Abstract:

Society has long debated the question of what it means to eat and be healthy. In today's day and age, the high prevalence and accessibility of health and nutritional information, combined with fad diets, advertising claims, and self-proclaimed experts, has created added challenges for an individual in deciding what to eat. This paper examines the professional organization with claims to expertise about nutritional health, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND), particularly examining their corporate affiliations. The Academy's annual Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo (FNCE) served as a case study for exploring interactions between registered dietitians and corporate representatives. While at FNCE, the research took two main approaches to data collection: 1) semi-structured interviews of registered dietitians and 2) document analysis of materials collected from booths on the expo floor. This paper sought to uncover how interactions at FNCE reinforced or challenged a commodification of dietetics. Commodification refers to the transformation of a good or service into a product or commercial entity. Recently, commodification has been cited in healthcare fields as corporate interests exert growing influence on research, product development, and healthcare outcomes. Findings can be useful for helping to guide future AND policies regarding corporate relationships. In addition, findings can have important implications for how nutritional recommendations are shaped, and the reliability of those recommendations with regard to public health.