



Whey protein stories – An experiment in writing a multidisciplinary biography



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ABSTRACT

This is an experimental, dual-purpose article about whey protein and how to conduct interdisciplinary analyses and writings. On the one hand, this article is a multidisciplinary commodity biography, which consists of five descriptions of whey protein written by the five different research groups involved in the interdisciplinary research project CALM (Counteracting Age-related loss of Skeletal Muscle Mass). On the other hand, it is a meta-analysis, which aims to uncover and highlight examples of how the five descriptions contribute to each other with insights into the contextualisation of knowledge, contrasts between the descriptions and the new dimensions they bring to established fields of interest. The meta-analysis also contains a discussion of interdisciplinary study objects and the usefulness of the multidisciplinary commodity biography as a format for interdisciplinary publications. The article contributes to the field of food studies with a multidisciplinary biography of whey protein – including its sensory qualities and challenges, insights into its cultural history, its nutritional value and effects on the human body and an analysis of how it is perceived by people who consume it. The biography thereby expands upon existing understandings of whey protein while discussing the usefulness of employing the commodity biography format in interdisciplinary writing. Moreover, the article contributes to the field of interdisciplinary research by providing a practical example of a joint publication and reflections upon the existence, interaction and possibilities of monodisciplinary knowledge structures within interdisciplinary studies and publications.

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1. Introduction

The international research community currently considers collaborative interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research to be promising methods for bridging the gap between scientific findings and durable solutions to societal challenges (The Lancet, 2015; Nature, 2015). Even though there is an increased awareness of the benefits of integrating research traditions in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research designs and projects, it is still

difficult to write and publish joint publications that afford equal weight and position the hard sciences and the humanities. Articles that attempt to take an interdisciplinary approach often end up being constructed either within the framework of a single research branch or within that of two or more research traditions that share methodological or theoretical approaches, in order to accommodate the demands of desirable (i. e. high ranking) journals (Lyall & Meagher, 2012). However, while they may be practical, none of these solutions allows for the equal co-existence of the different kinds of questions, realities and findings that characterise interdisciplinary studies. This article attempts to do just that by combining texts about whey protein written by the research groups participating in the interdisciplinary research project CALM (Counteracting Age-related loss of Skeletal Muscle Mass) in an

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