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**"Crunch my Heart! It Falls for You: Re-theorizing Chocolate Gift-Giving as Carnal Singularity Across Language Contexts**

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This is an accepted manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in Gifts, Romance, and Consumer Culture on 26 September 2018, available online:

<http://www.routledge.com/9781138500709>

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*Crunch my heart! It falls for you: re-theorizing chocolate gift-giving as carnal-singularity*  
across language contexts

Marjaana Mäkelä, Shona Bettany and Lorna Stevens

"Chocolate, dark or light..  
Makes me smile bright.  
Chocolate, whether speak or not..  
If it's love, it conveys a lot.  
But when you're.. not there with me..  
It's just a piece.. of sugar candy.  
It's you, who makes it sweeter..  
I love it with you, even if it's bitter.  
So be there always.. stay forever..  
I can't think of life.. without you ever.  
..  
O girl, O girl, O.. O.. girl.. you be mine..  
You are my choco-life..  
You be my.. Valentine.  
..  
Just be mine.. O O.. Valentine!!!"  
— Vikrmn, Guru with Guitar

## Introduction

*“He showed the words “chocolate cake” to a group of Americans and recorded their word associations. “Guilt” was the top response. If that strikes you as unexceptional, consider the response of French eaters to the same prompt: “celebration.”*

— **Michael Pollan, In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto**

This chapter augments consumer culture theorizing around subject-object relations with a feminist intervention into how materiality is conceptualized. It introduces the material-semiotic concept of carnal-singularity, drawing on the work around singularity in consumer culture research (Epp and Price, 2010; Belk and Coon, 1993; Kopytoff, 1986) to recover the body as a significant materiality in analyses of object agency within the context of the gift giving of chocolate. Materiality and chocolate has a long, complex and interesting history. In literature and film, the term “chocolasmia” denotes the linguistic trope where the word ‘chocolate’ in the title or plot is a euphemism for themes of a passionate or erotic nature. This demonstrates that chocolate and bodies (and sex) are already inextricably semiotically linked. We develop that understanding into exploring how, what we reconceptualize as, the carnal-singularity of chocolate, that is the processes and degrees by which the body of the woman (gifter or recipient) imbues the chocolate, is important for our understanding of the giving and consumption of chocolate. Importantly, by using online data in three languages, French, Finnish and English, we demonstrate how the carnal-singularity of chocolate shifts across language contexts and how this produces and reproduces gendered and sexualized cultural and societal structures differently across nations and even continents.

## Background

“Go ahead, it’s your favorite...” says in a charming tone the main character Vianne (Juliette Binoche) to her lover-to-be Roux (Johnny Depp), who soon sensually licks his fingers after having tasted the magical chocolate praline concocted by Vianne. What Roux doesn’t know is that Vianne perpetuates an ancient Mayan tradition of recognizing a person’s secret desires and translating them into a piece of chocolate of exactly the right flavor, either to seduce or to make people discover their innermost aspirations. The scene is played in Lasse Hallström’s film *Chocolat*, based on Joanne Harris’ eponymous novel, where chocolate becomes the currency for love, envy, passion, fear – and religious contemptuousness. Most of all, it is a fairytale binding charmingly together myths and emotions around *Theobroma cacao*, the food of the gods, which represented life and fertility already to ancient Aztecs and Mayas and has been associated with aphrodisiac qualities ever since, thus establishing a link between chocolate and the body. –Is it the slightly phallic shape of the cacao tree pod, growing in mysteriously humid and hot tropical climate, hence combining masculine and feminine features, or the reputation of the derived substances that have forged the myth? Or is it the taste, bittersweet as love itself and so easy to combine to innumerable flavors and aromas, apt to accentuate the sensation and the message? One incontestable sensorial effect reminds of the feelings associated to falling in love: the physiological pleasure of chocolate melting in the mouth. Whatever may be the reasons for the legend of chocolate as a love drug, it has been developing since those ancient civilizations in Central America had discovered the virtues of the fruit of the cacao tree. It is stimulant, relaxant and euphoriant – a perfect combination to become an aphrodisiac, and the element of mystery has been accentuated by its use in rituals, as well as its controversial medicinal effects which were particularly sought after in the 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Grivetti 2005) and continue to be investigated. It is a product with properties of a food and a drug, without being exactly either of them (Morris & Taren 2005).

Mayas believed that cacao had been donated to the mankind by the god Xmucane, as one of the divine beverages from which man was constituted (Grivetti 2005), and in their nuptial rites chocolate was an element for assuring fertility. Aztecs however considered chocolate, in the form of a beverage, so intoxicating and stimulating that it had to be prohibited from women and children. Hence, consumption of chocolate was permitted only to high-ranked males such as noblemen, priests and distinguished warriors. Nevertheless, the pleasure of eating chocolate on each other's skin may not have been unfamiliar to them (Fahim 2010). The Aztec king Montezuma is said to have drunk *xocolatl* from cups of pure gold before entering his harem, believing that the potion added was capable of adding to a sovereign's wisdom and power on top of the physical love effects. A text on Montezuma's court by Bernal Díaz from 1560 is presumably the first in a European language to document use of chocolate associated with sexual activity (Grivetti 2005). The Spanish brought chocolate to Europe and in the seventeenth century, it was rapidly introduced from King Philip's Spain to Western courts, where concubines and mistresses like Madame de Pompadour and Madame du Barry used it on their way to royal beds, and for maintaining those hazardous positions. Naturally, Marquis de Sade, Giacomo Casanova and Mata Hari were aware of its miraculous nature.

*"Into the dessert he slipped chocolate pastilles so good that a number of people devoured them. There were lots of them, and no one failed to eat some, but he had mixed in some Spanish fly. The virtue of the medication is well known. It proved to be so potent that those who ate the pastilles began to burn with unchaste ardor and to carry on as if in the grip of the most amorous frenzy" (Marquis de Sade)*

### **Chocolate as a gift**

The tradition itself to offer chocolates to sweethearts may have started royally with Maria Theresa of Spain who gave to her fiancé Louis XIV of France a beautifully decorated box with chocolates for their engagement. Sensual and emotional characteristics of chocolate were hence associated to traditions of gift-giving in a ceremonial way. Since those days, the scenery has shifted toward the opposite: it is most often the gentleman who makes a gift of chocolates to his beloved one as a token of love. Mary Douglas writes in the foreword to "The Gift" by Marcel Mauss (Douglas 2002, pXII): *"There are no free gifts; gift cycles engage persons in permanent commitments that articulate the dominant institutions."* This view is developed further shared by Diane Barthel, who argues that a gift of chocolate implies an act of patronage (1989). Nevertheless, romantic gift-giving is a skillful reciprocal play and women have used chocolate to romantic and erotic purposes as well, and they represent the vast majority of chocolate consumption (Belk & Costa 1998).

As chocolate became commercialized for ordinary consumers, it maintained its reputation as a romantic gift *par excellence*; it is not an ordinary food, not a necessity but an affordable luxury, which is laden with a thick layer of associations (Belk & Costa 1998). It is said to be addictive. This is a fact that hasn't however been proved scientifically, although popular culture is rich with connections made between chocolate and craving, which is a state easily associated to carnal - female - desire (Fahim 2010). Chocolate leverages the everyday experience and uplifts one's spirits when consumed alone, and is reputedly efficient against heartache or blue mood, hences assuming the role of a perfect self-gift which is oftentimes emphasized in romantic movies and chick-lit. - As we know from chick-lit and romantic films, also chocolate ice cream is a remedy against disappointment in love. First and foremost, chocolate enhances a romantic relationship by its physiological and above all emotional effects. Askegaard and Bengtsson (2005)

characterize chocolate as the most important seduction present, rivaled only by flowers in the imagery of romance.

It is noteworthy that chocolate is a gift that is accessible in some versions to almost everyone, which has contributed to its democratization in becoming an all-over tool of seduction: it is a versatile product which can be purchased for a very affordable price as an industrial product, or it may represent an extremely costly gift, when crafted into a luxurious selection of exclusively handmade pralines and truffles. Raw ingredients can be of bulk or of meticulously hand-picked best beans and fruit, and the same applies to the rest of the brand construction: conditioning, commercialization or selection of retail outlets. The expenditure and effort a suitor has invested in purchasing the gift tells a lot on his commitment to the relation: a tiny selection of gold-packaged Leonidas or Godiva pralines or a box from Tesco? According to Diane Barthel (1989, p434), there is a direct relationship between the amount of money spent by a man on the chocolate and the “sexually generous response” expected from the woman. Regardless the expenditure, it is an interesting stance that a luxury status for food is achieved only when communicated by social relations (Barthel 1989), which makes gifts of chocolate a particularly interesting phenomenon. For Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil (1997), this capacity is based on the dual nature of confectionaries like chocolate: their status in between food and non-food allows a wide variety of social meanings, especially as a gift.

Zarantonello and Luomala (2011) have identified seven categories for contextual chocolate consumption: context of physiological need, of sensorial gratification, of memories and nostalgia, of escapism, of materialism, of “chocolism” (addictive consumption mode of chocolate), and of interpersonal and self-gifts. These are interconnected in the fetish role of chocolate as a romantic gift: it fulfils sensorial,

physiological and material needs, provides occasions to nostalgic emotions and translates dissimulated or expressed feelings into an action of gift-giving. Chocoholic consumption orientation may be associated to what is often culturally viewed as an essentially female tendency of physical and gustatory self-pleasure, although it is entwined in a fascinating way to the imagery of sweet-loving women who yearn to surrender to temptation, hence calling for seduction. (Barthel 1989). Interestingly enough, the locution “chocolate-boxy” in English tends to be associated with kitschy, mostly female features and characteristics: over-sentimental, over-sweet and luscious (Barthel 1989). However, [no product reflects the erotic power of food more than chocolate, and chocolate is of course the food, par excellence, that is considered to be women’s particular weakness.](#)

[The association of women and chocolate has a long history and points to women’s carnal nature. Chocolate is coded as a feminine food, with women being constantly tempted to give in to their desires, and men encouraged to buy women the gift of chocolate as an expression of love with the promise of erotic rewards. We are told that chocolate itself is a seductive product because of the ‘love molecule’, phenylethylamine, it contains, which supposedly means that chocolate has the ability to simulate the euphoria and quickening of the pulse associated with being in love.](#)

### **Locating carnal-singularization in consumer culture theory**

*“The corner of a mouth (dark chocolate/red fruits),  
a piece of a nose (dark chocolate/chestnut honey),  
an eyelid (dark chocolate/fleur de sel, sichuan pepper),  
a bellybutton (dark chocolate/pimento pepper, red pepper),  
and a delicious nipple (dark chocolate/the fragrance of flowers).  
Small pieces of an edible body...”*



Mangez-moi, <http://www.gastronomista.com/2010/06/mangez-moi.html#.WI9xL01F3IV>

In this chapter, we seek to draw on existing consumer culture ontologies of gift giving (Belk, 1979; Sherry, 1983) in the context of chocolate consumption. ~~We aim at.~~ ~~We seek to re-theorizingise~~ this unique form of gift giving using a material-semiotic approach, which we call *carnal-singularity* adapting the concept of singularity (Kopytoff, 1986; Miller, 1987; Belk and Coon, 1993; Epp and Price, 2009) which has been used to understand the agency of material (predominantly non-human, non-sentient) objects within consumer culture research. Prior theorizing of gift giving *per se*, follow largely the work of Mauss (1924, 1950) and has theoretically focused on semiotics and meaning, symbolism and social and personal exchange, reciprocity and social and personal bonds (Belk, 1979). We suggest that the specificity of chocolate as a gift, as explained above, requires a theory which explicitly deals with not only meaning but also materiality. In terms of gift giving, Belk and Coon's use of the concept of singularity hints at this. Arjun Appadurai (1986, p. 16) describes singularity *vis à vis* material objects: "*It . . . seems worthwhile to distinguish 'singular' from 'homogeneous' commodities in order to discriminate between commodities whose candidacy for the commodity state is precisely a matter of their class characteristics (a perfectly standardized steel bar, indistinguishable in practical terms from any other steel bar) and those whose candidacy is precisely their uniqueness within some class*" (Appadurai, 1996, p.16 as cited in Belk and Coon, 1993, p.408). In this vein, singularity means that the material object has a personal meaning, is imbued with value and symbolism that de-commoditizes it (Epp and Price, 2009). Kopytoff (1986) shifts this concept usage from the material object (inanimate) to the human subject, making the analogy between the slave and the free man, with the free man being singularised/de-commodified/unique and the slave being commodified/interchangeable. As Belk and Coon (1993, p. 408) argue, "*whereas gift-giving rituals generally transform the object given into a*

singularized non-commodity (Belk et al. 1989; Kopytoff 1986), in the romantic love model the gift recipient is also singularized". Picking up from this idea that within romantic gift giving it is not only the gift but also the recipient that is being singularized provides us with a starting point for our development of this idea, and our theoretical contribution. In order to do this, we bring in another concept, carnality, to adapt the singularity concept to understand how the gift, in this case, chocolate, not only becomes de-commodified due to becoming laden with meaning and symbolism (a humanist approach) but effectively also becomes imbued with the body of the recipient (and giver), and hence with their sexual agency (a post-humanist reading). According to the OED, carnal means "of the body or flesh; worldly". Its secondary meaning is 'worldly, sensual, sexual'. Carnal is from the Latin *carnalis*, from *caro carnis* meaning 'flesh'. Traditionally, women have been identified with the body and nature and men have been identified with the mind and culture. Whilst the binary opposites of man/woman, mind/body, culture/nature, subject/object, and so on, have been challenged by postmodern thought, nevertheless these Cartesian opposites continue to provide a reference and indeed an underpinning for contemporary cultural texts.

~~From time immemorial, the mind and body have been conceptualized as a man/woman split.~~ Marina Warner, ~~for example,~~ writes about women's "ancient associations" with "carnality, instinct and passion", as against men, "endowed with reason, control and spirituality" (in Schiebinger, 2000, p. 287). ~~and~~ [Camille Paglia \(1992\) also offers a full and eloquent account of women's historical association with nature as distinct from culture. According to Bordo \(1993\) and Davis \(1997\), womanhood has traditionally been associated with the corporeal, as opposed to the spiritual; it signified nature, emotionality, irrationality and sensuality. It was disruptive, appetitive and volatile, in contrast to manhood, which was disciplined, rational and controlled. As the 'weaker' sex, women were perceived to be at the mercy of their mortal bodies, subject to its urges and](#)

frailties, prone to act on instinct in uncontrollable and potentially dangerous ways (Schiebinger, 2000).

Braidotti (1994) writes that embodiment of the subject should be understood as “a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological” (p. 4), thus reconciling the mind/body split. In similar vein, McNay (1999) notes that the body “is the threshold through which the subject’s lived experience of the world is incorporated and realized and, as such, is neither pure object nor pure subject” (p. 4). This approach also has close links to carnal sociology, which focuses on the active role of the body in social life, and on what the body does (Crossley 1995). Ultimately, the embodied theory brings the body to the fore in a way that transcends binary categories and focuses on the existential immediacy of lived experience (Csordas 1994).

Probyn (2000) observes that whilst embodiment and embodied theory strike a chord with many feminist scholars, “the realm of the alimentary brings these considerations down to earth and extends them. ... tracing out the connections between bodies that, in eating, open up and connect in different ways.” (p. 3). She suggests that eating provides a useful lens to consider issues of identities, and the interactions between sex, gender and power which are always being renegotiated. Indeed she suggests that “food and its relation to bodies is fundamentally about power” (p. 7).

Joy and Venkatesh (1994) argue that traditionally, consumption has been conceptualized and described as a disembodied phenomenon in our discipline. However, alongside this neglect of the body, there has been a modernist preoccupation with the spectacularized and colonized female body. This view is challenged by a postmodernist stance, drawing from an increasing commodification and scrutinization of the male body; a development which entwines this growing interest in the body with more general postmodernist views, both celebratory and liberatory. Accordingly, traditional binary

opposites such as mind/body or man/woman have been questioned if not disbanded, in the vein of French feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, as well as work by [\(LORNA'S ARTICLE AS REF. HERE](#) plus Joy and Venkatesh, 1994 and; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Instead of remaining passive objects, women have begun to assume the role of active (sexual) subjects. However, an image of women as 'consummate consumers', unable to resist to carnal temptations whilst ruled by their bodies, persists (Belk, 1998; Belk and Costa 1998).

The symbolic connotations of sex and food (Stratton 2003), are typically conflated into one powerful, irresistible urge, so that women's consumption of food is associated with the seductive, the erotic and/or auto-erotic; anticipating the ultimate orgasmic culmination of sensory bliss and complete satisfaction. This erotic narrative is rooted in long-standing, traditional models of femininity, and is bound up with women's weak flesh, which makes them particularly susceptible to temptation and sin (Paglia, 1992). Women are thus culturally coded as more prey to their bodily appetites than men, being living more in the body than men, the eternal 'carnal feminine' who cannot resist temptation (Grosz 1994; Stevens & Maclaran 2004; 2007).

The body has until comparatively recently been a neglected subject in our discipline. This is not entirely surprising, of course, given the privileging of (masculine) mental processes, cognition and rationality over the (feminine) sensory processes of instinct and emotionality. Indeed Joy and Venkatesh (1994) argue that consumption itself has been conceptualized and described as a disembodied phenomenon in traditional consumer research. They also observe that whilst in general terms the body, in all its complexity, has been largely ignored in consumer research, there has nevertheless been a preoccupation with colonizing and spectacularizing the female body. This is a perspective that is entirely consistent with a modernist discourse, they note, but it is one that is challenged in postmodernist discourse, as the male body becomes increasingly commodified and scrutinized. The growing interest in the body in the consumer behaviour discipline is thus regarded

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as symptomatic of postmodernism, with its concomitant celebratory and liberatory emphasis, which addresses the complexities and interconnectedness of the body and the mind in consumption (Joy and Venkatesh, 1994; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). According to Joy and Venkatesh (1994), the binary opposites of man/woman, mind/body, culture/nature, subject/object, and so on, are being disbanded, and this, they argue, drawing on the work of French feminists such as Cixous and Irigaray, heralds a time when women emerge as sexual subjects rather than passive objects of male desire, and thus they will no longer be perceived as the embodied 'other'. Women are often portrayed as 'consummate consumers' who are ruled by their bodies and thus are less able than men to resist the lure of carnal pleasures (Belk, 1998; Belk and Costa 1998). This manifests itself as an identification of women with carnality, usually in the form of experiential consumption and sensory pleasures. The narrative is particularly overt in the advertising of products (of which there are many) that are depicted as being endowed with the power to enable women to experience intense pleasure from their consumption. Examples of product categories that are depicted as objects of desire for women include chocolate.

The main carnal appetites that are attributed to women in advertising narratives are primarily those associated with sex and food. Often these two drives combine, so that food, toiletry, and cosmetic products often draw on symbolic codes that suggest aspects of sexual love, such as seduction, sexual climax and auto-eroticism. The association of women's consumption of food and toiletries with their sexual appetites provides advertisers with opportunities to explore a 'naughty but nice' discourse with considerable abandon. Indeed Stratton (2003) argues that food products are generally embedded within a carnal (and often specifically erotic) narrative in advertisements targeting women because these narratives are based on the assumption that 'eating is women's secret pleasure, reminding women of the repressed pleasures of their own bodies' (p. 237). — this material has already been published, so if we decide to use some of it it will need to be rewritten! Given that is very focused on advertising maybe don't need it and the new material might work better?

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Counihan (1999) writes that "the instinctive drives for food and sex are similar" (p. 150), as are their symbolic connotations, as both involve the body, consumption and consummation. The main carnal appetites that are attributed to women are primarily those of sex and food, which are typically conflated into one powerful, irresistible urge, so that women's consumption of food, for example, is associated with the seductive, the erotic and/or auto-erotic; anticipating the ultimate orgasmic culmination of sensory bliss and complete satisfaction. This erotic narrative is rooted in long-standing, traditional models of femininity, and is bound up with women's weak flesh, which makes them particularly susceptible to temptation and sin (Paglia, 1992). It points to a socio-cultural expectation that such carnal appetites are powerful and 'natural' in women. As consumers, women are thus tempted by a never-ending array of erotically charged narratives that speak to their primary desires: food and sex. Women are thus culturally coded as more prey to their bodily appetites than men, living more in the body than men, the eternal 'carnal feminine' who cannot resist temptation (Grosz 1994; Stevens & Maclaran 2004; 2007)

Dejmanee (2016) in the context of "food porn" however, argues that such carnal embeddedness vis à vis woman consumers resonates less with marketers' gendered positioning of women, but more with the "agency and digital identity play of postfeminist subjects". Postfeminism, she argues, refers to an ideological shift emerging in the 1990s "largely expressed through consumption practices

and the neoliberal "focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment" (Gill 2007, 149) where women use digital tools to negotiate contradictory postfeminist politics, rendering them both exploited and resistant. The concept of carnal-singularity allows us to map this shifting relation to gender/ed and sexualised structures of empowerment and resistance over time and space, as chocolate shifts in its carnal-singularity, heating up or

cooling down together with the body of the female recipient or gifter (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; as cited in Epp and Price, 2009).

Prior work on singularization has tended to focus on the study of things or non-human objects. We argue that this reifies the subject-object and body-mind dualisms and as such the rendering of the female and feminine as other within marketing and consumer discourse, the concept of carnal-singularity make explicit that the body is invoked in the analysis as a significant materiality, inextricably linked with the meaning processes of singularization – it is here we make a feminist intervention into the theory. Following this, with tracing the carnal-singularization of chocolate consumption vis à vis gift giving across language contexts, we demonstrate a further critical intervention, extrapolating the notion that by tracing these differences we challenge the naturalisation and normalisation of the woman's subordination to the body (and bodily impulses) as a universal taken-for-granted.

**Method:** The primary researcher collected data from internet sites in English, French and Finnish language, through a multi-sited netnography (Kozinets 2002) with the aim of seeking a cross section of opinion. Advertising, blogs, commentaries, posts and threads relating to chocolate consumption were retrieved, by using the key words “chocolate” and “gift” in their respective languages, in order to analyze the gendered nature and the underlying assumptions of chocolate discourse. ~~For~~ The corpus was constituted of four parts: the most voluminous one originates from prior research on foodie blogs in French and Finnish (Mäkelä 2016). There, the purpose of deciphering connections between chocolate as a gift, romance or sensuality and baking, data were gathered from two online sources: the most popular foodie culinary community online in French, Marmiton (www.marmiton.org), and a similar although a less voluminous community in Finnish, Maku (www.maku.fi.) Both are linked to a printed magazine and on the

websites, there is also a blog written by the journalists of the publishing company. The foodie blog corpus consists of 128 pages in total: 51 by Finnish bloggers, 47 pages by the French ones plus 15 pages from both Finnish and French journalists' blogs, and it reflects the consumptive orientation of foodies, seen in the wider context of omnivorous and transnational consumption trends. To complement the first corpus in the context of gift giving for the purpose of the present chapter, and in order to benefit of a larger selection of genres, a second one was gathered from entirely French data. On the discussion section "Coin salon" of the Marmiton website, a retrieval was conducted with sSearch words *chocolat* and *cadeau* (gift). This provided altogether an astonishing amount of 29 718 feeds with recipes, reflections and comments, written either by the redaction or by the users (retrieval on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2017). Out of these, a sample of 38 were analyzed in detail.

The third constituent of the multi-sited netnography was retrieved from commercial websites related to chocolate, in all three languages of the study. Due to the nature of this data and the structure of the sites, the volume of pages was not measured. The fourth constituent of the corpus was in Finnish: it was formed by streams on the most popular Finnish conversation forum, Suomi24, and by feeds from a popular foodie blog, 52 weeks of deliciousness (<http://52weeksofdeliciousness.com/>), created in Finnish despite the name. From Suomi24 were analyzed the section Food and drink and its sub-section Delicacies, with the key word *Suklaa* (Chocolate) (<http://keskustelu.suomi24.fi/ruoka-ja-juoma/herkut>). Suomi24 is a site with a wide array of user profiles, and it is characterized as representing the views of the "average Finns". Within the foodie blog, all recipes and comment feeds with chocolate were analyzed. Purposefully, the first data set represented a forum where no specific user profiles can be identified, and the other one a context where the blogger and her followers are consumers interested in food and baking, hence



having an emotional relationship with food (Johnston & Baumann 2015). The Suomi24 data sample consists of 123 feeds altogether (on a totality of 2723 pages under the section Chocolate). The foodie blog data have 94 search results with key word Chocolate. These include the blog posting, the recipe and the readers' comments, altogether 32 pages. Both were retrieved in February 2017. All texts in the entire netnography were analyzed in their original language. Aware of the inconsistencies of data, the analysis presented here is indicative and requiring thorough further investigation.

### **Thematic analysis**

An overview of websites in English and in French, specialized in chocolate gifts, shows a tendency that in the French-speaking world, it is more common to offer chocolate to men, whereas sites in English are more focused on confectionary gifts designed for women. Despite corporate attempts to commercialize chocolate as a gift to both women and men, especially the market for St. Valentine's Day targets essentially women. It is abundant: e.g. the website Hotel Chocolat ([www.hotelchocolat.com](http://www.hotelchocolat.com)) displays a collection of chocolate gifts for St. Valentine's Day with an interesting array of themes that go from a discreet "Straight from the heart" to strictly "Naughty", both embodying the central theme of offering chocolate in change of something else:

*"If Valentine's Day was a black and white movie, this is what our big love would be holding when they turned up on our doorstep at the end: the classic huge, heart-shaped box of chocolates with a ribbon. Sweep them off their feet the old-fashioned way this February 14th with 35 breathtaking caramels, cocktails, fruities, pralines and more."*

*"One thing on your mind this Valentine's Day? Make sure your other half is on the same page with these five solid 40% milk chocolate hearts. Irresistibly mellow, they're perfect for leaving on pillows, sneaking into pockets or slipping across dinner tables..."* (<http://www.hotelchocolat.com/uk/shop/valentines-day-gifts/straight-from-the-heart-valentine-chocolates/21.12.2016>)

An interesting feature is that the romantic version costs 39 pounds and the naughty one only 2,50. When the case is almost closed, why spend more? Indeed, an overarching meta-discourse in the English data is that of playfulness, combined to seduction and eroticism. Another famous chocolate manufacturer, Neuhaus, has chosen straightforward but elegant denominations to its chocolate gift selections. They are in French, the language of romance and even more: Caprice, Plaisir, Désir, Tentation, Irrésistibles or Séduction (<http://neuhaus.fi/seduction/21.12.2016>).

The gender-reinforcing capacity of St. Valentine's Day and its rituals associated with chocolate have been emphasized by Minowa, Khomenko and Belk (2011) and by Close (2012). Naturally, gift-giving on Valentine's Day is a tradition solidifying established relationships as well and does not restrict itself to seducing a new partner. The gift of chocolate is seen to be a prerequisite and an essential first step towards sexual conquest, melting away a woman's sexual resistance (Barthel 1989). Of course, it is also a product that women buy themselves, a small treat that provides pleasure and perhaps engenders 'jouissance' (joyful loving of oneself, even orgasm as in its signification in French), with the double entendre the word denotes, its auto-erotic and sensual power arguably making it the perfect monadic gift. Consuming chocolate, like love, is to be swept away by longing; both bring about euphoria, relaxation and ecstasy, and both bring about strong emotional and physiological responses. The pleasure may be transitory but intense while it lasts, with phrases such as 'melting moments' conjuring up the highly sensual and embodied aspects of letting go and giving in to desire (Lupton 1996).

Chocolate seems to hold an especial role in engendering both positive feelings (because of its link with indulgence, comfort and pleasure) and negative emotions (because of its link with weight gain and the loss of self-control (Lupton 1996). )In their study of women's chocolate consumption, Belk (1998) and Belk and Costa (1998) refer to the 'emotionally charged' environment within which women consume chocolate (p. 189), with ambivalence an integral part of women's consumption of such products. "Good thing about it is I can have it on my SW diet, while only being a little bit naughty. And being on a diet and a chocolate lover is a real killer!!!!" (Nicola, chocablog.com). Belk, Ger and Askegaard (1996), in their study of consumer desire, also address this contradiction, when they write that 'the state of wanting itself is simultaneously exciting, pleasurable, and frustrating: an exquisite torture.' (p. 370).

However, the theme of seduction is thus a key feature in the process when a product associated with innocent indulgence and romance may become decadent and sinful. Here, we suggest a reading of this process by the notion of carnal objectification by and through food. This development of food and sex drives via chocolate remains a matter of interpretation and is highly dependent on the context of gift-giving, of the extant relationships and of the expectations of people involved of counterparts. Nevertheless, the associational web of sweetness, sensuality and sin is age-old and solid, and it can be reinforced by the physical substance of chocolate which makes it so versatile in cooking and baking. If chocolate in form of confectionary products is most often offered by men to women (when in a heterosexual context of relationship building), baking with chocolate is a traditionally female way of conquering a heart and making a gift. Locher et al. (2005) claim

that when women offer self-made gifts such as chocolate cookies or cakes, these are often associated by men to the comfort foods of their childhood. A clever woman plays the card of warm memories of a mother baking chocolate chip cookies, which is a safe and subtle way to start the seduction process. Making a mouth-watering, rich and voluptuous chocolate cake might be the next step. In our interpretation of carnal singularity, anticipation of sex may constitute a continuum from more decarnal-singularized gifts such as chocolate cookies towards highly carnal-singularized products such as a luscious, promise-laden chocolate cake. The carnally evocative power of chocolate gifts shifts in function of the relationship and the expectations of counterparts.

Above, a few examples from websites of chocolate companies have illustrated the gendered nature of and the erotic associations within discourse on chocolate, in particular in the context of romantic gift giving such as the St. Valentine's Day. An analysis of the Marmiton discussion forum feeds sheds another light on the carnal associations made with chocolate in French: out of the 38 feeds analyzed, eighteen contained an index of indulgence, self-pleasure or seduction: expressions, locutions or other types of discursive tools such as ellipsis, which were used to enhance the association between chocolate and sensuality, to accentuate the sense of mystery or prohibition, and to emphasize the uniqueness of chocolate as an ingredient. Not only this, but the characterization of chocolate as a gift demonstrates that the chocolate gift becomes imbued with the body of the women in the act of gift giving:

*"Croque mon coeur, il craque pour toi ! Réalisez pas à pas un coeur en chocolat, marqué de votre plus beau message d'amour." [Crunch my heart, it falls for you! Step by step, make a heart in chocolate, marked with your most beautiful message of love.]*

"S'il y a bien une chose à laquelle on ne résiste jamais, c'est le chocolat. Allez, ne prenez pas cet air innocent ! Qui n'a jamais ressenti une grande émotion en laissant fondre un carré de chocolat sous le palais, en respirant la bonne odeur du gâteau en train de cuire, en trempant son doigt dans la pâte encore crue ?" [If there is one thing one never resists, it's chocolate. Come on, don't take that innocent look! Who has never felt a grand emotion while having a piece of chocolate melting in the palate, while sniffing the lovely scent of a cake baking, while dipping one's finger in the dough, still uncooked?]

"(Attention, vous avez un peu de chocolat au coin des lèvres). Et, à notre grande surprise, l'opération est simplissime, divinement régressive..." [ (Attention, you have a bit of chocolate on your lips.) And, to our big surprise, the operation is most simple, divinely regressive...]

Allusions to touching and physical effects of chocolate are abundant: licking, salivating, dipping fingers...this creates discursively a context which is as pleasurable for the baker as the result will be for the receiver of the chocolatey gift. The metaphor of succumbing is found in five feeds, where the image of melting chocolate can be interpreted as giving up to temptation. Interestingly, in our corpus the more intimate context of a discussion forum provides more liberty to writers than the blog format.

French culinary discourse is prone to sensuality, which fits the stereotype of the French culture with a constantly ongoing, subtle or overtly seductive play. The treasured culinary heritage is deeply embedded in national culture and heralded as one of the icons of Frenchness. When chocolate comes into picture, the language becomes even more laden with allusions to seduction, temptations, giving up or resisting (but why should we, as one thread of the meta-discourse of bakers seems to ask). Chocolate truly is an

iconic element for French bakers who wish to provide pleasure for themselves or for others, and the carnal connotations become more frequent within a context of free, associative genre of online writing such as a conversation forum. This discursive strategy weaves beautifully together the levels of tempting, hence constructing a setting for seduction: one is allured by the sweetness of the culinary result (sometimes also by the baking process, as it is so hard to resist to taste) and by the person to whom it is given. It is not surprising that one of the most beloved chocolate desserts in France is called *fondant au chocolat*, literally “chocolate melting”. To be able to enjoy the voluptuous, almost liquid chocolate within, one needs to break the crust hiding it and let the sensual dark chocolate flow on the plate. Tempting, and irrevocable – a deep metaphor of a seductive play.

When analyzing Finnish online discourse on chocolate, sensible differences with the English and French data are perceived. In Finnish discourse, the emotional index connected to chocolate is primarily that of an everyday pleasure, which is nevertheless somewhat stigmatized as easily leading to overeating and excessive self-indulgence, especially when one is in a blue mood. Chocolate is discussed for its nutritional faculties; taste differences are argued with vehemence and ethical aspects of chocolate production e.g. with questions of child labour are found in the discussion threads. However, objectification of woman by chocolate is seldom found in Finnish chocolate discourse in the same way as in the overtly eroticized French discourse, or in the playful English chocolate talk. There are some allusions made to eating chocolate with sweethearts, but interestingly enough, these may be dealt with in a straightforward, practically oriented style: “*J. Tule käymään ja tuo suklaata mukanas...tekee niin paljon mieli!*” (J. Come over and bring chocolate with you. I am so much craving!) The discourse is far from chocolate-boxy poetics, on the contrary.

However, it is noteworthy that an objectification of man — to an extent of illustrating carnal-singularity of the other sex — is found in several feeds, especially in the highly racialised context of associating white and dark chocolate with the skin colour of men: *"Tykkään tummasta suklaasta enemmän kuin vaaleasta : ) Mutta kaipaen vaaleaa miestä."* (I prefer dark chocolate to white :) But I miss a white man.) Both men and women express themselves with this metaphor, which fits adequately the context of Finnish gender equality. Nevertheless, men tend to use this locution with a depreciative and somewhat jealous tone. Given the relatively late internationalization of the Finnish society, skin colour and the presumed high potency of non-white men are still an issue in colloquial and popular discourse. Examples of metaphoric use of chocolate in the context of female skin colour were not found in this sample.

In the foodie blog data, chocolate was an ingredient like any other, and it was not mystified nor ascribed any specific role. A number of allusions were made however with sin: not as in sin of flesh in the erotic sense, but in the sense of a highly calorific commodity, which is dangerous for one's figure. *"Syntisen hyvä"* (Sinfully good) was the epithet to chocolate creations in several feeds. Several comments by readers accentuated this discourse: *"Oi oi. Kun puolen vuoden herkkulakko on tammikuussa ohitse, tiedän mitä sitten leivon!"* (Oh, when my sweets strike is over in January, I know what I'm going to bake!) The more indulgent the cake, the more comments there were, with indexes of prohibition (I shouldn't), desire (I just have to start baking immediately) and pure delight (It's just so goood). Pleasures of baking and especially of sharing the creations are present in the Finnish foodie talk, which appears almost denude of sensual connotations, establishing a difference with the "average Finns" talking about chocolate in the discussion forum. The narrative of striving towards healthy eating is prominent, although one can give in to sweet temptations every now and then.

In the Finnish data, we found an eloquent example of carnal-singularity by chocolate, which provoked interesting indignation and cyber-rage, as baking was presented in an overtly eroticized context. A Finnish bake-off – beauty contest – Instagram celebrity Mailis Penttilä provoked in January 2017 a small storm online with her video feeds and Instagram photos, presenting scenes of baking tempting chocolate cakes and brownies flagged with “Eat me!” signs. Her looks owe a great deal to Nigella Lawson, although in a less sophisticated format, dressed in red satin and overgenerous décolletés. (<http://www.iltasanomat.fi/viihde/art-2000005058505.html>). Contrasting to e.g. French culinary discourse, baking in Finland has traditionally had scant carnal connotations, when ordinary greasy jokes are not counted, and Finnish women expressed resentment or jealousy for this provoking intrusion in their domain: *“No need to go crying in yellow press after this kind of pics...”*. The exasperation may result from the fact that this self-made, male-appealing media personality attempts to eroticize something which traditionally isn’t in Finland (resentment for innocence) or, more intriguingly in the Finnish context, since she wants to make public some of the ancient feminine tricks of baking (jealousy for complicity). Empowering comments from both men (*“Who’s the lucky guy??”*) and women (*“Don’t worry, go on!”*) kept on coming however after the incident was made public in the national press, demonstrating a polarization of views around sexualizing chocolate.

When compared, English, Finnish and French chocolate discourse seem to fulfil diversified functions both for foodies and for average consumers. Where Finns adopt mostly a practical orientation with e.g. ethical concerns, the French tend to use chocolate more as a narrative for seduction and the English express guilty pleasures, kitsch and humour. There is a layer of mystery and invitation for chocolate in French, which turns out in Finnish as an element of prohibition for nutritional and appearance concerns.



**Discussion and Conclusion:** In this chapter, we have used cross national data to illustrate how chocolate as a gift shifts across national boundaries in the way the body of the women (and rarely, of a man) is linked to the buying, eating, consuming and loving of chocolate. We have developed the concept of carnal-singularity to progress the ideas around materiality in consumer culture and to suggest a way that might be used to map the shifting values and meanings of chocolate *vis à vis* womens' bodies in popular discourse. In doing so we demonstrate the inherent ambiguities of postmodern feminism, as worked out in internet locations where the woman is at once expressive of her sexuality and at the same time, checked for "unfeminine" excesses of sexuality or (food) consumption – two things inextricably linked in the discourse. Across the different language contexts, the carnal-singularity of the chocolate gift shifts, from the almost desexualized, humorous and kitsch, with guilty pleasure of the self-gift in English, to the overtly sexualized, seduction of France and the slightly too serious, evaluative, and critical discourse in Finnish. The concept of carnal-singularity thus demonstrates how conceptualizations of the inextricably linked consumption, women, the body and sexuality are culturally specific, indicating a challenge to the naturalization of the carnal feminine in popular and academic Western discourse. ~~For the purpose of deciphering connections between chocolate as a gift, romance or sensuality and baking, data were gathered from the most popular culinary community online in French, Marmiton (www.marmiton.org). Search words chocolat and cadeau (gift) provided together 29 718 feeds with recipes and comments, written either by the redaction or by the users (retrieval on January 20th 2017). Chocolate truly is an iconic element for French bakers who wish to provide pleasure for themselves or for others. Of the data, a small sample of 38 feeds were studied in detail. In eighteen out of them we found expressions, locutions or other types of discursive tools such as ellipsis, which were used to enhance the association between chocolate, and love~~

or sensuality, the sense of mystery or prohibition, and to emphasize the uniqueness of chocolate as an ingredient. Not only this, but the characterization of chocolate as a gift demonstrates that the chocolate gift becomes imbued with the body of the women in the act of gift-giving:

"Croque mon cœur, il craque pour toi ! Réalisez pas à pas un cœur en chocolat, marqué de votre plus beau message d'amour." [Crunch my heart, it falls for you! Step by step, make a heart in chocolate, marked with your most beautiful message of love.]

"S'il y a bien une chose à laquelle on ne résiste jamais, c'est le chocolat. Allez, ne prenez pas cet air innocent ! Qui n'a jamais ressenti une grande émotion en laissant fondre un carré de chocolat sous le palais, en respirant la bonne odeur du gâteau en train de cuire, en trempant son doigt dans la pâte encore crue ?" [If there is one thing one never resists, it's chocolate. Come on, don't take that innocent look! Who has never felt a grand emotion while having a piece of chocolate melting in the palate, while sniffing the lovely scent of a cake baking, while dipping one's finger in the dough, still uncooked?]

"(Attention, vous avez un peu de chocolat au coin des lèvres). Et, à notre grande surprise, l'opération est simplissime, divinement régressive..." [ (Attention, you have a bit of chocolate on your lips.) And, to our big surprise, the operation is most simple, divinely regressive...]

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metaphor of succumbing is found in five feeds, where the image of melting chocolate can be interpreted as giving up to temptation. This discursive strategy weaves beautifully together the levels of tempting, hence constructing a setting for seduction: one is allured by the sweetness of the culinary result (sometimes also by the baking process, as it is so hard to resist to taste) and by the person to whom it is given. It is not surprising that one of the most beloved chocolate desserts in France is called *fondant au chocolat*, literally "chocolate melting". To be able to enjoy the voluptuous, almost liquid chocolate within, one needs to break the crust hiding it and let the sensual dark chocolate flow on the plate. Tempting, and irrevocable — a deep metaphor of a seductive play.

We need more data!

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