the research was critical visual analysis of selected Mulino Bianco advertisements. I started with television campaigns of the three 'evolutive phases' that resulted from archive research, because television was the medium that Barilla has invested in more consistently. For a more thorough visual analysis, I sampled the zwieback advertisement associated with each campaign. By sampling the zwieback advertisements, I aimed to monitor how the same product had been contextualised in different collectives and practices, because zwiebacks have always been part of the Mulino Bianco range and have featured in every Mulino Bianco campaign since 1976. The visual analysis of these three campaigns was completed with the launch, the fourth phase of the brand (1971-1976) that was added at a later stage to document the early steps of Mulino Bianco's iconicity. Given the minor importance of television at this preliminary stage of the brand, I focused on print advertising.

Critical visual analysis derives from Western tradition in fine arts analysis, and it is widely applied in consumer research to the study of the development of representational conventions and their connection with consuming subjects (Schroeder, 2008). This method combines visual scrutiny with reception and meaning creation as images have to be explained in relation to cultural references (Scott, 1994). Critical visual analysis focuses on visual consumption and on the construction of visual landscape based on advertising images (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998). I developed a framework inspired by other studies in visual analysis in consumer and consumer-related research (Minowa, Maclaran & Stevens, 2014; Schroeder, 2008; Borgerson, Schroeder, Blomberg, *et al.*, 2006; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004; Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998; McQuarrie & Mick, 1999; Stern & Schroeder, 1994; Goffman, 1979). This framework was aimed at facilitating a systematic reading of the images according to the criteria of critical visual analysis (Schroeder, 2008) and it was particularly inspired by Goffman (1979) and Stern and Schroeder (1994). Learning from Goffman (1979), I observed if the stylised gestures and appearances were gendered, much like the 'feminine touch' that he observed in commercial representations of women. The second source of inspiration was the work of Stern and Schroeder (1994), who fostered a humanistic approach to interpretation, listing the genre, the subject, the character portrayal, the composition and the perspective of representations among the criteria to be included in the visual analysis. This framework, that can be consulted in Appendix A, was organised at four levels:

- I. Non-verbal communication
 - Appearance (age and gender; body and looks; collectives)
 - Manner (expression; eye-contact; clothes)
 - Activity (touch; body movement; proximity)
- II. Props and Settings
- III. Composition (camera angle; montage; gaze)
- IV. Audio (soundtrack; tone of voice)

These four levels were integrated with attention to the advertising narrative 'used to examine the plots of consumer stories, to ascertain the associated values, and to describe

the mythic allusions in topical advertisements' (Stern, 1995, p.167), highlighting what changed and what did not across the different campaigns. Moreover, this framework investigated representations of collectives, practices and gaze inferred from appearances, activities, and composition. This framework was helpful in obtaining a rich description and interpretation (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998). The extensive description obtained through this framework has been analysed further through the themes of practices, collectives, and gaze that emerged from the literature review.

4.2.3 Interviews

The third step of this research involved interviewing Mulino Bianco consumers. Interviews are considered to be particularly well-suited for hermeneutic analysis, as they investigate consumers' sense-making from their point of view (Goulding, 2005; Silverman, 2001; Thompson, 1997). Interviewing is a suitable method in qualitative research, as it offers 'flexibility and humaneness in data collection and, thereby, a marked capacity to examine the origins, interconnections, and potential ramifications of actualised ad meanings at the moment of their construction (Mick & Buhl, 1992, p.335). Interviews, then, help the researcher to understand the meanings that are created, including the context and the cultural frames that people utilise to make sense of these meanings (Miller & Glassner, 2010). These cultural frames are not purely symbolic, but they are rather 'cultural embedded normative explanations' (Orbuch, 1997, p.455) through which consumers organise their social world. In the context observed during this research, these frames regulated gender and family performativity, disciplining domesticity and meal rituals.

This research used semi-structured interviews, also known as in-depth interviews, that are a mid-point between rigid planning and unstructured guidelines (Esterberg, 2002). This type of interview relies on a loose structure that can change according to respondents' input. This flexibility makes semi-structured interviews suitable to explore a topic from respondents' perspective, as they adapt according to the answers and interests of the person interviewed. In this research context, semi-structured interviews were chosen to illustrate the personal experiences and memories that consumers had of Mulino

Bianco. Moreover, semi-structured interviews facilitated the respondents in feeling free to share their experiences of intimacies, and family life, allowing these accounts to emerge as a co-led process. For the interview protocol, please look at Appendix D.

This research project has included 34 semi-structured interviews with consumers that, at the time of the interview, consumed Mulino Bianco products with different intensity, from once a day to almost never. To be part of the sample, participants had to be familiar with Mulino Bianco products, possibly after having been consumers in a previous time of their lives, and with Mulino Bianco's advertising. This may appear as conflicting with the idea that respondents are selected only if they have lived the experience under study (Goulding, 2005). However, I believe that cultural brands are relevant not only as source of identities, but also for how they charge with meanings certain practices and forms of expression. Thus, iconic brands are meant to resonate with a broader set of consumers whose experience of the brand can change of quality and intensity. The sample was equally divided among lesbigay and heterosexual respondents, reflecting the family crisis I will address in the first chapter of findings. During the discussion of policies such as the extension of civil partnership and step-child adoption to lesbigay subjects, 'the Mulino Bianco family' resurged as an idiom of political value, as it referred to the traditional family now questioned by policy-makers. As the brand has come to represent heterosexual families, the sampling aimed to reflect two extreme positions: those who aligned with that representation and those who felt left out. Participants were sampled among lesbigay activists and among heterosexual consumers who aligned with Catholic principles, relying on their self-identification with one of these two groups. When I refer to the final group I sampled, I am borrowing the term 'lesbigay' introduced by Carrington (2013), as my participants are not covering the whole spectrum of LGBTQ identities.

In terms of consumption, the overall sample is divided between 9 enthusiast consumers, who consume Mulino Bianco products with a frequency ranging from every day to once a week, 12 medium-engaged consumers, who buy Mulino Bianco once a month, and 13 non-engaged consumers, who have consumed the brand but never or almost never consume it. Heterosexual participants tended to be more frequent consumers. This can be explained by these consumers having a higher presence of children in their home, and the will to accommodate their taste. Due to the nature of purposive sampling (Silverman,

2001) the two samples are not equivalent, but they share the same age average (40, 3 years old). The main difference concerns the household composition. All of the 17 heterosexual participants were married, and 14 of them had children. In the lesbian sample, 14 participants were in a partnership, 8 of which with children, and 3 participants were single at the time of the interview. Another difference is in the average education of the sample was higher among the lesbians. Further details regarding the whole sample are available in Appendix B.

By choosing these two opposite configurations, I am aware that my sampling bears two potential limitations. The first one is that beyond the lesbian ones, other families were left out by the nuclear, white, heterosexual family iconography, such as single parents or mixed raced families. The second limitation is that homosexual couples are not necessarily less normative than heterosexual ones (Carrington, 2013), and this research does not aim to take essentialist positions by assuming that the definition of sexual orientation can predict gendered and domestic practices. However, this research has focused on lesbian identities as they were involved in one of the latest criticism of the brand. My ambition was to interview members of the Catholic movements who had been more vocal in relation to family rights, such as *Manif pour Tous* and *Movimento per La Vita*. However, these movements were quite defensive, and did not agree to be interviewed personally, rather only through questionnaires delivered through their spokesperson. As this was not meeting my requirements and it would not have produced the rich descriptions I expected, I declined their offer. Likewise, some lesbian respondents were sceptical that I was not affiliated with Barilla, and refused an interview because they were against food products that contained palm oil and animal ingredients.

After these initial difficulties, I resolved to source participants by using snowball sampling and selected gatekeepers. The use of gatekeepers developed organically throughout the process of data collection and accessing participants was a time-demanding and complex endeavour that would not have been possible without their active role. Respondents of the lesbian community were recruited through a gatekeeper in the local lesbian groups, through the mailing list of the lesbian family association 'Famiglie Arcobaleno' and through word of mouth among my personal connections. Catholic respondents were recruited through a gatekeeper within local Catholic groups

and through the local diocese. After having been introduced to potential participants, I followed up with a short email in which I explained that I was looking at how Mulino Bianco had entered the social debate over family rights, and more broadly, how the brand articulated in the lives of Italian families. I shared with them that the choice of sampling participants among the lesbian/gay/Catholic community was motivated by the role these two communities had in the current debate over family rights and definition, a debate in which Mulino Bianco was frequently mentioned because of its association with heteronormative family portrayals.

Snowball sampling is a variation of purposive sampling, that addressed a specific population instead of the whole demographic, because of the theoretical requirements of the research project (Marvasti, 2004). It is a valid sampling technique to source participants who hold alternative views or lifestyles (Esterberg, 2002), as in the case of observant Catholics and lesbian/gay activists. Likewise, gatekeepers were crucial when it came to introducing new potential participants to the data collection process. I ceased to collect data in August 2016 as the interviews began to confirm the patterns I had already observed, showing I was reaching theoretical saturation, the stage at which data are no longer able to provide new insights and develop new themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Because of the unplanned number and profile of participants, the two samples are not directly comparable in family composition. When compared to the heterosexual sample, in the lesbian/gay one fewer participants have children. On the other hand, in the heterosexual sample more participants are in a family with children. Although family composition differs, the two samples share the same middle-class extraction and ethnicity, as only one participant had a non-Italian parent.

Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, according to participants. Even if this was not a requirement, the interviews involved both partners if they volunteered for this study. In these cases, interviews were still conducted one person at the time, with two exceptions. In most cases I interviewed only those consumers who felt more responsible for food provisioning and food preparation at home. Interviews were recorded after having obtained permission from participants. When possible, the interview took place at respondents' homes to make them more comfortable, to simplify the recording and to allow them to share with me any Mulino Bianco items they had at home. However,

obtaining an interview was at times very difficult. Throughout the recruitment process, then, I had to make very clear that this study was not meant to evaluate ‘quantitative’ data on consumption, but rather their consumption stories. Once broken that initial resistance, participants were willing and curious to participate, confirming the brand’s popularity and pervasiveness in everyday life.

Interview guidelines were refined through two pilot interviews, which I decided to exclude from the final transcripts as they were very different from the others I collected. This is not to say that all the interviews I collected were consistent throughout the data collection. On the contrary, they changed according to the attitude and involvement of the participants, guided by the context in which they took place, and the act of interviewing itself got more refined as the process of data collection progressed with the data collection. The final guideline of questions included only open-ended questions, through which I could track if the key topics were consistently addressed. The interview started with background questions, smoothing the initial tension of the interview, but also priming the interviewees to move to memories, anecdotes, and personal reflection associated with the brand. In the second stage, respondents were asked to view and comment the zwieback advertisement that I had analysed previously, as a sample of Mulino Bianco campaigns over time. This step was intended to understand consumers' interpretation in light of their experiences, and not to compare them with the visual analysis I conducted. In fact, I adopted a research-response response interpretation (Scott, 1994), so the authorial intentions behind the advertisements were inferred, and not tested, through these questions.

Respondents often mentioned more ads, from Mulino Bianco or other brands, that were integrated in the discussion. With the last set of questions, respondents were asked for their opinion on the evolution of Mulino Bianco, and to share their thoughts on what they would like as the next campaign and if they had any particular expectations in this regard. Along with the closing remarks, I usually replied to any question or curiosity that arose during the interview. These questions frequently double-checked my affiliation with the company, and asked for clarifications on the choice of Antonio Banderas as the miller. Notes on the interview, my feelings about it and emerging themes were collected after

having met my participants and sometimes integrated these during the process of transcription.

Interviews were tape-recorded, and I personally transcribed them. Manual transcription was useful in terms of gaining familiarity with data, and to add notes whenever laughter, the tone of voice, silence and unrecorded remarks occurred, ensuring the 'rich rigour' expected in qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). Interview transcripts were analysed through thematic analyses, following the operations Spiggle (1994) theorised: categorisation, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalisation, integration, iteration, and refutation. The first stage of the analysis was categorisation, or the process of 'reducing data into meaningful segments and assigning names for the segments' (Creswell, 2007, p.148). This operation was conducted through manual coding on printed transcripts. I started coding by using notes I had written during transcription, placing my ideas alongside the data and what I learnt from the literature. I experienced that the coding process is 'subjective to some extent because the researcher chooses the concepts to focus on' (Walsham, 2006, p.325) and this is at times creative and at times discomfoting. Through abstraction (Spiggle, 1994) I started to detect the pattern emerging from interviews, progressively grouping codes into themes and sub-themes, so that the macro-code 'gender' included the 'mothering' and 'fathering' codes. Further codes emerged from comparison (Spiggle, 1994), by which new data helped me clarify what I had already coded, and by comparing how the different samples were related. Although Spiggle (1994) describes this process as guiding further data collection, in my case, it kept happening while I was coding new interviews, which revealed insights useful to understand the data that I had already coded. I kept going back and forth between interviews, and between interviews and literature, according to the iteration process. This iteration allowed me to introduce literature that I had not considered before, such as the one on family displaying. Moving between literature and interviews helped in identifying how each theme could be nuanced through different properties, an operation named dimensionalisation. In this operation, I understood how themes derived from the literature, such as gaze, had empirical variations in the life of consumers, ranging from 'behaving properly' to 'behaving like nobody is watching'.

At that stage, I needed to understand how my codes and themes related to one another. I followed the advice of Belk, Fischer and Kozinets (2013), who suggested to get inspiration from the axial coding theorised in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In Spiggle's (1994) terminology, this process is called integration and relies on the same principles that look, like axial coding, at the relations between codes. These relations can be of three kinds: different codes can be dimensions of the same phenomenon; they could be elements of the same process; or they could explain one another (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). I used these relations to understand how themes interacted to one another, and how these articulations fitted the theoretical framework that I had considered. The last step of the process is refutation, in which I exposed my analysis to empirical scrutiny (Spiggle, 1994) that meant to test how my assumptions reverberated between my data.

4.3 Interpretation

As I had anticipated, the three different datasets integrated during the interpretive process. Studies on brand iconicity, including both brand genealogy and socio-historical research, imply that different methods need to converge in a final level. For instance, Holt (2004) claims that the theory-building process requires moving back and forward between the different levels of analysis (textual, discourse and socioeconomic) while combining them into an elaborate account of the brand's symbolic power. Likewise, in this research, integration and interpretation developed together. This process is called interpretive integration, 'where an explanation is generated from the empirical work which incorporates the knowledge produced by the different methods, blending it into a coherent account' (Moran-Ellis *et al.*, 2006, p.55). The research questions guided integration, and thus the datasets will interplay differently in the chapter of findings that will follow. For example, consumer interviews have little relevance in the first chapter of findings, as the interpretation of the building of Mulino Bianco's iconicity was based more on the socio-historical and critical visual analysis.

Interpretation was not systematic, but rather followed the 'synthetic, holistic, and illuminating grasp of meaning' (Spiggle, 1994, p.497) that happens during interpretation,

which makes it such a subjective and unstructured process. As theory and data are put continuously in a relationship, interpretation is known to be a difficult and messy undertaking (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998). I followed empathic interpretation, which amplifies the meanings embedded in the data and in the point of view of participants, instead of applying concepts that had not emerged from the field (Willig, 2014). For instance, this meant I had to consider how the theme of family crisis was articulated for participants and how it interfered with the iconisation process. However, my point of view was not and could not have been neglected, as interpretive research is always the result of a fusion of horizons between the frames emerging from the texts and those belonging to the researcher (Thompson, 1997). Thus, interpretation was guided by an attention to the power dynamics of heteronormativity in advertising representations, and between advertising and consumers, as expressed in the queer-feminist perspective I outlined before. However, my primary guidance in the interpretive process has been the literature and scholarship related to the field of research, specifically iconic brand theory. Looking at the theoretical frameworks that I previously addressed was fundamental to guide the theory-building process. While themes and constructs emerged from my data, I could use this theoretical framework as a reference point to locate my data and to understand how my empirical context could contribute to the theories I was referencing. For example, the focus on practices emerged from a look at the potential overlooked aspects of brand iconicity.

4.4 Ethics

This research has obtained the Ethical Approval by Royal Holloway University of London, and it is compliant with the guidelines provided by the Statement of Ethical Practice offered by British Sociological Association, as updated in 2017. Following the statement, this research sought to ensure a correct and informed relation with participants, in which participation in the research is voluntary, and informed consent was gathered before any data was collected. Participants were granted confidentiality, privacy and anonymity. Permission for recording interviews had been sought and allowed before the interviews were conducted, and the material was not disclosed outside of data analysis. When working with a company or organisation, the issue of confidentiality is especially

relevant, because it is easy to determine the identity of those interviewed, especially when the name of the company is already public (Walsham, 2006). Only the position of the participants that are employed by Barilla were disclosed since this contextual information helped to validate the data collected from the company's side. This disclosure was agreed with participants' informed consent and permission. I attached the informed consent template I used for the interviews in Appendix C.

Mulino Bianco did not sponsor or participate in the design of the research, so there are no obligations towards the company, which will access materials and results with no interference to the process of data collection. This independence ensured ensure absence from conflicts of interest and of access to the archive during and after the project was over. At the end of the research process, the organisation received a report of the research, in compliance with the research ethics adopted in this study (Tracy, 2010). Particular attention was given to not discriminate towards interviewees according to their sexual orientation, also in the effort eliminating the rhetoric of the 'gay other' that enhances the differences of lesbigay participants against the rest of the population (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2003, p.247). To minimise misunderstandings and distress, I was as clear as possible about the aim of the research and interactive about the agenda entailed. Gender status is considered a 'sensitive topic' (ESRC Framework, 2015) and therefore none of the interviews was carried out prior to the ethical approval of Royal Holloway University of London. The feminist perspective I adopted as part of the paradigm research has motivated a specific attention to relational ethics (Tracy, 2010), according to which the researcher looks for reciprocity and interdependence with participants. That meant an open relationship with participants, including mutual sharing of information and the refuse to treat participants as objects whose experience could be exploited for data.

4.5 Limitations and Contributions

Final notes on the research methodology relates to language, the writing process of this research and the pros and cons of this methodology. Consumer and marketing interpretive research is the subjective production of a researcher or a research team, and thus are context-based, mediated from interpretation and based on the description of social

experiences (Hogg & Maclaran, 2008). This makes it harder for interpretive scholars, as well as for myself, to convince the audience of the trustworthiness of the final research product. Hogg and Maclaran (2008) clarify how language, and the process of writing, participate in the interpretive process and in captivating the trust of the reader. Both the different texts analysed and the interpretation process rely on language as ‘the central medium for transmitting meaning and as such provides a methodological orientation for a phenomenology of social life that is concerned with the relation between language use and the objects of experience’ (Goulding, 2005, p.302).

Finding a research question, if only for a while, is one of the hardest tasks. It was through the process of writing and rewriting each chapter of this thesis that I navigated my own interpretation, and the words I was borrowing from my participants. Thus, I acknowledge that this story is a situated account of the complexity I experienced, but also a journey in which not everything went as planned. Therefore, I recognise that, bearing my own perspective, this research is limited. In fact, I did not offer all my participants an equal representation, as I gave more room to the stories and voices that fitted my inquiry better. Moreover, my contextualised position and my queer-feminist perspective reflected my motivation, but it was deliberately against the values some participants held. Writing and processing some of these words gave me a sense of discomfort at times because our values were conflicting. While I kept the integrity of their point of view, I have never checked with participants how and if they agreed with my final interpretation, acknowledging the incongruence of our point of views. Further limitations of this thesis concern the access to archival data as well. While I already knew the archive, I had focused mainly on Barilla in my previous research. It was a surprise to see how Mulino Bianco had received less attention, especially in the last few years. The voids in the archive could not be compensated with the cooperation of the marketing office, and some details were merely lost. Other data, such as revenues and sales, were not shared with me, as the company did not intend to make them public. While this did not compromise the socio-historical analysis, the documents and data that I finally had access to were indeed different from those that I had expected to find.

On the other hand, this research and my position in the field contributed to the methodology as presented earlier. In fact, my identity as an Italian PhD researcher

pursuing this research at a British university put me in an ideal position to conduct this research. The institutions and even the participants felt flattered by the interest a foreign university had in this research context, and sometimes imagining to be heard by British academics -they took a self-reflexive position, describing what they meant more thoroughly. More mundane benefits of my position were granted by my understanding of the language, and by my familiarity with the Italian culture. Whenever the topic of my research was introduced in a conversation, people often felt they could relate to it, commenting on the last advertisement they had seen or on the products they loved. Sometimes I made notes on these comments, sometimes they inspired questions or non-research conversation, but they all contributed to shaping the final work. Moreover, these comments confirmed how an iconic brand enters the lives of consumers, becoming a cultural code that can be shared and understood despite how often the brand is consumed. This research offers a methodological contribution in understanding how iconic brands affect the material and symbolic life of consumers at large, by connecting these consumers' narratives with archival and company documents.

5. Findings: Mulino Bianco and the advent of a family practice (1971-2018)

5.1 Introduction

In contributing to the debates regarding how the marketplace reshapes family life and how branding activities influence family food consumption practices, this chapter examines how Mulino Bianco has reshaped the symbolic and material aspects of breakfast in Italy.³ Moreover, this chapter looks at the way in which family transformations are intertwined with marketplace ideals and moralised representations of domestic life, gendered divisions of domestic labour, ‘good’ food and a ‘healthy’ life. Branded food is charged with symbolism (Moore, Wilkie & Lutz, 2002), it is active in the ‘social reproduction of home and family identities’ (Moisio, Arnould & Price, 2004, p.362) and has a crucial role in reshaping existing domestic rituals (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). Thus, the study of Mulino Bianco as an iconic brand illuminates how brands interfere with domestic practices and family rituals.

The pervasive presence of this brand in the current Italian marketplace is illustrated through the use of the idiomatic expression the ‘Mulino Bianco family’, denoting a middle-class and harmonious nuclear family. Yet, not many know that such an expression -often used in a denigratory way to indicate the marketised idealisation of family life (see Dalli, Romani & Gistri, 2006)- is a backlash towards a compelling marketing campaign of the late 1990s in which the iconicity of the brand, established a decade before, was reinforced. Even fewer know that it is with this and the previous campaign that the brand established its ideological influence in shaping what is known today as the ‘Italian family breakfast’, a practice that Mulino Bianco orchestrated to establish its leadership in the bakery industry. The aim of this paper is to illustrate this process and the ways this iconic brand has re-shaped a declining practice and made it into a family food occasion,

³ This chapter is an adaptation of an article in press in the *European Journal of Marketing* (Pirani, Cappellini & Harman, 2018). The main difference between these two works is the time- frame considered in the analysis. While the article under review considers the history of the brand till 1995, here the frame extends till 2016.

influencing the current normative way of having breakfast in Italy. The purpose of this paper is to advance our understanding of the pervasive influence of brands in family life, showing how they do not merely reshape existing family food practices. Rather they can re-create new ones, investing them with symbolic meanings, anchoring them with novel materiality and equipping consumers with new understandings and competences.

5.2 A framework for studying iconicity over time

The iconic status of Mulino Bianco has been illustrated by others, showing how it has created 'new sign values for goods, by recombining elements from disparate cultural contexts, which even though they might not be related to any actually existing consumer lifeworld, might be thought to have a potential appeal' (Arvidsson, 2003, p.144). This study does not aim to replicate what has already been stated, but rather to show how the iconisation process was intertwined with the (re)creation of a family practice. Scholars have been interested in understanding the iconisation of a brand, a process in which its 'higher cultural, moral and political values' (Kravets & Orge, 2010) are attached to existing products. They have shown how such values reshape and sustain existing myths which provide 'collective salves for major contradictions in society' (Holt, 2006b, p.372). Inspired by this body of work, I looked at the iconisation process of Mulino Bianco combining a macro understanding of how brands engage with existing myths (see Holt, 2006; 2004) with a micro understanding of how such myths are then translated into the materiality of the brand and its practices (see Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013)

The symbolic aspect of the brand refers to a set of ideas, images, feelings and emotions that in case of an iconic brand, are part of a myth (Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013). Holt (2006a) highlights how an iconic brand does not create a myth, but rather embellish existing myths circulated via other agents, including the media. As he says, 'iconic brands play a useful complementary role because commodities materialise myths in a different manner, allowing people to interact around these otherwise ephemeral and experientially distant myths in everyday life' (Holt, 2006a, p. 374). The iconicity of a brand is established when it materialises expressions which resonate with a national myth, and therapeutically solve cultural and social tensions in societies. For example, in his analysis

of the iconisation of the whiskey brand Jack Daniel's, Holt (2006a) shows how this brand emerged as symbolic of gunfighter values - the frontier myth attached to a particular ideal of American masculinity already circulated via other influential cultural forms –solving cultural contradictions concerning the coexistence of new masculine identities of the 1950s. In our case, Mulino Bianco anchored its iconicity around the myths of tamed nature as well as rural and familial past, allowing it to reconcile radical cultural changes affecting family life and well as food practice and culinary culture.

The material aspect of a brand plays a central role in the way, consumers objectify ideas and norms (Woodward, 2007) and negotiate their own identities (Miller, 1987). Understanding the material aspects of objects and brands has been considered central for understanding individual agency (Borgerson, 2005). Studying materiality involves looking at 'the material substances and design intentions that go into composing objects' (Ferreira & Scaraboto, 2016) and considering how designers intentionally anticipate future ways of consuming and interacting with objects and brands (Borgerson, 2005; 2013). Given the importance of looking at the way the materiality of a brand is anticipated and produced (Dant, 2008), we look at the process through which objects - from the packaging to the shape and ingredients of biscuits, from the logo to the gadgets and the magazine - have been planned by the company.

The term practice is used here referring to the idea that social life 'stem(s) from and transpire through the real-time accomplishments of ordinary activities' (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017, p.110). A practice is a routinised behaviour shared socially and carried out individually, constituting the fabric of individual and social life (Warde, 2005). Interacting with objects is a fundamental element of each practice, since 'consumption is a moment in almost every practice' (Warde, 2005, p.137). As practices are not only the 'doing' but also the 'saying' around activities, the representations of ideas and understanding are also a crucial element of a practice (Warde, 2005). Visual and verbal representations are particularly relevant for this study, as Mulino Bianco created a new way of consuming biscuits, transforming the image of the domestic breakfast investing it with new symbolic meanings around family life, but also equipping consumers with competences and materiality to sustain such meanings.

The scant consumer research studies looking at breakfast highlight how this is a practice 'vulnerable to domination by other practices' (Veeck, Hongyan & Yu, 2016, p.166). Time and effort dedicated to this eating occasion are currently being reduced as people focus on the day ahead and eating 'on the run' rather than treating breakfast as a lengthy communal meal confined to the domestic sphere. Overlapping with work and school schedules, which dominate the temporal organisation of the morning, breakfast is currently seen as a 'squeezed practice' (Le Pape & Plessz, 2017) in various socio-cultural contexts. For example, Marshall's (2005) study of meals conventions in Scotland shows how breakfast is still considered one of the everyday family meals, but that people do not tend to have it together. Also, he highlights how cooked breakfasts have gradually disappeared, being replaced with a combination of uncooked and ready-made items. Similarly, Veeck et al.'s (2016) studies of urban families in China show that despite recognising the symbolic significance of eating a cooked meal together in the morning, skipping breakfast or eating some ready-made snacks outside of the home are common patterns amongst their participants. These common changes in diet are also documented by historical analysis of advertising in the US, UK and Australia, showing the gradual substitution of cooked meat-based breakfast to cereals and other convenience products (Schneider & Davis, 2010; Green, 2007). Such a dietary shift, often instigated by global brands like Kellogg's (Davis & Schneider, 2010; Green, 2007), followed broader food concerns regarding health, novelty and convenience. As documented by Schneider and Davis (2010), if until the 1950s good mothers were represented in cooking breakfast for the entire family, discourses on health and convenience started appearing in the 1950s and dominated the following decades. This trend also encouraged women to adopt a more individualised consumption of convenient food, moving away from the ideal of breakfast as a cooked meal for the family.

The case of breakfast in Italy differs from the aforementioned trends in which an elaborated combination of freshly cooked food has gradually disappeared and has been substituted by ready-made and branded items. What is today known as the Italian breakfast –biscuits soaked in coffee and milk- is a recent practice established in the late seventies (DOXA-AIDEPI, 2014). The origins of the current breakfast can be traced after the II World War when Italians substituted the consumption of cold leftovers of the evening meal (for example, pasta or polenta with herring or cheese) with stale bread

soaked in milk, which became the most common option until the late seventies. Also, the time of breakfast changed in that period and from being consumed after a couple of hours of work, to a meal scheduled before the working day (DOXA-AIDEPI 2015). As breakfast was taken during mid-morning, there is no evidence that this was considered a family occasion in which food was shared amongst members. In the early 1970s having breakfast was not very common and less than a third of the population consumed it (Maestri, 1994). A rapid change in trends developed in the late 1970s and 1980s, when Italians continued to drink milk and coffee but substituted stale bread with biscuits and zwiebacks (DOXA-AIDEPI 2015). Today 80.2% of the population has breakfast at home (ISTAT, 2014) and 6 Italians out of 10 consumers opt for coffee, milk and biscuits (DOXA-AIDEPI 2015). Historians and consumer researchers speculate that such a dietary change has been influenced by the dominant position of Mulino Bianco in the marketplace (Mortara & Sinisi, 2016; Dickie, 2007; Arvidsson, 2003).

The rapid changes of breakfast are particularly impressive if compared with the limited transformation of the other meals. Some argue that working life has affected the structure of the meals, with the decrease of lunch consumed at home, the increased consumption of snacks during the day and the advent of dinner as the only domestic meal of the day (Milani & Pegoraro, 2006; Zamagni, 1998). However, these studies are based on data representing only a fraction of the working population, mainly living in the North of the country. In fact, recent statistics show that consuming lunch at home is still a prevalent practice (reaching an average of 73.4% of the population), as it remains the main meal of the day for more than 60% of the population (ISTAT, 2014). A comprehensive study looking at changes to the nation's diet is missing, but statistical reports show the constant consumption of vegetables, a decreased consumption of meat, and an increased consumption of fish along with more use of ready meals (ISTAT, 2014). The time spent eating also seems to show that meals are still considered significant events of the day. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2018) in 2015 Italians together with French spent the most amount of time in eating and drinking worldwide (more than two hours a day on average).

5.3 Documentary evidence

As I anticipated in the methodology chapter, this analysis focuses on four pivotal moments that have been key for Mulino Bianco's iconicity: the launch of the brand (1972-1975), The Happy Valley campaign (1978-1987), the Family campaign (1990-1995) and the Miller Campaign (2011-2017). These moments have been identified after having consulted the archive, company members and J.Walther Thompson staff, who curated the most recent Mulino Bianco campaign. The thematic analysis that follows has been influenced by Warde's (1997) seminal work on food dichotomies and media representations (including novelty/tradition, health/indulgence, economy/extravagance and convenience/care) and subsequent studies applying such dichotomies together with analysis of gender and family roles (see for example, Schneider and Davis, 2010). As in other interpretive works that use documents and visual data (Marshall *et al.*, 2014; Marshall, 2014b) the reading of the available material is only one of the possible interpretations, which illustrates my interest in the evolution of a family practice in relation to a brand's myth.

5.4 Launching the brand and a practice: the creation of the Mulino Bianco's myth

In 1971 Barilla, the Italian family-owned company producing pasta, faced financial difficulties and was acquired by the American multinational W. R. Grace and Company, but it was then re-acquired by the Barilla family a few years later (Sutton, 1991). Grace decided to diversify the production of the company, identifying new products to launch in the Italian market. After exploratory studies on other products, marketing research conducted with consumers supported the idea of producing biscuits and shortbreads, an existing market with few competitors and with a narrow target. Previous advertising shows how biscuits had a long tradition of being perceived as food for children, toddlers and adults in recovery (Pannella, 2013) but marketing research show that a repositioning

of the products was possible, turning biscuits into a product for the family.⁴ As consumers could not see Barilla as a believable brand to make biscuits, Mulino Bianco, a new brand producing biscuits was launched in 1975. The brand was created with the support of Motivational Research, and the sociologist Francesco Alberoni, the first person to have introduced Motivation Research in Italy, had a prominent role in planning the symbolic elements of Mulino Bianco (Arvidsson, 2003), while the material aspects of the product were decided by the marketing division of Barilla (Anceschi & Bucchetti, 1998).

5.4.1 The symbolic



Figure 3: 1975 advertising "When mills used to be white, biscuits tasted of butter, milk and wheat. Tomorrow morning, look for them at White Mill."

Alberoni suggested that 'in times of economic recession and political crisis the only way out is new needs, feelings and values' (Maestri & D'Angelo, 1995, p.111). In the late seventies, the Italian political and cultural context was characterised by internal terrorism and political instability and 'Italians nurtured a latent desire to abandon the values of industrial modernity' (Arvidsson, 2003, p.110). Accordingly, the brand was created around a new ideal of life, entrenched with nostalgia: an idealised farming arcadia of slow-paced and communal living.

Visually the brand was represented as a little white mill in the countryside, an imaginary world that had never existed but felt

nevertheless lost. This idea of going back to a nostalgic and imagined rural past was central to the reshaping of the image of the current Italian food (Dickie, 2007). Mulino Bianco was one of the first to intersect and develop such new sensibilities amongst consumers creating a coherent branding process around the myth of tamed nature. Other

⁴ Interview with Dr Andrea Allodi, Director of the Bakery Department when MB was created (8/05/2017).

brands had attempted to link their biscuits with natural ingredients and the celebration of the past. Fifteen years before the launch of Mulino Bianco, Lazzaroni, a leader in the market, advertised its biscuits recalling that “here the pleasant and healthy way to find the sweet things of your childhood- tasting Lazzaroni biscuits now, as yesterday, the first ones in quality and deliciousness! Thousands of kilos of genuine butter from our Alps! Thousands of fresh eggs every day!” (Panella, 2013, p.120). Mulino Bianco pushed the concept of nature and the past in a slightly different direction, as the old mill was a place in people’s memories, a link to an imagined past that the initial marketing research located just before the Second World War, in an undetermined countryside in which farming and artisan labour have tamed nature (Rossi, 1994).

The first advertising campaign was broadcasted on television in 1976 and it showed this connection between consumers’ memories and nature. The opening scene invited the audience to enter in an urban upper-class living room where a little girl asked her mother to recite a nursery rhyme from her own childhood. She is not a Domestic Juggler, as she is not multi-tasking among different caring practices, but she has the same nurturing attitude implied in this character. The flashback into the mother’s memories was visually represented with a girl in a white dress and a straw hat and a wild dandelion in her hands, reciting a rhyme about farm animals. The male voice-over invited the viewers to take a leap into their own memories, asking ‘Do you remember when biscuits tasted of butter, milk and wheat? Tomorrow morning search for them at the Mulino Bianco’. These same lines had already appeared in the print advertising of 1975 (Figure 3). Posed to adults and especially mothers, this question was purely rhetorical, since those biscuits had never existed, but managed to solidify the brand within an imaginary tradition. The reference to search for these biscuits in the morning was an attempt to reposition the product as a breakfast item. The motherly gaze that informs the scene suggested an identification with the mother, while electing mothers as those responsible for supplying these products.

The last line of the advert, ‘Eat healthily, go back to nature’, a constant element across all campaigns, was a statement addressing middle-class mothers and their own childhood memories which could be re-enacted with these new products. This link between past and nature was then strengthened in the 1977 advertisement set in an old farmhouse at dawn, where mundane moments of archaic, rural life were represented. Despite Mulino

Bianco being a new brand, the stress in these two campaigns was not on the products, briefly featured at the very end of the adverts, but on the ideals of going back to ‘tradition’, framed as an imagined one from nursery rhymes to dream-like scenes of rural family life. Despite being a new and arguably unhealthy convenience product, the narrative emphasises tradition, care and health (Warde, 1997). This is an interesting way of twisting the well-documented food dichotomy of novelty-tradition, which we speculate could be attributed to the suspicious attitude that Italian women used to have toward industrial and ready-made products, considering them ‘tasteless, fake, artificial and even poisonous’ (Arvidsson, 2000, p.256).

5.4.2 The Material

The brand materialised its ideals of returning to a rural past through different elements: the logo, the packaging and the products. Gio Ponti, an acclaimed designer and architect, was employed to coordinate the brand image, from the logo to the shape of the biscuits. The idea of the mill was taken from a previous Barilla printed advertisement promoting flour ‘fresh from the mill’, which was welcomed by consumers. Combined with the colour of purity, the white mill became the imaginary locus of the brand (Maestri & D’Angelo, 1995), or, in other terms, the arcadia (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003) that sheltered this rural myth. The logo mirrored this old-fashioned aura: a drawing of a white mill in a hilly countryside, framed with garlands of wheat and flowers (Figure 4). Graphically, the ears of wheat and flowers were inspired by bucolic prints of the beginning of the last century and the mill was inspired by the American brand, Pepperidge Farm (Maestri and D’Angelo 1995).



Figure 4: Mulino Bianco logo



Figure 5: Mulino Bianco packaging

Once the logo was created, the packaging was designed. Along with standard rigid boxes, the marketing team opted for soft bags in yellow paper, recalling the bags once used by bakers (Figure 5). The form of the biscuits was also a marketing decision. Gio Ponti created biscuits with irregular shapes, mimicking domestic ones, with simple forms and rudimentary decorations. Decorative elements were inspired by symbolic figures used in artisanal bread popular before the Second World War (Rossi, 1994). The implementation of this idea of creating irregular biscuits on an industrial scale was particularly challenging, but was pursued, since irregular biscuits sold in bags represented a definite difference in a market dominated by biscuits with rectangular shapes into rigid boxes (Rossi, 1994).

The recipes of the biscuits were the last piece of the creation. Mulino Bianco invested in designing premium biscuits by using ingredients such as whole eggs and real milk – rare ingredients in the market of the time – whose irregular shapes and packaging alluded to a broader notion of ‘genuine’, which encompassed the pristine lifestyle and values of rural communities. The recipes of the biscuits, created with George Maxwell, an English technician and baker, aimed to recall home-made biscuits with rudimentary shape but with a distinct flavour of milk and eggs (Maestri & D’Angelo, 1995).

5.4.3 The repositioning of a product and a practice

The initial marketing campaigns aimed at re-positioning the product and reshaping the cultural understanding of the practice of breakfast. If brands like Kellogg’s had to convince mothers to substitute a cooked meal with cereals, emphasising the healthy, convenient and economic qualities of the ready-made products (Schneider & Davis, 2010), Mulino Bianco had first to re-create a declining practice. Less than a third of the population reported having breakfast in the morning (Maestri & D’Angelo, 1995) -thus the common stale bread soaked in milk and coffee, did not retain a strong symbolic meaning amongst families.⁵ However, consumption of milk and coffee was growing.

⁵ “Italian breakfast” (1971) case study

Milk consumption per person had reached 72 lt per person in 1971-1973, but it was barely 50 lt per person 20 years before. During the same span of time, yearly coffee consumption rose from 1.3kg to 3.3kg per person (Zamagni, 1998).

In 1971, internal research on how Italians had breakfast reported that the organisation of working life was an obstacle to the development of this practice.

‘This weakening of the importance of having breakfast seems to be directly proportional with the degree of personal participation to the rhythm of modern life (big cities, distance from the workplace, different working hours, non-domestic female activities).’

The same report documented how Italian homemakers considered breakfast something between a habit passively adopted and a nutritional need to be satisfied. Therefore, breakfast did not receive much consideration from mothers who believed that ‘dinner and lunch were the only real meals’.⁶ Reintegrating breakfast into the family routine implied restating a practice that was not easily reconcilable with schooling and working life (Veeck, Hongyan & Yu, 2016) and as such women needed some ‘incentives’.⁷ Breakfast with biscuits was then framed as a reassuring practice in which mothering could be performed with no extra domestic labour and without compromising care (Warde, 1997), a crucial element for Italian mothers in their role of feeding the family (Saraceno, 2004). Also, Mulino Bianco created a narrative in which hedonism and health could be concealable in the new breakfast, a mundane and ordinary family occasion in which women could be reassured that there was no transgression in substituting stale bread with biscuits. Italians had strong feelings against industrial confectionery products, which were thought of as unhealthy and relegated to special occasions, such as the reception of guests (Maestri & D’Angelo, 1995). As the brand reconciled the food dichotomy of health and indulgence (Warde, 1997), it became ‘the point of explosion’, in Alberoni’s terms, between children and adult’s morality around the consumption of sweets.⁸ Repositioned as a measured transgression, Mulino Bianco biscuits were then associated with breakfast, a vanishing practice whose symbolic elements had yet to be established.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Report on Breakfast after 30 non-directive interviews, Delfo, 1979

⁸ Handnote on “The reasons for Mulino Bianco success” 1976-1984, Young and Rubicam (1984)

5.5 Articulating the brand and breakfast: The happy valley campaign (1978-1987)

The steady growth in market shares reached its high point in the 1980s, confirming the success of the brand's launch as well as overcoming well-established competitors. As documented by internal market reports, this paralleled with rising penetration of biscuits in the consumption patterns of Italian families, showed how the practice of breakfast had changed. In 1980, 83% of Italian families consumed biscuits, after a yearly average growth of 12% in the previous five years. The increase in the amount consumed was equally striking: in 1980, Italians consumed 53% more biscuits than in 1976, almost 8.5 kg per family. The success, which in 1986 saw Mulino Bianco at 22% of market share, was supported by the heavy use of advertising. In fact, in late 1980 the brand accounted for 30% of all advertising of biscuits, and its advertising sale-ratio for all its products was 5-6% (Sutton, 1991). Mulino Bianco's advertising effort of the 1980s was monopolised by 'Happy Valley', a nine-year-long campaign which started in 1978. Developed by the advertising agency Troost Campbell-Edward, it consolidated the brand's myth of nature, nostalgic peasant past and romantic traditions. Such a myth echoed a new sensibility of the time, in which rural past was rediscovered through the celebration of culinary traditions (for example, in 1986 the Slow food movement was formally created). Such a sensibility was also evident in the growing production of films, books and music in which the past and nature were both celebrated as a synonym of purity and happiness (Bondanella, 2009). Two examples are the movie "Novecento" (1976) by Bernardo Bertolucci, that pictured the transformation of rurality at the turn of the century, and 'The Tree of Wooden Clogs' (1978) by Ermanno Olmi, about the life and struggles of farmers at the turn of the century.

5.5.1 The symbolic



Figure 6: The Happy Valley Campaign (screenshots)

In the Happy Valley campaign (Figure 6), each TV advertisement was introduced through a spelling book, where each letter was used to present the names of the featured biscuit. The drawing of the white mill fades from the pages of the book into the scenes of a farm and farmers, vaguely located in a countryside of the late 19th century. The scenes portrayed were an idealisation of the past peasant life in which the labour of the farmers, who did not indulge themselves in the hedonic consumption of eating biscuits, was romanticised. The principles of tradition and care (Warde, 1997) characterising the launch of the brand were celebrated in this campaign featuring peasants and their dedication to preparing ingredients that would then be used in Mulino Bianco biscuits. In the rusk advertisement, the farmers were collectively involved in threshing, and they never talk to one another, as if they were performing an ancient ritual. The collective erases the focus on the individual and conveys a feeling of harmony. Working sounds are substituted by a pleasant tune, and the audience is positioned outside of the scene, distant yet present. The focus on hands and manual work emphasises the wholesomeness of the final product and the care involved in the production. Health and its link to a genuine past were also emphasised in the campaign with the final message ‘Eat well, go back to nature’. This statement ‘was risky because Italians had never eaten those good biscuits that tasted of butter, milk and wheat’ (Maestri & D’Angelo, 1995, p. 167), but the fact that nobody had never experienced this idyllic past didn’t prevent consumers from feeling a genuine nostalgia. The voice over connects the scene and the morning practices with the closing line ‘tomorrow morning at breakfast...’, re-emphasising the link between the product and breakfast. In comparison with the collectives observed in chapter 3, here the community prevails over nuclear experiences of parenthood and food preparation. Despite this, the campaign did not show family life, this theme emerged from consumers’ interpretation.

As scenes alluded to the communal and cooperative living of rural households, marketing studies documented how consumers overlapped the myth of the rural past with the archetype of an ideal family, which was described as ‘a family that protects, helps, treats well, an honest nurturing-mother, intact, pure, omnipotent, that thinks about everything and that avoid the fight with everyday life’.⁹ In chapter 3, we observed how advertising literature only mentions nuclear family.

5.3.2 The materiality of a new practice: magazines and promotional items

Although already identifiable in the advertisements, the theme of family life was considerably extended in this campaign through the launch of a series of promotional items and a free magazine, strengthening the link between the brand and the practice of having breakfast. Between 1978 and 1996, Mulino Bianco designed more than 650 series of promotional items, which evolved in line with the brand’s imagery (Ganapini & Gonizzi, 1994, p.134), Although other brands had previously used consumer promotions, Mulino Bianco was the first Italian brand to develop memorabilia consistent with the brand’s myth.¹⁰

By collecting ‘points’ printed on each pack, consumers could save for promotional items including tableware sets, various types of bowls, jugs and cookbooks. The most successful one, *il coccio* (Figure 7), launched in 1978, was produced for the entire duration of the campaign. According to the Mulino Bianco website, more than 20 million Italians received *il coccio* in their homes (between 1978 and 1986 the entire population was around 56 million). This ceramic bowl - moulded on a farmer’s bowl of 1919, used to soak stale bread- reproduced an advertising prop appearing in a previous campaign. Closer to a soup bowl than to what was then considered a coffee mug, *il coccio* was a materialisation of the newly reshaped practice of breakfast. Without any handles, it was designed to be held with both hands, a childish gesture which suggested that breakfast at home was a safe and intimate moment.

⁹ Study on brand image, CER, (1982)

¹⁰ Interview with the head of the bakery department at the time of the Mulino Bianco launch (8/05/2017).



Figure 7: Il Coccio

Figure 8: Sorpresine collectables

Women were the primary target of the products whose rustic and straightforward design provided branded tools that could be used during the reinvented practice of breakfast. The strong association between these items and an imagined rural past was aimed at reconciling two openly contradictory themes: going back in time and implementing a new eating habit which *de facto* deviated from the eating choices of past. As the brand positioned itself as a reassuring return to an undetermined yesterday, familiar gender roles were not jeopardised. Women, and indeed mothers, were often directly addressed in their roles of feeding the family. For example, in one of the promotions, the cookbook ‘Traditional recipes on the table: Rediscovering the dishes of the past’ (1986) – mothers were invited to display the book on the shelves of their kitchen and open it every time they asked themselves ‘what shall I prepare today for my family?’. The cookbooks encouraged them to create ‘happy family occasions’ cooking ‘simplified’ versions of ‘traditional’ dishes (1986, p.3). Interestingly, in the cookbooks there was no mention of biscuits or other ready-made products.

A similar narrative is present in the NaturAmica (Friend Nature) a free magazine, distributed via post since 1980 to those who had registered to receive the promotional items. NaturAmica aligned the reader with the central themes of Mulino Bianco, such as domestic care, environmental concern and an idealisation of the countryside. The magazine was aimed at a middle-class female readership, providing ‘traditional’ recipes, gardening tips and ideas for interior design, while presenting newly branded collectables. The first editorial letter of the first issues said that NaturAmica is a magazine that ‘wants to go back to natural flavours, to the healthy and simple things of the past, against the growing pollution, the difficult ecologic and biologic balance, the damages of the

sedentary life and of wrong nutrition'. The magazine intersected homemade foods with Mulino Bianco items, making ready-made food complimentary and non-contradictory with home-made food. In doing so, it perpetuated the overall narrative bringing together care and convenience, health and indulgence (Warde, 1997). For example, the January issue of 1986 promoted homemade jams and preserves, offering housewives free labels for their jars, while presenting the new collectible Mulino Bianco sugar pot.

Children were also recognised as crucial consumers to be rewarded for their loyalty. Between 1982 and 1990 snacks started to be sold in family packs, each one of them contained *sorpresine* (little surprises), smaller collectable items such as puzzles and colourful stationery, packed in retro-style matchboxes. *Sorpresine* provided children with the immediate reward of something to play with without needing mothers' intervention. These promotional items boosted the sale of Mulino Bianco snacks, so that in 1981 sales boomed from 28 tons in January to 49 tons at the end of the year, gaining 60% of the market share of snacks.¹¹ Although the inclusion of toys in packets of food was not new in the Italian market, this was a considerable shift for the brand. Mulino Bianco repositioned as a brand that could provide leisure to children, associating food with toys (see Elliott, 2007).

5.3.3 Legitimising breakfast

The main aim of Mulino Bianco during these years was to create new cultural meanings legitimising the newly established practice of breakfast. This was partly achieved through aggressive distribution of gadgets and souvenirs aimed at providing objects that could support the consumption of biscuits in the morning. Internal marketing research showed that the company was concerned that consuming biscuits in the morning could have been a temporary trend.¹² Lacking any substantial symbolic meanings, breakfast remained an 'overlooked and nutritionally insufficient meal'.¹³ The company unsuccessfully tried to

¹¹ Interview with the head of the bakery department at the time of the Mulino Bianco launch (8/05/2017).

¹² According to the Delfo report on breakfast (1979), Italians thought of it as a chance to gather the family, but everyday life leads to them skipping breakfast or dealing with burnt toast

¹³ "Conceptual Definition of a Barilla Product for Breakfast", Leader (1980)

identify complementary products, which consumed together with biscuits could ‘conciliate nutritional values with pleasure, communicating love, care, like if home-made, while providing a functional rule’.¹⁴ Making sure that this practice did not jeopardise the rhythm of everyday life, or create additional domestic labour for women was also an important feature.¹⁵ We could not trace a systematic overview of the brand’s effort to legitimise breakfast outside of advertising campaigns, however in the company’s archive there is a small collection of leaflets and brochures distributed in popular magazines. Among those is “Breakfast: how to change it”, a brochure distributed with the issue n.9 (1989) of the lifestyle magazine *Starebene*, whose readership is mainly constituted of middle-class women, aged between 35-45, living in urban areas. This brochure provided tips on what to prepare breakfast and how to organise it, emphasising the importance of eating something – with preference given to bakery products- along with coffee or milk. Although Mulino Bianco wasn't explicitly mentioned, it was featured in the brochure with a second advertisement on the front and back cover.

5.6 Cementing the articulation: The family campaign (1990-1995)

By 1987, Mulino Bianco was the only biscuit brand that could be recalled by almost 46% of biscuit consumers, against the 18% of its closest competitor,¹⁶ and by 1991 an internal report declared it had a market-share of 32.2%. However, the company feared that ‘one day the consumer could wake up and realise that the sweet and pretty mill is, in fact, an industrial “monster” that invades and saturates the market, becoming a monopoly’.¹⁷ Marketing research, in fact, suggested that the myth of the nostalgic countryside was fading away, since it located consumers' fantasies in a distant and unachievable past far removed from the current lives of many consumers.¹⁸

¹⁴ Imago market research, 1986

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Study on brand awareness, Doxa (1987).

¹⁷ “MB’s reasons for success”, Young and Rubicam (1984)

¹⁸ “The new Image of MB”, Imago (1986)

Italian society had indeed changed. In the second half of the 1980's consumption had become a central element of a new cultural and social order, once heavily centred around religion and politics (Arvidsson, 2003, p. 133). Italians became more focused on their own individual identities and hence consumption become a central element of this period (Ginsborg, 2003; Ferrarotti, 1988). Italians not only consumed more goods, but they also consumed more advertising. In 1987, 40% of the Italians had a phone, and one-fourth of the population had a TV, even if substantial disparities persisted between North and South (Gattei, 1989). Such changes in consumption happened at the same time as certain family trends evolved. Divorce became more common after it was legalised in 1978, with 27,682 cases in 1990 compared to 16.857 in 1986 (ISTAT, 2015) and fertility decreased considerably (Golini & Silvestrini, 1995). Advertising participated in these changes conveying an American model of industrial production and protestant ethos, a society of hedonism and individualism, of consumptions and divorces (Falabrino, 2001). Nevertheless, families were celebrated as cores of Italian society through Italian television. Private television channels mixed advertising with formats imported mainly from the USA (Ginsborg, 2003), with sit-coms helping to authorize the emerging consumer culture and notably the portrayals were generally centred around nuclear families (Mazzoleni, 2000).

5.6.1 The symbolic





Figure 9: The Happy Family campaign (screenshots)

Considering these cultural and social changes, the myth of rural mill was inadequate in reconciling the tensions of the new-born Italian consumer culture. The myth of nature encased in the rural arcadia was not able to address social insecurities such as those emerging from the environmental crisis of the late 1980s. Marketing research also suggested the need to strengthen the association with the family, not based on the mother-child connection but on the middle-class nuclear family raising children and being simultaneously committed to paid employment. After two minor trials, in 1990 the agency Armando Testa released the family campaign, under the direction of Oscar winner, Giuseppe Tornatore, and with the music of Ennio Morricone, the creator of soundtracks used in spaghetti western films. The 5-year campaign, which according to the historian Dickie, was ‘the most successful campaign in the history of Italian television’ (2017, p.3), featured the everyday life of a middle-class family relocating from the city to the countryside (Figure 9). The picturesque Tuscan countryside was selected to materialise the second-home aspiration of millions of urban consumers (Dickie, 2007) and an XIII century mill was purchased and painted in white. The campaign was organised in a series of mini-episodes narrating the adventures of a ‘modern family who leave the city and choose to live healthy by going back to nature’ (Dickie 2007, p.3). This narrative encapsulates the two main symbolic leitmotifs of the brans: tamed nature and familial and rural past.

The 'modern family', as the company defines it, is constituted by young, healthy and good-looking parents without any strong Italian feature, and the children, a boy and a girl, blonde and brown-haired, reproducing the same colour combination as their parents. The cameo appearance of the grandfather ensured a link with tradition without overshadowing its modernity. The father, a journalist, and the mother, a teacher, are portrayed at work only in the first episode in which all actors, including the grandfather, confess their dreams of wanting to live in the countryside. The subsequent episodes portrayed the family appreciating the natural beauty of the countryside organising family parties in the garden, riding bicycles, running across fields and purchasing vegetables in the local market. Their experience of nature and family life is one of leisure, as they are not required to farm nor work in the fields. The family shows a very active and modern lifestyle: in the rusk advertisement, they enjoy outdoor activities and play with their children in the fields of wheat. The parents are fit and groomed, dressed in casual attire, conveying the image of a youthful family. Clothes are important in nuancing the characters. In fact, the adults are dressed for outdoor, leisure activities. As such the representation of the mill, and indeed of the past is not a threatening one because it promised a better quality of life closer to 'tradition' without giving up the benefits of capitalist economy. While the strapline says, 'Eat well, go back to nature', the advert showed that being closer to nature didn't mean going back to an agricultural lifestyle. Instead, nature was a middle-class retreat orientated around aesthetic and leisure concerns. Nature had become hypernature, expression of the way industry chooses and processes ingredients, maximising their benefits.¹⁹

The emancipating role of the mother is central in this campaign and indeed in line with other food advertising of the time (Davis *et al.*, 2016). She is portrayed as the one who is responsible for feeding the family, a modern Domestic Juggler, and her everyday tasks are described as effortless since they are mediated by the brand and its ready-made products. Her work of feeding the family with ready-made products is not seen as a contradiction within the narrative, since it represents the overall image of the brand reconciling food contradictions, such as convenience and care, health and indulgence

¹⁹ Final synthesis of consultants' considerations over the new communication project for MB, Young and Rubicam, 17/6/1986

(Warde, 1997). This conciliatory role is indeed central for the legitimisation of a new family practice, in which the mother, as the leading figure of the practice, is portrayed as someone who takes care of the family without increasing the domestic labour for herself. In line with advertising of the time, she is portrayed as both a producer and direct consumer of the food she serves (Davis *et al.*, 2016), partly reclaiming her hedonic place in the family. The father, a peripheral figure in the preparation of food, is portrayed as the primary Breadwinner, who, often away for work, reappears to spend leisure time with the children, as he does in the rusk advertisement. This figure echoes what has been called the emotionally engaged father (Marshall *et al.*, 2014), a fathering role typical of the 1980s advertising in the UK and Australia, who provides support for the children but is not involved in domestic labour. This character reflects the performances of masculinity within family I observed in the literature review, as he combines the Breadwinner with the Nurturing Father.

5.6.2 Materiality

The use of promotional consumer items to be earned by collecting points was also continued and expanded in this campaign. Along with tableware, the new series included electric appliances such as a little oven for warming up Mulino Bianco pastries, and an espresso machine. Through such gadgets, Italian women were provided with the tools for the execution of the practice of breakfast, in which Mulino Bianco products played an essential part of the morning food occasion. Other gadgets were also introduced in 1988 showing the materialisation of the mill. A series of mill-shaped goods, including a radio, an alarm and a stationary container helped to move Mulino Bianco from the kitchen to children's bedrooms.

Another partly unplanned, material consequence of this campaign was consumers' interest in the mill, the building located in southern Tuscany. The mill started to develop tourism of its own, attracting curious consumers. The sociologist Omar Calabrese describes the phenomenon in these terms: 'white exactly like in the advert, it is surrounded by fields, it really has its little spinning wheel. And hundreds of people observe it in religious silence' (Calabrese, 1994). More recently, the historian Dickie interviewed the owner of the

building who remembered the phenomenon as ‘real processions. Hundreds of people come to visit the mill at weekends. Most were disappointed because, obviously, it wasn’t like it was on television. Only the kids were happy: they ran around enthusiastically amid all the plasterboard and polystyrene’ (Dickie 2007, p.3). The mill, now accessible as a tourist destination gave consumers a chance to experience the middle-class and familial dream of ‘going back to nature’.

5.6.3 The invention of Italian (family) breakfast

According to a 3SC market research run in 1990, 86% of Italians believed that having breakfast based on cereals, fruit and yoghurt was a sign of cultural modernity, associated with North European countries. Despite considering breakfast to be a healthy practice, the research showed that only a small proportion of informants had yoghurts in the morning while most of them had coffee and milk with bakery products, a breakfast model they did not believe to be correct nor nutritious. Mulino Bianco’s efforts were directed towards nutritionally legitimising the existing practice of breakfast. While the symbolic value of a family breakfast had already been established, Mulino Bianco had to work harder to nutritionally defend a ‘traditional’ practice that was only 15 years old.²⁰

This validation process took two steps: naming the practice and supporting it on a scientific level. After considering the option of ‘Mediterranean Breakfast’, the label ‘Italian Breakfast’ was chosen to define a practice seen as both modern and contemporary. For example, it was noted that this type of breakfast didn’t mandate family members to sit down at a table, or to spend a long time in the kitchen preparing it: ‘It is also positive that it asks the cooperation of all family members: while one is in the bathroom the other gets the coffee ready and children take their own cups’.²¹ Thus, the campaign explicitly referred to ‘Italian Breakfast’, connecting the practice with a ‘modern’ family and a morning family food occasions that did not require the demanding rituals of other daily meals. Centred around the figure of the mother feeding the family without cooking, a

²⁰ Internal document, 8th July 1991

²¹ Internal document, 12th February 1991

'modern' lifestyle was enacted without jeopardising gender roles in the household. The second step was to instate a Public Relations campaign supported by scientific authority, rehabilitating Italian Breakfast within the media as well as schools with *ad hoc* projects. The data available in the archive does not allow us to trace a very systematic overview; however, internal correspondence held among company members witnesses how Media Italia, a PR company, was chosen to run the breakfast campaign. Media Italia had already worked with nutritional trends, such as the rehabilitation of the reputation of sweet snacks and sugar in public opinion. During the campaign on sugar, Media Italia had established SISA (Italian Society for Nutritional Studies), a scientific committee dedicated to the research on food products. SISA generated Fo.Sa.N, Fund for the Study of Food and nutrition, a pool of nutritionists created to guarantee the scientific claims supporting the nutritional properties of bakery products.

An internal report shows that the budget Mulino Bianco destined for the first two years of the Italian Breakfast campaign was of 1.500.000.000 Lire per year, starting in 1991. A significant percentage of the budget went to Fo.Sa.N., appointed to organise scientific meetings as well as presenting existing research on breakfast. Before the breakfast project, Fo.Sa.N had already partnered with Mulino Bianco in promoting the habits of snacking amongst children. Fo.Sa.N. started to focus on breakfast only in 1992, an attention culminating with a dedicated meeting in 1996, named '*Have Italians added a meal at the table?*', and held on the 26th of June in Cassano D'Adda. The engagement with the scientific community paired with a consistent promotion of Italian Breakfast on different media. In 1995, Mulino Bianco distributed to the media a brochure named 'Italian Breakfast: the right way to start your day' to the media which illustrated the nutritional values for every Mulino Bianco item, suggesting that they all were 'ideal products' that, paired with coffee and milk, would make an Italian Breakfast healthy, various and pleasurable. The brand also partnered with women's magazine, such as *Donna Moderna* (Modern Woman) and *Famiglia Cristiana* (Christian Family), belonging respectively to Arnoldo Mondadori Group and to the Vatican publishing company, San Paolo. In *Donna Moderna*'s issue of the 14th of May 1993, the editorial 'Never without breakfast', overviewed national and international breakfast habits, closing with the words 'Yes to breakfast, but to the Italian one'. In the same issues, Mulino Bianco's coupons were rewarded to the readers who completed a questionnaire on breakfast run by GPF &

Associates. After 1996, the brand interrupted the 'Italian Breakfast' project, retaining a loose connection with this meal. We speculate that this decision was taken as the articulation of Mulino Bianco as the family breakfast brand had already been cemented in the previous 20 years.

5.7 Moving beyond the articulation: The Miller campaign (2011-2017)

The last iconic campaign developed in the aftermath of the socio-economic breakdown started in 2008 (D'Ippoliti & Roncaglia, 2011). While struggling to keep up with pre-crisis standards (Cappellini, Marilli & Parsons, 2014), Italian society has become cautious in limiting who can be considered a family and benefit from its privileges. After 2013 some Catholic associations, as *Manif pour Tous*, *Standing Vigils* or *Family Day*, have mobilised to defend the heterosexual procreative family, standing against the legal recognition of LGBT unions. These associations were also active in protesting against the introduction of gender theories in public education (Garbagnoli, 2014). Unlike Catholic Church and observant Catholics Italian society seems to be de facto more open, especially in terms of overcoming the prejudice on homosexuals, for the 74.8% of the population believes that homosexuality is not a threat to family, and 62.8% would support a form of legal recognition to same-sex couples (ISTAT, 2012). However, only the 43,9% of Italians would grant homosexual couples the right to marry and only the 19,4% would let a gay couple adopt children (ISTAT, 2012). Mulino Bianco, imbued with family-related values, became part of the media discourse supporting gay rights. The company and advertising consultants confirmed that Mulino Bianco was caught in a cultural impasse, as the family meanings attached to it had lost their positive values. To resolve this impasse, the advertising agency J. Walter and Thompson designed a new campaign, shot by the well-known director Luca Guadagnino.

5.7.1 The symbolic



Figure 10 *The Miller* campaign (screenshots)

This campaign features a miller who comes back from a foreign country to return to his roots. Each advertisement features the miller improving, or inventing, a new Mulino Bianco product, taking inspiration from everyday life, such as watching a crushed zwieback falling on the buttered side (Figure 10). The employee of J. Walter and Thompson explained that the miller was designed around the archetypes of the Sage and the Magician (Hartwell, 2012), as a knowledgeable man able to transform his life through his work. The miller embodies the myth of craftsmanship, that reminds us of artisanal skills but also of the 'art of getting by', which Italians pride themselves on. The myth of craftsmanship illustrates that creativity can combine innovation and tradition, intuition and know-how. The craftsmanship myth also has a gender implication, as he is clearly at the centre of the life in the mill. All the other characters, such as a plump maid, a hen behaving like a pet and the workers, have less agency and depend on him. However, the Banderas-miller combines expertise and care about food, usually two elements that are not claimed together by male food lovers and professionals (Cairns, Johnston & Baumann, 2010). Using the gender types emerged in the literature review, the miller can be profiled as a Domestic Divo, who displays a professional knowledge and expertise in a domestic environment. As the Domestic Divo, he does not cook for a family or for himself, but for an indistinct collective that also includes the audience, thanks to an ambiguous gaze that demands the staging of these skills. Unlike the Domestic Divo, the practice of cooking is not a mere display of knowledge, but also personal dedication, such

as in the Nurturing Father. The ambiguous gaze couples with an ambiguous collective in which he operates, that it is not a family-centric but that generates family-like gendered practices.

The miller's identity builds on a second form of ambiguity, as the actor Antonio Banderas is clearly recognisable, as if he was an endorser, but he is indeed acting as an impersonator of the miller. However, his recognisability questions if the literature on celebrity endorsement applies here, particularly the theories on fitting between brand and endorser, such as the meaning transfer theory (McCracken, 1989) or the 'match-up' hypothesis (Till & Busler, 2000; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Kamins, 1990). The 'match-up' hypothesis is based on the idea that endorsers provide adaptive information, for instance prompting the assumption that the endorsed product will provide the same attractiveness showed by the celebrity endorsing it (Kamins, 1990). Thus, this hypothesis emphasises the importance of a proper match-up between product and endorser, based on the congruence (Erdogan, 1999). Instead, meaning transfer theory (McCracken, 1989) looks at endorsement from a cultural perspective, explaining that endorsers are charged with meanings derived from their acting roles. These meanings are then transferred onto the brand advertised, so that the 'the consumer suddenly 'sees' the similarity between the celebrity and the product, and is prepared to accept that the meanings in the celebrity (by dint of long and fond acquaintance) are in the product' (McCracken, 1989, p.316). This transfer requires a cultural fit between the product and the celebrity, as the desired quality to be highlighted for the product has to be in the celebrity. That does not mean that product and celebrity need to be congruent, as the Miller campaign would suggest. However, Antonio Banderas is present as an impersonator and not as himself, so it is unclear what role his celebrity has in the advertisements.

The working life of the miller mainly develops inside the mill, presented for the first time as a functioning building with a working grindstone. After several campaigns in which the mill had lost prominence, the company looks at the symbolic meaning of the comeback of the mill, as revealed by the company:

'for the baby boomers the mill is a feeling of wellbeing, to recall a serene situation that you don't have anymore because of age or because you have to worry about

issues you didn't use to have. For this target it means a lot, it is still a good world, a world that brings you back to serenity'

[marketing office manager, Mulino Bianco]

This new mill is suspended in the past: even if the mill is created through computer graphics, it operates entirely without technology. Everything recalls a small-scale business, including the crates of apples and the bags of flour. The ingredients, presented as if they came from a local farmer, hint at the marketplace trend of organic product (Prothero, 2017) and craft production (Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013). However, Mulino Bianco also adopts this myth of craftsmanship to contrast a controversy against the use of palm-oil that involved other important Italian brands (Cova & D'Antone, 2016). Mulino Bianco positions itself as a market home-made food (Moisio, Arnould & Price, 2004), where the industrial origin of its products is concealed with meanings of care and manual labour.

Although market home-made food is linked to family feelings and domesticity, these two elements are entirely missing from the representations of the miller. Unlike the previous campaigns, the family is taken over by a collective bound together through work and friendship. Domesticity disappeared along with the family: the miller works and lives in the same space, but never eats at the table or shares a meal with somebody else. The family table has now become a workbench, which still gathers all the visitors in the mill.

5.7.2 Materiality and practice

During this campaign, the brand neglected the material level, prioritising the development of digital experiences. For example, there was a comeback of the old merchandise, that was re-issued in a digital version, leveraging on nostalgic feeling proper of retro-branding (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003). As well as on the digital platform *Il Mulino che Vorrei* (The Mill I'd love), users could collect and exchange the digitalised version of the *sorpresine*, the little games the brand included within each pack of snacks. This appealed only to people who experienced these items as children and had little resonance outside the platform-users. Collectible items also featured in the Miller campaign: the bowl *il*

coccio was shown on the workbench alongside the ingredients, stimulating nostalgic feelings. Tangible performances of the brand progressively diminished. In the early 2000's the serving suggestions for the biscuits, which invited consumers to 'materialise' their own version of Mulino Bianco's favourite with the sentence 'You can bake them too!', disappeared entirely from the pack. Regarding practices, breakfast is not represented anymore in the Miller campaign, where only the miller is at times shown eating biscuits dipped in milk. However, there are no contextual clues that confirm that he is having a meal, as he could also be testing his products. Interviews with the company confirmed that the widening of product range and the loss of focus over breakfast had caused the brand to lose its prerogative over breakfast. On the other hand, consumer studies showed breakfast to be progressively losing its status as a meal, becoming a snack.

5.8 Discussion and Conclusion

The overview of the four iconic phases of the brands allows us to discuss the evolution of collectives and gender representations. The collectives represented in Mulino Bianco campaigns have changed from the community of farmers, with an extended network of kinship, to the nuclear family and finally to a single man who shares his private and working space with other people. Looking back at the literature review, only the nuclear family mirrors the collectives already described by other scholars. In fact, the nuclear family broadcasted by Mulino Bianco is produced by the combination of two gender types, the Domestic Juggler and the Nurturing Father /Breadwinner, which are associated with family representations. On the other hand, community as a collective had not been reported in the literature on food advertising. Even the single life of the miller is atypical, as it recalls more the Domestic Divo, who cooks for others, than the Wild Bachelor. Unlike the hedonistic single life of the Wild Bachelor, the miller portrays a hard-working single man and entrepreneur in touch with the community around him. The ambiguous collective in which the miller lives can be considered a progressive updated version of the rigid family/alone division, as it mirrors the Italian demographics, where single families and house-sharing arrangements have steadily risen and are integrated into society (Castiglioni & Zuanna, 2017). The evolution of gender roles, instead, did not follow this progressive trend. Ironically, the more progressive gender roles are displayed

in the 'Happy Family' campaign, where the father is shown as an active co-parent and the mother with a career of her own. On the contrary, the miller embodies 'the man in charge', whose caring attitude only sharpens his authority. He delivers his knowledge and authority as the Domestic Divo, patronising the maid. The maid, like any other female character here analysed, has a caring role: if not a mother herself, she has a motherly attitude. None of the advertisements observed features a central female character with a non-motherly role.

The second consideration refers to the class portrayed in the advertisements. The brand launched its myth through a middle-class mother who could sit, undisturbed, with her daughter. Then, the brand moved to celebrating peasants subsisting on their own farming, living as if they belonged to another century. The Mulino Bianco family moved again to celebrating the middle-class lifestyle, now modernised by societies reliance on consumption, merchandise and collectables. The brand has gone back to celebrating the working class, and the ethics of small-scale, artisanal production. The farmers and the working-class miller are celebrated as producers, against the middle-class gaze of consumers that have informed all the campaigns. The miller who returns to manual work and 'bakes from scratch' is a myth that resonates with the need to cope with the challenges of austerity (Cappellini, Marilli & Parsons, 2014). However, there is a certain ambiguity concerning the actual austerity of the miller, as his lifestyle is glamorised by the reminiscence of the Hollywood charisma of his impersonator. The life of the miller is romanticised and idealised as much as the life of the farmers, as if it was the result of a middle-class gaze. However, the campaigns analysed also contained ambiguous gazes, suggesting how ambiguity is an important element of the iconographic construction of the brand.

This socio-historical analysis of Mulino Bianco confirms how the development of strong symbolic narratives is fundamental in the construction of brand iconicity (Holt, 2004). In the case of Mulino Bianco, the symbolic narrative of the brand is still today based on the recurring elements of nature and family, but this chapter has shown how the study of iconicity cannot be limited to symbols. In looking at the symbolic, material and practice-based aspects of the iconisation process of Mulino Bianco, I demonstrate the importance of looking at how the iconisation process can be intertwined with specific practices. By

observing the evolution of the brand, it is possible to track how the iconicity of Mulino Bianco did not develop only at the symbolic level, but it involved materiality and practices as well. This socio-historic analysis of Mulino Bianco has shown how the brand was able to invent a new practice, the one of Italian breakfast. The articulation of a new practice in relation to the theory of iconic brands will be unpacked in greater detail in the Discussion chapter. Here, I want to remark how the iconisation process took place at three different levels, and that these levels did not necessarily progress together. As the Miller campaign has shown, the shift in symbolic values has not been followed by an adaptation of the material and practical level. In fact, the brand has not designed material extensions or practices in line with the new myth or consistent with the previous articulation. The weakening of the material aspect of the brand had started at the end of the Family campaign, as the company stopped designing collectables and distributing magazines in 1996. The only material element that resisted was the bag-shaped pack, that is no longer a prerogative of Mulino Bianco as other brands have imitated it. In the Miller campaign, it is unclear if family has entirely disappeared from the iconography, or if breakfast has disappeared from the scene represented. The understanding as to whether the miller is having breakfast or testing the products is left to the audience's interpretation.

6. Findings: Doing family and gender at the breakfast table

After having observed iconicity from the perspective of the company, this chapter looks at how consumers make sense of Mulino Bianco iconicity over time. It does so by focusing on the ‘family myth’ to which the brand is attached. Thus, it, looks at how consumers interpret the notion of family produced within these advertisements, and how it sits within a broader understanding of family performances.

According to the theoretical framework of this research project, gender is performative (Butler, 1990) and family is itself the product of practices and displays (Dermott & Seymour, 2011; Morgan, 2011, 1996; Finch, 2007). Because this investigation focuses on practices, this chapter looks specifically at breakfast, which is the practice more closely associated with the brand. This chapter starts with the exploration of how consumers define Mulino Bianco and how family comes as its main point. It then proceeds by looking at respondents’ experiences of breakfast. Finally, this chapter investigates how respondents negotiate the norm, trying to answer how this brand’s icon has developed cultural meanings folded in the personal and collective narrative of gender and family performance. Data is here presented considering the division between heterosexual respondents and those who are lesbigay. The decision to present the data dividing the two samples does not intend to essentialise participants on the base of their sexuality. Indeed, in the first drafts of this chapter the two samples had been kept separate. However, it became evident that presenting the results by keeping the two samples separate preserved a finer grain of analysis to the reader. Also, this distinction mirrored the current crisis that affects the brand, in which Mulino Bianco is considered a model of ‘traditional’ Italian family values. I acknowledge that each group covers a spectrum of perspectives, so that progressive and reactionary Catholics would find themselves in the same group. On the other hand, the lesbigay sample ranged from fervent activists to non-politically involved respondents.

6.1 The Italian Dream: The Mulino Bianco family

This chapter opens with the overview of what respondents highlighted as the most iconic element of the brand: the Mulino Bianco family. There was no difference between the two samples, which consistently described it as the ‘traditional Italian family’, confirming how the icon has become a cultural item of consolidated meaning and relevance. Between lesbian and heterosexual participants there were far more similarities than disparities: all respondents showed neutral if not negative feelings towards the Mulino Bianco family, judged as outdated and not suitable for representing modern families. Only one respondent from the conservative example expressed a sense of positive nostalgia, but it related more to the brand than to the representation per se. However, the two samples were consistent also in the way they misinterpreted the icon: all respondents remembered a cooking mother and a distant father, characters not shown in the campaign.



Figure 11: Screenshots from the Family Campaign (1990-1995)

6.1.1 Heterosexual sample

What respondents recalled of the Mulino Bianco family is summed up in the words of Michele:

'I think it [the Mulino Bianco family] is based on the traditional families between the 50's and the 70's, advertising has always been this way, obviously two children, the older one male and the younger one female, who helps the mother, everyone has their role, well defined, with the father that goes to work and kisses the children who go to school. So we could say that it is the average family of those years, both regarding possibilities and education, elevated to a model'.

[Michele, 30-year-old, surveyor]

Michele is one of the few who self-defines as conservative because of his political affiliation to right-wing parties rather than religious beliefs. He comes from a middle-class family, and he had just moved in with his wife after they were married. His take on the iconic model is quite positive, as he considers it part of an Italian tradition that has positive connotations, even if he is never openly nostalgic about it. Like Michele, many other respondents across the two samples mention the term 'tradition', but they do not always refer to something they can clearly define. Michele describes tradition as a prescriptive standard, so that heterosexual parents 'obviously' have two children of opposite sex. While Goffman (1979) clarified that two children of opposite genders stand for a universal notion of 'complete' family, respondents associated with an Italian prerogative. The opposite gender of the children is also reported as a matter of balance and stability, like the similar age of the parents, or their matching hair colour.

The origin of the tradition is impossible to define, and Michele locates it within a past he cannot recall. Despite having seen the advert when he was a child, Michele positions this portrayal between the '50's and the 70's. In reality, these decades were breaking with the past rather than continuing it: from an accelerated economic boom, Italy moved to the 'lead years' of political crisis and economic recession (for a detailed overview see Ginsborg, 1990). During these 20 years, the size of families started to decline progressively, while also family typology changed: between 1951 and 1971, extended families with 6 or more people halved from 20% to 9,7 % (ISTAT, historical repositories). On the other hand, the percentage of nuclear families stayed quite stable throughout these two decades, remaining the most common type of family (Ginsborg, 1990). The presence of elderly people declined without disappearing, leading to contemporary 'modified extended families' in which grandparents, who lived in the proximity, were actively

involved in raising their grandchildren (Ginsborg, 2003, p.75). It is this recent model that informs the way respondents read this family of five. In fact, in the original campaign the grandfather lives in the mill, but respondents across the samples mention him sporadically, as if he were a marginal character exceeding the logic of the nuclear family. The tradition Michele refers to is not derived from recent history but rather from images of normative domesticity disseminated in the advertising of the economic boom, such as the cereal packet family (Cinotto, 2006; Leach, 1967). Tradition, then, constitutes a vague notion that historicizes the nuclear family and its displays -such as the family meal- as a longstanding regime and absorbs it into national identity, while extending middle-class 'possibilities and education' to the Italian society at large.

Besides being the quintessential image of a traditional family, respondents also pointed out how the Mulino Bianco is the family 'who wakes up and has breakfast together'. Everything in it, from the positive feelings to the meal itself, is staged. Michele's wife, Fabiola, recalls clearly:

'this table lavishly laid, all these people around it, happy, the children happy to go to school, the woman who stays home with all that stuff, it would take her hours to store it away'.

[Fabiola, 30-year-old, social educator]

Fabiola works for a Catholic charity that supports single mothers from disadvantaged conditions. As part of her job, she observes these mothers at mealtimes to see how they progress, and how they interact with their relatives. Whenever these families pretend to be in better relationships than they are, the assistants working at the charity informally label them as a 'Mulino Bianco family'. The display and the 'conspicuous happiness' that emanates from the Mulino Bianco family has a lot to do with the concept of family time. If 'family time is a prescriptive term that directs families to act in a certain way' (Daly, 2001, p.294), then the Mulino Bianco family performs its ideal script, undisturbed and fulfilling. Breakfast time is spent around the table, which is the catalyst of the family. Elements such as sitting down and sharing food bring the concept of breakfast closer to a 'proper meal', that in the definition of Bell and Valentine (1997) should also imply hot, cooked and elaborated food. In Fabiola's reading, abundant time is related to material

abundance, locating this portrayal in a privileged social class. Wealth is displayed through piles of croissants, or the zwiebacks unwrapped and fanned out, unnecessary displays for a breakfast of four. This breakfast, in which time and money are not restricted, reproduces the 'leisure class' (Veblen, 2017[1899]), whose conspicuous free time marks the status of the upper middle class, while normalising above average possibilities, concealing the effort required to obtain and stage such a meal. Fabiola puts the effort back into the picture imagining the long hours the mother will take putting things back. Other respondents mention the same 'problem' -putting things away- but they imagine the Mulino Bianco family to be so wealthy that they would pay a housekeeper to do so.

The fact that putting things away would be a 'woman's duty' shows how gender is important in defining the traditional family. Respondents recall the mother as the one who prepares breakfast, serves it, puts it away and cleans up the over-sized mill. In other words, consumers identify the Mulino Bianco mother with the Domestic Juggler described in Chapter 3. Thus, she becomes the 'cooking mother' that Stella mentions among her most vivid memories of the brand:

'Tuscan landscapes, pretty fields of wheat, and a housewife that bakes cookies for the whole family, to be consumed in a moment of joy'.

[Stella, 55- year-old retired school teacher]

Stella has been a loyal Mulino Bianco consumer throughout the childhood of her three sons, and she associates the brand with genuine ingredients and a homely feeling. However, what Stella and many other respondents recall as a cooking mother is, in fact, a woman that never cooks, who only serves industrial biscuits and snacks bought from the store. The woman in the advertising is meant to be a teacher, with a career of her own, who used industrial products to facilitate her morning routine. Stella, who was a teacher herself raising three children and feeding them biscuits for breakfast, fails to notice the resemblance between her life and the one of the Mulino Bianco mother, who she feels to be very different from herself. By reading the Mulino Bianco woman as 'the cooking mother', Stella projects her own ideal of a woman's role within the house, responsible for cooking and baking for the joy of her family. The nuclear family creates a framework that transforms the woman into a housewife, and none of the respondents recall her doing

anything else apart from preparing breakfast or getting the children ready once the father has left for the office. In the first advertisement, the mother is presented as a teacher, but none of the respondents recall her as a woman with a career who uses industrial products instead of homemade ones. Thus, respondents read her early-morning grooming, like setting the table with makeup on, as if this woman lived in a state of constant self-management, rather than a sign that she might be leaving the house as well.

The only one associated with work is, in fact, the father. Many heterosexual respondents recall the husband kissing children before going to work, already dressed in a suit and tie. This reading of the father is also quite telling of how respondents remember this image through the lenses of social class. Not only is the father employed, but he also occupies a white-collared position, as made evident by Fabiola:

'The father is of a certain kind, because it is not the father who goes to work into the factory, who wakes up at 6 in the morning, or who arrives from the night shift and doesn't have breakfast, or who grabs a quick snack and goes to bed. No, he is in a suit and tie, with his briefcase, he loads the car with the happy children'.

[Fabiola, 30-year-old, social educator]

Working with families who suffer from finance insecurities, Fabiola is aware that this ideal of masculinity is distinctively middle-class, and it could not belong to men who work night shift in a factory. Most importantly, this man performs detached fatherhood: in the context of breakfast as a domestic practice, the father does not commit to any task inside the house; he is remembered only for leaving it. Respondents consistently recall the father as the only one who is professionally characterised, despite how in the first advertisement both parents are presented as professionals. Respondents associate him with a formal attire that features only in few episodes, as he also dresses in more casual clothes. Since he is shown shopping with the family and playing with the children, his relationship with the family and the domestic sphere is de facto more nuanced than his leaving for work and taking the children to school. Along with the cooking mother, the working father is the projection of a single-earning middle-class family, where the value of the father is measured by his ability to be the bread-winner in the house. Put in front of a nuclear family, consumers immediately read in the characters those gender types that

in chapter 3 were described in relation to family: The Domestic Juggler and the Breadwinner. The literature review had showed how these were the only gender types identified in relation to family. Italian consumers confirm how the reading of gender performances is narrowed down to these two types whenever a heterosexual family is present.

6.1.2 Lesbigay Sample

Lesbigay and heterosexual respondents gave similar definitions of what a Mulino Bianco family is and looks like, emphasising on its middle-class status, the rigid gender division and the staging of a ritualised meal, with abundant time and elaborate display. Lesbigay respondents acknowledged the social appeal of this model, despite having different ideological positions towards the normative family as individuals. Having grown up with the brand and its campaigns, the Mulino Bianco imagery was often mentioned as part of Italian popular culture as well as childhood memories. Giacomo, active in the LGBT community of his own town and father of two children, reckons how this icon substantiated the lifestyle Italians aspired to, what he calls the ‘Italian dream’:

[this advertising] is potentially speaking to everyone because it is an aspirational model, having the possibility to have a mill of your own where you can spend your days doing nothing, enjoying your family, a little like the American Dream. [...] this is an Italian transposition. This is the Italian dream, being able to afford a mill of your own, where you can go and relax with your family, carefree’.

[Giacomo, 34-year-old, lawyer]

To him, the popularity of the icon is due to the relaxed, upper-middle-class lifestyle it portrays, exemplified by the oversized mill in the countryside, a mansion in which the capitalist logic and the escapade from it are both fulfilled. In fact, the countryside is just a landscape that allows the family to break free from the city, while they still have jobs. As commuters, they enjoy the benefits of a better landscape without committing to any farming duty: the mill itself is not used to mill flour but only as a rustic residence. By calling it ‘the Italian dream’, Giacomo establishes a connection between the Mulino

Bianco family and the quintessential capitalist myth: the aspiration to own a house and spend time with the family. This myth derives from the American Dream iconography of the normative family of the 50's that vehiculated the ideological privilege of the middle-class nuclear family and its rituals (Cinotto, 2006; Wilk, 2010).

In comparison with conservative respondents, lesbians had the tendency to be more critical towards the model of the 'traditional family' and its moral undertone, trapped under the execution of the script of the 'happy family', which produced a sit-com effect. For Pietro, an LGBT activist and former copywriter, their dialogues are so stiff that they seem to wait for track laughter. He finds the connection with the past also very problematic:

'[the Mulino Bianco family] is Catho-fascist, because, according to me, it is exactly the kind of model suggested by Catholic forces of a different kind, political and not political, that often influence Italian society. It is fascist because it is very outdated, doesn't open up, and it looks like the classic model of fascist growth, in which the man has to be a man, the woman has to stay at home, and you need to have children, because the nation needs children, otherwise the foreigners will invade us'.

[Pietro, 46-year-old, entrepreneur]

Pietro's expressive description points out how pervasive the Mulino Bianco family is in popular culture and how its persistence is related to conservative ideologies embedded in recent Italian history. In this reading, tradition shelters positive nostalgia, but it can also evoke ghosts from the past, such as the Fascist Era and its heritage. The model enforced by Mulino Bianco recalls one promoted within conservative Catholic and fascist ideologies, where the reproductive duty of families was considered a collective affair, and the subversion of gender roles a punishable threat to the status quo. Gender roles ought to be oppositional and separate, 'a man has to be a man', within the rigid limits of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995), while women are confined to domestic spaces and reproductive duties. Threatening gender division means weakening the stability of the country to the point that 'the foreigners will invade'. Pietro's opinion confirms how the Mulino Bianco family is mostly recalled as the commercial rendering of the

heteronormative nuclear family, a mode whose appeal obscures its sanctioning power and the ideological content it conveys. Indeed, this rendering is fostered by the interpretation rather by the portrayal itself: there is no woman confined to domestic duties nor a man who behaves like an aggressive macho. Yet, this interpretation of tradition nuances the Mulino Bianco family with reactionary undertones related to rigid gender roles.

Like Pietro, the majority of lesbigay respondents reduced the Mulino Bianco family to the normative representations of masculinity and femininity, traits that are usually referred to the parents but are also transposed onto the siblings, so that the little boy is described as 'a leader' of the games that he plays and the little girl is meant to learn how to be 'a woman' from her mother. It is noteworthy that both heterosexual and lesbigay respondents have similar readings of the Mulino Bianco family, but they also read elements that are not represented, such as taking a modern family for a very conservative one. In the exact way the conservative sample reported, Benedetta recalls the advertisement with:

'A mother who cooks, since the mother is clearly not working on a project or working on the computer, and if she did, there would be a man behind her controlling what she was doing'.

[Benedetta, 30-year-old, therapist]

Benedetta is a lesbian mother with a Catholic background, whose memories of the Mulino Bianco family were those of a normative family. Benedetta not only explicitly labels this portrayal as normative, but she also considers it normal, because it resembles the family she grew up in, where only her father was working. This normality takes a negative nuance, as evident in the way she described the mother as deprived of a life of her own, so that the only activity she can accomplish is cooking for others. The act of cooking is not envisioned as functional to family routine, or as a source of personal enjoyment, but as confinement for this woman. Not thinking of the time that industrial products are meant to save, Benedetta points out the burden of cooking in a scene where there is no cooking at all, reading this activity as derogatory, which stops this woman from having a career. The inequality that structures this family emerges in the opposition between the kitchen and the computer, so that the father is the only family member with cultural competences.

This ambiguity between what is normative and what is normal is reflected in the experience of many lesbian and gay respondents, who grew up in families where domestic work was still gendered even when both parents were working. Respondents, then, not only project family ideologies onto the icon, but also transfer these ideologies into their own family experiences.

6.2 Breakfast Practices in Real Life

Since food practices are gendered, breakfast is also quite telling of gender assumptions and family roles. Even if it is considered part of the three meals a day pattern, and the government guideline suggest that it should cover the 20% of the daily calories intake²², in Italy breakfast receives less attention than lunch or dinner. Thus, it is not surprising that morning routines differ marginally between normative and lesbian and gay families. Drawing from respondents' experiences across the two samples, the commitment to breakfast practices is influenced by two elements: the number of family members that need to be synchronised, and when they are all home. Regardless of gender and sexual orientation, couples tend to make breakfast more habitual when they move in together, yet the habit decreases when children are present. The emphasis on breakfast increases when other meals are not shared, and it decreases when lunch and dinner are eaten together. It is then possible to generalise that breakfast varies in relation to the pattern of meals and to how many people participate in an observed household.

6.2.1 Heterosexual sample

Eating together as a family is an ideal that doesn't need to be grounded in experience to hold its myth (Wilk, 2010). Borrowing Sabrina's words, the vast majority of respondents from both samples still believes that '*Functioning families eat at the table*' even if they do not always manage to. Sabrina is a 34-year-old mother of four, the head of a progressive Catholic association, and has a career as a consultant. Along with her

²² See the Ministry of Health guideline, accessed on www.gov.it/portale.salute, accessed on the 20th of July 2017

husband, they make time to have breakfast every morning with their children, since *'the table is the place where we educate them'* and where the children are expected to learn to sit down, ask for things and entertain a conversation. The table is idealised as a place of family bonding and of self-development. To make breakfast at the table possible for all, they eat in two rounds, with the older children getting ready first while the younger ones are spoon fed later on. Unlike most of the interviewees, Sabrina refuses the role of the main feeder of her family: '

there is equality between us, because with my job I am out more than my husband is, and I also earn more. It would be absurd if my husband did not cook, shop or look after the children.'

[Sabrina, 36-year-old, consultant]

Having reached a fair share in domestic chores at home is important for Sabrina, who grew up in a family where cooking was a women-only activity. However, this equality is possible because of her role as breadwinner, a role that justifies a contribution from her husband to domestic chores.

The equality Sabrina has reached, though, is uncommon for the sample I interviewed, where most women were held responsible for feeding their families. With two girls under 5 years of age, Pamela deals with breakfast on her own:

'If I manage, I set my alarm five minutes before them to drink some milk and coffee, but most of the time I have at least one of them in my lap before I am done. Then I finish my coffee, I give them their yoghurt and we start getting ready'.

[Pamela, 32-year-old, employee]

Pamela is an observant Catholic, and had her first child while still training to become a lawyer. After finishing her training, she decided to pursue her dream as a stay-at home mom. Her husband leaves earlier for work, often without breakfast, while she takes care of both her daughters, prioritising their needs over her own. In an effort of attending to different tasks at the same time, caregivers like Pamela rarely manage to have her own uninterrupted breakfast sat at the table, with a far messier juggling lifestyle (Thompson,

1996) than the one of the groomed Mulino Bianco woman. Unlike what is displayed in Mulino Bianco advertising, interviews reveal that the only people who manage to have longer, more relaxing breakfasts are couples, not only because their family time is not child-centred (Daly, 2001) but also because breakfast is often the only meal they manage to share during the day, which encourages them to make it special.

Breakfast can be very hectic, time-pressured and hard to coordinate as a family. Not all participants agreed that having breakfast together was worth the effort:

'In our house everybody wants to stay in bed. We all have breakfast on our own, because we have different schedules, everyone gets his own one ready [...] someone should wake up earlier to have breakfast together. I know people who do it and they are really happy. They wake up at 5 am, it is nice to start the day in a good way. But [...] we have other moments we look at during the day, to me in our country we don't need this.'

[Francesca, 50-year-old, housewife]

Francesca is a housewife and mother of three, whose duties include feeding her family (DeVault, 1991), and driving her children around for their after-school activities. Having breakfast together would be a collective sacrifice, adding extra domestic labour on her shoulders as well as demanding commitment from her children and husband. Nobody in her family expects to find breakfast ready nor are they available to prepare it, preferring instead to preserve their individual routines, such as sipping a cup of coffee on the go. As breakfast is not cooked, it is the only meal where each family member can eat what they prefer. Later in the interview, Francesca explains that, besides breakfast, they always try to eat together, that they regularly have lunch at 2 pm, waiting for her eldest son to return from school. By looking at the relationship between meals (Cappellini & Parsons, 2012), we see that Francesca is able to save energy and time for herself by not being responsible for preparation of breakfast, relieving her from the burden of always being in the kitchen.

6.2.2 Lesbigay sample

What is highlighted so far in the heterosexual sample is valid also for the lesbigay one: respondents believe that eating together is important but they are willing to make an exception when it comes to breakfast. However, Patrizia, a lesbian and a teacher, believes that breakfast is a practice Italians cannot live without, revealing how breakfast is established in Italian routines. In reality, lesbigay respondents, like heterosexual ones, experience breakfast as a hasty meal, eaten while standing or on the go, that becomes something more elaborate during weekends or when on vacation. Some breakfasts assume the value of extraordinary consumption because of the symbolic values attached, while ordinary consumption tends to be recorded simply as a routine (Marshall, 2005). Among extraordinary breakfasts, respondents recall weekend ones, usually more elaborate and sometimes cooked, featuring foreign recipes like pancakes. Special breakfasts are also often associated with holidays, usually memorable for their abundance and the combination of savory and sweet food.

Breakfast practices can change significantly within the same family, not only in relation to time but also to the presence of family members. Giacomo, a 40-year-old lawyer and an LGBT activist, reveals how breakfast can take on different meanings throughout the same week, requiring a different *mise en scène*. This collective performance also involves his son and his husband, who is a politician:

'in the morning my son wakes up and comes in our room, he wakes us up, [...] he asks for milk and I admit that is my husband who wakes up, goes to the kitchen. We are very Mulino Bianco in the morning. They go to the kitchen and prepare breakfast together, then my husband says: 'Go and wake daddy up' and my son comes and wakes me up and tells me that the breakfast is ready. Then we sit at the table and have breakfast together [...] But this is when we are all together. Some days of the week we are all together, others my husband is in Rome, so we do it differently. I must say that when my husband is not there we stay on the couch, we are a little messier. Sometimes we also have milk in bed, on the couch, we do the things you shouldn't do. [...] I am one of those who prefer breakfast in a café, so

I get a coffee at home, I go out, enjoy coffee at a café, usually when I am on my own I go about my routine in this way, coffee and croissants.'

[Giacomo, 34-year-old, lawyer]

Giacomo's routine changes significantly if his husband and son are at home, showing how family practices have different levels of staging. Given that lunch and dinner are often disrupted by long working hours, they stage an extended 'Mulino Bianco breakfast' that is more a ritual rather than a convention (Marshall, 2005), building a moment of familial bonding. The 'Mulino Bianco' breakfast, rich in family displays and codified rules, becomes a signifier for a proper family. Giacomo has interiorised a way of looking at his own family practices, a 'family gaze', that acknowledges that some practices produce a 'family picture' more efficiently.

This gaze derived from advertising sets a standard on what a family should do to be recognised as such (Epp & Price, 2008). By labelling his own family as a Mulino Bianco type, Giacomo adopts an ideological familial gaze (Hirsch, 1997), showing how the representation of the family meal does not only concern an eating practice but it also implies a family ideology. The transformative power of this gaze makes it possible for Giacomo to re-arrange his own homo-parental family into a normative family portrayal, encased in middle-class standards. Respondents enact different forms of familial gazes that modulate according to the displays put in place. For instance, Giacomo adopts a different family gaze to justify how he lets his son have breakfast in bed, thanks to the complicity they developed in their parent-son relationship. In this case the validation of their family practices is not ideological but it is based on their own mutual agreement. Finally, Giacomo mentions how he likes having breakfast outside the home. He was brought up in a family that never had breakfast together, so when he is alone, he reverts to a habit he learnt as a child: a croissant at the local café. These interviews focused on domestic breakfast, so the practice of having breakfast outside is not very represented, even if quite common. Having breakfast outside the domestic space is a way to prioritise time for oneself above family time, a need often undisclosed about breakfast and family meals in general (Murcott, 1997). Having breakfast at home together is likely to be an ideal, and exactly because it is an ideal, it is likely to fail.

6.3 Envy and Rage: Failing the Model

As detailed so far, the two samples present more similarities than discrepancies. However, differences between the two samples arise in relation to what the Mulino Bianco family model stands for in current social debates. Although respondents found the model unsuitable for today's representation, they did so for opposite reasons. Older, heterosexual respondents referred to structural conditions, such as the economic recession, to explain why the happy, middle-class family had become an out-of-reach dream. On the other hand, lesbian respondents were more prone to consider the normative model unsustainable because it is too strict. Notably, only lesbian families are appropriating the 'Mulino Bianco' label, while heterosexual ones refuse to be compared to it.

6.3.1 Heterosexual Sample

In terms of practices, consumers actively negotiate a way of having breakfast as a family that does not mirror what happens in the Mulino Bianco model. However, the model is hard to shed and it persists in popular culture, causing both 'envy and rage', using a participant's expression. Only conservative participants blamed the economic crisis for making the normative portrayal so annoying, as exemplified by Ascanio:

'What do you do, you show a family at the table with all the difficulties we have now? People with unemployment benefits would say 'But what are you showing us?' Everybody would love to live in that house. Nice, tidy...Showing it now would be like slapping those who struggle.'

[Ascanio, 56-year-old, sales agent]

Ascanio is Francesca's husband, and his job was not affected by the crisis. As the deacon of his local parish, his role involves getting in touch with families who are affected by the crisis. Because of recession, the scene of a well-off family in an advertisement becomes insulting instead of enchanting. The imagery has not changed, since everyone loves the idea of a tidy house, but displaying happiness and economic security becomes

unthinkable. Later in the interview, Ascanio explains that he believes that recession undermines family unity by preventing men from entering the job market. Ascanio expresses an ideological view over family, as according to him, men who do not work risk losing their dignity. A family with no breadwinner is condemned to economic and moral fragility, since the weakening of roles affects the transmission of values. Despite having condemned the ostensive décor of the Mulino Bianco family, Ascanio confirms the logic behind it: a stable family is a family where the man goes to work. Unable to contribute to reproductive labour, a man at home becomes useless to his relatives and to society at large.

Not all respondents blame it on recession: economic crisis overlaps with family crisis. Participants with a strong Catholic background wonder if family crisis is due to economic issues or to the fact that the normative family model is no longer suitable to represent the Italian Dream of a well-off family. The Mulino Bianco family obscures the complexity of real-life families:

'like it was the only side of a coin. The other is the challenges, the clashes, children who fight among each other and with their parents, frictions that exist anyway'.

[Lisa, 45-year-old, support teacher]

Lisa is an observant Catholic mother of two, who believes that the time she spends at the table with her family is particularly significant. For instance, her family shares every meal and she cooks both lunch and dinner for her husband and two children. Meals are used to process individual tensions collectively, and Silvia believes that family is a place where she can be true to herself, without the need of staging a façade, as the Mulino Bianco family does. The conspicuous happiness of the normative family is reduced to a one-sided performance where the challenges of being a family need to be eclipsed behind a mask. Lisa's refusal of a motherhood on display does not mean that she does not display her mothering skills (Harman & Cappellini, 2015). For example, throughout the interview, Lisa speaks of her own effort -and her success- in cooking nice meals even on a budget, and to make the table a place where her children learn to talk openly about their own

experiences. In other words, she sees herself as a good mother despite not displaying herself as the Mulino Bianco mother does.

Respondents understand the one-sided performance of the Mulino Bianco family as a staged display where there is no room for imperfections. Federico, a 50-year-old father of three, uses the metaphor of dirt and purity, so that the Mulino Bianco icon becomes 'totally disinfected' and 'aseptic' from real-life issues. In Federico's words, dirt becomes a synonym of danger, mess and corruption (Douglas, 1984) against purity and order. The dirt that threatens to pollute the happy family portrayal is the relational disruptions, such as arguments between family members, or domestic challenges, such as putting dinner together with little time or little money. However, harnessing 'the dirt' in times of crisis is a rewarding feeling, and respondents like Lisa are proud that real families are 'infected' by challenging forces, which makes them resilient and unique. On the contrary, avoiding or concealing these experiences to keep one's family 'clean' is believed to be against the organic and relational nature of family. Federico's use of the term 'aseptic' evokes feelings of sanitised medical environments rather than warm and welcoming domesticities.

Real-life families reclaim 'the dirt' and 'the mess' as part of their own family, and they refuse being paralleled with the Mulino Bianco model whenever there is a resemblance. With four children, a big house and a stable relationship, Sabrina is often addressed as the one with the Mulino Bianco family:

'And I get it, since from outside we should be thankful: we have a house, children, in the morning we are in no rush since our jobs do not ask us to be out before 9 am [...], but if you look closer, we have our problems, frictions, issues. A world where you eat a snack all smiley and happy? No thank you'.

[Sabrina, 36-year-old, consultant]

Sabrina finds herself at the centre of a normative gaze that compares her family with a stereotype. This gaze is based on the idea of family as a category that simply 'is' rather than a process achieved through practices and real-life issues (Morgan, 1996). Sabrina refuses this label and instead invites any external observer to look closer at the not-so-

perfect things her family does. Several families who have normative households have the same experience, but they all refuse to be labelled as the 'Mulino Bianco family'. Even if the kind of family they endorse -heterosexual, reproductive, nuclear- shares similar features with the commercial icon, they dismiss the comparison as derogative of a richer texture of family experiences. To detail the complexity of their own lives, they refer to the negative and more troubling aspects, such as problems and fights, aspects that are not meant to be seen, and that build the 'other side of the coin' of being a family.

Talking about social performances, Goffman (1969) divided between front and backstage, where the front stage is the controlled side of the performance and the backstage 'may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course' (*ibidem*, p.114). To resist the label and the pressure of the front-stage, respondents rely on the backstage, the concealed performances that may contradict the status of the proper family. The dirt and the mess, usually hidden from the happy family façade, are showed with pride to prove how the family is a collective that can strive despite the challenges.

6.3.2 Lesbigay Sample

Respondents from the lesbigay cohort never mentioned the economic recession as the factor that made the 'happy family' unsuitable to be represented in contemporary advertising. Instead, they focused on the obsessive staging of perfection:

'The Mulino Bianco family represents the perfect family, where all the bad things are swept underneath the rug so nobody can see them; it is the mirror of the Italians and of the Italianness, that is showing perfection and the taboo of showing problems'.

[Bruno, 40-year-old, receptionist]

Bruno uses this introduction to tell the story of his coming out when his parents' concern focused on what the neighbours would say rather than on the dynamics within their own

family. In his experience, this reaction mirrors a general obsession of Italian families who are concerned to stage perfection for others' gaze, a concern to lose their face in front of others (Goffman, 2008). Challenges and problems are the dirt swept underneath the rug, hidden from the neighbours' judgement to preserve the façade, here understood as a collective face or the image the family displays for others. If the family performance, like any performance 'is a delicate, fragile thing that can be shattered by minor mishaps' (Goffman, 1969, p.56), major mishaps like a gay son must be concealed from any relevant audience. Like other lesbigay respondents, Bruno feels that being gay grants him a privileged point of view outside the rigid frame of the heteronormative family:

'B: The Mulino Bianco family is THE family, always and only that kind, where everybody is happy. It is what everybody wants.'

Interviewer: Is this what you want?

B: Obviously this is not my dream, as a gay man I don't aim to have a family, I'd rather travel until I am 90 -year- old to see the world and not just stick to a house in Tuscany'

[Bruno, 40-year-old, receptionist]

Bruno's definition of family - 'a place where you are loved and where you love' - is very fluid and he *believes* that everyone could be family, even an old lady with a cat. At the time of this interview, Bruno was about to move into a house he refurbished with his partner. However, in the interview he rejected the idea of having that kind of family he understood as a heteronormative institution, that sanctions and excludes all the other forms of kinship. Like other lesbigay participants interviewed, Bruno framed the crisis of Italian families as a consequence to the rigidity of the family model, a rigidity this group has experienced in their own skin. The exclusion from the possibility of achieving a 'normative family' has trained the LGBT community to have different ideals of kinship and affective life, and this has turned into an advantage in times in which the normative family is questioned.

However, the LGBT community does not entirely reject the 'traditional family model'. Benedetta and Btissam, two lesbian foster parents, explain how their identity as family consolidated with the arrival of Sara, the child they who is staying with them:

‘Since Sara arrived we began to feel authorised, in fact sometimes we look at each other and we say ‘We do as any family does, and we feel authorised to access some benefits and a world that is otherwise reserved to families’.

[Btissam, 34-year-old, theatre director]

Sara will stay with them for a limited period of time. Temporary adoptions are legal for single as well as homosexual parents, and Sara herself asked to stay with them after a first trial. Benedetta and Btissam already considered themselves a family, but they were recognised as one only because of Sara, showing how being a family is subject to a social authorisation. That gaze is granted only when recognisable performances of family are in place, like caring for a child. This new family status is transitory, for Sara will go back to her family of origin at some point, and any legal or social recognition will no longer support the relationship they are building now. Btissam admits that their behaviour as ‘the good gays’ who are helping a child in need facilitated this transitory social legitimisation. Even if precarious, this validation grants them the access to a status -family- that gives them benefits they never experienced, such being excused for cancelling an appointment due to Sara’s health or being granted extra discounts at museums or leisure facilities. Legitimised from the outside, this transformation also reflects inside the family, fostering a different behaviour, such as ‘doing like families do’, that lets them access a system of meanings (Morgan, 1996) precluded before.

While homo-parental families ‘do like families do’, they gain more visibility for doing so. Being successful as a family is an achievement lesbian respondents flaunt proudly, as Sofia says:

‘Now the homosexual couples are able to portray the Mulino Bianco family, because if you look on Facebook, you see this union, this is to say: We made it and we are doing fine’.

[Sofia, 30-year-old, employee]

Sofia and Carla are 30-year-old lesbian mothers who decided to have children after 10 years of relationship. Because of legal restrictions, they flew to a fertility clinic in Spain,

a process they recall almost like a gamble. They are very careful about posting pictures of their own twins on social media, and they take distance from flamboyant exhibitions of queerness such as the local Gay Pride parades. For example, Sofia blames those lesbigay couples who flaunt their children like trophies. However, the parallel she traces with the Mulino Bianco family is functional to claim a visibility that has always been a prerogative of normative families. Identifying as a Mulino Bianco family means to claim for oneself a ‘normality’ within Italian culture negated in the official political discourse.²³ This visibility translates into a staging of happiness -we are doing fine- which reminds the ‘conspicuous happiness’ of advertising, vehiculated through social media rather than on television. Sofia is not particularly fond of the Mulino Bianco family, but it is the visibility of the icon that makes it so effective. By adopting the ‘Mulino Bianco family’ label, LGBT families put on a façade that embeds a gaze and thus also the possibility of being seen and legitimised.

6.4 Discussion and Conclusion

In chapter 3, I pointed out that available academic literature describes men and women in a family context exclusively as Domestic Jugglers and Breadwinners. This research shows that consumers do the same, taking family as a context that normalises the gender roles performed within. The traditional family is an ideal not inscribed in the advertising text, but instead actively co-created by consumers, who enrich this notion of the ‘tradition’ with their own memories and beliefs, and legitimate it by locating it into a conventional notion of past. Respondents construct the notion of tradition by recalling the advertising characters by their distinctive gender displays and practices, so that the father always wears a tie and the mother prepares breakfast. In other words, the characters are transformed into the gender types of the Breadwinner and the Domestic Juggler identified in chapter 3. It is noteworthy that these displays are selected among a broader iconography where the father wears something other than a tie and the mother does more than setting

²³ While writing, she is the only legal parent of the children had with her partners, given the lack of legislation over stepchild adoption for LGBT parents.

the table. It is the context of the family that reduces the characters to extreme gender polarities. By reducing the characters to their most heteronormative signs, consumers are actively negotiating the meaning of the icon, imbuing it with conservative gender roles. This polarisation emerged in terms of gender representations, but interviews revealed how it persists in the way consumers are actually functioning as a family. The experience of real-life breakfasts shows how food practices continue to be strongly polarised, with the election of a caring partner in lesbian families (Carrington, 2013) or the assumptions that feeding is a feminine prerogative (DeVault, 1991; but on the current Italian context see also Sassatelli, Santoro & Semi, 2015).

Although conservative and lesbian respondents do not share the same definitions of family, this research shows that respondents share the same family practices and similar reading of the commercial icon. What changes is how they relate to the cultural myth that informs the icon. In fact, lesbian respondents are more critical towards the 'happy family model', because they have for long been excluded from the possibility of participating in that model. However, some lesbian families are willing to appropriate the label of the 'happy family' by hijacking its original meaning to make it more inclusive. On the other hand, heterosexual respondents feel nostalgic about the reassuring image of the happy family, yet they too reject the flattening normality it delivers. It is important to frame this research in relation to the Italian context and culture of family practices. A recurrent theme in the interviews was the qualification of Mulino Bianco as a symbol of an Italian family of the past, whose perfection mirrors a stability that has been lost. Both samples believed that such a family model was inadequate to represent current family issues, but they did so for different reasons. Conservative respondents believed that a change in family model was caused by individualism and the weakening of values such as defined gender roles and the commitment to stay together. Lesbian respondents, excluded from the model of the 'traditional family', welcomed the failing of the normative model of family as a necessary update for Italian society.

These considerations concern the interpretation of family practices rather than the practices per se. Finch (2007) emphasises the role of others in making family practices effective through interpretation. To be effective, these practices need to be interpreted as related to family meanings. Families facilitate this process through display, which is not

only a 'readable expression' (Goffman, 1979), but it is also accountability, as 'the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that their actions do constitute 'doing family things' and thereby confirm that these relationships are 'family' relationships' (Finch, 2007, p.67). Departing from here, I suggest that family display implies a gaze, a 'way of seeing', embedded in the same possibility of being recognised as a family. Thus, I am calling family gaze the expected interpretation that produces family meanings out of family-related displays. This analysis has shown how certain displays of the Mulino Bianco family (sitting down at the table, the number of children) enhance the 'family look', or in other words, its possibility of being recognised as such. The Mulino Bianco family's display happens for and through the audience, which is expected to share this ideological gaze. The gaze, always a power relationship (Mulvey, 2009), is not directly produced by the display, but it rather imposes a family meaning derived from it, bestowing a transformative power: the Mulino Bianco family becomes the normative family par excellence, the homo-parental family becomes the Mulino Bianco family when they sit down at the table, the heterosexual family becomes the Mulino Bianco family because of the children and the house.

This ideological family gaze is constrictive and unsustainable both for normative and non-normative families. The two samples relate differently to the Mulino Bianco icon because their experiences of being family meet different challenges. Certain homo-parental families label themselves as the new Mulino Bianco family as a way to obtain visibility, or the chance to be recognised, that compensates for the lack of legitimisation on the political ground. In order to enter this spectrum of visibility, lesbian families need to match the normative criteria of the ideological family gaze. In other words, those non-normative families that do not accept the codes of the ideological family gaze, stay unrepresented. On the other hand, heterosexual families, who bear resemblances with the Mulino Bianco family, refuse any comparison, as being associated to the 'happy family' façade would not do justice to the complexity of their experiences. To escape the trap of being gazed upon as the perfect family, these families make visible the mess and the challenges they experience, as this ideological gaze would confine their performance to a restrictive set of behaviours. By associating with those practices that are not meant to be displayed, families produce a non-ideological familial gaze. In contrast with the ideological one, the non-ideological family gaze is the one that allows mutual recognition

as a family through practices that ask for little if no display at all, like letting your toddler have milk in bed, or fighting with a teenage son. Finch (2007) suggests that there might be practices in which family is done but not necessarily displayed, meaning that the system of meaning (Morgan, 1996) to whom they refer is so well articulated that there is no need to provide any actual display. Like the bedtime ritual used as an example (Finch, 2007), domestic breakfast also emerges as a family practice with limited display, unless charged with symbolic meaning when lunch and dinner are compromised.

To conclude, the Mulino Bianco family is the most popular family portrayal in advertising; its visibility and the lack of any other family representation makes it an icon hard to substitute. Thus, the following chapter will look into how consumers have interpreted Mulino Bianco's effort to overcome this portrayal with the Miller Campaign, and how this last iconic phase locates within a broader market of family representations in advertising.

7. Findings: The Miller campaign and its interpretation

This chapter explores the most recent iconic campaign of Mulino Bianco, and how it was positioned and interpreted in relation to the 'The Mulino Bianco family' campaign. The previous chapter illustrated how the icon of the happy family eating together had become an empty signifier that nevertheless keeps resonating in Italian popular culture. This chapter shows how the brand moves towards a new myth, the one of craftsmanship, paired with iconographic ambiguity concerning gender and domestic practices. Unlike the previous chapter, data from the lesbian and heterosexual participants are here presented together, addressing the extensive commonalities between samples. In comparison with the perfect family and its rigid façade, the miller's ambiguity leaves room for multiple interpretations. However, ambiguity does not entirely break with the iconographic tradition of the normative family, a tradition that survives in the atmospheric details. Respondents from both samples welcomed the Miller campaign as a detachment from the normative family. Without entirely dismissing the normative frame, they believed the brand was not brave enough to introduce unconventional representations of family.



Figure 12: The Miller campaign (screenshots)

As discussed in chapter 5, between 2011 and 2017 the Miller campaign broadcasted the story of a miller who returns to his own roots after a long time abroad; possibly moving from a busier life to artisanal work. The campaign can be considered iconic because of its rich and symbolic imagery and its focus on the craftsmanship myth. This is presented as a renewed proficiency in old skills, as manual work that conveys cultural capital and embodied knowledge, and as a quest for genuine and natural food²⁴. The creative agency J. Walter & Thompson designed the campaign with an archetype-based approach (Hartwell, 2012), and the miller took the features of Antonio Banderas thanks to the intuition of the creative director Sergio Rodriguez. This chapter takes an interpretivist approach and focuses on the consumers' understanding of the campaign and how it interfaces with their own agenda. Respondents across the two samples had a very similar reading of this campaign, locating the miller in between a strategic ambiguity and a family feeling. As defined in the literature review, ambiguity is the property of meaning different things to different people (Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013). Because of the marked similarity, in the following section data from both samples are presented together.

7.1 Relevance through ambiguity: Inclusivity and identification

One of the most salient aspect respondents identified in the Miller campaign was ambiguity. In Chapter 5, the critical visual analysis had already shown elements of ambiguity in the portrayal of the miller, such as the ambiguous gaze and the impersonator/endorser role. In this chapter, the focus is on how this ambiguity emerges from the consumers' interpretation and how it is contextualised. The ambiguity of the main characters is evident by how respondents named him in different ways, such as: Mr. Mulino Bianco, the baker, the boss, a 'weirdo with a hen'. As the campaign does not provide any background about the miller's past, his story was imagined in different ways. An example is provided by Paolo, a Catholic free-lance participant and father of two:

²⁴ This consideration has emerged both in interviews with company members and with the creative agency at the head of the project.

'He is single, and he is fine on his own. At least in the imagery. But maybe he has a female or male partner somewhere else, maybe he has a family somewhere else, he has a traditional family at home, but this is something the advertisement doesn't tell'.

[Paolo, 50-year-old, free-lance project manager]

Like many others, Paolo cannot entirely grasp the miller's identity, so he guesses his background. Bruno, a gay respondent in a long-standing relationship, gives a very similar interpretation:

'He is single or at least he is represented like that. To me, he could also be gay. He is not represented flirting, in a couple, showing affection, this is a change, because there is not a family nor a couple anymore, but a family situation more open, more open to personal interpretation'.

[Bruno, 40-year-old, receptionist]

Despite their different backgrounds, the first reflections Paolo and Bruno have of the miller are similar: a gay or single man, two categories constructed as the 'Other' in comparison with the family. Unlike what was observed in the literature (Borgerson *et al.* 2006), where participants 'straightened up' queer images, here both Paolo and Bruno infer a possible 'gay reading' from straight ones, regardless of their background. Respondents' accounts show that these queer interpretations arise alongside the family one; the miller may have a traditional family somewhere else, or even a less normative one which is 'open to interpretation'. Some lesbigay respondents noted with a hint of irony that the hen, the miller and the maid were indeed a family. Heterosexual respondents did not mention this observation, revealing a more cautious use of the term 'family'.

Respondents believed this ambiguity to be a deliberate strategy of the company to make this portrayal more inclusive allowing different audiences to identify with it. Praising the fact that the miller does not make explicit any gender or family role, Costanza says that:

'if you want your audience to be touched by the advert you can't put up walls. Like the happy family. If I divorced two months ago, what shall I do? You can't give closures'.

[Costanza, 45-year-old, restorer]

Unlike the happy family, that eliminated any possibility of identification for those without a 'happy family' themselves, the miller works for everyone: single men, working fathers, gay couples but also to regular families. Respondents believed the miller was inclusive, as they could identify with him in the first place, and they did so for different reasons. Sabrina, who self-defines as a progressive Catholic and mother of four, appreciated how the miller does not try to sell out a perfect morning idyll as much as the family did, substituting it with a more realistic scene:

'It is a well-scripted scene because it can happen to anybody, it is like when you say that the universe is giving you a sign that this day is not starting well, the coffee spills over, I forget to turn off the milk and it burns, the rusk falls, this is the bad luck of small things and instead of getting pissed he smiles'.

[Sabrina, 36-year-old, consultant]

In the 'bad luck of small things', the everyday disruptions that sometimes trouble simple routines, Sabrina sees a commonality with everyone's life, and with her own too. Some connections are even more personal, as in the case of Paolo:

This campaign is not speaking to family anymore, it also speaks to me, to someone who has an activity in which has to invent new things to see it growing.

[Paolo, 50-year-old, project manager]

As a free-lancer, Paolo empathises with the miller because he knows how important creativity is for a thriving business. As a man, he feels excluded from the conventional family representation and he identifies more with the miller. This role of creative entrepreneur bears an element of gender performativity that Paolo picks up on. This reveals how family is still experienced as feminine, a collective that relies on feminine labour in which men are not as involved (Beagan *et al.*, 2014; DeVault 1999, 1991).

However, the gender performativity of the miller does not break with the past, but it rather fosters a continuity with the gender performances of the family campaign, as it will be explained further on.

7.2 Elements of continuity: Gender roles, context and rural arcadia

Participants detected in ambiguity a way to update the brand symbolic narrative; ambiguity, however, kept a resonance with the previous campaigns. This resonance is both an iconographic continuity and a reverberation of meaning detected by participants. The three elements of continuity are normative gender types, the context of the mill and nature as a rural arcadia. These elements show that ambiguity is a strategy that targets a new myth market while changing a brand' image, without breaking completely with the past.

7.2.1 Normative gender types

One of the defining elements of continuity is gender types. Gender performativity is very important in the definition of the miller and despite the overarching ambiguity described so far, both the miller and the maid embody very normative genders; the miller's masculinity is oppositional to the maid's maternal role. In chapter 5, I pointed out how these two characters embody the gender types of the Domestic Divo and the Domestic Juggler. Respondents detect a similarity with the Domestic Juggler and the Breadwinner of the Family campaign because in both cases the gender types are normative and built as polar opposites. Lisa, a Catholic mother, described the characters in these terms:

'I think he is the owner of the firm and she is her maid. He has breakfast, so his everyday life is completely mingled with work, he tries his products and invents new solutions from his own experience [...] She is a helper but does not sit with him, he does not ask her to sit. She has an apron...the mother did not use to have an apron. They are not equal.'

[Lisa, 45-years-old, support teacher]

For Lisa, the miller is a professional baker who cares for his job. She first describes him as the owner who works on his own enterprise. He is a man who fixes what is broken, who gets his hands dirty, and who shows how things are meant to be done, like the Domestic Divo. Unlike the Domestic Divo, the miller shows a personal dedication: we see the man behind the baker, and his private and professional life blend together. Since it is impossible to establish where his working day starts, his breakfast becomes a quality test. As already remarked, this masculinity is thought as inclusive: later in the interview Lisa notes how a man:

‘might be bothered by a family too perfect, but here, since he is an entrepreneur, not a businessman, a man can mirror himself in the perfectionism’.

This quote confirms what Paolo hinted before: the professional masculinity of the miller subtracts him from the femininity of the family based on emotions. Like Lisa and Paolo, other respondents with more conservative views remarked that men would have been likely to identify with this advertising scene only because a man was represented. In addition to this, respondents picked up on the perfectionist side of cooking rather than on the act of feeding others, confining the care-expertise combination (Cairns, Johnston & Baumann, 2010) in the realm of professional masculinity. The miller’s know-how is warmed up by an element of personal engagement: as an entrepreneur, he is removed from the sterile corporate world of suit and ties where respondents located the Mulino Bianco father.

In contrast to this, the generous figure of the maid never passes as a potential partner of the charming miller, lacking any participation in the decisional process, while being too ‘maternal’ or ‘a kind of mother’ in her caring attitude and reassuring role. Respondents acknowledged the disparity between their gender performances and the inequality behind it wasn’t met with the same harsh criticism reserved to the Mulino Bianco family. For Patrizia, who felt ‘bothered by the moralism’ of the family campaign, the gender imbalance between the miller and the maid is not equally relevant:

‘He is baking and she brings him coffee, she is not cooking, but she is also not involved in the design. She is there serving, a serving woman, and he says: ‘you

know what we need?'. So rules are overturned, since usually it is the woman who is cooking, but an overturning that is not modern.'

[Patrizia, 32-year-old, support teacher]

Patrizia is not the only informant who noticed how, despite the power imbalance observed, a man who cooks in front of an unengaged woman is an unusual choice in the Italian context, which could also be interpreted as progressive masculinity. Patrizia notices how the miller, as a man, is still the only one with decisional power, while the woman, albeit not involved in the kitchen, doesn't gain any authority outside of it. These gender representations do not challenge gender inequality but rather reproduce it. Respondents do not find these roles offensive, but rather reassuring, as the miller adds care to innovation while resolving everyday issues. The comparative lack of agency of his counterpart didn't fail to be noticed, but it was received differently when compared to the Mulino Bianco family. Deprived of a normative frame, normative gender roles were more easily justified. For example, the 'professional lens' justified the overpowering decisional proclivity of the miller with his role as a business-owner (Holt & Thompson, 2004).

7.2.2 Context and atmospheric details

Another element of connection between this campaign and the previous ones is the context, with the mill as the most significant example. All respondents shared the same brand imagery regardless their age and their different memories of the original campaigns. Salvatore is one of the youngest informants and yet connects the Miller campaign with to older Mulino Bianco ones:

'we have the same candour, the light, the big windows, the table, some elements are repeated, maybe we moved inside the mill but there is continuity'

[Salvatore, 28-year-old, unemployed]

The staging of the mill, the colours, the light, the big windows are recalled as if they never changed but have just evolved within the brand's iconography. The mill itself,

which is now a functioning workshop, is the signature of this visual legacy. Reiterated in every campaign ever produced it is strengthened by symbolic elements such as the light and the table. The table, now a workbench, is the most important prop at the core of the mill's interior space. The table evokes the everyday family practices the Mulino Bianco family are attached to, given a strong symbolic value in the construction of family rituals (Epp & Price, 2010; Cinotto, 2006). The table is also a common feature in the experience of respondents, who often referred to it as the dedicated space for educating children, for sharing family time and shielding them from technology (Epp & Price, 2008). The presence of the table therefore recalls the family campaign as well as participants' own idea of ideal family time (Daly, 2001).

7.2.3 Nature as Rural Arcadia

The last element which ensures continuity with the past is nature as rural arcadia, symbolised in the wholesomeness of the ingredients, and hinted through the bag of wheat and fresh eggs. In the Happy Valley campaign, that not all respondents recall, ingredients were celebrated by showing their production. In the Miller campaign there is no mention of their origin, but elements such as the loose apples suggest small-scale production. Consumers like Danila, a lesbian mother, are sceptical of this portrayal:

'A good world is making you believe that there is attention for the ingredients, that there is attention during the production, that we want the quality for you and your children, but then when you start looking what are the best snacks, you cannot think that an industrial product is a good world, is antithetic'.

[Danila, 43-year-old, employee]

The myth of nature, of artisanal quality and hand-made production recalls pre-industrial rurality and describes the original myth of the brand. However, this myth now collapses in front of the awareness that Mulino Bianco disguises its industrial identity behind the tale of artisanal production. The sunny mill with fresh apples in wooden crates is unveiled as an inflated and pretentious representation of a production system that is presumed to be very different. The Mulino Bianco remote arcadia was interpreted differently

according to the sex of respondents. While men framed this discontinuity between artisanal promises and industrial production as an ideological battle against a brand veneer (Holt, 2002), women, and especially mothers, framed the deceiving advertising message in the context of shopping practices and food choices. This research confirms recent data showing that middle-class women are still mainly responsible for food provisioning, reading the labels and checking for nutritional information (Sassatelli, Santoro & Semi, 2015). Thus, they feel that certain displays are there to ‘make them believe’ something they have the competence to know is not true (Brown, 2004), deceiving their knowledge through marketing tricks (Heath & Heath, 2008).

Unlike Danila, other mothers are keener in accepting this imagery, even if they are aware that the nature that surrounds the miller is not realistic or connected to the actual ingredients used. Beatrice is a mother of three who believes that reality is not what the campaign is after:

‘Mulino Bianco doesn't show us the labs as they really are, it shows him (the miller) who worries for us, who personally spreads his own zwieback, to make things simpler for us. To make sure they don't break, that everything is natural, with the colours of million and wheat, the same atmosphere of the beginning’.

[Beatrice, 49-year-old, housewife]

Beatrice is one of the older participants in the sample and belongs to the generation who witnessed the launch of the brand. Beatrice is accustomed to the ‘atmosphere of the beginning’ that never displayed the industrial production but rather conveyed the brand’s values, such as making things simpler for the customer and showing that production is compliant with nature. Beatrice praises Mulino Bianco longstanding power to reconcile industry and nature and mass-production with care. This echoes some of the oppositional principles that organise meanings around food (Warde, 1997). Since its launch, the brand has acquainted consumers to deal with Mulino Bianco’s contradictory yet reassuring narrative. Through the character of the miller, the brand still harmonises dichotomies that animates the food marketplace, such as the ‘us-and-them logic (‘us’ being traditional, local, sustainable, natural and moral)’ (Sassatelli & Scott, 2001, p.223), versus corporate food. Despite being impersonated by a celebrity, the miller represents ‘one of us’ and

seals the distance between traditional and industrial food through hard work and personal engagement.

Mulino Bianco products lose their industrial connotation when they appear in childhood memories. Costanza, a working mother and a former volleyball player reports that her diet has always been healthy, but after she got pregnant her diet became even healthier, rich in fresh and organic products. Despite this ‘natural turn’, as she calls it, she still buys Mulino Bianco from time to time, remembering how her father used to buy it for her:

‘We are our parents’ children. If I grew up with certain ideals, I bring those ideals forward. If at home I’ve seen a certain product and I associate it with a pleasant memory, I will have in my cupboard’.

[Costanza, 45-year-old, restorer]

Passing from father to daughter, Mulino Bianco products are handed down like values, resisting the changing eating practices that follow a respondents’ life-cycle, but also creating intergenerational connections (Hogg, Folkman Curasi & Maclaran, 2004). When respondents assign to the brand an element of tradition, they are actually referring to a meta-tradition that has its own foundations within the brand's imagery, products and practices. While the campaign evokes iconographic nostalgia, ‘for the past, for a halcyon era when life apparently moved much more slowly, when things were different and we had time to make "proper," healthy, varied, and nutritious food, with copious amounts of fresh ingredients, using complicated methods and traditional technologies, and to share it with family and friends’ (Brewis & Jack, 2005, p.58), respondents experience a nostalgia for the childhood when they met the brand for the first time. This meta- tradition plays with the memories of consumers who grew up with Mulino Bianco products, or who fed it to their children, structuring a sense of continuity within the brand.

7.3 Ambiguous reactions: Consumers’ humour

As ambiguity opens the portrayal to multiple interpretations, it also opens to resistance. Throughout my interviews, respondents kept making fun of the miller, enacting one of

ambiguity's potential side effects: consumers' humour (Brown, 2014). Humour here defines a range of feelings that span from derision to a more benign sarcasm combined with a sense of resistance to Mulino Bianco's imagery. Parody towards marketplace icon is indeed commonplace (Prothero, 2017) and while the aim of mockery is always the same (unveiling the construction of the advertising imagery), it is triggered by different reasons. One of these reasons, here detailed by Bruno, rests on the change from Hollywood Star to endorser:

'I am really sorry for Antonio Banderas, who used to have a career [...] I am more attached to the Banderas in Almodovar. He just got a load of money with a pluriannual contract for Barilla to shoot these adverts. But I don't care to think this Banderas as the same actor of the 80s or the one married to Melanie Griffith. He is this way now, so obviously you can laugh about him looking at what happened to him'.

[Bruno, 40-year-old, receptionist]

In this case, the fall from grace is not a matter of misbehaviour or disgrace (Erdogan & Drollinger, 2008), or a consequence of having employed his authority for commercial purposes (Abbots, 2015) as contemplated in celebrity endorsement literature, but rather a price to pay for selling out to advertising. Bruno's derision derives from the incongruence detected between the sugary world of Mulino Bianco and 'Antonio Banderas' past as gay icon. Derision was also common between those participants who did not position him as a gay icon and yet who could not make sense of the casting: the most common locution was 'why him?'. Unable to understand the connection between Antonio Banderas, the character of the miller and Mulino Bianco, respondents believed money to be the only *trait d'union* between the brand and the endorser. Without the glamour of proper cinema, acting in advertising is seen as a monetary exchange (Stevens, Cappellini & Smith, 2015). Observing Antonio Banderas' transformation from Zorro to Mulino Bianco, respondents feel entitled to laugh about him. Humour not only fails to connect the endorser with an expected allure, but it also denies the advertising text the chance to be taken seriously. Far from a strictly individual act, humour is also a form of collective resistance and power reversal. Parodies of the miller flourished between 2013 and 2014, enriching the cultural references of the Mulino Bianco campaign and providing material for collective

consumers' humour. However, 'parody is a form of identification' (Butler, 1997, p.34), that demands a degree of engagement with the object of the parody. Derision, like aspiration, creates attachment, but it does so by reversing power relationships. Instead of feeling burdened by the sanctioning logic of the norm, respondents can take their turn to 'sanction' the advertising text by 'stripping away' the masks it adopts.

For some respondents, benign mockery turns into proper derision, as in the case of Barbara, a lesbian respondent. Like all the other respondents in her cohort, Barbara is attached to Mulino Bianco because she grew up with it, and to her it is a piece of Italian popular culture. Despite not being a heavy consumer, she believes Mulino Bianco products are good quality and genuine. To her, Antonio Banderas impersonating the miller is ridiculous and insulting for these values:

'The last [advertisement], I don't like it, he is really ridiculous. He is not funny. They wanted to be funny, but this is not the image the brand had, it always recalled values such as the family, the house, the warmth, encouraging messages, welcoming, not a burst of laughter with a hen. In the end he makes you laugh, but he is not credible'.

[Barbara, 42-year-old, landscape designer]

Despite being extremely critical against the portrayal of the 'Perfect Family', Barbara associated the brand with the visual codes embedded in the campaign, focusing on the domestic sphere and the familial protection. She believed the miller to be incongruent with the brand similar to other respondents who felt disappointed by the choice of a foreign celebrity, and who imagined the miller's role to be impersonated by a professional baker, or at least by an Italian actor. Barbara's disappointment aligns with the literature that suggests the endorser and the brand should be congruent to raise believability (Kamins & Gupta, 1994) or that the endorser should own the 'properties sought for the product' to be a productive match (McCracken, 1989, p.316). However, the incongruence between brand and product still generate symbolic meanings that contribute to the iconicity of Mulino Bianco. The popularity of this 'mismatch' between Banderas and the miller can be explained by the evolution of celebrity endorsement in the era of media convergence (Hackley & Hackley, 2015). The convergence of media channels affects the

flow of meaning creation, putting ‘the levers of the cultural production process in the hands of consumers’ (*ibid.*, p.468). Thus, symbolic meaning does not move only from the celebrity to the brand, it is established in the brand-celebrity relationship, potentially flowing, as in the case of Mulino Bianco, from the brand to the endorsers. In the same way that celebrities cumulate meanings after each role, brands cumulate meaning after each campaign, such as the family-related values that Barbara remembers and transfers onto the miller.

7.4 The myth market of family representations

The Miller campaign is an innovation from and a constant reference to the Mulino Bianco family; still paradigmatic of family representation in advertising and still the reference point against which other portrayals are measured. This analysis revealed that there is a myth market of family representations to which other cultural stakeholders participate. Respondents consistently mentioned two other brands that represented families in their advertisements: Findus and Ikea. Findus was recalled as the ‘gay family advertisement’; at the time of the interviews Findus’ advertising featured a gay couple. Shot at the table-level, the advertisement recalled by the participants focused exclusively on the hands of the people involved while their faces were never shown. It is through the dialogue that the homosexual relationship is disclosed, the audience overhears that the mother of one of the two is introduced to the ‘new boyfriend’ when she comes over for supper. As the camera frames only the table, the details of the scene are left to the imagination. The Ikea families, in contrast, were broadly identified as ‘modern families’ in which conventional rules of gender, race and kinship were bypassed. These two examples are mentioned as alternative strategies, open LGBT representations and plurality, for overcoming the trope of normative family representations. While the Miller campaign generated very similar readings among lesbian and heterosexual participants, the Ikea families and the Findus family did not. The data here is therefore presented separately.

7.4.1 Heterosexual sample

Heterosexual respondents shared the belief that a 'normal family' is never represented, given that a norm is impossible to identify and represent:

'How do you represent a family today? It is a sore spot, in my opinion. To avoid problems, they just eliminated it. I think it is a safe move to avoid being pointed as conservatives or bigots. [...] It would be counterproductive representing a family, maybe a good-looking man with a good-looking woman. It would be outrageously compliant'.

[Federico, 50-year-old, baker]

Like many others, Federico claims that the heterosexual family with children is a controversial portrayal not only because its normative status is now questioned but also because its association with conservative and ultra-catholic environments gave it a negative nuance. More radical voices argued that media provide only negative or unachievable representations of heterosexual families, disclosing a discomfort with the models media provide. Uncomfortable with the way heteronormativity is overlapped with heterosexuality (Jackson, 2006) respondents, and especially mothers, felt disappointed with the stiff and outdated characters advertising sticks to. According to these participants, the ethics of family representation (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005) did not expand but simply reversed, so now the heterosexual family is the 'Other' that is excluded from representation and facing the same censorship once reserved to LGBT community.

On the other hand, informants observed how the LGBT communities began to gain attention in advertising. At the time of the interviews, the Findus advertisements was quite popular among respondents, being one of the few Italian advertisements that openly represented a gay couple. Beatrice sits at the more conservative side of the sample's spectrum although she does not openly criticise the advertisement:

'I was surprised when they started with this advertising, I believe it is Findus, showing the same situation of a traditional family but it shows these new kinds of relationship that may arise between people of the same sex. These new messages that are sent and I got them, I think there is an evolution'.

[Beatrice, 49-year-old]

In Beatrice's account, the Findus family is located among other examples of progressive representations, such as caring masculinities and working mothers. Beatrice reads the advertisement by highlighting the connection with the iconography of the traditional family, dissociating the family displays from the actors who perform them. The sense of tradition is granted by the context rather than by the relationship represented: a table and the ritual of inviting a relative over to share a meal. Unlike the miller, that played with ambiguity, the Findus advertising openly represented an unconventional domestic space. While Beatrice does not condemn the advertisement, according to her own ideological framework the relationship shown is not a family, so that there is no substitution of 'the real thing'.

Ikea is a more nuanced case, broadly associated with progressive images and inclusive advertisement, as also observed in literature from other countries (Borgerson *et al.*, 2006; Skover *et al.*, 2002). Connotated by plurality, Ikea families range from single parents to multi-nucleus ones. By representing families that do not match the 'nuclear/heterosexual' norm and are yet common, Stella believes that Ikea:

'has taken a risk with these images of divorced parents...these situations exist'.

[Stella, 56-year-old, school teacher]

'The situations' that deviate from the traditional family qualify as part of the reality, and they give visibility to ordinary lives, but they are nevertheless risky. The icon of the traditional family reinforces the myth of gastronomic traditions that are part of the pseudo traditionalism' (Lears, 1994) of Mulino Bianco, so that departing from the first would undermine the second. By comparing Ikea and Mulino Bianco, Anna does not pay attention to the different nature of the products advertised, rather Anna emphasises the importance of this kind of family in sustaining consumers' trust.

Not everyone agrees with electing Ikea as 'the champion of diversity'. Beatrice, for instance, believes that Ikea is popular mainly because:

'it shows how the house, even if small, could be a tidy nest, the expression of well-being'.

[Beatrice, 49-year-old, housewife]

Beatrice is aware of Ikea's advertising choices, and she believes that the Ikea catalogue:

'is destined to a world I cannot even imagine, where you see these couples and the children born from them'

where 'these' couples are an undefined 'Other' that includes, for instance, multicultural ones. Despite acknowledging how the brand gives room to families that 'mess' with the conventional family portrayal, Beatrice brings Ikea back to the notion of tidiness and family nest. Through the catalogue and the furniture exhibition, Ikea presents an idealised world of symmetry, order and design, where nothing is out of place, and where visual conformity is preferred over difference. By emphasising these aspects, Beatrice highlights the most normative traits of the brand, reconnecting it to a conventional depiction of domesticity, literally using tidiness to harness the symbolic pollution (Dion, Sabri & Guillard, 2014) of unconventional family and difference.

Because of its long-standing engagement with a plurality of family representations, Ikea is perceived as a brand with clear political commitment. For instance, Ikea stood in favour of the civil partnership bill that passed in Italy in 2016, openly supporting the equality of gay families. Michele remarks this episode as a form of intrusion from the commercial sphere into the political one:

'I would suggest, in general, to stay out of social disputes. To me, a firm should not take sides against anyone, regardless if one believes it right or no. I think about the civil partnership law, I think a firm that has an interest shouldn't take sides'.

[Michele, 31-year-old, surveyor]

The strength of the 'traditional family' portrayal is found in its presumed potential to cater for the majority. In fact, the omission of the traditional family in favour of a gay couple

caused some of the more conservative respondents to believe that the brand aimed not to support gay families but to exclude heterosexual ones. Other respondents share with Michele the belief that nuclear, heterosexual families are non-discriminatory portrayals that firms replace only for political reasons, causing ideological reactions. Whenever this model is abandoned, conservative participants believe there is the risk of discriminating against the majority by favouring a minority, charging commercial items sold to everybody with political values that concern only some.

The origin of a brand affects the respondents' judgment of its political engagement. Respondents reported that as a foreign brand, Ikea could take strong political positions without being judged too harshly, while Italian brands are more limited and not brave enough to disrupt the 'traditional family'. Embedded into Italian culture and values, Mulino Bianco's marketing choices would be more impacting on the social level, but at the same time the brand is believed to be less prone to disturb the status quo. Consequently, changes in this visual landscape can only be brought from abroad and accepted as a reflection of a different ideological system. This understanding raises across the two samples but will be unpacked in relation to the lesbigay sample. Overall, heterosexual respondents understood 'the traditional family' as part of Italian consumer culture as well as of the ideological system of Italian brands.

7.4.2 Lesbigay sample

As advertising images clearly participated in the myth market of family representations, respondents were aware of the social role of advertising. Overall, what heterosexual respondents found progressive, lesbigay ones considered inadequate, or just the bare minimum to dismantle the privilege of heteronormative representations. A former copywriter and activist himself, Pietro believes in the power of advertising but also in its unreliability:

'There is very little proposition of different social and cultural models. In advertising you see something, and even if it is hard to admit, it is maybe more useful than years of civil fights. Advertising gets into people's imagery faster than

civil fights in the street. [...] I think it is worrying that advertising can do this, because when advertising stops doing it, because it decides that the cultural model for that firm in another one, we lose these things again'.

[Pietro, 46-year-old, entrepreneur]

Alberto admits how the divide between capitalism and gay activism (Kates, 2004) is shrinking. Like Pietro, the whole lesbigay sample believed that advertising was part of the legitimation process, even if they were reluctant in admitting this power. Unlike conventional activism, made of 'fights in the street', advertising manages to push homosexual families among mainstream images, changing the visual landscape (Schroeder, 2002) of family portrayals. However, advertising is deemed unreliable as the support given through certain campaigns is not likely to stay. In other words, advertising acts as a magnifier to show what is already existing, and struggling, in the social and political world (Brighenti, 2007), but it does not subvert social institutions. Interviews showed how respondents largely believed that advertising moves only within the safe perimeter of images that have already gained some form of social recognition, and that the commercial logic behind it ends up always exploiting political activism.

Lesbigay respondents equally mentioned Ikea and Findus as examples of non-traditional families in advertising, but with different attributes. Lesbigan respondents celebrated Ikea as a pioneer of inclusiveness, while Findus was accused of mere pinkwashing, a term that in Italy is not used in relation to breast cancer campaigns (Carlson & Le, 2017) but to define the corporate use of LGBT images for commercial purposes. In fact, Findus' choice to show the hands and not the faces of the gay couple is read as censorship of their identity. Benedetta, a lesbian mother with a Catholic background, voices the opinion of those participants who forgive this form of censorship because at least the gay topic is represented:

'the first time I saw it I thought "Not bad, it is always a good thing". For sure they do not touch, they do not look at each other, they do not hug, when one is in the picture the other is shown from the back. As if you didn't really need to see it. But I thought that maybe, little by little.'

[Benedetta, 40-year-old, therapist]

Censorship is revealed in the words of Benedetta by how she mentions what these characters cannot do rather than what they can. An openly gay portrayal needs to be cautious, so the characters are not only face-less, a stylistic choice that undermines the dignity and power of the character observed (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998; Goffman, 1979), but are also prevented from showing the most basic signs of intimacy, like touching each other. Anything that could appropriate the codes of a conventional family or couple is excluded from the image, revealing how displaying family is also a constraining code of behaviour (Heaphy, 2011). Nevertheless, Benedetta adopts a ‘better than nothing’ approach, making this representation a step forward in a culture of advertising unfamiliar with these themes.

The reticence of Italian media enervates the activist fringe of the lesbian sample, so that the censorship of the Findus advertisement becomes unacceptable and degrading. A former activist in the LGBT movement, Pietro openly accuses Findus of the narrow ‘conditions of representations’ the gay community has to abide to be represented:

‘adverts show gays and lesbians, the clean ones, that want a family and often have children in the adverts. They are the acceptable ones, if they are lesbians they are always beautiful, never masculine, never, and gays are never feminine, they would be scary’.

[Pietro, 46-year-old, entrepreneur]

The gay couple of the Findus advert embodies ‘the acceptable ones’, dressed in a shirt and welcoming the mother in law for dinner normalised according to the codes of homonormativity (Duggan, 2003). The Findus couple aligns with one of the most common LGBT portrayals: the Caucasian middle-class gay couple (Nölke, 2017). As Pietro remarks, representations of gay families have to include normative family displays, such as children in order to be recognised as such. The previous chapter showed that this also happens in real life, where children, for example, facilitate the acceptance of a gay couple into society.

On the other hand, Ikea benefitted from a general consent from the lesbian community. The reasons for this support are well summed up by Danila, an outspoken LGBT activist:

'Ikea has been the first one to legitimise the [gay] family, so two women or two men, and sometimes with children, they have been the first to say: "every family is ok, to us they are all family". [...] And Ikea is also an active voice, internationally, on the welfare of its employees. For instance, Ikea is one of the few firms that regularly hires trans people, and not for back-office positions but for regular, front-office ones. [...] They have been taking active policies for years, hiring and benefit policies, and they have done it in a country, like Italy, in which there was nothing, they weren't asked to take a position'.

[Danila, 43-year-old, employee]

Ikea is praised for being multicultural and inclusive, representing race, gender and sexual diversity. Ikea expands the notion of what is a suitable representation by portraying family as a plurality, as a multiplicity of options. However, informants refuse the idea that being represented in advertising is a sufficient form of self-empowerment (Tsai, 2011), aware of the 'pinkwashing' trend which usually produces short-lived, gay-friendly campaigns that offer little support to the gay community. Ikea's multi-faceted policies, that range from hiring to advertising, witness a more ideological approach towards the issue of LGBT rights. Ikea is seen as a champion not only for a consistent representation of family diversity, but also for the actual policies and practices enacted within the firm, providing authentic support rather than taking exploitative moves for commercial reasons.

The Ikea families are often mentioned as the opposite of the Mulino Bianco icon and its normative façade, as they manage to embrace the mess and flaws of everyday life. Barbara, who lives with her partner, likes Ikea's approach because:

'it is up to date, it shows socially coherent realities. There is this advertisement in which in the morning he takes a jar of redcurrants jam and associates all the memories of that jam, going through his life, cute moments that can actually happen, that maybe you are ashamed to tell, I don't remember if it was a fart or a sneeze, but things that can happen and finally you can talk about it'.

[Barbara, 42-year-old, landscape designer]

‘Socially coherent realities’ are those in which the division between frontstage and backstage is eliminated (Goffman, 2008). Although the advertisement described is not dedicated to breakfast, Silvia builds a parallel with Mulino Bianco by locating the scene in the morning. Unlike Mulino Bianco, Ikea focuses on all the salient moments that built the identity of the protagonist, including the uncomfortable ones. The divorced family or the bad-timed fart have something in common: they are both socially sanctioned and related to negative feelings, such as shame. Instead of focusing only on the ‘staged’ side of life, Ikea advertising also includes the ‘shameful’ experiences of life, liberating those who go through them from the stigma and the pressure of performing ‘la bella figura’, of which the Mulino Bianco family became emblematic.

The different attitudes of Ikea and Mulino Bianco are also explained in relation to their country of origin. Italian and foreign brands are political actors with different degrees of agency, as explained by Giacomo:

‘I believe that if I was against gay marriage and I saw a foreign firm, like Ikea, and an Italian one, like Barilla, supporting gay marriage, I wouldn’t have the same judgement. Somehow, I would justify the foreign firm more, coming from a different setting, different from mine, and thus that it is not meant to share my beliefs, but I would judge more strictly the Italian one’.

[Giacomo, 34-year-old, lawyer]

By putting himself into someone else’s shoes, Giacomo reveals an underlining theme echoed also in the heterosexual sample. As previously discussed, heterosexual respondents understand the unconventional representations of family chosen by Ikea and Findus as possible only because it comes from a different system of values. Being foreign, these brands can take positions, like supporting gender equality, that are legitimate in their own countries but that are still debated in Italy. Brands can also be cultural ambassadors by extending the concept of Culture of Brand Origin (Lim & O’Cass, 2001), which addresses the perception consumers have of the origin of a brand according to its marketing activities. From the perspective of brand culture ‘organisations are

increasingly competing on the basis of their ability to communicate who they are and what they stand for' (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006, p.10), possibly leveraging on dominant values of the country where they come from. However, being outsiders of the consumer culture of destination, foreign brands may have less impact when tackling social-related dynamics. Thus, the Ikea connotation as a champion of gay rights is supported by its Swedish origin, given that Sweden is considered one of the most progressive countries in Europe in terms of gender equality. This qualifies Ikea as a stranger to Italian culture and issues. To this extent, it is important to remember how, in the previous chapter, the Mulino Bianco family was registered as 'a traditional Italian family'. Lesbian respondents feel that an Italian brand supporting marriage equality as much as Ikea does would be much more impacting and thought-provoking, but they do not expect any Italian brand to take such a 'brave move'.

7.5 Discussion and Conclusion

The Miller campaign has achieved two aims: the first is to update the Mulino Bianco myth; the second is to answer the representational crisis related to respondents' discomfort with available advertising images of family and gender. This crisis revealed that both samples longed for alternative portrayals to the traditional family embodied by Mulino Bianco. Adopting Holt's theory of iconic brands (2004), the representational crisis opens a myth market in which different brands, along with other cultural products, compete for the public's affection. This is done through representations that mingle 'commercial and ideological objectives, and historically constituted popular memories' (Thompson & Tian, 2008, p.597). This chapter addresses how the representational crisis opens a myth market for novel family representations, interpreted through national narratives, personal experiences and current ideological frictions.

The first finding of this analysis is Mulino Bianco's use of strategic ambiguity to tap into the myth market of family representations. Other brands adopt other strategies, such as plurality chosen by Ikea and the openly gay couple shown by Findus. Findus' gay couple was mostly criticised, deemed too cautious by lesbian respondents or discriminatory by

conservative ones. Ikea, instead, was considered the brand that best managed to represent contemporary households by embodying the various ways of doing family and gender (Finch, 2007). The progressive approach used by Ikea was believed to be an outcome of the Scandinavian ‘gender equality myth’, making the culture of brand origin a relevant dimension for Ikea’s ‘brand gender’ (Ulrich, Tissier-Desbordes & Duboi, 2011). However, consumers can also resist certain interpretations (Borgerson, *et al.*, 2006; Scott, 1994), especially when they are ideologically distant from their own beliefs. One example is Beatrice, the conservative Catholic respondent who identified the Ikea families as the epitome of tidiness.

The findings I here reported have shown how ambiguity is indeed an effective strategy. The Miller campaign was welcomed as inclusive in comparison with the traditional family portrayal that none of the participants identified with. By comparison, Findus’ open portrayal of the gay couple was accused by the lesbian sample for being too timid and by the heterosexual one for being too explicit. The same participants who felt bothered by Findus, considered the option of a gay miller and found it nevertheless acceptable. Current literature has documented that advertising that targets the homosexual consumer may go unremarked by the straight consumer (Puntoni, Vanhamme & Visscher, 2011; Borgerson *et al.*, 2006), but it had not yet been observed when a gay interpretation is inferred despite any visual clue, as in the case of the miller. The importance of ambiguity in relation to the theory of iconic brands will be discussed further in the Discussion chapter.

The second finding of the analysis leverages on the analytical tools developed in chapter 3, and observes how collectives, practices, and gaze intersect with gender representations. The miller portrayal confirms how family can condition the way genders are represented and interpreted. As per the matrix introduced before (Pirani, Cappellini & Harman, 2018), the miller embodies the Domestic Divo who bestows his competence and professional knowledge onto the audience as well as the other fictional characters (Swenson, 2009). The miller also appropriates the care of the Nurturing Father and the independence of the Wild Bachelor, where the wild element is mitigated by the context but still revealed by his play-boy allure. To sum up, his masculinity is still aligned with a general trend of men depicted only in traditional masculine perspectives (Gentry &

Harrison, 2010), where a nurturing attitude is accepted only as a professional resource. The practice of preparing food takes different meanings than those associated with the Domestic Divo, as it interlaces with the private life and gratification of the miller. By combining care, pleasure and expertise, the miller embodies an unusual form of masculinity in food practices (Cairns, Johnston & Baumann, 2010), where masculinity tends to be associated only with expertise and pleasure. On the other hand, the maid is a background character, whose accommodating attitude draws similarities to the Juggling Mother, frequently represented in advertising (Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Thompson, 1996). In comparison with the perfect family campaign, we witness how ambiguity disguises conservative gender values: the female character moved from a mother sitting at the table to a servant standing with an apron, and the male character moved from being an employee to an entrepreneur with increased responsibility and decisional power. As already observed, these reactionary gender roles are conveyed without meeting the same harsh criticism that was reserved for the femininity and masculinity of the Mulino Bianco family. Within the interpretative frame of the nuclear family, genders are immediately read as normative. Thus, the nuclear family works as an interpretive framework that facilitates a normative reading of gender roles. As the case of the Miller campaign has illustrated, respondents are less inclined to a normative interpretation of gender performances if these are observed in a collective that is not a family.

In the Miller campaign, the family gaze is prompted by the use of atmospheric details, such as the table, rather than through a set of certain legitimate practices relatable to doing family (Heaphy, 2011). The power of objects in signalling relations was also observed in the Findus campaign, in which the protagonist of the scene is the table that hints, but does not show, the conspicuous display of the traditional family sitting and eating together. As objects intersect with identity practices of family over time (Epp & Price, 2010; 2008) it is not surprising that the table is enough to trigger a family gaze. Guided by the presence of the mill, the audience reintroduces a family where there is no family at all, leveraging on a generic ‘family feeling’ rather than through overt family displays.

This chapter focused on respondents’ reaction to Mulino Bianco’s new campaigns’ intent to steer the brand away from the normative family, that had become a catalyser of values not intended for the brand. Respondents acknowledged the strategic ambiguity by reading

the miller as a more inclusive portrayal strategic ambiguity reading in the miller a more inclusive portrayal, that also retained a link with the past. In a moment of social discontent with advertising and the way it interacts with social themes, respondents read ambiguity as an inclusive tool. This allows the brand to juggle between the political, the social, and the commercial dimension, without taking a position, yet answering the social fear of exclusion. This analysis has shown how respondents' background was not creating much difference among the two samples in the way they read ambiguity, while explicit representations exposed different ideological positions to a suitable representation of the family. To this extent, ambiguity is an effective strategy to smooth down ideological differences, while increasing the chances for the brand of gaining consensus. Through ambiguity, the brand also managed to hold together more than one symbolic source, specifically family and nature, themes that had already appeared in previous campaigns. This multi-themed narrative fosters a sense of continuity within the brand's culture and imagery. Respondents use this sense of continuity to fuel their own sense of meta-nostalgia, where the reassuring presence and stability of the brand evokes pleasant childhood memories and family practices, while addressing the new social structures for non-heteronormative ways of doing family and gender.

8. Discussion: Continuity in iconicity through brand practices, archetypes and ambiguity

This research has focused on how iconicity is emplaced and updated, and how consumers reflect on its development over time. Empirical evidence from Mulino Bianco showed an understudied aspect of iconic brands: how elements of continuity are important in the update of iconicity. The persistence of an iconic brand over time was shown to depend on three elements: consumers' projections of their own experience and interpretation onto the brand's myth; the resonance of this myth within the national ideology; and materialisation of this myth through practice. It thus suggests that iconic brands rely on consumers' work and interpretation to update and sustain their iconicity.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 have covered different aspects of the Mulino Bianco brand culture: from the socio-historical analysis of the brand, to how consumers made sense of it by looking back on their lived experiences, to how they reflected on the company's effort to move on from the family myth. This chapter brings the findings of these chapters together to discuss the methodological and theoretical contributions of this thesis. First, I unpack the fundamental importance of practices in the iconisation process as well as outlining the ways in which iconic brands can invent new practices, in the same manner Mulino Bianco did with breakfast. Second, I discuss how the recurrent themes I observed within the symbolic narrative of Mulino Bianco clarify the updating process of iconic brands. Lastly, I further examine the brand's strategy to move on from the family campaign and how this shift relates to symbols and practices of the brand.

8.1 Methodological and Theoretical contributions

By focusing on consumers' interpretation, this research provides a methodological contribution to the study of iconic brands. To date, socio-historical analysis and brand genealogy tend to focus on data from the brand and from the cultural industries surrounding it (Prothero, 2017; Rokka, 2017; Otnes & Maclaran, 2017; Heller, 2016; Kravets & Orge, 2010; Holt, 2004). Research studies that incorporate interviews with consumers have largely focused on enthusiast consumers or members of the *populist*

worlds who helped establish a brand myth (Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017; Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013; Diamond, Sherry, Muñiz, *et al.*, 2009; Holt, 2006a). ‘Populist worlds,’ here, is a term invented by Holt (2004) to define communities and spaces in which brand managers look for emerging ideologies that can be integrated into the plotlines of brands. Usually at the margin of society, populist worlds provide a feeling of authenticity to myths because they are not controlled by commercial or institutional authorities (Holt, 2004). In contrast to these existing studies, this research involved both enthusiastic consumers (followers) and less-engaged ones (feeders), considering both groups’ lived experiences of the brand. Furthermore, this study has involved consumers who have been explicitly neglected by the brand’s myth. This methodological approach therefore looks at the impact that iconic brands have on the wider public thanks to their visibility and pervasiveness in popular culture.

This approach to the studying of updating iconicity has brought three novel contributions to Holt’s (2004) theory of iconic brands. First, this research contributes to existing branding literature by observing how iconicity is achieved through practices, contributing, along with materiality (Kravets & Orge, 2010) and mythical imagery (Holt, 2004; Thompson, 2004), to establish a brand’s social relevance. Through the example of breakfast, Mulino Bianco’s case study shows how an iconic brand can not only introduce variation in consumption practices, but also create new ones. The second theoretical contribution is the concept of *brand archetypes*, which I introduce hereby. Brand archetypes extend the theorisation of archetypes in the marketplace as presented in the literature review, and are defined as elements of continuity that grant consistency within the symbolic narrative of a brand. Brand archetypes are the symbolic units that build a brand’s myth and make the brand resonate with vast audiences because they belong to the collective unconscious. The third theoretical contribution widens the relevance of ambiguity for iconic brands (Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013), as it shows that ambiguity can be used to move a brand’s imagery to a new iconic phase.

The methodological and theoretical contributions highlight the problematic nature of the role of consumers in the available literature on iconic brands, according to which consumers are not involved in the construction of a myth unless they belong to one of the ‘populist worlds’ the myth is steeped in (Holt, 2004). However, scholars have shown how

consumers are more than a passive audience to these cultural narratives. Consumers can develop ambivalent reactions toward myths, especially when myths acquire negative meanings (Kozinets, 2001) or trigger moral conflicts (Cova & D'Antone, 2016; Luedicke, Thompson & Giesler, 2010) or embody meanings that conflict with consumers' identity work (Arsel & Thompson, 2011).

Mulino Bianco's case-study has shown how iconicity is co-produced, as it evolves and unfolds with the involvement of producers, consumers, and other cultural actors. Through interpretation and experience, consumers contribute to shape and reshape the meanings of the icon, but also the material practices established by the brand. Hence, consumers can resist and influence the transition from one myth to the other, as is shown here in the case of the Mulino Bianco family, whose myth persisted despite having lost congruence with the cultural context. Consumers are also involved in the cultivation of brand-related practices. My findings show how the symbolic level of iconicity disarticulated from the one of practices and materiality, as consumers do not associate breakfast with the brand that reinvented it. Although Italians are now accustomed to having breakfast with convenience products, they are rejecting the family ritual Mulino Bianco associated with it.

8.2 Myths are embodied: Iconic practices

The first theoretical finding presented here is that the iconisation process can be related to specific practices. Iconic brands can contribute to innovating consumer practices by widening their range, but they can also create novel ones, investing them with new meanings, materiality, and understanding. The literature on iconic brand has focused mainly on the symbolic aspect of brands, and only more recently on their material level. Holt (2004) clarified that iconicity is based on a 'handful of great performances' (p.10), where the performances are actually advertising campaigns rich in symbolic imagery. Objectification is equally important, as material performances consolidate and cement a brand's imagery (Kravets & Orge, 2010), and transform the symbolic meaning of a brand into a tangible product (Mark & Pearson, 2001). This research thus illustrates that practices are the third level that contributes to the construction of iconicity.

Mulino Bianco played a crucial role in Italian consumers' understanding of breakfast. However as shown by Trevor-Roper (2012) with his historical analysis of the invention of the kilt in Scotland, traditions are not invented by a single actor in a short period of time, but they emerge from a long process in which various actors and forces operate. Considering the data presented in chapter 5, I do not claim that the brand has invented a tradition from scratch. This analysis has a more modest aim, to show the iconisation process of Mulino Bianco and its implications for the reshaping of breakfast and the conceptualisation of family food practices. The analysis shows how the reshaping of breakfast was a complex process articulating the relationship between the practice of eating breakfast and the brand, which operated at the symbolic, material, and practice levels. It is only through the consideration of these three aspects and their connections that we can understand how the relationship between Mulino Bianco and family breakfast was launched, articulated, and then cemented in Italy.

At the symbolic level, the iconisation process operated similarly to other brands (see Holt 2006a; 2004). Mulino Bianco responded to the anxieties over industrial progress society with the myth of tamed nature and rural past. Later, with the myth of a familial rural past, it narrated solidarity, love, and intimacy. This, in sharp contrast to the growing numbers of divorces and the decline of births, provided an answer to fears about the declining status of the family as an institution. The image of the 'modern family' became a reassuring one, since it reconciled the neoliberal aspirations of the time, which were oriented around individual success with patriarchal values concerning family and gender roles. However, this image became overwhelming, and the brand decided to invest in the craftsmanship myth, to move the attention from consumption to production. In this case the brand frames itself in a ambiguous time and space that belongs to the rural world, whose consumption creating a new understanding of family life and place.

As a symbolic device reconciling tradition with modernity, Mulino Bianco did not only solve social and cultural anxieties, but also created a past and present around undetermined ideas and ideals of Italianess which were able to address a heterogeneous collective of consumers. Using ideals and images from other cultural contexts Mulino Bianco succeeded in creating a new idealised lifestyle. As previously noted, the launch

of the brand and the promotional campaigns were created by the most influential Italian sociologists, marketing firms, film and music directors of the time who brought some of the ideas and images circulating in the cultural industries to the brand. As such, Mulino Bianco is an example of what Holt (2004) has called a 'parasite', since it intercepted and developed current sensibilities and myths to attach its own products. Likewise, with the Miller campaign, the brand has stopped openly representing a family to target emerging sensibilities that contest the representations of normative families.

However, it would be misleading to think that the relationship between the brand and breakfast as a family practice was articulated only at a symbolic level. This analysis shows how such articulation was crucially planned with a coherent representation of the symbolic via the material, aimed at bringing about new ways of consuming and interacting with the brand (Borgerson, 2013). The biscuits and the packaging provided a coherent materialisation of a rural and reassuring past, in which convenience and novelty were downplayed, while tradition and care were emphasised (Warde, 1997). The collection of novel promotional items did not simply represent a coherent manifestation of the brand and its rural past in consumers' kitchens, but provided a new source of socially legitimate leisure for mothers via a new practice of collecting points and then displaying their rewards. If previously the link between food and toys was used by brands to target children (Elliott, 2007), Mulino Bianco helped to promote the collection of novelty consumer items as a family practice. This extended the brand's playfulness to mothers, providing a source of leisure while practising their newly introduced domestic task of feeding the family at breakfast. Therefore, promotional items and gadgets were not simply a reward for women's loyalty to the brand, but became a way for the brand to solve the dichotomy of *labour* versus *leisure*.

This dichotomy has not previously been observed in studies looking at the representations of food for women (Davis, *et al.*, 2016; Schneider & Davis, 2010; Warde, 1997), but it captures the crucial aspect of food as domestic and material labour. This new dichotomy illustrates the success of the brand in convincing mothers to add additional labour to their everyday lives, as necessitated by the myth of family breakfast produced by the brand. This new labour is not presented as a source of enjoyment, but rather it is the brand and

its novelty items that promises a source of well-earned leisure, helping to mitigate potential resistance to introducing a new food occasion into the family routine.

This research shows that providing new materiality to Italian mothers was also a way of introducing a new understanding and competence to revamp a declining practice. These reflect an ideological conceptualisation of family life and its everyday manifestation via certain consumption practices. While brands targeting breakfast in other cultural contexts had to reshape habits and beliefs around an already well-established eating occasion (Schneider and Davis, 2010), Mulino Bianco had to first convince Italian consumers of the importance of introducing such a domestic practice, which did not exhibit any strong symbolic meaning. Reassuring consumers via magazines that introducing breakfast into the family routine was a sign of modernity and competent mothering, whilst simultaneously incentivizing it via gadgets and other promotional items, Mulino Bianco did not simply rehabilitate breakfast as a declining practice, but gave it a moral status, elevating it as a food occasion for the family and a leisure practice for mothers and children. Strategically the brand acknowledged breakfast's ancillary role amongst other domestic food meals (Le Pape & Plessz, 2017) and, consequentially, put forward a new understanding of the practice while respecting the existing hierarchy of the meals and their significance for doing family.

Mulino Bianco created a new food occasion for the household, in which caring for the family (DeVault, 1991) and therefore being a good mother was achieved without demanding culinary skills or new competencies in managing the family time schedules. As such, the introduction of a new family practice did not jeopardise the existing cosmology of food in the family, but rather reinforced it, since it made breakfast a practice in which convenience and care could be brought together. In this way, breakfast became a household occasion in which the 'good' middle-class family could be practised and displayed through a brand combining labour and leisure and care and convenience. Speaking directly to mothers the brand was underpinned by a 'traditional' understanding of their roles of feeding the family in an Italian context, without aggravating it with additional tasks, anxieties, and responsibilities. On the contrary, Mulino Bianco provided solutions for 'modern families' and indeed modern mothers and their desires to care for their families with the help of the market. Resonating with consumers' sensibilities on

health (Schneider and Davis, 2010), the brand labelled this new practice, as the 'Italian breakfast', reconciling contradictory food discourses including health, care, and convenience. The label 'Italian' provides a cultural legitimisation of a new family practice, reconciling culinary norms with modernity and marketplace with family life. By inventing the Italian Breakfast, Mulino Bianco transformed breakfast into a family practice. The brand managed to 'make acceptable, in the collective imagery, industrial food production and daily consumption of sweets, especially biscuits' (Vercelloni, 2015, p.217), attaching family meanings to these products.

At the symbolic level, the brand concealed the indulgence of biscuit consumption through the wholesomeness of a rural imagery based on nature and family values. The brand cemented its iconicity through myths - rurality, family and craftsmanship – that were built by recombining elements of naturality and authenticity, but also of care and community. Mulino Bianco's iconography was established, and amplified, by consumers' interpretations that reworked these elements. For example, the Mulino Bianco family became the 'traditional family' that had never been in the advertising campaign. This same myth got reworked further when Mulino Bianco was elected as the symbol of conservative family positions in Italian popular culture. Enmeshed in the social discourse, the symbolic narrative of Mulino Bianco lost its original meanings. The craftsmanship myth was designed to re-gain control over this symbolic narrative, while shifting the attention away from the family myth. The craftsmanship myth addressed both the representation of family and family practices by eluding a clear depiction of family, domesticity and breakfast, focusing instead on the know-how of the brand. Rather than focusing on meanings such as know-how and expertise, however, consumers interpreted the craftsmanship myth as an inclusive portrayal, projecting their need for less conventional representations of family and domesticity.

Mulino Bianco contributes to the theory of iconic brands by showing the intertwining of symbols, materiality, and practices, but also their separation. Mulino Bianco spent twenty years, between 1975 and 1995, consolidating the consumption of biscuits at breakfast and breakfast as a family meal. As I have shown in chapter 5, in the last twenty years the brand has stopped cultivating the materiality and practices, leading to a progressive decoupling of the practice of breakfast from the brand imagery. This can be explained by

the company's marketing strategy, but also by looking at consumers' understanding of this practice. Interviews have shown how respondents negotiate this ideal derived from advertising with their own real-life experiences. The iconography of the middle-class, heteronormative family has lost its appeal in times where family composition and gender roles have changed. Having breakfast together is too demanding for real life-families, who prefer to prioritise sleep or individual routines over this novel tradition. As the practice of breakfast was introduced without jeopardising the pattern of the other meals, it could be equally dismissed without affecting daily routines.

Finally, the leisure/labour divide that qualified the new practice of breakfast has lost its original meaning. The digitalised equivalents of the materiality that rewarded mothers and children have not reached the same popularity. Respondents associated breakfast with leisure only in relation to non-ordinary life, such as holidays and indulgent weekend mornings. In these cases, more elaborated recipes are preferred to the mundanity of biscuits. Without the leisure, only labour is left, and it places a burden only on women's shoulders. The uneven involvement of women in breakfast preparation is not derived from advertising iconography, as much as from women's experience. The interviews reveal how women across the samples have grown up in a context in which domestic labour is unequally shared, and some of them admit to being the only ones who feed the family. Consumers are then willing to sacrifice breakfast as to avoid taking any extra commitment to family time, as a compromise that helps to preserve the hierarchy of meals already established as rituals for doing family. The fading of the breakfast practice does not mean that consumers stopped consuming bakery products, but rather that this kind of breakfast is not associated anymore with the brand which introduced it.

8.3 Archetypes and branding: Iconic clusters of meaning

The second theoretical contribution is the introduction of *brand archetypes* to explain the process of updating iconicity. The update of a brand's myth is critical in the life of an iconic brand: 'to maintain the myths' vitality brand managers must continually extend its performance and also allow to respond creatively to new popular culture '(Holt, 2004, p.208). To be effective, brands should be able to sustain both consistency and relevance

(Beverland, Wilner & Micheli, 2015) from one iconic phase to the other. The threshold between creating a new myth or updating the old one is thin, and scholars divide between these two interpretations. Holt (2004) states that a brand should develop one myth, expanding it through new plots and novel references, without falling into the trap of renewing it completely and move to another one. Since Holt (2004) himself lists multiple myths under the same brand, scholars quoting him read that the survival of iconic brands compels ‘to construct new myths and narratives that conform to the new order’ (Heller, 2016, p.560). Other scholars describe this as a renovation process, as ‘the resilience of a brand lies precisely in its ability to conquer a renewed allure and ideology in a different historical context that requires the brand to return to its former identity traits’ (Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017, p.1515). However, existing literature has not shown how brands manage to keep the consistency in a brand’s narrative, within the same myth or in moving from one myth to another.

I argue that consistency is achieved through the presence of symbolic leitmotifs across the Mulino Bianco campaigns. The data presented in Chapter five, comprising marketplace analyses and consumer research, along with the visual analysis of three iconic campaigns and respondents’ interpretations of these campaigns, showed that the myth update of Mulino Bianco resulted from the creation of different symbolic patterns through the alternation of persisting leitmotifs, family and nature, with the latter having a less prominent position. These themes recurred in Mulino Bianco’s history, changing hierarchy according to the myth and the myth market in which they were embedded, signalling a continuity rather than a complete renovation of the myth’s symbolic meanings. While ideological disruptions compelled Mulino Bianco to change the myth’s narrative, these themes have not disappeared from the brand. These clusters are narrative leitmotifs triggered by iconographic elements, such as sunlight, the fields of wheat, but also by consumers’ interpretation, as the reading of a family in the rural collective of the Happy Valley campaign shows. I argue that these recurrent leitmotifs are archetypes that inform all the myths that established Mulino Bianco’s iconicity.

To refine the concept of archetypes, I move back to the work and definitions provided by Carl Jung (Jung 1977; 1964;1934) who described archetypes as the primary elements of collective imagery. The term archetype was not invented by Jung, who himself attributes

its genesis to Hellenistic philosophy, expressing ideas that had not been created but descended directly from divine intelligence. Jung repurposes the term to describe the representations of the collective unconscious, a part of the psyche that 'doesn't owe its existence to personal experience [...] The concept of archetype, which is an essential extension of the collective unconscious, addresses the psychic existence of determinate forms that seem to be present in every time and place' (1977, p.70). According to Jung, archetypes are the original material of other cultural forms, such as tales, myths and esoteric doctrines, forms that are meant to transmit collective knowledge derived from unconscious processes (Jung, 1977). Every myth, then, is a refined and contextualised elaboration of archetypes, making them intelligible to the reader. Among the archetypes that Jung himself attempts to describe, there are archetypal figures, such as the Sage, but also archetypal events and motifs, manifested as places or situations (Jung, 1934). Thus, the 12 main archetypes used in branding literature cannot be exhaustive of the richness of this collective heritage. As archetypes are inherently ambiguous, and even potentially self-contradictory, classifying them can be a frustrating endeavour, as 'even if recognisable, they cannot be described because of the richness of their references [...] as the only things that refer to their nature is their pluri-significance, their almost inestimable abundance of meanings, that makes any univocal formulation impossible.' (Jung, 1977, p.64).

Drawing from my findings, I define archetypes as clusters of persisting meanings that inform the narrative of commercial myths, superseding time and place, but subjected to contextual and ambiguous interpretation. I suggest that multiple archetypes can inform a brand's myth, and that they cannot be entirely manoeuvred because they rely on interpretation. I further argue that brand archetypes survive from one cultural disruption to the other as they do not depend on context. I consider archetypes as the symbolic 'bricks' that build brands' myths, connecting brands with deep issues, fears, and desires that arise from the collective unconscious. Brands' archetypes provide the content to the brand's myth, but their meaning extends beyond the myth market that they target, as they refer to mental forms that are not determined by contextual experiences (Jung & Von Franz, 1964). As pre-existing, ambiguous and unconscious sets of meanings, archetypes are not discernible on their own, but they become intelligible when woven into myths, through the symbols and iconography a myth puts in place. In other words, archetypes

are the ingredients of the myth, and their constant update relies on myths in which they are embedded. They are also hard to dismiss, because they nest in the collective unconscious.

Archetypes, then, are the seeds of meaningfulness in a brand's myth, and they connect its narrative to broader instances. This is different from what Holt (Holt 2006a, 2004) postulated, stating that the meaningfulness of myths relies on the 'populist worlds', because of the authenticity they provide. Heller (2016) has already observed that 'populist worlds' are not enough to explain the iconisation process, as in the case of corporate iconic brands myths which can be 'stories that originated in mainstream society' (p.371). On the same lines, I argue that myths are meaningful to vast audiences not because of populist worlds but because of archetypes, which bridge the narrative of advertising with broader social concerns. Marketing and consumer research studies from the Mulino Bianco archive confirmed that nature and family had been instances that concerned Italian consumers since the launch of the brand. I consider them as archetypes as they have universal validity, despite their meaning being made intelligible in the context of the advertising campaigns. To give an example, the archetype of nature collects different meaning, from wilderness to nurture, and it belongs to humanity as a collective. In Mulino Bianco's symbolic narrative, nature as an archetype entered the myth of rurality as a primitive element, the nuclear family as a lush landscape, and craftsmanship as wholesomeness. The iconographic persistence of the archetype of nature is to be found in the fields of wheat, the sun, but also the ray of light.²⁵

These archetypes are in Mulino Bianco's brand identity through the overarching celebration of the past. Archetypes become part of a brand identity but they do not originate there, and it is their belonging to collective symbolic meanings that explains the relationship between brands and society. As I show in Figure 13, each of the three myths analysed (rurality, nuclear family, and craftsmanship) is informed by the archetypes of nature and family, where one archetype has a prominent role, while the other is

²⁵ The ray of light has an iconographic tradition linked to the transcendence of the self, spiritual connection, and cosmic fertility (Eliade, 1971). Light, then, is not only an atmospheric element, but a hint of recognising nature as driving human renovation, as well as connecting human and non-human beings.

downplayed but still present. In the context of the post-boom growth that informed the *rurality myth*, nature is nurturing agriculture against the man-made capitalist industry. The family archetype is present but with less prominence, emerging as an extended family of pre-industrial farmers. In the following myth of the *normative family*, the myth and the archetype almost overlap, while the archetype of nature is here downplayed into a fertile landscape. Finally, in the *craftsmanship myth* the hierarchy of archetypes reverses again, as nature, featured as wholesomeness, is the core of the narrative while the archetype of family persists as a ‘family feeling’.

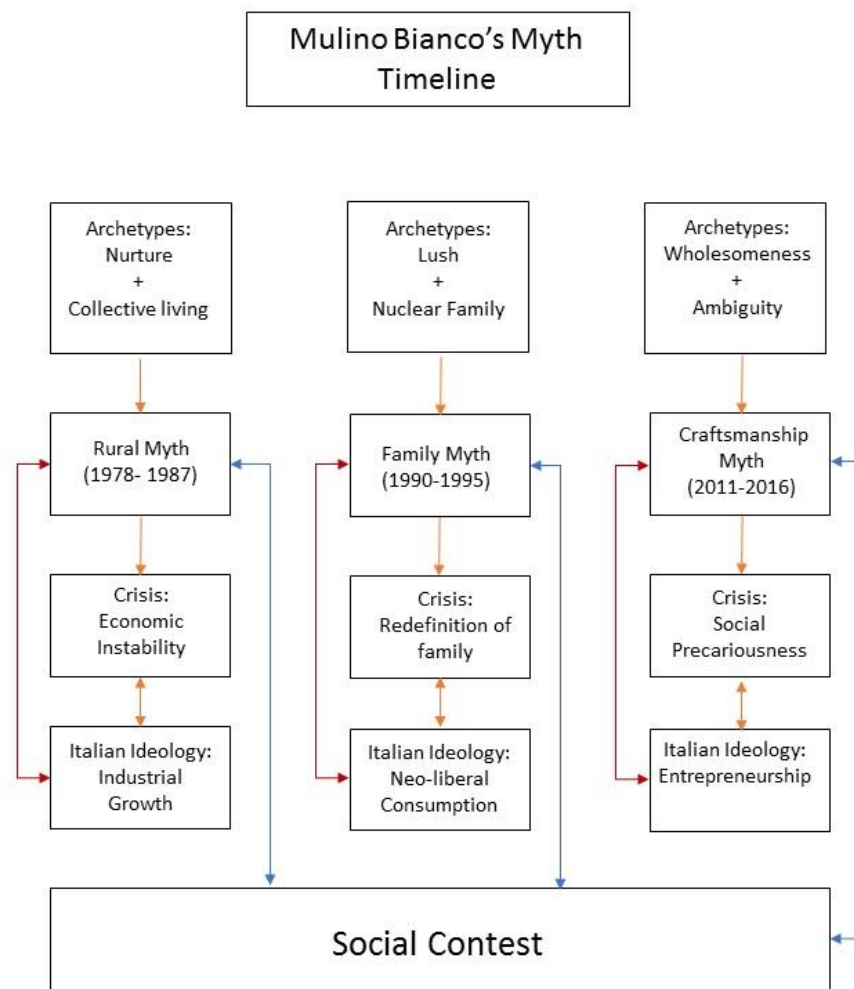


Figure 13: Mulino Bianco's timeline

The timeline also shows how consumers have a fundamental role in the development of myths, and in making archetypes intelligible. As consumers were interviewed at one point in time, their sense-making is based on previous myths/campaigns and on consumers' memories. During the interpretation process, consumers project their current beliefs onto the myth, including previous narratives, contributing to the meaning the myth finally takes. For example, thanks to consumers' sense-making, the modern family of five has become the traditional family of four, which reflect a sense of nuclear stability (Goffman, 1979). Among the two archetypes analysed here, the one that focuses on family relies the most on consumers' interpretation. In fact, both in the Happy Valley campaign and in the Miller's campaign, the family archetype is inferred by consumers rather than openly signalled through iconography.

8.3.1 First Archetype: Family

The family archetype occupied much of the analysis. Jung (1944) defined the father and the mother as archetypical complimentary figures that identify regression, as well as a return to childhood but he never considered family as an archetype. Because family emerged consistently in the archive analysis and the interviews with consumers, I consider it an archetype. In the Happy Valley campaign, the company stressed the role of Mother Nature, while consumers inferred a nurturing family in the collective of farmers. This interpretation invited the company to invest in this archetype, that informed the second iconic campaign through the portrayal of heterosexual nuclear family. The normative family has a prominent role in Western countries, and Butler (1990) locates it at the centre of the arrangement that regulates gender relationships in personal and collective beliefs, the 'heterosexual matrix'. By attaching its name to the family archetype, Mulino Bianco achieved immediate resonance, tapping into an already established cluster of meanings. Finally, respondents made sense of the 'Miller Campaign' in different ways, but the majority of them connected it to family, either by remarking on its absence or by detecting a 'family feeling' that reminded them of the previous campaigns. By acknowledging the presence of a persistent set of meanings related to family, we can understand how the craftsmanship myth managed to tap into the untargeted myth market of family representations.

The relevance of family is not a theme derived from a 'populist world'. I propose that the resonance of this archetype is ensured by the role of family in Italian society at large and by the role of mother and motherhood in a Catholic country. For instance, the perception that Italian families are endangered emerged as a consistent theme across the two samples, even if the implication varied according to the sample. In fact, all participants believed Italian families were undergoing a struggle that was not only financial, but their sense-making of it changed according to their family ideology. While more conservative participants felt nostalgic for a presumed stability of the past, lesbian and gay ones read the family-crisis as a potential renewal of family norms. All of them felt the lack of institutional support. Respondents' accounts are in line with contemporary social studies that look at Italian families (Castiglioni & Zuanna, 2017; Saraceno, 2017; Sassatelli, Santoro & Semi, 2015; Cappellini, Marilli & Parsons, 2014), and at family policies which are the neglected 'Cinderella' of social policies in Italy (Saraceno, 2010). These studies underpin how changes in family and gender structure become a social concern that makes unconventional family representations so compelling.

8.3.2 Second Archetype: Nature

The second archetype that emerges from this analysis is nature. The nature/culture divide is an anthropological theme discussed across disciplines, and with implications also in relation to consumption practices. Shankar and Canniford (2013) explain that in a romantic ideology of consumption nature is conceptualised as opposite to modern culture, and this includes sublime, sacred, and primitive discourses. Sublime and sacred discourses make the natural space worth revering and worshipping (Belk & Costa, 1998), and a place to seek the experience of wilderness in opposition to the artificiality of culture (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015; Arnould & Price, 1993). On the other hand, the primitive discourse informs nostalgia. Nature is both a spatial and a temporal signifier that celebrates premodern consumption: 'the nostalgic image of nature is used by advertisers to promote a vision of consumption that euphemistically denies the very nature of the world that makes consumption possible (Illouz, 1997, p.94). Of the three discourses, the

primitive is more relevant in defining the meanings nature takes in the Mulino Bianco's narrative.

The archetype of nature, related to vital forces, fertility, authenticity, and purity, was developed in opposition to anthropic environments marked by corruption, sophistication, refinement and pollution. In the myth of rurality that informed the Happy Valley campaign (1978-1987), nature was expressed as everything that stood as antithesis to the industrial and global economy. The oil crisis of the '70s, paired with the political violence of the Years of Lead had spread a feeling of distrust in institutions throughout Italian society. As a result, the brand promised to take consumers to a place of communion and autarchic production, a self-sufficient bubble governed by seasons only. In the early '90s, where industry has regained a different role in the social mind set, nature could not be so removed from a modern lifestyle. Thus, only the pleasurable aspects of the fields of wheat were preserved, along with the lush of the countryside. Again, these are the fields of wheat that consumers recognise in the Miller's campaign, defining it as a natural element, detecting a continuity with the previous campaigns, yet seeing it as a novel adaptation of it. In the context of the widespread distrust consumers developed for mass production and industrial ingredients, such as palm-oil (Cova & D'Antone, 2016), the fields of wheat of the Miller campaign contextualise nature as unrefined ingredients and a direct relationship with food.

By using the notion of archetype, this research tries to unpack the dynamics behind brands' cultural narratives, focusing on the lingering elements of iconicity, elements that resist the fluctuation of myth markets while sustaining their cultural resonance. The analysis showed how the archetypes of nature and family updated the Mulino Bianco's myth, changing their relational dominance in accordance with the myth structure. The theoretical relevance of archetypes is that it explains how brands manage to keep their myth consistent while updating it, and how a myth achieves resonance among a broader audience. However, archetypes are insuperable by definition, they cannot be dismissed as myths can be. The resilience of archetypes leaves brand managers with little, if none, control over them.

8.4 You say it best when you say nothing at all: Iconic ambiguity

The third finding is that ambiguity, derived from archetypes, facilitates the transition from one myth to the other, escaping stagnant meanings derived from old narratives. According to Jung's scholarship, archetypes are ambiguous elements *par excellence*, with endless potential and indefinite meanings. Ambiguity moves from the archetype to the myth and finally to the brand, allowing various interpretations, and ensuring that the symbolic narrative of the brand is malleable precisely because of its imprecision. As we witnessed in relation to nature and family, archetypes do not have precise connotations, and they reduce, but do not lose, their amorphousness only when they become part of a myth.

Interpretive consumer literature has already paralleled ambiguity with intrinsic advertising polysemy that can 'target multiple audiences with the same advertising message' (Puntoni, Vanhamme & Visscher, 2011, p.26). Like ambiguity, polysemy opens up the advertising text to different interpretations. However, these terms are not entirely overlapping, as polysemy demands from the audience to choose among defined interpretations, while ambiguity can tolerate confusion and paradox (Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2011), allowing the audience, as observed, not to choose at all. Branding literature has already investigated the potential of ambiguity in relation to myths and myth management (Brown, 2014; Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013). Ambiguity in branding becomes a positive asset as it allows even contradictory meanings to accumulate, expanding the possibility of interpretation (Brown, 2014; 2013). Myths are ambiguous, open to multiple interpretations, and able to pass this quality to the brands they inform (Brown, 2013).

The potential of ambiguity is here observed in relation to downplaying archetypes. The reason for downplaying an archetype is the deterioration of its meanings in relation to the previous myth. Unlike the process of de-iconisation (Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017), where the brand loses its iconic power, the case I am referring to is when a persisting myth remains as a source of iconicity. The Mulino Bianco family is an example of how a myth, almost overlapping with an archetype, took meanings initially not intended for it, while staying iconic. By adopting ambiguity, the Miller campaign moved on to a new symbolic narrative, avoiding representations that would openly contradict or enforce the

decaying one. The Miller campaign leverages on the potential of the unclear to transition from a myth to another, without letting the old one to vanish entirely. In the Miller Campaign, for example, ambiguity leaves the audience free to imagine how much and if the craftsmanship myth is deviating from the previous family myth, allowing novelty and continuity to coexist in the new brands' narrative.

Respondents did not always identify the miller, the hen, and the maid as a family, but they detected a 'family feeling' in that iconography. Through an ambiguous family gaze, the Miller Campaign became the expression of inclusive family representations, competing with other brands and cultural actors that adopted unconventional family representations. In fact, both lesbian and heterosexual participants read the miller's portrayal as a strategy that met their need for more inclusive representations, as even an amorphous collective can have a 'family feeling'. Both samples interpreted the scene as the inclusive portrayal they were hoping for, adapting it to their own beliefs. The use of ambiguity shows that Mulino Bianco referred to the national tensions surrounding family, but it avoided alternative portrayals of family such as the ones adopted by other brands like Ikea or Findus. Ambiguity, then, acts as a homeostatic device: it regulates the necessary changes while preserving the status quo. Respondents' believed that the miller was crucial to an inclusive portrayal and yet not bold enough to subvert the dominance of family over other forms of domestic intimacy, as neither the hen nor the maid could be deemed legitimate housemates.

The ambiguity of the Miller Campaign articulates at different levels, as observed in chapter 5 and 7. For example, in the Miller Campaign, a latent family gaze is referred to the miller, the maid and the hen, who could potentially pass as a family, or not. More, the miller is impersonated by Antonio Banderas, and he is made so recognisable that the lines between endorser and impersonator are blurred. Moreover, the mill and its rural imagery are not congruent with the glamour of Antonio Banderas, leaving consumers puzzled about his role in the mill. It is in this incongruence and in the brand-celebrity relationship that new meanings are generated, so that the endorser is not simply transferring meanings to the brand (Hackley & Hackley, 2015). The derision, parody, irony, and mockery enacted by consumers in relation to this ambiguous role are indeed a side-effect of

ambiguity (Brown, 2014), as consumers can look down onto the former Hollywood star now turned advertising impersonator.

8.5 Family narratives and gendered myths

The normative family is a myth that conditions the personal, social, and institutional tools that define the recognition of intimacies as well as their actualisation. It is also the ideal against which real-life families and couples define their own peculiarities and deviances, a constant comparison that cannot be suspended. Respondents from both samples equally idealised family meals as rituals of conviviality and inter-generational bonding, imbued with nostalgic memories of nurturing women and caring elders (Moisio, Arnould & Price, 2004). This persisting idealisation of family time and gender roles in food practices stands at odds with respondents' tensions towards different family models. Socio-economic instability aggravates the dissonance between idealised family and everyday performances. Wilk (2010) predicted that 'the yawning gap between stereotype and performance creates a zone of maximum dissonance, a table where a hundred mass-mediated stereotypes are seated alongside real people, coping with a country where stable jobs that can support a family have become a vanishing memory' (p.434). Similarly, Bourdieu (1996) considered family a well-funded illusion that could be reproduced only with the guarantee of the state.

The attachment towards the 'traditional family' performances is reflected onto the Mulino Bianco family, entrenched with the same feelings of middle-class stability. This icon is currently responsible for storing the nostalgia for times of economic growth as well as to legitimise, through tradition, the ideological stability of the middle-class, nuclear family. Imbued with a personal and cultural projection of gender roles and middle-class values, it represents a past Italians never had but they wish they did. Emerging during the economic boom, the nuclear family of growing possibilities did not preserve food traditions and conservative gender roles, but it was rather a place where industrial products and women's emancipation strived (Zamagni, 1998). The persisting myth of the middle-class family has to be looked at not only in the lifestyle it suggests, but also in its

moral qualities. If ‘class is made on cultural values premised on morality’ (Skeggs, 2005, p.969), the middle-class family is the ideal realisation of family moral values, togetherness, integrity, and stability, whose myth is grounded in tradition (Gross, 2005). Current studies have shown that instead of smoothing social contradictions, the middle-class family produces its own anxieties ‘inherent not only to the census dynamics among families, but also to the gender dynamics within families’ (Sassatelli, Santoro & Semi, 2015, p.25). In fact, this study has shown how participants do not reject normative family and gender roles because they lack economic or structural support, but rather because the micro-dynamics of the family roles cannot be boxed into the rigid schemes of these roles. For example, the role of the stay-home mother who lives for her family does not reflect the complexity of women’s private and public life, even for those respondents who chose to be stay-home mothers.

However, the myth of the normative family flourishes even if it cannot be replicated. This form of negative idealisation, ‘when something you desire is an obstacle to your flourishing’ (Berlant, 2011, p.1), occurs especially in times of crisis. Real life experiences challenge heteronormativity and end up producing alternative skills or scenarios, but, unlike what has been predicted by Butler (1990), they do not question the model on which the myth is based. This emerged clearly in relation to breakfast, as a meal constantly disrupted by conflicting priorities that nevertheless confirmed that a family should eat together. People are not willing to dismiss the family myth as it provides a sense of continuity in their own lives:

‘(subjects) might not well endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the content of the attachment is, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject’s sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world’ (Berlant, 2011, p.24)

This chapter closes with a reflection on the persistence of family in Italian consumer culture. This myth evokes not only a family arrangement, but also a pleasant lifestyle of economic security. Consumers’ attachment to the symbolic narrative of a brand fosters a sense of continuity and resilience against the turmoil people experience throughout their

lives. It is already known that iconic brands can provide ‘stability, security and belonging amid large-scale and radical transformations’ (Kravets & Orge, 2010, p.212). Likewise, the myth of the normative family evokes both social and personal stability, and for some consumers also a regression to childhood. However, the permanence of the symbolic detaches from the practices. Domestic breakfast based on biscuits and bakery products has become a common practice, but consumers do not associate it with the brand that launched it, nor with the imagery of the family meal. If on the one hand, the Mulino Bianco family has become the quintessential normative family, on the other the brand has lost a ‘family meaning’ in relation to consumption practices.

The persistence of the heteronormative model can be explained in relation to the ‘family crisis’ respondents believe they are experiencing, in contrast with a past where family was imagined as a fortress, immune from turmoil. The precariousness of the present against the stability of the past is a socially constructed dichotomy, along with the idealisation of family as:

‘an immensely stable and stabilising force, changing only slowly if at all, resisting pressures for change outside itself. This impression of stability, however, needs to be put against a recognition of the intrinsically transformational processes which underlie it [...] It is fashionable to see the family in contemporary capitalism as being in a state of crisis. It would be as true to say that crisis is something that the institution of the family has never been out of’ (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p.205).

This is not to say that Italian families are not experiencing a lack of institutional support or political tensions. However, family crisis here emerges as the transition towards a new idea of family as a plurality of potential arrangements and the redefinition of the micro-politics of gender to be enacted within. The crisis of family documented here did not explore macro-structural changes, but rather revealed respondents’ perspective of a more intimate attempt to define and enact gender roles, domestic labour and care-taking beyond normativity.

This research has shown that nobody feels comfortable with the model of the normative family, regardless of their sexual orientation. Lesbian participants claimed visibility for

homosexual relationships and heterosexual participants for a more egalitarian structure of family relationships. Both samples claimed visibility for different ways of doing family and affective relations. They did so by stressing the disruptive moments of their family life, such as conflicts and mess, moments that belong to the 'backstage' of family life (Goffman, 1969) and thus are never made visible. This claim intersects with consumer culture through the visual narratives of advertising. Indeed, consumers end up preferring family representations that celebrate plurality, such as Ikea, or that celebrate no family at all, such as Mulino Bianco's miller. Through ambiguity, the miller is open to multiple interpretations, and triggers forms of identification that are not based on family form. However, alternative portrayals of family are not readily accepted, and consumers of both samples have manifested little enthusiasm for alternative family portrayals, such as the gay family of Findus. Thus, the 'traditional family' persists as the only family model to have a certain visibility in the social discourse. Or in other words, the only portrayal of family to be iconic.

8.6 Conclusion

To sum up, findings have addressed the iconisation process from the perspective of the company and of consumers, highlighting how continuity is an important element in sustaining iconicity. Continuity is related to brand practices and archetypes, which ensures the symbolic and material consistency of a brand in the imagery as well as in the lives of consumers. However, myth and practices can decouple: the case of Mulino Bianco has shown how the myth attached to the brand is alive in popular culture, but the practice of breakfast related to the myth is not associated with the brand. Through this research I contend that the iconicity of a brand is shared between consumers and producers, and both groups contribute to facilitate, or to prevent, its update.

9. Conclusion

Almost one year after my fieldwork was completed, the interviews transcribed and the analysis finished, I saw an advertisement that clearly demonstrated that the myth market of family representations is yet to be resolved. The advertisement was released by Motta, a Mulino Bianco competitor in the breakfast segment. The advertisement opens on a sunny garden where an impeccably styled woman is arranging flowers for an outdoor table. Her daughter interrupts the scene asking an explicitly affected question, made more annoying for the high-pitched voice in which it is formulated: if there is a breakfast which is both nutritious and inviting, combining taste and lightness. As deadpan as her pearl necklace, the mother replies that such a breakfast does not exist, may an asteroid hit her if it does. And indeed the called-for asteroid falls on her, closing the scene on the destroyed table. This Motta advertisement was received as a provocative bravado which went viral and became a trending topic (Vitale, 2017). Analysing a cluster of 5500 tweets about the advert, DataMediaHub has revealed how the prevailing common reaction (64%) was humour, as most of the comments ridiculed the asteroid while praising advertisers' creativity. Only 19% of the comments openly supported the asteroid as an 'iconoclast outburst' against the normative family (Lo Conte, 2017), while a mere 10% lamented how violence is now widespread in mass media, defending the attacked family. In the context of this research, it should be noted that in 7% of the comments the Mulino Bianco family was explicitly mentioned as the model the asteroid meant to hit (Vitale, 2017). Playing with consumers' memories of an advertisement released 20 years ago, Motta confirms that the normative family associated to breakfast is a cultural code that circulates in popular culture. Through the asteroid, Motta catalysed the discomfort towards a rhetoric of class, family and food practices still embodied in the Mulino Bianco family.

This research has shown the evolution of the Mulino Bianco brand from a socio-historical perspective but also through the narratives of consumers, demonstrating how it operates as a carrier of a seemingly never-ending myth. Throughout this thesis I answered two research questions:

- How does Mulino Bianco, as an iconic brand, try to update its iconicity over time?

- How do Italian consumers interpret the Mulino Bianco iconicity in relation to their family and domestic arrangements?

The analysis of Mulino Bianco aimed at clarifying how iconicity is established and updated over time, moving from one iconic phase to the other. As already discussed, what made Mulino Bianco a compelling case was that its iconicity has not developed through a consistent coupling of social contradictions and myths, where the change of the first would affect the latter. Instead, respondents reflected on Mulino Bianco's iconicity by recalling persisting symbolic narratives. The 'Mulino Bianco family' is an example of a mismatch between the myth and the cultural context, a mismatch that has not (yet) affected the iconicity of the brand, as cultural branding theory (Holt, 2004) would expect to. The persistence of these symbolic narratives in consumer culture led this research to question how iconic brands manage their iconicity, particularly in the transition from one phase to the other, but also how consumers make sense of it over time.

The first step of this research was carried out through detailed archival research and visual analysis which revealed how the brand went through several iconic phases: the launch and three iconic campaigns. The observation of these phases problematised the process of 'myth updating,' that a myth should undergo to retain its iconicity (Holt, 2004). Data revealed that iconicity is emplaced, and thus updated, at three levels: the symbolic, the material and the practice-based levels. Notably, I observed how an iconic brand, because of its prominent position in consumer culture and strong symbolic articulation, manages to create new practices, charging them with novel symbolic meanings, ad-hoc materiality and new conventions and understandings. Mulino Bianco, in fact, has led to a re-shaping of breakfast, a previously declining practice, in a routinised meal and family occasion centred on the consumption of breakfast products.

By analysing consumers' interpretations as well as the findings from the visual analysis, I suggested that the updating of a brand's myth is possible through the re-organisation of its primary symbolic elements, here called brand archetypes. Mulino Bianco's brand archetypes are nature and family, and they participated in all the brand's myths, adapting their meanings and relevance according to the symbolic narratives. These archetypes are also leitmotifs that persist in consumers' memories of the brand, and that ground the

brand in broader social and anthropological concerns. Unlike what Holt (2004) theorised, I suggest that a brand's authenticity does not derive from populist worlds, but from these archetypes, which are clusters of meanings embedded in the collective unconscious. Finally, as archetypes are inherently ambiguous, their meanings are activated only within the structure of the myth and its interpretation. However, ambiguity makes iconic brands even more powerful as it allows them to encompass conflicting meanings, expanding brands' resonance and possible interpretations (Brown, 2014; Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013). Mulino Bianco has shown that archetype ambiguity is also an asset in transitioning from one iconic phase to the other, as it invites respondents to use their own sense-making to understand a certain iconography, making it suitable for the shifting social frictions they are personally experiencing.

9.1 Theoretical contributions

To sum up, the study of Mulino Bianco highlighted three theoretical contributions to the theory of iconic brands: that iconicity is emplaced and updated on a practice-based level; that brand archetypes ensure continuity in a brand's myth; that ambiguity facilitates the shift from one iconic phase to the other.

9.1.1 Brand Practices

This thesis firstly contributes to the notion of iconicity, showing that it is built through a combination of three levels: symbolic, material and practice-based. Furthermore, this research has shown that iconic brands can create new practices, as Mulino Bianco has done with Italian breakfast. While the available literature on iconic brands had already highlighted the importance of the imagery (Holt, 2004) and of the materiality (Kravets & Orge, 2010), the role of practices has been largely understudied. By re-defining the tradition of Italian breakfast, Mulino Bianco successfully positioned itself in a family practice which never existed before. Before the advent of Mulino Bianco, breakfast used to be an overlooked practice, with little if any domestic implications. Through a longitudinal effort between 1971 and 1975, Mulino Bianco crafted breakfast as a 'traditional' habit to be restored, adding family meanings to it. The brand paralleled the

practice of breakfast with the strengthening of family values and family displaying (Finch, 2007) but also with ad-hoc materiality, such as collectible goods. Over time, Mulino Bianco embodied symbolic meanings related to nature and family, made tangible in the brands' appearances as well as gadgets. The practice of breakfast became a further enactment of these meanings, conveying the need to restore a lost meal that had actually never existed while making it an ideal representation for family time.

9.1.2 Archetypes

Secondly, the thesis contributes in defining iconicity as being built through archetypes, symbolic units that come together to create myths. Archetypes make brands relevant and ground them in social concerns. Archetypes are ambiguous by definition, and it is their re-organisation within a symbolic narrative which grants the necessary consistency needed to update a myth. Archetypes, moreover, ground a myth in collective interests and concerns, making a brand relevant to the society at large. As they do not change contextually, it is rather their interpretation that changes, modulating in line with the current national ideologies and personal experiences. In the case of Mulino Bianco, two archetypes have guided the symbolic structure of the brand: family and nature. These archetypes are present in all three myths (rurality, normative family and craftsmanship) developed in Mulino Bianco's most iconic campaigns. Thus, the updating of myths can be seen as a re-organisation of these two archetypes in the context of a changing myth-market. A managerial implication of the concept of brand archetypes therefore concerns resonance. As family is one of the most influential symbols in Italian society, by branding the archetypical normative family Mulino Bianco achieved immediate resonance. Archetypes, in fact, are very effective in placing a brand into a pre-existing cultural narrative (Mark & Pearson, 2001), but this comes at the expenses of how easy brand are to control. In fact, the Mulino Bianco family has survived as a collective interpretation of the traditional family, making it difficult for the brand to detach itself from it.

9.1.3 Ambiguity

Finally, the third contribution states that ambiguity, a property of archetypes, can be strategic in transitioning between iconic phases, as it allows consumers to negotiate the symbolic meanings of a brand. Ambiguity can resolve a mismatch between the meanings a brand achieves through time and the social frame in which they are interpreted, it allows viewers to use their own sense-making to read the advertising scene in the way they find most suitable, resolving potential iconographic tensions. In the literature to date ambiguity has only been explored as a static asset of iconicity (Brown, McDonagh & Schultz 2013), rather than as a strategic asset in a transitioning phase. The meaning of the Mulino Bianco family became controversial in a moment in which Italian society was itself transitioning to new forms of family recognition. Instead of taking a position over this dispute by choosing openly queer or conservative portrayals, the brand decided to adopt a vague representation, open to multiple interpretations. The brand did not dismiss the family archetype, which was still present in the craftsmanship myth, even if the iconography did not make it explicit. The ‘Miller Campaign’, as shown, was read as inclusive both by lesbian and heterosexual respondents, who could choose, according to their beliefs, what to read into the advertising scenes. Ambiguity allowed Mulino Bianco to compete within the myth market of family representations with other brands such as Ikea and Findus, without running the risk these two brands took with openly unconventional family representations. The managerial implication of this finding is that co-authoring a myth does not limit the brand to stitching external cultural texts to the brand’s myth or to collaborating with consumers (Holt, 2004), but also includes sharing control over the icon. However, sharing control can lead to losing it. This can be avoided by leveraging the archetypes’ ambiguity, leaving consumers free to interpret the iconography in a way which diminishes the frictions between the iconography, their cultural context and their beliefs.

9.4 Empirical Contribution

The second research question has been answered through the empirical findings, that addressed how iconicity is lived and experienced by consumers with different ideological backgrounds and engagement with the brand. This research has shown how iconicity shapes people's lives, influencing their practices. By looking at how Mulino Bianco is understood, discussed and consumed, the research provides a glimpse of family routines, domestic arrangements, beliefs about family and society, political choices and personal experiences. The choice of a double sample was meant to cover the most extreme positions in relation to these themes. That said, participants had more nuanced views than expected: there were progressive Catholic activists and lesbian mothers with a strong Catholic background, right-wing participants who dreamt of a new Mulino Bianco advert with LGBT families in it, and LGBT families who hoped not to be overrepresented in advertising. However, the two samples had a similar interpretation of the Mulino Bianco campaigns, as the Mulino Bianco family was universally understood as normative and the miller as ambiguous. Both samples read Mulino Bianco as the 'traditional' family, combining a heteronormative kinship with a middle-class status that privileges appearances over real-life experiences. Thus, respondents understood that being the Mulino Bianco family meant forcing the complexity of family life into the rigid schema of a norm, but also to benefit from a certain visibility. This portrayal linked to recognition and visibility because it is the only family portrayal in Italian advertising which is widely recalled, eclipsing any other representation. Nevertheless, none of the respondents felt represented by the Mulino Bianco family, while they all read the miller as inclusive, not only in terms of gender and sexuality but also in terms of class.

Differences amongst the two samples emerged concerning how consumers apply this icon to their own family life. In fact, this visibility was valued positively only by lesbian and gay respondents, who claimed that they could be 'the new Mulino Bianco families', thanks to the extension of family rights to LGBT families. On the other hand, heterosexual consumers refused to be compared with this icon, as an 'imposed marketplace myth' (Arsel & Thompson, 2011, p.792) that deprived them of their identities and peculiarities. While the two samples differed in their understanding of family and gender, their experiences aligned, revealing a closer sensibility to everyday family practices. Indeed,

the Mulino Bianco family occupied much of the conversation about the relationship between the brand and family practices. Respondents showed very little awareness of how the brand had shaped this practice, assuming the breakfast Mulino Bianco invented to be the most conventional one to have at home. Having breakfast in the Mulino Bianco way was understood as a mechanism for displaying family and class during this meal, rather than simply using the branded products.

Since tradition has been at the heart of Mulino Bianco since its launch, it is no surprise that consumers now read the brand as a keeper of the status quo. However, as noted in the data, consumers contribute to that role by projecting onto the brand their need for reassurance, the brand safeguards a sense of nostalgia they have for their own past, for childhood memories and idealised family representations. As Castiglioni and Dalla Zuanna (2017) put it, ‘along with the family in flesh and bones, a mythical one lives in the mind of most Italians’. Nostalgia, however, contributes to creating a friction with contemporary practices and actual experiences, as those normative models are not embraced in everyday life but they still gain a wide recognition and visibility. This unshaken attachment to a fantasy, or an ideal, can be explained in that it provides a feeling of continuity to people’s lives, a hope for stability in times of turmoil even if the fantasised object has negative implications (Berlant, 2011).

9.5 Methodological Contribution

This research offers a novel methodological approach to the study of iconic brands as it combines archival research, critical visual analysis, and interviews. The combination of these three methods allows for exploration of the development of iconicity from both the producer perspective and the consumer perspective. Considering the brand culture in which an iconic brand develops, this approach aims to provide a more holistic understanding of how consistency in iconic brands is achieved as a joint effort between consumers and producers. By interviewing consumers, it was possible to observe how their understanding of iconicity was shaped through the years. In comparison with other methodologies designed to study brand iconicity, such as brand genealogy (Holt 2006b, 2004), this approach allows for a more in-depth understanding of how iconicity is

experienced in everyday life including the memories and narratives of consumers, as well as their accounts of their material engagement with the brand. Thus, this methodology facilitates the exploration of the material and practice-based elements of iconicity as well as the symbolic one.

9.6 Limitations

The first limitation refers to the data I could access. As the marketing team changed, and the documents on Mulino Bianco have never received the same attention as those of Barilla, some archival data was not available; for example sales, revenues, and precise indications of the brand's market share were only occasionally archived, making a year by year comparison impossible. After 1996, very few documents were moved from the marketing offices to the historical archive, making for a rather sparse data set for the last two decades. This has been partially addressed using interviews with company members but nevertheless it could not compensate for the lack of consistency in the data used to map Mulino Bianco's iconic phases.

The second limitation refers to the focus on four iconic phases of the brand (including three advertising campaigns). While these were identified as most relevant given the focus on iconicity, other campaigns and phases of Mulino Bianco have not been investigated with the same depth. These four phases were selected after having studied the archive and consulted the members of Mulino Bianco marketing branch. In the preliminary stage, this research did consider other Mulino Bianco campaigns but they are not part of the analysis presented as their significance was not related to iconicity. However, addressing these campaigns would help to understand what marketing strategies were in place between one iconic phase and the other, and how consumers remember these strategies. While iconicity is based on few great performances (Holt, 2004), the understanding of its evolution or decay could be improved by including these non-iconic phases.

The third limitation refers to the research design. Although the samples were purposefully selected to achieve polarity in terms of respondents' beliefs and ideas about family, this polarity was not evidenced in the data. However, this unforeseen complexity helped in

highlighting a new, and more interesting result: people do not reflect upon family representations only according to their ideology, but also through their experiences and memories. The sampling could have been more layered in terms of class, since all respondents interviewed belonged to the middle-class cluster, which in Italy is a macro-cluster (Sassatelli, Santoro & Semi, 2015). For instance, the sample did not include working class or upper-class participants, nor did it monitor how respondents located themselves in the middle-class cluster. The sampling was not designed to highlight class differences, but the concerns which emerged in this research, specifically the family crisis, represent a middle-class perspective. On the same note, the sampling did not aim to observe generational differences, nor cultural ones. The emergence of iconic archetypes suggested that respondents' life-cycles and generation can impact upon brand perception beyond ideological beliefs. Thus, generational differences and life-cycles are here indirectly inferred, requiring further investigation for a more precise analysis. Similarly, the choice of having only Italian respondents has limited the understanding of which elements of Italian popular culture are taken for granted in their understanding of the brand.

The last limitation concerns the representations of family other brands have provided. During the interviews, consumers mentioned other family representations in advertising, such as the ones of Ikea and Findus. These portrayals have been investigated in relation to Mulino Bianco' and not in relation to the brands to which they associated. Consequently, this research has not systematically addressed what representations of family were available in advertising at the time of the interviews, and if other brands addressed the issue of family representations. This limitation affects the understanding of the marketplace in which this research is set, but it can be taken into consideration for further research on family representations in Italian advertising.

9.7 Further Research

More research should also be dedicated to the development of a robust definition of archetype in consumer culture, one which adopts a scope broader than simply branding issues. On the empirical level, the notion of archetypes I developed could be applied to

other iconic brands, possibly in different national contexts, to provide a comparison between different case-studies and social arrangements. As for other fields, the study of brand iconicity has focused mainly on Anglo-Saxon culture, but it has produced interesting results whenever it has been considered in other countries, as in the work of Kravets and Orge (2010) on Soviet brands or Rokka (2017) on Champagne. This research has explored the intertwining of consumer culture and Italian familialism, a phenomenon which has been abundantly documented in the past and is still at the centre of scholars' attention (Castiglioni & Zuanna, 2017; Saraceno, 2010; Ginsborg, 1990). Thus, the strength of the family archetype was undoubtedly influenced by the national context in which it was observed, and further research could clarify how national ideologies condition the emergence of archetypes, focusing on cultural continuities rather than disruption. Finally, the theoretical insights here presented will help further research on iconic brands. For instance, the notion of brand archetypes could be applied to other empirical contexts. The focus on the creation of iconicity and practices opens new avenues for research. Little is known about the relationship between these brands and the practices they introduced, such as the role of consumers in adopting and developing them, or the competition arising between brands in establishing a practice.

Methodologically, further research projects should include content analysis on the gender and family portrayal in tv advertising. In the context of this research, I worked on the resonance certain representations have (such as the nuclear family) in the perception of consumers. However, there is no available data on the actual broadcasts, such as how many families, among those represented, are still nuclear, and whether food-related gender roles are still as limited as the ones I observed in the academic literature. Moreover, respondents could not recall advertisements featuring single families, housemates, and elderly people, albeit these categories account for a large percentage of Italian households. Thus, it would be worth recording whether these subjects are actually absent from advertising, or what practices and roles they perform when present. In relation to a broader representation of domesticity in advertising, the Miller campaign is an unconventional portrayal, as domesticity is transformed into a space of work and leisure, blurring together expertise and care.

On the empirical level, more has to be written about the development of breakfast as an Italian practice, looking beyond the Mulino Bianco archive and focusing on other brands as well as on the managers and employees that contributed to the Italian Breakfast project. For instance, Mulino Bianco's archive documents revealed how the cereal brand Kellogg had tried to enter the Italian breakfast segment. Moreover, further research could investigate breakfast as a family practice, interviewing consumers on their morning routines rather than on brand-related practices. As this research focused on Mulino Bianco, the practice of breakfast has received peripheral attention, overlooking aspects as non-domestic consumption, or the establishment of breakfast routines. I consider these aspects potential themes for a future research project. Twenty years after the launch of the Italian Breakfast project, it is important to monitor, as this research has partly done, how this brand practice has evolved and survived. The empirical findings of this research project invite researchers to look at the Italian culture of doing and representing families more closely. This could be articulated in two ways. The first way refers to the concept of family gaze in a market-related context. Across this research project, I underlined how there is an ideological family gaze which conflicts with a personal family gaze derived from one's own experience of family. The recognisability of family also depends on how these gazes are mobilised, as shown in the Miller campaign. Thus, further visual research on Italian advertising could pay attention to how the gaze is used to imply -or negate- the presence of a family. Alternatively, future research could also look into the culture-specific aspects of family practices and representations. As shown in chapter 6 and 7, consumers repetitively referred to an 'Italian way' of understanding family practices and relationships. However, as this research has focused on a specific brand, the broader understanding of family-related meanings in Italy has not been addressed. Thus, further research would help clarify what are the tenets of the 'Italian family' as understood in popular culture, and what are the implications beyond consumer culture.

Personally, this research project has been a valuable experience to investigate the relationship between brand culture and society from the perspective of every-day, intimate life. Thus, I hope this work will offer some valuable insights outside the context in which it has been developed, providing a new point of view to scholars studying the influence of brands in family and gender practices.

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Appendix A: Critical Visual Analysis Guideline

1) Non-Verbal Communication (Panofsky, 1970 in Dyer, 1982)	
Appearance	<i>age</i> : what does the age of the characters stand for?
	<i>gender</i> : conventionalized portrayals – women as mothers, submissive, emotional; men as rational and assertive (Goffman 1979)
	<i>nationality and race</i> : stereotyped vision of the other (humour)
	<i>hair</i> : symbolic meaning. Es.in women are sign of seduction or narcissism (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998)
	<i>body</i> : whole/body parts; nakedness; thin/fat.
	<i>size</i> : relative size conveys status (Goffman, 1979)
	<i>looks</i> : impression created by a character (the ordinary person, the ideal type...) (Bordo, 1983)
Manner	<i>expression</i> : face and facial expressions (happy, delighted...)
	<i>eye contact</i> : communicates status, mood and thoughts (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998)
	<i>pose</i> : standing, prone, using somebody's else body to lean against (Goffman, 1979)
	<i>clothes</i> : formal, informal, costume
Activity	<i>touch</i> : ritual, functional, the self- touch, the feminine touch (Goffman, 1979)
	<i>body movement</i> : kinesics, Goffman's ritual subordination
	<i>positional communication</i> : proxemics, relationship between actors; intimacy (Hodge & Kress, 1988) This includes bodily dominance (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998)
Props and Settings	<i>props</i> : cultural significance or symbolic value of stage objects, possessions (Stern & Schroeder, 1994; Holbrook & Grayson, 1986)
	<i>settings</i> : familiar, wishful, fantastic (Millum, 1975) outdoor and indoor, weather. Cultural conventions of settings (Stern & Schroeder, 1994)

2) Composition	
Camera angle	what to shoot and from which point (Monaco, 2009), ‘bird’s eye view’ (Dyer, 1982. p.107), but also the perspective, as ‘the viewer’s vantage point’ (Schroeder and Stern, 1994, p124)
Montage	technical effects (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p.175)
Gaze	Is there a gaze implied in the scene? (Mulvey, 2009; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004; Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998)
Objectifying techniques	for example, cropping women to portray them as an object of desire or as an act of violence (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998)
3) Audio	
Sounds/music	soundtrack, music, atmospheric sounds (Monaco, 2009)
Tone of voice	pushy, insisting voice (Dyer, 1982) voice pitching, rhythm coordination (Monaco, 2009).

Appendix B: Participants

Name	Age	Occupation	Degree	Gender	Sample	Family composition	Consumption Rate
Ascanio	56	sales agent	Bachelor	M	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	1+ a month
Beatrice	49	housewife	Bachelor	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	1+ a month
Caterina	50	accountant	High school diploma	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	almost never
Costanza	45	restorer	Bachelor	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	1+ a month
Fabiola	30	social educator	Bachelor	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married	1+ a week
Federico	50	baker	High school diploma	M	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	almost never
Francesca	47	employee	High school diploma	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	1+ a month
Glenda	49	artisan	High school diploma	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	almost never
Lisa	45	support teacher	Bachelor	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	once a month
Maura	44	tv director	Postgraduate	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	once a month
Michele	31	surveyor	High school diploma	M	HETEROSEXUAL	married	1+ a week
Pamela	30	employee	Postgraduate	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	once a week
Paolo	50	european manager	High school diploma	M	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	1+ a month
Pio	49	artisan	Bachelor	M	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	almost never
Sabrina	36	consultant	Master	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	1+ a month
Stella	56	school teacher	Bachelor	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married with children	every day
Tania	31	educator	Bachelor	F	HETEROSEXUAL	married	1+ a week
Barbara	42	landscape designer	Master	F	LESBIGAY	partnership	almost never
Benedetta	40	therapist	Master	F	LESBIGAY	partnership with children	1+ a week
Bruno	40	receptionist	Postgraduate	M	LESBIGAY	partnership	never
Btissam	34	theatre director	Bachelor	F	LESBIGAY	partnership with children	every day
Carla	30	unemployed	High school diploma	F	LESBIGAY	partnership with children	every day
Danila	43	employee	Bachelor	F	LESBIGAY	partnership with children	never
Fabrizio	32	architect	PhD	M	LESBIGAY	partnership	almost never
Fulvia	42	cultural manager	PhD	F	LESBIGAY	single	never
Giacomo	34	lawyer	Master	M	LESBIGAY	partnership with children	1+ a month
Massimo	31	activist	Bachelor	M	LESBIGAY	single	once a month
Morena	47	editor	Bachelor	F	LESBIGAY	partnership with children	never
Patrizia	32	support teacher	Postgraduate	F	LESBIGAY	single	once a month
Pia	42	researcher	PhD	F	LESBIGAY	partnership	once a month
Pietro	46	entrepreneur	Bachelor	M	LESBIGAY	partnership with children	almost never
Roberta	32	activist	Master	F	LESBIGAY	partnership	never
Salvatore	28	unemployed	Master	M	LESBIGAY	partnership	never
Sofia	32	supermarket assistant	High school diploma	F	LESBIGAY	partnership with children	every day

Appendix C: Informed Consent

My name is Daniela Pirani and I am a PhD student in the Management Department at Royal Holloway University of London. I am doing a research on Mulino Bianco's advertisements, looking at how consumers interpret the change and evolution of Mulino Bianco campaigns in relation to their experience of the brand.

If you wish to participate to this study, we will schedule an interview at your earliest convenience. During the interview we will look at Mulino Bianco advertisements and comment them together. You do not need to be familiar with all the brand's campaigns or to be a regular consumer of the brand's products. If you agree to take part to this research, I will record the interview and I will save the material produced during the interview, such as notes and recordings.

Confidentiality is very important to this research. Interviews, recordings, notes and any other material will be used only for this research project. The interview and your personal data will be anonymised and will stay confidential, and your participation to this project will not be disclosed. The recordings and the transcriptions will not be shared and only I, Daniela Pirani, will have access to the material collected during the interviews. If you want to, I can share with you the quotes I intend to use for my thesis, or you can ask for the transcript of the interview. You may be contacted again to clarify the transcription of the interview, if needed, and if you wish so I can share with you a summary of this research project.

For any query, contact me at

daniela.pirani.2014@live.rhul.ac.uk

At the end of the interview you will receive a copy of this document. If you have any question concerning this project please let me know.

Informed consent:

I read the information here reported, I received an adequate answer to my questions, I consent to participate to the interview and I consent for the interview to be recorded

Signature

Name & Date

Appendix D: Interview Questions

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

- 1) Name, Family Name
- 2) Date of Birth.
- 3) Gender
- 4) Occupation
- 5) Degree
- 6) Composition of your household
- 7) Composition of the family of origin
- 8) Who is in charge for food provisioning in your household?
- 9) What are the brands you remember consuming as a child?

DRAWING ELICITATION

- 10) Could you please draw the Mulino Bianco logo or anything you associate with the brand?
- 10a) What is the position of the mill compared to the city? Who lives in the mill? Which values do you associate to the picture you drew?
- 10b) Where is the drawing placed? What people surround the scene?
- 11) Do you consume any of the MB products? If yes, how often? Which ones?
- 11a) Do you consume them on your own?
- 12) Who buys them?
- 13) What are your memories/thoughts associated to the brand?
- 14) What is Mulino Bianco? What Mulino Bianco is not?
- 15) What Mulino Bianco used to be for you? What wasn't it?
- 16) Who does what in the mill? And at your place?

ADVERTISEMENTS DISCUSSION

- 17) Showing and commenting Mulino Bianco campaign

The Happy Valley Campaign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRNoBN5zjKw>

The Family Campaign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4C52VnpDamQ>

The Favole Campaign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNFZ2MexvU4>

The Miller Campaign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-t195BcSr3o>.

Prompting questions for discussion:

- 18) What do you think happens in this advertising?
- 19) What is the role of the characters?
- 20) What is the role of the Mill into the advertising?
- 21) What do you think is the intended audience of these ads?
- 22) How do you feel about the last advertisement?
- 23) Do you like the choice of Banderas? Why?

QUESTIONS ON MULINO BIANCO CAMPAIGNS

- 24) Are there other ads from Mulino Bianco that you remember beside those shown? Do you like them? What elements you like/dislike of these ads?
- 25) If you could be in one of the ads of Mulino Bianco in which one would you like to be?
- 26) What is your overall opinion of the brand?
- 27) What do you think the next campaign will be?
- 28) What would you like the next campaign to be?

THE MULINO BIANCO FAMILY

- 29) Have you ever heard the expression: Mulino Bianco Family?
- 30) How would you describe it?
- 31) What was the role of each character?
- 32) Do you remember any scene in particular?
- 33) How do you think they interacted among each other in that scene?
- 34) Are there any elements in these ads that remind you of your own family?
- 35) What do you think of the Mulino Bianco family?
- 36) Do you think it will ever come back in the ads?
- 37) Do you miss it? Would you like to see a reinterpretation of it?
- 38) Why do you think people remember it?