

RUNNING HEAD: FONDUE MAKES A COMEBACK

Fondue make a comeback

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ABSTRACT

The fondue, a Swiss classic, has recently made something of a comeback in homes across the UK. But what explains the resurgence of this 1970s retro chic dish in Britain? On the one hand, its resurgence is surprising, given that fondue doesn't fit with either current trends toward healthy eating or the rise of more Instagrammable dishes. On the other hand, however, it does fit with the growing trend toward sharing plates. Intriguingly, it may also link to current concerns about global insecurity etc. since the fondue can be considered as something of a nostalgic dish for some (i.e., for baby-boomers and those who are comfortably into middle age) and a comfort food for many (i.e., perhaps regardless of their age). Finally, the origins of the fondue in a country that lies just outside the EU (but which manages to maintain good economic/political relations) may also be relevant given current debate about how Brexit will play out. In this commentary, I take a closer look at some of the cultural factors that may help to explain this recent food trend.

KEYWORDS: FONDUE; NOSTALGIA; COMFORT FOOD; HEALTHY FOOD; GASTRODIPLOMACY; FOOD TRENDS.

Introduction

The British press is currently rife with stories detailing the re-emergence, or should that be resurgence, of the fondue. The fondue, a Swiss favourite, ideal for cold winter evenings, was a staple of the 1970's dinner party in the UK. Just take Michelin-starred Swiss restaurateur Anton Mosimann: "*Fondue is great food, especially in winter. You come in cold and what better than to sit and share a fondue*" (Elliott, 2017). John Lewis, the British department store, witnessed a tripling of sales of fondue sets last year (Holden, 2017). On the one hand, the resurgence in popularity of this example of retro chic should come as little surprise, given that so many foods do end-up cycling back into fashion if you wait long enough – think here only of recent revival of other 1970's classics of the British dinner table, such as Arctic Roll (from Birds Eye), Chicken Kiev, prawn cocktail, Angel Delight, Penguin Biscuits, and the Soda Stream (Andrews, 2013; Daily Mail Reporter, 2008; Sandbrook, 2016). (Though thankfully, some things though like Vesta Curry and Findus Boil-in the Bag cod in butter sauce – a sous vide dish that was way ahead of its time – are probably best left in the annals of British Food History; Spencer, 2003). At the same time, however, the fondue's recent resurgence is somewhat more surprising when one considers the growing trend towards healthy eating (Gagliardi, 2015; Hogan, 2017; Laurence, 2017). Dipping chunks of bread into a pot of bubbling cheese and wine or the pieces of meat into bubbling hot oil is not, after all, exactly anyone's notion of healthy. Nor is fondue an especially photogenic dish either, so again off-trend as far as the growth of more Instagrammable dishes is concerned (see Spence, Okajima, Cheok, Petit, & Michel, 2016, for a review).

However, there are several other reasons as to why it should be fondue, as opposed to Black Forest Gateaux, Brie, or Bratwurst, that happens to be the *dish-du-jour* coming back into fashion in the UK these days. One of the distinctive features of fondue is that it is very much a shared dish/experience (Anon., 2014), and this fits with the phenomenal rise in popularity of sharing plates, mezze plates, etc. in recent years (Spence, 2017a). Fondue then can be seen as the perfect solution for those home diners wanting to capture a little of the sharing vibe that is such a common feature of eating out these days. As Harte (2015) puts it: "*By its very nature fondue encourages closeness, conversation and conviviality, and when only two people are involved, romance.*" Next, one might consider that fondue is a participatory dish, one that involves the active involvement of everyone at the table. It turns out that those dishes that we feel that we have had a hand in making/creating/finishing tend to be liked that little bit more

than those dishes that are made entirely for us – this is the well-known IKEA effect (Dohle, Rall, & Siegrist, 2014, 2016; Norton, Mochon, & Ariely, 2012). In one elegant example of this phenomenon, Norwegian researchers had participants complete part-made kit meals. The latter then had to rate the meal that they were led to believe they had made themselves and another that they were led to believe had been created by someone else. The self-finished dish was rated as tasting better than the dish that the participants thought had been made by someone else, even though the participants actually tasted the same food in both cases (Troye & Supphellen, 2012).

One can, of course, argue here about whether dipping pieces of meat into hot oil or wine or stale bread into a bubbling pot of gloopy cheese really counts as participatory, but it certainly seems like an idea worth countenancing. Indeed, the benefits of ‘made it myself’ link all the way back to the apocryphal egg supposedly added to the recipe for the Betty Crocker cake mix that enabled the 1950s housewife to convince herself that she had actually made the cake – something that they apparently had a hard time doing when the mixture contained powdered egg instead (Park, 2013; Shapiro, 2005).

There is also a sense in which the fondue may trigger nostalgia in those who partake of the practice (i.e., for baby-boomers and those who are comfortably into middle age). Once again, nostalgia is something that many top restaurants are strategically trying to target nowadays. Think here only of The Sounds of the Sea seafood dish at The Fat Duck restaurant in Bray, or and the smell of the sweet shop at Heston Blumenthal’s world-famous restaurant. The idea in both cases is to trigger positive childhood memories and emotions (Blumenthal, 2007, 2008; Sutton, 2001; Tweedy, 2015; Leonor, Lake, & Guerra, submitted). The suggestion is that those positive feelings associated with nostalgia may colour the dining experience in a positive manner (in much the way that comfort foods are thought to do; Spence, 2017b).

The nostalgic (reassuring) element of fondue may be particularly appropriate at the present time when the world seems like such an unpredictable and dangerous place, what with the recent global financial crisis, the North Korean situation, Brexit, the Migrant Crisis, etc. In this sense, Carbon’s (2010) observation that consumers tend to shift toward rounder cars at times when world seems like a dangerous place, and toward more angular forms when all is well with the world may be relevant. It would not seem unreasonable, I think, to suggest that nostalgic comfort foods become more appealing/fashionable at those times of local/global uncertainty too (Carbon, 2010).

Additionally, one can't help feeling that at a time when the UK is figuring out if/how to separate from the rest of Europe, that this nostalgic food stands originates from a part of Europe that stands outside the European Union but is still connected with the rest of the EU in much the way that many Brits would hope to achieve. Perhaps, then, the resurgence of the fondue can partly be explained by Brits trying, implicitly or otherwise, to convey an impression, or identity, through the food we eat of the future we would like for ourselves. It is in this regard it would be hard to imagine that Black Forest Gateaux, Brie, or Bratwurst having anything like the same appeal at the present time here in the UK.

Remember the freedom fry? In 2003, at a time when France opposed going to war in Iraq, the cafeterias in the U.S. House of Representatives stopped serving French Fries, and started serving "Freedom Fries" instead. Meanwhile, "French Toast" became "Freedom Toast" (Silver, 2011). In this sense, the rise of fondue may have more to do with gastrodiplomacy than anyone has so far given credit for (Spence, 2016). Perhaps relevant here, one Parisian cheesemonger (or fromager) recently refused to serve a British customer his prized Beaufort cheese because the latter's intention was to use his cheese in a fondue (Mulholland, 2017).

Finally, I suppose that one could perhaps also think of the unusually-shaped fondue fork as being on-trend too, given the recent interest of top chefs in challenging the status quo with regards to what cutlery can be (Spence & Piqueras-Fizman, 2014; Welch, Youssef, & Spence, 2016). As this brief review has hopefully made clear, there are a number of plausible reasons why the fondue is back in fashion here in the UK after an absence of almost 50 years. And beyond Britain's shores, there are also nascent signs of a growth of interest over in North America too (e.g., Kealey, 2017; McKeever, 2017; Zummo, 2018; though see also Sax, 2014).

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