EDIBLE ETHICS
THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES
OF AUSTRALIA'S FOOD MEDIA

Samantha Mary Wight

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the coursework requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (Gastronomy)
School of History and Politics
The University of Adelaide
January 2006
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... ii  
DECLARATION ........................................................................................................ iv  
1 INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................... 1  
   1.1 Methodology ....................................................................................................... 3  
2 THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FOOD MEDIA .................................. 6  
   2.1 The Changing Role of the Food Media ............................................................... 6  
   2.1.1 The past ........................................................................................................... 6  
   2.1.2 The role of today’s food media ....................................................................... 8  
   2.1.3 Food writers as journalists .......................................................................... 10  
   2.1.4 The responsibilities of a journalist .................................................................. 13  
2.2 Message Sent – the Information Reported by the Food Media .............................. 14  
   2.2.1 Health and nutrition issues .......................................................................... 15  
   2.2.2 Product information ....................................................................................... 16  
   2.2.3 Skill-related information ............................................................................... 17  
   2.2.4 Ethical and social eating issues ..................................................................... 18  
   2.2.5 Lifestyle information ..................................................................................... 19  
2.3 Distributors of Information ................................................................................... 20  
2.4 Consumers’ Rights to information ........................................................................ 21  
3 THE ETHICAL DILEMMAS OF TODAY’S FOOD MEDIA ........................................ 23  
   3.1 Ethics ................................................................................................................... 23  
   3.1.1 The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance .................................................... 24  
   3.1.2 Ethics in the twenty-first century ................................................................... 25  
   3.2 Different Ethics? .................................................................................................. 25  
   3.2.1 Reporting the facts...or not? Objectivity and the food media .......................... 26  
   3.2.2 The ethical issues of the food critic .................................................................. 28  
   3.2.3 No such thing as a free lunch? ....................................................................... 32  
   3.2.4 Advertisers and spin doctors ......................................................................... 35  
   3.2.5 Recipe plagiarism ............................................................................................ 38  
   3.2.6 Accurate Information - the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth .... 38  
   3.2.7 All quiet on the food media front - writing about social and ethical eating issues .......................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 41  
   3.2.8 Biting the hand that feeds - conflicts of interest ............................................ 43  
4 BUT THE NEWSPAPER SAYS IT’S TRUE! THE IMPORTANCE OF EDIBLE ETHICS ............................................................................................................. 45
4.1 How Much Influence does the Food Media have? ........................................... 45
4.2 Consequences and Results of Breaching Ethics and Responsibilities ............ 47
  4.2.1 A duty to the consumers ............................................................................ 47
  4.2.2 Breaching the brotherhood of food journalists and the food industry ....... 50
  4.2.3 The publication and defamation ............................................................... 53
5 FOOD MEDIA ASSOCIATIONS ............................................................................. 56
  5.1 The Food Media Club of Australia ................................................................. 56
  5.2 International Food Media Organisations ...................................................... 57
    5.2.1 Campaigns by the Guild of Food Writers United Kingdom ................. 60
    5.2.2 Ethical codes ......................................................................................... 62
6 CONCLUSION - THE FUTURE FOR AUSTRALIA’S FOOD MEDIA ............... 65
  6.1 Australian Edible Ethics ................................................................................ 65
  6.2 Educating the Educators, and a United Voice .............................................. 68
7 APPENDICES ...................................................................................................... 73
  7.1 Transcripts of Interviews ............................................................................. 74
  7.2 Copies of E-mails with International Food Media Associations ................. 75
  7.3 The Declaration of Adelaide ......................................................................... 76
  7.4 The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance Code of Ethics ....................... 77
  7.5 The Australian Copyright Council Information Sheet .................................. 78
  7.6 Code of Professional Ethics of the New Zealand Guild of Food Writers ...... 79
  7.7 Ethical Guidelines of the Guild of Food Writers United Kingdom .............. 80
  7.8 Code of Ethics of the Association of Food Journalists ................................. 81
  7.9 Ethical Guidelines for Food Critics of the Association of Food Journalists .... 82
8 BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................. 83
ABSTRACT

The role of food writers has changed – no longer are they concerned only with recipes and lifestyle issues. Today's food writers are faced with writing on a broad scope of topics that stretch from recipes and restaurant reviews through to health, nutrition, and social and ethical eating issues.

This study first outlines the professional role and responsibilities of food writers, and then examines the idea that, in a professional capacity, food writers are journalists. As such, food writers are faced with the responsibility of acting in the best interest of the public when they report information on food and food related issues. Yet, unlike their international colleagues, Australian food writers do not have their own code of ethics, although they do have an active professional association, the Food Media Club of Australia.

This study identifies the ethical dilemmas faced by the Australian food media, and looks at how they are currently dealing with issues such as accepting junkets, and the idea of food being a subjective topic. It then considers the potential consequences of unethical professional practices by food writers before recommending the development of a professional code of ethics for Australia's food media. Academic literature on the media and media ethics is considered, although there is little written specifically on the food media itself. Therefore, in order to ascertain specific insight and knowledge as well as some understanding of the current operations of Australia's food media, interviews with industry professionals and an ethics expert were conducted. Additionally, information was gathered from members of international food media associations. The various interviews revealed a common concern over the lack of information published by the food media on social and ethical food issues such as genetic modification, and sustainable agriculture. Consequently, after examining approaches used by food writers in the United Kingdom to publish such information, recommendations also include a more strident and proactive approach by the Australian food media in order to reach the general public with information that they, the food media, deem important to the future of Australian food.
DECLARATION

This dissertation contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my dissertation, when deposited in the Bar Smith Library at The University of Adelaide, being made available for photocopying and loan.

Signed:

Date: