# We Are All Foodies: Using Cultural Logics to Construct a Self-Reflexive Eating Identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Michele Leigh Darling Charlottesville, Virginia

Master of Arts, Sociology, California State University, Sacramento 2004 Master of Business Administration, St. Mary's College of California 1999 Bachelor of Arts, Sociology-Organizational Studies, University of California, Davis 1994

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> > Department of Sociology

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how dynamic structural and cultural changes in the modern American foodscape have created a situation of ambiguous rules and unlimited options whereby all consumers are forced to create an eating identity rooted in both (1) what one actually eats, and (2) ideas about what one should eat. Using 77 in-depth qualitative interviews with adult consumers, I identify three main eating identities by analyzing impressions, beliefs, stories, and behaviors around food, eating, and food-related diseases, as well as potential policies to influence junk food consumption. The ways in which consumers define foods, frame issues about food and food-related diseases, as well as make sense of eating behaviors differ depending on their eating identity. I find that people draw upon different cultural logics to make sense of food, eating, and their food choices, as well as to explain any discrepancies that may arise between what they think they should eat and what they do eat. I argue that maintaining and re-creating an eating identity is an agentic, yet required, form of identity work that provides a way to make food choices and to make sense of food and eating, of one's self, and of others. Under conditions of dynamic modernity, all people, even those without a self-proclaimed interest in food, must use food to construct a self-reflexive eating identity, a sometimes challenging process.

For Mom and Dad, who taught me the importance of dedicated work and the value of education.

Inspiration is for amateurs; the rest of us just show up and get to work. - Chuck Close

## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We must eat to survive, but how do people decide what and how to eat? Eaters may have similar goals, but their food choices may vary dramatically. People use a variety of cultural and social resources to construct eating identities, but how do they talk about food and the choices that they make?

Leopold<sup>1</sup> is a Latino man in his late 20s in California. Although he and his wife disagree on this point, he believes that only meals comprised of a meat, a vegetable, and a carbohydrate are "full meals." He considers himself "capable" in the kitchen, cooking regularly for himself and his wife, but he also enjoys dining out and the occasional fast food meal. He believes that information about nutrition is common knowledge, pointing to the calorie count printed on the soda can he drinks from during the interview. Health is important to Leopold, but he does not follow a prescribed diet. His favorite meal is a big steak with pasta and vegetables, but he tends to make "whatever [he] feel[s] like cooking…based on what [they] have in the cupboard."

Tara is a white woman in her early 30s in Virginia who considers herself very health-conscious. After many years of gluten-free vegetarianism, she is spending a year as a Vegan for environmental reasons. Her daily diet is stereotypically Vegan: mostly whole beans, grains, vegetables, and tofu. On special occasions, or when she has had a really bad day, she makes her favorite "fake sausage dip" with Tofutti chorizo, Tofutti cheese, and Tofutti sour cream. She admits that she does not keep those ingredients on hand because she considers it to be "junk food" that she eats emotionally. For Tara, a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms self-selected by the respondent, reflecting their preferred gender and ethnic identity.

strict Vegan eating regime she initially adopted for Lent has become a year-long diet experiment because she feels good about doing it, "both like health-wise and when [she] think[s] about the state of our planet." However, she is now worried about eating quinoa because even though it is a Vegan staple, she "feels bad" that the grain's popularity in North America has raised the price for indigenous consumers in Latin America.

Dylan is an Asian woman in her early 20s in Virginia who follows the Paleo Diet, eating primarily meat, nuts, fruits, and vegetables. She decided to eat Paleo after taking anthropology and biology classes in college, and feeling like "everything lined up" with the diet and what she had learned. She describes herself as a very active member of a dance team, and that she "just wants to eat everything" after practice, but that eating a lot of pasta and carbohydrates always leaves her hungry. Even though she is not a perfectionist, for Dylan, eating a strict Paleo diet "is like a solution to all my problems."

Whether it is Leopold's emphasis on including a meat, vegetable, and starch in every meal, or Tara and Dylan electing to follow different, but both highly regimented, diets, all three of these respondents are very certain about what is appropriate to eat. Now consider Helen, an elderly woman who describes in a video from Wessels Living History Farm what she ate while she lived on a Nebraska farm during the 1930's:

We had our own chickens, milk, our own eggs. Like my daughter, she said she never got hungry. We had canned meat and we had chickens. We had milk, we had – I baked bread. [I] canned, yeah. We'd butcher our own animals and then we had hogs, too. We'd butcher hogs, and then you'd cure that, and like I say, when the neighbors would come over, you'd just get a meal together. Of course, you had your own potatoes. You had your own meat. (Bolton 2003)

Despite the financial and physical challenges of the Depression era, Helen fed her family not with what she felt like eating or what she thought she should be eating, but with what was available. Her story provides an example of how the way food is produced and consumed has changed, which is reflected in how Leopold, Tara, and Dylan eat today. For much of human history simply finding enough calories was critical, but today's affluent consumers have seemingly endless options for how and what to eat, and so they must make food choices. Sometimes, the ability to choose can result in rigid food rules about what is and is not appropriate to eat. It seems that now we do not eat to live, but rather live to eat.

While the specific details may differ, I argue that we all have to create and maintain an eating identity. The three respondents profiled in the opening vignettes all care about food, health, and their sense of self. However, although all three people have the similar goal to eat what they believe is optimal, that goal leads them in very different directions, with very different meanings. Both Tara and Dylan strictly limit the types of foods that they are willing to eat, while Leopold intentionally seeks out a variety of foods and nutrients in every meal.

For all three people, food choices are not just about the food. For Tara, being a Vegan is central to how she thinks about herself, both as a moral and environmentallyconscious person, yet she is conflicted about which foods she should eat to remain in alignment with her ideals. For Dylan, performing at peak levels is central to her selfperception as a dancer and athlete. And for Leopold, cooking a delicious and balanced meal is central to his role as a stay-at-home husband, even though his wife would be happy with "just one thing" as a meal. Both Tara and Dylan are extreme in their food choices, while Leopold does not follow a prescribed diet, yet they all do the same type of identity work around food.

These three respondents see their choices as justified and legitimate reflections of their own personal food and lifestyle preferences. They serve as examples for my overall finding, that food choices represent more than just a way to stay alive, but also are an important element of one's sense of self. Food has become a required marker of identity, I argue, as a result of changes in the food industry and the science of nutrition, with its ambiguous and changing definitions.

The abundance of food options and the cultural acceptance of unique eating patterns makes it possible for people to develop fundamentally different, yet clearly articulated, ideas about what is appropriate to eat. Interest in food is not new; even in times of widespread calorie deprivation there have been connoisseurs and epicureans who devoted time and energy to food, particularly haute cuisine (Mennell 1996; Strong 2002). I use a more contemporary term, "foodie," which draws on Josée Johnston's (2010:4) description of a "foodie" as someone who both "genuinely enjoys food... [and] engage[s] in identity politics and status distinctions through their eating practices." While it would not be unusual for people today who consider themselves to be foodies or connoisseurs to be able to talk extensively about their views on food (de Solier 2013; Strong 2011), most of my respondents, including the three people described in the opening vignettes, do not explicitly consider themselves foodies by this definition. Regardless, I argue that my respondents do the same identity work foodies or connoisseurs do, with deeply considered ideas about what they eat on a daily basis and why, which they can describe in great detail.

My argument in this dissertation is that structural and cultural changes in the American foodscape<sup>2</sup> since the 1940s have created a situation of ambiguous rules and a vast number of options whereby *all* consumers are forced to create an eating identity in order to choose what to eat and to make sense of food and themselves. Even if that identity is one of an omnivore who eats everything without restriction, I argue that an eating identity is required whether one is personally interested in food or not. Even when the possible choices available are highly constrained due to economic and social inequalities (Pugh 2015), I argue that creating an eating identity is still required. Regardless of economic, social, or regional limitations, an eating identity must be individually determined because there is not a coherent or widely accepted definition of what one should be eating, but instead there are multiple acceptable alternatives.

People develop an eating identity and draw upon cultural narratives, or logics, to make sense of their sometimes conflicting food choices within an uncertain and changing foodscape. Cultural logics are a "relatively coherent, systematically, and mutually reinforcing" collection of "taken-for-granted assumptions about human nature and social relations, which are expressed and transmitted through everyday phrases, rituals, and practices" (Schalet 2000:76). They operate at the level of "common sense," defined by Ann Swidler (1986:279) as "the set of assumptions so un-self-conscious as to seem a natural, transparent, undeniable part of the structure of the world." At the heart of this analysis is Sharon Hays' (1996:133) argument that "people select from among the

 $<sup>^{2}</sup>$  I use the concept of a foodscape as including both (1) the food system, or how food is produced, distributed, and sold, *and* (2) the food culture. Chapter 2 includes a detailed discussion of this concept.

cultural logics at their disposal in order to develop some correspondence between what they believe and what they actually do." In this case, consumers use available cultural logics to make sense of any gaps between what they think that they should eat and what they actually do eat. The cultural logics presented in Chapter 6 provide a means to understand one's experience with food and eating, whereas in contrast, the explanatory models discussed in Chapter 5 are a way to describe and explain why food, eating, and food-related diseases might be a problem.

## BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Sociologists have talked about food and eating since the beginning of the discipline. While Karl Marx's ([1867] 1977) critique of capitalist agriculture focused on production, both Emile Durkheim's ([1912] 1995) description of food as the substance of religious rites and Max Weber's ([1922] 1946) description of the relationship between eating special foods and status explored the symbolic meanings that food and eating have for groups and individuals. Georg Simmel's ([1910] 1997) contention that fashion, or changing tastes, can be used to signal social class and Norbert Elias' ([1939] 2000) portrait of the ongoing process of civilizing eating and table manners highlight the focus on the upper class as the bellwether for appropriate foods and eating behaviors. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, much of the sociological research around food had broadened the relationship between food and concepts of particular interest to sociologists, including class (Bourdieu 2002; Warde 2000), gender (Avakian 1997; Counihan 1992; DeVault 1991), and national culture (Douglas 1972; Fantasia 1995; Mennell 1987, 1996). While distinctions in eating between social categories are important, more recent research in the

sociology of food and sociology of consumption has moved towards a focus on individual identity formation (Bisogni et al. 2002; de Solier 2013).

I build on this focus on the relationship between food and individual identity in the context of changes in the overall foodscape, including both the *food system*, or how food is produced, sold, and consumed, as well the *food culture*, or how people talk and think about food. Changes in both of these areas combine to create a dynamic and evolving foodscape wherein individuals must create their own eating identity and determine for themselves what is appropriate to eat, and how.

Historical perspectives of eating (McIntosh 1995; Mennell 1996; Strong 2002) highlight how concern about people eating food deemed as unhealthy is not a new issue. I present a brief overview of historical changes in and challenges of food and eating, and argue that this problem requires special consideration now. While many of the issues raised in this dissertation are not new, under conditions of dynamic modernity, wherein the pace, scope, and profundity of social change are faster and more extreme (Giddens 1991), how people eat becomes an even greater struggle or project. We move from Helen, eating a simple diet of a few staples and/or worrying about getting *enough* food and calories for sustenance, to Leopold, Tara, and Dylan, who, while affluent enough to have the ability to choose, can face confusion in making choices from a dizzying array of food options, and can then be held accountable for those choices. As a result of these historical processes, structural and cultural changes have impacted individual selfmeanings and self-understandings. And within this changing landscape, food and eating have become an ongoing project under constant self-reflexive consideration.

## Food System

Food production and the consequences experienced from eating have changed dramatically with industrialization. The food system produces highly processed foods and makes them cheaply and widely available for consumption on a mass scale. The effects of increased consumption of these highly processed foods have been reflected over the past few decades in national rates of food-related diseases.

*Technology.* Significant and rapid changes in the food system have continued to increase since World War II due to advances in food technology and manufacturing processes (McIntosh 1995). Many advances in food technology, including preservation and long-distance transportation, were a result of wartime necessity during World War II to feed both military troops and civilians on the homefront (McIntosh 1995). Only a few decades ago, many of the flavors and ingredients in contemporary foods commonly available in the United States either did not exist, or were not widely available (Cordain et al. 2005). Improved food production and expanded food distribution has increased both the type and variety of foods available for mass consumption.

The growing number and type of food products available has increased what Stephen Mennell (1996) describes as a situation of "diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties" in food. Food has become more homogenized, in that the mass-produced foods available for sale are the same across the country. However, at the same time, the "menu of choice" (Cowen 2002) for food and tastes has become more diverse and specialized, in that the number of products available from which to choose has increased dramatically. Opposing forces of homogenization and specialization combine to create a foodscape in which how people eat is simultaneously more similar and varied. Thus, the Western, or Standard American diet, is a result of consumers across the country making food choices from the same and almost limitless pool of available foods, many of which are highly processed.

The Standard American diet (SAD) is signified by an "excess consumption of calories from refined carbohydrates, fatty meats, and added fats ... lack[ing] many nutrients found in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables" (Grotto and Zied 2010:603). While the SAD is not new, it has become even more highly processed in the past thirty years (Cordain et al. 2005). Consequences from the mass distribution and consumption of highly processed foods throughout the United States are reflected in national health indicators.

*Food and health.* Changes in food production have occurred side-by-side with changing patterns in health. At the same time as the increase in mass-produced, highly processed food, the percentage of American adults who are categorized as "obese" or "extremely obese" has increased significantly (Fryar, Carroll, and Ogden 2012). Although the timeline of these two events align, there is disagreement about the significance of the rise in food-related diseases, as well as potential remedies. While the link between eating and food-related diseases, including obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular (heart) disease often goes uncontested, whether increasing obesity rates constitute a social problem is debated (Boero 2013; Henderson et al. 2009; Moffat 2010; Saguy and Almeling 2008; Taylor 2011). For example, the focus on an "obesity epidemic" obscures the fact that obesity is just one of many indicators of Metabolic Syndrome (MetS), a larger cluster of risk factors for cardiovascular disease, stroke, kidney disease, and type 2 diabetes mellitus (Beltran-Sanchez et al. 2013).

Another area of debate relates to which foods are appropriate for consumption, as shown in the opening vignettes. Consumers in the contemporary food system theoretically have an almost unlimited choice of foods, and beliefs about which foods should be eaten often conflict dramatically. Adding to the confusion of contrasting popular beliefs is that the official dietary rules change frequently. The United States Department of Agriculture revises its dietary guidelines every five years to adhere to the latest scientific findings, and even these official recommendations are contested (Post 2011). Foods that are in one moment touted as supporting health are then, or even sometimes at the same time, also demonized as harmful. As an example, for decades consumers have received changing and mixed messages about eating eggs, ranging from "eggs are as important in the diet as milk" in the 1940s to "hold the eggs and butter . . . cholesterol is proved deadly" in the 1980s to "eggs aren't nearly as bad for you as doctors used to think" in the 1990s (McIntosh 2000:535S).

Even more recently, research published in the *Annuals of Internal Medicine* argued that guidelines to limit saturated fats are unfounded (Chowdhury et al. 2014). However, several peer researchers refuted the findings, and the authors published a correction a week later stating that only unsaturated fats are protective (Consumer Reports 2014). These types of conflicting expert messages in scholarly journals are reflected in the broader culture through personal conversations about food, as well as in the wider media, discussed in the next section.

## Food Culture

The changes in the manufacturing, packaging, and selling of food in the United States also create and contribute to changes in the food culture, or how people think and talk

about food. As food options expand in diversity of number and quality, food decisions require more attention, thought, and conversation. For many - but not all - Americans, the main concern has shifted from eating enough food to survive to eating the "right" foods. While ethnic traditions (Counihan 2005; Inness 2001b; Julier 2005; Zafar 1999) and religious edicts (Fishkoff 2010; Freidenreich 2011) continue to influence food choices, an overall lack of clear rules or guidance often means that determining which foods are appropriate to eat is open to dispute. The expansion of options and constant contemplation of what to eat promotes food as a topic of conversation and consideration, as entertainment, as a way of drawing boundaries, and as a way of relating to one's self and to others.

Many people find pleasure in talking and thinking about food and eating, as well as the actual act of eating. "Eating out," specifically, is not only a way to consume food, but is also a form of entertainment (Warde 2000). Eating meals outside the home has increased since World War II, along with the number and variety of restaurants available, from fast dollar food menus to fine dining prix fixe tasting menus, whatever the diner's mood, preference, or resource constraints.

Food has also become a form of entertainment via the mass media with the proliferation of television cooking shows and mass-market publishing (Salkin 2013). Consumers can learn about and be excited by new foods, recipes, and restaurants through books, television shows, and documentary films, which portray cooking and food as fun and interesting. However, consumers can also be horrified by media that highlight health concerns about foods, which have turned the genre of food exposé into a commercial and financial success (Tichi 2004). Consumers may be warned to not eat certain foods, or

only prepare foods in certain ways. Thus, entertainment helps fuel both an interest in and revulsion about food, and combined with a lack of clear definition about food safety and healthy ingredients, the list of foods that are acceptable to eat simultaneously expands and contracts. As a result, food becomes an even stronger, and sometimes confusing, symbol for consumers to make sense of the world, themselves, and others (Douglas 1979; Lupton 1996).

With its increasing relevance in the popular culture, the interest in and symbolic power of food is increasing. Affluent consumers have seemingly limitless options about what is appropriate to eat, but instead of a feeling of freedom and ease, the lack of rules creates an omnivore's dilemma, wherein the opportunity to select from anything increases the challenge and confusion about what to eat (Pollan 2006). The foods that one does select to eat (or not) become a strong, yet permeable, moral boundary (Lamont 1992, 2000). New food-based boundaries can be rooted in content, but also in judgments of the quantity of food one eats (Mennell 1996; Saguy 2013), or the ethics of how the food is produced (Starr 2009). Efforts to reinforce boundaries of appropriate eating can come from internal self-judgment or from external judgment by others. The state can even become involved in policing the boundaries of healthy eating by restricting (Grynbaum 2012) or taxing (Shughart 1997) offending foods, such as sugar-sweetened soda (Bittman 2010; Ferris 2014). Consumers must be creative and flexible in using cultural logics to think about food and eating in order to navigate their way through this changing environment and manage their own way of experiencing food.

## Food and Identity

With these changes in the food system and food culture, food is no longer just for sustenance, or even for health, but has become a feature of how people think about and relate to themselves and others. While food has been linked previously with social identity (Bisogni et al. 2002), I argue the need to combine one's understandings of what one *should* eat with what one *does* eat to create and constantly maintain an eating identity has become intensified as individuals face both an expansion of acceptable food options, as well as a strengthening of boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable foods. People have more foods to choose from, but at the same time their food choices become more crucial in how they see themselves and relate to others.

Disagreement and uncertainty about food and eating guidelines require people to develop their own food rules (Counihan 1992) or *gustemes* (Lévi Strauss 1963:86), which they may or may not be able to act upon in various contexts and situations (Ilmonen 2011; Mennell 1996). In response to ambiguity, many people - including several of my respondents - create a self-defined continuum of "everyday foods" to "treats" to "junk foods" (Petrunoff et al. 2014). The emphasis here is on "self-defined" — one key concern this project explores is how the foods that fall in each part of such a continuum vary dramatically. While variation in food rules may be loosely linked to social identity characteristics such as education (Bere et al. 2008; Counihan 1992), ethnoculture (Counihan 2005; Inness 2001b; Julier 2005; Zafar 1999), region (Edge, Engelhardt, and Ownby 2013), or gender (Coveney 2000; Kim and Leigh 2011), variation in food rules may also be due to external structural circumstances like availability or due to selfperceptions and self-understandings of what is appropriate to eat, and when. An example of an external structural issue impacting food rules would be whether a neighborhood has a grocery store or farmers market<sup>3</sup> with access to fresh fruits and vegetables or only fast food restaurants. Previous research has shown that the distribution of food resources can determine the choices people make (Fantasia 1995; Kim and Leigh 2011; Rose and Richards 2004; Walker et al. 2011; Whelan et al. 2002). An example of an internal issue might be the emotional memory of a food that promises comfort (Lupton 1996; Sutton 2001), which may override even the strongest and most explicit food rules. The combination of the ambiguity in guidelines, the variation in availability, and the emotional nature of food and eating leaves consumers responsible for their food choices within situations that are often beyond their complete control.

In summary, the entire American foodscape, both in terms of the production of food and the culture of food, has changed under the dynamic conditions of modernity (Giddens 1991). The structural changes in food production have forced individuals to construct their own micro-level understandings and meanings about food and eating, creating selfreflexive eating identities (Giddens 1991) rooted in, but often in conflict with, a broader culture. The lack of clear and widely accepted guidelines results in a need to constantly reflect upon what one should eat, what one wants to eat, and what one actually does eat. In response, people use cultural logics to explain both their success and failure in achieving alignment between what they should do, want to do, and actually do. In the contemporary American foodscape, decoupled from traditional social identities, it is up to individuals to engage in this reflexive process.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> I follow the USDA's use of the phrase "farmers markets" instead of a possessive term "farmers' markets."

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Isabelle de Solier (2013) argues that while the relationship of food and eating to categories of social identity, such as race, class, gender, or education, has been explored, her own scholarship on the identity formation of foodies is the first to address the relationship between food and the individual self. She builds on Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, among others, to explore "the role food plays in the formation of the post-traditional elected self-identity of the foodie" (de Solier 2013:2). However, I contend that while she does begin to address the lack of research on food and the individual self, her focus solely on foodies reveals an even further gap in the literature, which I address with this research: It is not just foodies who engage in this process. I argue that under the conditions of a changing American foodscape, in terms of both the foods that they eat, or necessarily have the sociocultural resources to be a foodie, *must* use food to form an *eating identity*. We cannot choose not to choose.

The idea that one can — and must — engage in this type of identity work has its roots in Michel Foucault's (1988:18) concept of technologies of the self, which

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

Responsibility for attaining happiness falls squarely on the individual, and he or she becomes the "entrepreneur of himself or herself" in an attempt to maximize her or his "human capital" (Gordon 1991:44). And while individuals may seek out expert advice on which technologies of the self are optimal to attain this happiness, they often face a conflicting set of "expert systems" (Giddens 1991), which leaves them on their own to

figure out what is best for them to eat. But rather than being framed as problematic, in a "neoliberal era of celebrated self-sufficiency" (Pugh 2014:84) personal responsibility about food and eating are often embraced and lauded in the cultural, medical, and political spheres. Taking responsibility for one's own eating is seen as a badge of honor, framed as the freedom and maturity to determine for oneself how one wants to eat. Learning about "good" foods and the latest nutritional science is framed as increasing one's human capital through a private investment of time and energy (Peters 2001:81), rather than as an unfair demand on one's time.

This food identity work, however, is often not smooth or easy. Even with an investment of time and energy to do one's own research, the confusion and concern many people have about what to eat is pervasive. Half of people surveyed thought it was easier to do their own taxes than to figure out how to eat in a healthy way (International Food Information Council Foundation 2012:12). Individuals struggle with this process of creating and maintaining an eating identity because of the constraints and limitations imposed on them by the current food system and food culture.

This confusion about what and how to eat exemplifies Anthony Giddens' (1994:184) concept of "manufactured uncertainty" wherein "many aspects of our lives have suddenly become open, organized only in terms of 'scenario thinking,' the as-if construction of possible future outcomes." Because there is no longer a set of dominant food rules or constraining traditions, individuals must craft their own individual set of food rules (Counihan 1992) from a variety of information sources and cultural logics about the meaning of food (Swidler 1986). Consumers must sometimes re-appropriate

and redefine which foods are appropriate to eat into their own personal bricolage (Hebdige 1979) of bits and pieces of available information and guidelines.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This project is grounded in Anthony Giddens' (1991:5) concept of the "reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, tak[ing] place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems." I explore how people must use food to create an eating identity, rooted in diverse, even conflicting cultural narratives, or logics, that they then use to make sense of food choices and eating behaviors. Giddens argues (1991:54) that "a person's identity is not to be found in behavior, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going."

With my findings, I address a gap in the food studies literature highlighted by Isabelle de Solier's (2013) book *Food and the Self* in which she argues that foodies take a keen interest in cultivating a skilled and knowledgeable reflexive eating identity. I follow her lead in grounding my argument in the works of Anthony Giddens (1991), but I extend her argument by arguing that *all* individuals engage in a reflexive project of the self around food, not just foodies. "Foodie" may be a particular eating identity, but it is far from the only one. Although there are people for whom food is simply a form of sustenance to which they give little thought (Lupton 1996), I contend that due to changes in the food system and food culture, even people who do not particularly like food, or who do not have economic resources to access as many options, still have to think about food and engage in this self-reflexive project around food and eating. It is not because they like food, want to talk about food, can afford, or even necessarily enjoy food. The

changing national, regional, and local foodscapes in which one lives force a consistent and reflexive consideration of one's relationship to food in order to function in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When there is no agreed upon "truth" of what diet is best, everyone must determine for themselves what is appropriate to eat.

In considering how changes in the foodscape exemplify an environment of dynamic modernity, I argue that engaging in a reflexive project of the self is not optional, nor is it always enjoyable due to the uncertainty, ambiguity, and emotion surrounding eating. I am interested in the struggle people experience in creating such a self-reflexive identity due to the uncertainty of contradictory "expert systems" (Giddens 1991), where not everyone agrees which foods are appropriate. I also consider how a reflexive eating identity can be problematic due to the power of sometimes conflicting emotions, memories, or ethnocultural heritage. Thus, I explore what happens when the reflexive process of maintaining an eating identity breaks down, highlighting the gap between what people say and what they do (Hays 1996). Finally, I consider how the reflexive eating identities people create affect their conceptions about healthy eating and the conflict between personal responsibility and state intervention in promoting healthy eating behaviors.

My purpose in this study is to explore how adult consumers negotiate competing logics in a reflexive project of self-identity (Giddens 1991). By focusing on individual eating identities rather than social identities based on gender, ethnicity, or education, I argue that it is not just people with intentional food-intensive identities, such as foodies or connoisseurs, who undertake this type of reflexive project of the self, but that we all must, and do.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Food is necessary for survival, and it is also imbued with meaning (Mennell 1987) that impacts broader social structures (Mennell 1996). Food has long been a means of categorization (Douglas 1972, 2004; Sahlins 1991; Zerubavel 1991) and status (Stead et al. 2011). The meanings implicit in material goods are indicative of attitudes (Weatherill 1993), and the consumption of particular goods can be used to form distinctions and classifications of one's self and of others.

Using the sociological imagination (Mills [1959] 2000:8), I acknowledge the importance of both "the personal troubles of milieu" and "the public issues of social structure." By their very personal nature, it is easy to consider concerns around food choice and eating behaviors as personal troubles. Eating in an unhealthy way, including junk food, either in terms of quality or quantity, is often seen in public discourse — and amongst most of my interviewees — as stemming from the character of the individual. An individual experiences the physical results from unhealthy eating, such as weight-gain or the food-related diseases of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Much of American society, however, ascribes moral judgments to food choices as well. People who eat a lot of junk food, for example, are described by many of my respondents as being lazy, unaware, and only thinking in the short-term.

Concerns about food and eating can also be considered public issues. The processing, availability, and price of food are affected by both the state and the capitalist food production industry, clearly issues of social structure. In addition, when the financial costs for the treatment of food-related illnesses are borne by society as a whole

through public health care, "some value cherished by publics is felt to be threatened" (Mills [1959] 2000:8).

The importance of food and eating as a public issue is evident in the political sphere. First Lady Michelle Obama's highly visible and widely discussed initiative, Let's *Move*, focuses on increasing physical activity and healthy eating for children with the goal of "solving the problem of obesity within a generation" (White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity 2010:1). This is an admittedly challenging goal, requiring public and private efforts. Federal agencies as varied as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Education, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Environmental Protection Agency - among others fund obesity research and prevention programs throughout the country. Many of the large private foundations in the United States, including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the California Endowment - among many others - have initiatives to fund millions of dollars towards obesity prevention (Pina 2010). Thus, federal, state, and community agencies all provide funding and resources for individuals, businesses, community organizations and local governments to engage obesity prevention and research programs (Gillibrand 2013).

This project employs the sociological imagination at its foundation to argue that questions about food and eating are a combination of personal troubles and public issues. It is impossible to deny the importance of personal biography in eating identities, food choices, and eating behaviors, but neither can one deny the importance of the food industry, culture, and the state in terms of the production, consumption, and regulation of food. In eating, financial, consumptive, and political decisions intersect with the cultural

logics of health, morality, connection, elaboration, choice, and heritage, and the very definition of what is appropriate for ingestion. This study is important in that it situates a seemingly personal trouble within the context of a public issue by focusing on how the contemporary food system and food culture require the creation of an eating identity by people who do not necessarily think of themselves, or want to think of themselves, as having an eating identity.

Food choices, health, and eating are a national cultural and political preoccupation, and what is missing from the conversation is my research: that it is not only about the food. We all struggle to create and maintain eating identities that reflect our sometimes contradicting beliefs about, and behaviors around, food. Until we acknowledge changes in the food system and food culture, as well as the cultural work that is required to create and maintain an eating identity, any attempts to change behaviors and improve health outcomes will be unsuccessful.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

The primary research question for this study establishes an analysis that "link[s] together historical shifts in the political economy, changes in particular social settings, and critical alterations in self-experience" (Callero 2003:122). Given historical changes in the food system since World War II, and the resultant changes in food culture, how do people create a self-reflective eating identity, and use available cultural logics to make sense of food and eating, as well as justify their eating behaviors? The broad scope of this question provides opportunities to examine food and eating from the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels, exploring how people must navigate a changing foodscape, whether they want to or not.

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND ANALYSIS

Food is unique because there are immediate and long-term physical consequences to both its avoidance and its consumption (Mintz 1993). Everyone needs to consume food and drink to survive; thus, the population for this study is all adult consumers. However, because what is deemed appropriate for consumption is highly contested and varies according to demographic and environmental factors of food availability, the sampling frame for this project includes adults over age 18 with at least some college in two American cities with long-standing and vibrant food cultures: Davis, California and Charlottesville, Virginia. I deliberately sought to bracket issues of availability and access by approximating a focus on middle and upper-middle class consumers in locations with a wide variety of food options. This sampling frame is not meant to be representative of all consumers, but instead highlights the issues of eating identity for people who theoretically have the financial, social, and cultural capital to eat whatever they want. Although a class-based analysis is beyond the scope of this project, I believe that people with limited socioeconomic resources engage in a similar reflexive process (Silva 2013).

As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, the study's primary research method is in-depth qualitative interviews to explore understandings and beliefs about food, eating behaviors, food-related diseases, and thoughts about policies to influence food consumption. A goal in selecting this specific method and sampling frame is to hear stories from people who theoretically have the financial means, motive, and opportunity to select whatever food they want for themselves and their families. I want to find out how people who can make choices from a variety of options actually choose food, which choices they make, and most importantly, the stories that they tell about food.

## Respondent Recruitment

Interview respondents were recruited using colorful flyers posted and handed out in public places, including cafes, public bulletin boards, and on telephone poles along busy pedestrian streets. While this recruitment strategy limits generalizability, the richness and detail provided by people who are willing to talk about food and eating allows an exploration of the meanings created by consumers who have easy access to fresh food, yet sometimes, or often, consume junk food.

While the respondents do not directly represent the racial/ethnic make-up of the two cities (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of respondent demographics), interviewees represent a wide range of ages (from 18 to over 70), educational experiences, occupations, and most importantly, eating habits. I spoke with college students negotiating how to eat in the dorm, caretakers navigating how to feed young children, young adults struggling to eat while working multiple part-time jobs, and financially secure professionals determining how to eat in alignment with their ethical ideals.

As demonstrated in the three opening vignettes, respondents' eating identities represent a variety of dietary rules, including very strict Vegans, who avoid all animalbased products, very devout Paleo eaters, who base their eating plan around animal protein, and Omnivores, who relish eating everything, including fast food, soda, and other foods that they considered to be junk food. Approximately 28 percent of my respondents describe following a special diet, which mirrors an estimated 30 percent of the US population who manage special dietary needs (Koeller 2012). Many of the examples presented throughout this dissertation reflect the experience of people who follow a special diet, but respondents who do not follow a similar diet use food in the same way. For example, just as strict Vegetarian Molly chastises her teenage daughter's snack of jam spread on crackers as "pure crap," junk food eating omnivore James describes his sister's year-round consumption of Marshmallow Peeps with disgust as the behavior of a "sugar fiend."

#### Interviews

All interviews were conducted face-to-face in and around Davis (n=40) and Charlottesville (n=37). Respondents completed a Pre-Interview Information Sheet both to screen for age and education eligibility, as well as to gather information about demographic characteristics and consumption behaviors. Interview topics included the respondents' definitions of junk, healthy, and unhealthy foods, their current eating habits, how they ate as kids, their thoughts about people who eat a lot of junk food, interventions to change eating behaviors, and questions about tobacco usage.

## Analysis

Interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim; with primary qualitative data analysis completed using NVivo software. Grounded Theory Method generally directed my coding, memo-writing, analysis, and writing processes (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss [1967] 1999). Reflexive and iterative coding allowed key themes and concepts to emerge from the interviews themselves with a progressive focusing towards specific variables and codes (Chambliss and Schutt 2013).

## **OVERVIEW**

The foods that people eat impact how they talk about food and my goal has been to explore the struggle that people face in deciding what to eat, as well as the ways in which what they actually do eat may or may not align with what they want to eat. I have less

interest in whether the people I speak with *actually* eat what they say that they eat. My real interest is in the stories that people tell about food and what they claim to eat, highlighting the power of cultural logics to inform their choices. I argue in the following chapters that concerns about food and eating are not just for people who like food and want to focus on food, such as foodies, but are real for everyone living in the contemporary American foodscape. Chapter 2 presents an overview of the current sociological literature about food and eating, focusing on the relationship between changes in the overall foodscape, including both the food system and food culture, which have impacted people's individual experiences with food. Chapter 3 details the data collection and methods used in the analysis.

Detailed empirical findings are presented in the next three chapters. Chapter 4 begins by detailing three eating identities determined from the interviews as a combination of eating behaviors and beliefs about food and eating. The eating identities vary not only in what people eat, but also in how they talk about the food that they eat in order to keep a "particular narrative" going about themselves and their eating behaviors (Giddens 1991:54). Respondents with the first eating identity, *Balancers*, desire and enjoy a varied and balanced diet, including junk food, and express ease about and alignment in their food choices and eating behaviors. In contrast, *Slippers* express concern about their food, and in particular how they sometimes slip when their choices do not line up with what they want to eat. Finally, *Controllers*, who have the most extreme beliefs and rules about food and eating, also express concern about food, but follow their rigid food rules with discipline and control. In addition to the impact of childhood and importance of caretakers in shaping how people eat, the chapter explores

the food rules and behaviors that generate and maintain eating identities, as well as the symbolic importance of perceiving one's own rules as unique.

Chapter 5 explores the boundary making process of food, including defining different categories of foods. The chapter also considers the perceptions my respondents have about people who eat junk food on a regular basis. This chapter concludes by presenting three distinct explanatory models, or frames, which can be used to describe and explain problems that may arise from food choice and eating behavior, including food-related diseases. The *medical model* values the ability of science to identify both causes and remedies for food-related diseases, including changing personal responsibility and behavior based on available nutritional information. In contrast, the *public health model* focuses on changing the food environment in order to influence eating behaviors to prevent food-related and available, and the food environment overall, are influenced by corporate and political policies. Depending on their eating identity, my respondents use these models differently in order to define and explain food-related diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Chapter 6 discusses the six cultural logics about food and eating that I identified from the interviews, which serve to moderate the interaction of individuals and the larger food system. My respondents draw upon these logics to sort "into the[ir] ongoing 'story' about the self" (Giddens 1991:54) in order to make sense of and talk about themselves as eaters. The logics differ depending on what food and their food choices *do* for people. The most commonly used is the *Logic of Health*, in which food is closely linked to both health and disease. Within the *Logic of Morality*, food is a way to demonstrate one's own

worth, as well as to judge others. The *Logic of Elaboration* is a means to use food to demonstrate knowledge, skill, taste, and cultural capital as a form of distinction. In the *Logic of Connection*, food provides comfort, often in relation to other people. In the *Logic of Choice*, food is an important way to explore different options and express personal freedom. Lastly, within the *Logic of Heritage*, food provides an opportunity to celebrate and remember both personal history and communal foodways. Finally, the dissertation concludes with Chapter 7 providing an overall discussion and consideration of theoretical contributions and policy implications for this study.

In summary, my overall argument is that conditions of dynamic modernity have created powerful changes in the American foodscape, both structurally and culturally, which require individuals to use multiple and ambiguous resources to develop selfunderstandings and self-meanings that they use to construct reflexive eating identities. This process is often a struggle, so consumers must draw upon available cultural logics to make sense of food and their own eating identities. In the absence of clarity about what is appropriate to eat, food becomes a nexus of identity, even for people who do not claim, or even want, an eating identity.

### **CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review discusses current sociological and food studies research about the structural and cultural changes around food, eating, and identity. A brief historical discussion of changes in the food system, roughly since World War II, provides context to understand the contemporary circumstances in which we experience food and eating. Macro-level historical industry changes have coincided with and created changes in the meso-level food culture, which in turn have altered micro-level understandings and meanings of the individual food experience. While this chapter presents a trajectory of structural and cultural changes that have resulted in the current American foodscape, it is not intended to directly compare food and eating in the past to the present. These structural and cultural changes around food, within a condition of dynamic modernity, require people to use the cultural logics available to them to make sense of self-reflexive eating identities (Giddens 1991).

### MACRO-LEVEL CHANGES IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

How food is procured, cooked, and eaten has changed repeatedly and become more rationalized and civilized over past centuries (Elias [1939] 2000). And like most aspects of daily life, the production and consumption of food has changed rapidly and dramatically since the Industrial Revolution (McIntosh 1995). Much of the food consumed today in the United States comes from industrial or corporate sources (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010; Martinez 2007), and increasingly busy lifestyles have resulted in a greater emphasis on speed and convenience. According to a recent study by the Hartman Group (2013), 50 percent of foods eaten are in the form of snacks or mini meals on the go, and 47 percent of the time, food is eaten while alone. Such changes exemplify Anthony Giddens' (1991:16) concept of "modernity's extreme dynamism," wherein the pace, scope, and profundity of social change now exceeds any previous time. This section explores changes in the macro-level food system that have dramatically and rapidly impacted what foods are available for purchase and how they are produced. *Impact of World War II* 

While the American food system underwent several transformations over the preceding decades, World War II had a dramatic impact on the American food system (McIntosh 1995), helping to create the abundance of highly processed, convenience, and fast food available today. During the War, not only did the United States government have to secure food for its expanding military operations, it also had to provide food for civilians on the homefront. The rationing of staples like sugar, fats, meats, and canned fruits and vegetables required people to improvise, change their eating habits, and sometimes grow their own food, resulting in an overall increase in the consumption of eggs, milk, and fresh fruits (McIntosh 1995).

While rationing increased the consumption of fresh foods, the use of technology to preserve, produce, and transport food to the troops changed the industrial food processing system, instituting operations that remain in use today. After World War II, the increased use of plastics for packaging and increase in frozen prepared foods reduced spoilage and provided increased convenience for consumers (McIntosh 1995). During the 1950s, the introduction of the in-home freezer and TV Dinners (McIntosh 1995) created demand for new cooking appliances and food products that consumers had to learn how to use and consume (Cohen 2003). Technology expanded the scope of food production since World War II, as well. A few large agribusiness corporations increasingly corporatized

agriculture, resulting in fewer and more highly specialized and standardized farms (Ikerd 2008; Lobao and Meyer 2001), which can ship identical food products around the world.

With an expansion of processing and industrialization since World War II, there has been, as Stephen Mennell (1996) argues, a combination of "diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties" of food. People have increasing access to a rather homogenized diet due to the proliferation of consolidated agriculture, chain grocery stores or restaurants, and national advertising campaigns. For example, although White Castle hamburger restaurants had been open regionally since the 1920's, the national homogenized fast food industry began in earnest around World War II, with the opening of the first McDonald's in California and the first Dairy Queen in Illinois in 1940 (Jakle 1999). For the first time, identical fast food restaurants opened across the country. One of the comforts of McDonald's or Starbucks is its predictability: it is the same on every visit and at every location (Ritzer 2008).

There was also a concurrent increase in differentiation in what people like to, and want to, eat. This "greater diversity of tastes co-existing and competing at one time" (Mennell 1996:329) provides an opportunity for consumers to expand their preferences and make choices from a wider variety of foods. Thus, while the production of food has become more concentrated, the number of products from which to choose has expanded, and diversified. Food has also become cheaper, in part due to government interventions in pricing through subsidy practices that encourage the production and use of cheap sugars and oils (Francks, Grandi, and Eisenberg 2013).

## Food and Health

The introduction of mass processing, packaging, and fast food around the time of World War II also coincided with the introduction of the first set of national Recommended Dietary Allowances in 1943 to ensure civilians received proper nutrition during the war years (McIntosh 1995). The specifics of the "Dietary Guidelines" have changed as nutrition science knowledge and eating patterns have changed (Post 2011), but the guidelines have consistently focused on the role of diet and nutrition in health promotion and food-related disease prevention. Despite the Guidelines' intention to promote healthy eating, the increased production of consumption of highly processed and commercially prepared foods have resulted in significant changes in health outcomes<sup>4</sup> since World War II, including obesity (Francks, Grandi, and Eisenberg 2013), type II diabetes mellitus (Anekwe and Rahkovsky 2014), and cardiovascular disease (Jones and Greene 2012).

An analysis of the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) shows that the leading causes of death - heart disease, cancer, and stroke - have not changed since the 1930s. Yet, people are living longer; the risk of dying has dropped for all age groups from 1935 to 2010 (Hoyert 2012). However, the rates of food-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease are all increasing.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> This project focuses on three common food-related diseases or risk factors: obesity, type II diabetes mellitus, and cardiovascular (heart) disease.

*Obesity.* An analysis of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey between 1960 and 2010 shows that the percentage of adults categorized as overweight<sup>5</sup> has not changed much (31.5% in 1960-62, compared to 32.7% in 2009-10). However, the percentage of obese adults has almost tripled from 13.4 percent in 1960-62 to 36.1 percent in 2009-10. An even greater increase has been seen amongst people who are categorized as "extremely obese," increasing from 0.9 percent in 1960-62 to 6.6 percent in 2009-10 (Fryar et al. 2012).

Recent research into the sources and causes of the crises of obesity, as well as type II diabetes, in the United States and around the world has identified the overconsumption of unhealthy foods as the main culprit (Lyons 2011; Richards, Patterson, and Tegene 2007). The environment in which people live (Swinburn, Egger, and Raza 1999) matters, yet personal responsibility in food choices is often presented as the main solution to foodrelated diseases (Henderson et al. 2009). Of particular concern is the impact food choices have on children's health. Among children 2 to 19 years of age, 23.9 million children (31.8%) are overweight and 12.7 million (16.9%) are obese (Beltran-Sanchez et al. 2013). Parents, mothers especially, are held as the most responsible for their children's weight and food decisions (Johnson et al. 2011; Jordan 2008; McIntosh et al. 2006; Powell, Langlands, and Dodd 2011).

Although there are disagreements about whether the increase in obesity rates is an "epidemic" or a socially constructed "moral panic" (Boero 2013; Henderson et al. 2009;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "Overweight" is body mass index (BMI) greater than or equal to 25.0 kg/m2 and less than 30.0 kg/m2. "Obese" is BMI greater than or equal to 30.0 kg/m2. "Extremely obese" is BMI greater than or equal to 40.0 kg/m2.

Moffat 2010; Saguy and Almeling 2008; Taylor 2011), there has clearly been a quantitative increase in obesity levels, which many attribute largely to food options, food choices, and eating behaviors.

Disagreements also emerge about whether the cause of these increasing obesity rates is because of eating too many calories, exercising too little, or some combination of both. A widely accepted concern among health professionals is the obesity-related increase in "risk factor development and incidence of diabetes mellitus, CVD [Cardiovascular Disease] end points (including coronary heart disease, stroke, and heart failure), and numerous other health conditions, including asthma, cancer, end-stage renal disease, degenerative joint disease, and many others" (Beltran-Sanchez et al. 2013:e2). However, as previously mentioned, this "concern" does not go uncontested (Saguy 2013); obesity is just one of many indicators of Metabolic Syndrome (MetS), a larger cluster of risk factors for cardiovascular disease, stroke, kidney disease, and type 2 diabetes mellitus (Beltran-Sanchez et al. 2013). This section includes a discussion of two of these specific food-related diseases — diabetes and heart disease — both mentioned by many of my respondents.

*Diabetes.* Diabetes mellitus is "a group of diseases marked by high levels of blood glucose resulting from defects in insulin production, insulin action, or both" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2011:11). In 2010, approximately 19.7 million Americans (8.3% of the population) had diagnosed type II diabetes mellitus, and an additional 8.2 million had undiagnosed diabetes. In addition, over 38 percent of the population had pre-diabetes, indicated by abnormal fasting glucose levels (Beltran-Sanchez et al. 2013). A diagnosis of type II diabetes is associated with older age, obesity,

a family history of diabetes, a history of gestational diabetes, impaired glucose metabolism, physical inactivity, and one's race/ethnicity (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2011). The increasing prevalence of diabetes is seen across all groups, but disproportionately affects African American and Hispanic/Latino individuals, and other ethnic minorities (Beltran-Sanchez et al. 2013).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011), diabetes is the seventh-leading cause of death, although that is likely underreported. People with diabetes have twice the risk of death as people the same age but without diabetes. Similarly, medical expenses for people with diabetes are more than twice as high than for people without diabetes. In 2007, the total cost of diabetes in the United States was estimated to be \$174 billion (Caspersen et al. 2012). Despite the increased risk and cost of treatment, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011:11) contends that "many people with type II diabetes can control their blood glucose by following a healthy meal plan and exercise program, losing excess weight, and taking oral medication." *Cardiovascular disease.* While the rate of deaths from cardiovascular disease has decreased by 60 percent since 1960 (Jones and Greene 2012), it is still the leading cause of death for both men and women, in all racial groups (Murphy, Xu, and Kochanek 2013). Whether the reduction in cardiovascular disease mortality rates is attributable to advances in treatment or improvements in preventive behaviors is subject to on-going debate (Jones and Greene 2012). Regardless, although people are not dying from cardiovascular disease as frequently, the actual prevalence is increasing. The number of hospital discharges for cardiovascular disease, which includes people discharged alive, dead, and "status unknown," has increased from just over 3 million people in 1970 to just

35

under 6 million people in 2010 (Beltran-Sanchez et al. 2013). In short, people go to the hospital for cardiovascular disease more often, but they are not dying there. Cardiovascular disease is a complex health threat, with protective factors that include not smoking, engaging in physical exercise, and having low cholesterol levels. Among the

risk factors, food choices are clearly a significant contributor to the risk of cardiovascular

disease (Chowdhury et al. 2014; Jones and Greene 2012; Luepker 2008).

Models or frames. Disagreements about the causes, outcomes, and remedies for foodrelated disease highlight different ways of framing or using models for understanding people's food choices. One widely accepted explanatory model<sup>6</sup> is the *medical model*. which focuses from a physician's perspective on the causes and consequences of, and remedies for, food-related diseases as based on rational and scientific information, such as nutritional science (Laing 1971). In contrast, the *public health model* focuses on the relationship between environmental factors and food-related diseases, such as the availability of fast food and opportunities for physical activity like safe walking paths (Adler and Stewart 2009). As discussed in Chapter 5, I have also identified a third explanatory model, the *food industrial complex model*, which emphasizes the impact that corporate and government policies have on food production. Whichever model or frame is used to describe and explain the causes, consequences, and remedies for food-related diseases, changes in the food system have impacted health outcomes since World War II. Americans are living longer, but are experiencing higher rates of food-related diseases, including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Along with these epidemiological

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of explanatory models.

changes, the way that food is talked about and consumed in every day life has also changed.

## MESO-LEVEL CHANGES IN THE FOOD CULTURE

Alongside dramatic changes in the way food is produced, the food culture has changed as well under conditions of dynamic modernity. By *food culture*, I mean the way that people think about and talk about food. Food has meant more than just sustenance for a very long time (Elias [1939] 2000; Mennell 1996; Strong 2002), but the current way of linking food with mass entertainment is a fairly new practice. In addition, the symbolic power of food has grown, with an increased importance of which foods, and in what quantity, are acceptable or ethical to eat. This section explores how changes in both the entertainment and symbolic value of food combine to create a food culture that is dynamic, ambiguous, and shifting.

#### Food as Entertainment

Just as the industrial processing of food expanded in scope during the post-war period, food as entertainment is not a new phenomenon, it has just expanded in scope and profundity. Details of courtly feasts designed to entertain and delight abound across kingdoms and centuries (Strong 2002). However, people no longer have to attend a Royal Court to see and eat perfect food masterpieces that they could never possibly make in their own kitchens. Now, they can go out to a restaurant and watch or read about food from the comfort of their couch.

*Eating out.* The increase of restaurants during the 19<sup>th</sup> century made fine food available to anyone who could afford it (Strong 2002). The number of restaurants continued to increase during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, resulting in an ever-increasing level of dining out (Kant

and Graubard 2004). In fact, the share of meals and snacks eaten outside the home has increased almost every year since 1939 (USDA Economic Research Service 2013a). The percent of food expenditures spent away from home has increased from 17 percent in 1939 to 50 percent in 2012 (USDA Economic Research Service 2013a). Over three quarters of meals and snacks consumed away from home are from restaurants, with 36 percent from limited-service eating places<sup>7</sup> and 42 percent from full-service restaurants<sup>8</sup> (USDA Economic Research Service 2013b).

Eating out can be due to necessity, such as simply relieving hunger while outside the home, or satisfying a business or personal obligation. However, it is important to acknowledge how eating out has become a leisure activity, bringing with it an expectation of entertainment and enjoyment (Warde 2000). Research about consumers in the United Kingdom found that "going out for a meal or entertaining friends to a meal at home were rated as the most popular [leisure activities] after watching television" (Burnett 1989:318). Consumers consider atmosphere and style in their choice of

<sup>8</sup> Full service restaurants provide food services to patrons who order and are served while seated (i.e., waiter/waitress service) and pay after eating. These establishments may provide this type of food service to patrons in combination with selling alcoholic beverages, providing carryout services, or presenting live nontheatrical entertainment (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Limited-service eating places provide food services (except snack and nonalcoholic beverage bars) where patrons generally order or select items and pay before eating. Food and drink may be consumed on premises, taken out, or delivered to the customer's location (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

restaurant, in addition to the food (Auty 1992). The dining experience begins with the general ambiance, including lighting, spaciousness, and décor (Alonso and O'Neill 2010). A study in the United States found that consumers prefer an unpretentious style in restaurants because of their "desire to use the dining experience to socialize or enjoy the experience as a 'holistic event' in a non-threatening, non-intimidating atmosphere" (Alonso and O'Neill 2010:275). Clearly, eating out is not only about the food.

In interviews with diners about why they eat out, Joanne Finkelstein (1989:19–20) finds that many people eat out because it is "fun, a convenience, a habit, an entertainment, a pleasure," and that diners will ignore or disregard eating out experiences that were not pleasurable as "being rare, circumstantial, and unfortunate." Diners will select restaurants that suit their particular purpose, such as fast or slow, ordinary or special, and will therefore mostly be satisfied with their experience because they usually get what they expect. As Alan Warde (2000:189) argues, dining out "will usually be a source of entertainment, always one of satisfaction in the sense that the diner will be the recipient of the fruits of someone else's labour, and it will often in addition be considered fair exchange, as reasonable value for money." Eating meals and snacks outside of the home is a form of entertainment, as well as sustenance, reflecting an increasing interest in food and eating, above and beyond the actual dining experience.

*Food in the media.* As entertaining as eating out can be, food as amusement has moved beyond being physically present for the meal. The rise of professional lighting, food styling, and hours spent behind the scenes to prepare one dish have increased the amount of "food porn" on television, in magazines, and in cookbooks. While "food porn" is a contentious term used more by academics than actual food professionals (McBride

2010:38), it brings to mind an idealized view of food where "we enjoy watching what we ourselves presumably cannot do." Television and mass-market publishing have brought food as entertainment into the home, bringing with it the potential ability to talk about food and eating in at least a somewhat educated and informed way, even without any actual proficiency or experience in the kitchen.

*Magazines and television.* Food magazines and food articles in general interest magazines (Longone 2001) and regional or local cookbooks (Fertel 2013) have been produced since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the inception of now-classic cooking magazines like *Gourmet, Saveur, Bon Appetit,* as well as notable public television chefs like Jacques Pépin, Julia Child, and Martin Yan. However, it was not until the expansion of the number of cable television channels in the early 1990s that there was room, and demand, for an entire channel devoted to the "niche interest" of food and cooking (Salkin 2013).

What is now known as The Food Network launched in 1993, broadcasting food and cooking shows 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Food Network broadcasts shows that cater to a multitude of special interests, from focusing on particular types of food (e.g., cupcakes or sandwiches) to types of cooking (e.g., barbecue or baking) to locations (e.g., regional specialties or combining travel with food). In addition, an increase in cooking game shows on both The Food Network and on broadcast television, including amongst amateur home cooks, has increased the general interest in food and cooking. The Food Network even began producing its own eponymous magazine in 2009 featuring its own chefs, personalities, and shows.

*Cookbooks.* In addition to magazines, specialty diet and cookbooks have flooded the market. In some cases these books are written by or endorsed by celebrity chefs or television personalities, often affiliated with the aforementioned Food Network, in order to help increase their brand recognition. Of the top 10 best-selling cookbooks as of June 29, 2014, nine could be considered "specialty" cookbooks. The cookbooks, listed in Appendix A, specialize in particular diets: three Paleo and one Vegan; on modes of cooking: outdoor or frontier cooking; or on specific foods: cakes, hamburgers, or smoothies (Publishers Weekly 2014). These specialty cookbooks "not only appeal to a particular community, they also announce both its existence and celebrate the shared identity of its audience" (Brien and Wessell 2013:6). There are now cookbooks, diet books, and food shows to address the intricacies of even the most detailed food rules. However, the vast disagreement in the guidelines presented between the competing specialty cookbooks again demonstrates the challenging issue of conflicting "expert systems" (Giddens 1991). Even amongst specialty diet cookbook authors, there is disagreement: the question of whether or not to eat "safe starches" like white rice and white potatoes has caused a schism in the Paleo diet orthodoxy (Tam 2014).

Cookbooks provide not only recipes, but also images and text that inform how we think and talk about food, and research into feminist food studies has highlighted the importance of food and cooking in the lives of women as a means for personal expression and worth (Avakian 1997; Inness 2001a; Lindenfeld 2005). Cookbook authors run the gamut from professionally trained chefs to television personalities to food bloggers, many who are women. Of the top 10 best-selling cookbooks in June 2014, women author six, men author two, one is co-authored by a woman and a man, and one has an institutional

author. The author sets the content and tone of the cookbook, and cookbooks authored by women tend to be more instruction-based, focusing on supporting the home cook, while cookbooks authored by men tend to be more egocentric, focusing on the author himself (Mitchell 2010). Cookbooks can be used as a tool to encourage men to engage in more home cooking, as a way to "dissipate the old difficulties that men, particularly, face in the kitchen" (Costa 2013:8). However, Jessamyn Neuhaus (1999:540, 2003) argues that masculine and aggressive language in cookbooks since the 1950s has signaled recipes as aimed at men to position "men as creatures of strength and action, who did not fuss about the kitchen," and to offset the stereotype of home cooking as the woman's domain. Thus, cookbooks can serve to both challenge and reinforce gender stereotypes, with food, cooking, and entertaining a way of "doing gender" (DeVault 1991; Julier 2005; West and Zimmerman 1987). However, as I discuss later, the symbolic gendered nature of food remains largely uncontested.

*Food exposé.* In addition to magazines, television shows, and cookbooks that seek to promote the enjoyment of food and cooking, media sources also seek to promote information and awareness-raising about food. Books exposing the dangers of the food production system date back to Upton Sinclair's ([1906] 2005) novel *The Jungle.* Cecelia Tichi (2004) argues that this history of muckraking has continued with contemporary books such as *Fast Food Nation* (Schlosser 2001). In addition to criticizing safety, these books, with provocative titles such as *Chew on This: Everything You Don't Want to Know about Fast Food* (Schlosser and Wilson 2006), *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite* (Kessler 2009), and *Wheat Belly: Lose the Wheat, Lose the Weight, and Find Your Path Back to Health* (Davis 2011) argue that the food

producers' intentions are suspect; that they are intentionally producing food that they know is harmful and/or addictive (Moss 2013). A new type of media, documentary films, has expanded since the mid-2000s, exposing concerns about food production, such as *Food Inc.* (Kenner 2008) and *King Corn* (Woolf 2007), as well as the way people eat, such as *SuperSize Me* (Spurlock 2004), *Forks Over Knives* (Fulkerson 2011), and *Fed Up* (Soechtig 2014). Various respondents mentioned several of the aforementioned books and documentaries, unsolicited, during interviews. This media focus on food and food exposé as popular entertainment proliferates into the common culture and affects the way that people talk and think about what food means to them.

#### Food as a Symbol

Food is a symbol, or signifier of other meanings (Lupton 1996), and as interest in food expands, so do its meanings. As a consumer good, food is not only for eating, but also for making sense of the world (Douglas 1979:62). Food becomes a way to think about the world, and about ourselves.

One aspect in which we can see food as reflecting a changing world is in terms of gender roles. The responsibility for food preparation has historically fallen mostly on the shoulders of women, with mothers and daughters taking primary responsibility for the food consumed by the family (Allen and Sachs 2007; DeVault 1991). In particular, it has been the responsibility of the mother to select the proper food for the children and family (Anving and Sellerberg 2010; Endrijonas 2001; Namie 2011). Care and domesticity, in the form of cooking, has been directly linked with notions of the "natural" feminine ideal (Graham 1983), with the ability to select and prepare food for the family as a fundamental female pursuit and the home kitchen a predominantly woman's domain

(Deutsch 2010; Gregory 2002; Inness 2001b; Little, Ilbery, and Watts 2009). However, while men have traditionally held positions of prominence in restaurant kitchens, the recent expansion of food as entertainment has helped increase men's interest in home cooking (Schuster 2011).

As women increasingly spend more hours working outside the home, and as people in general become more distracted and focused outside the home, day-to-day home food preparation becomes outsourced (Conley 2010:62). As a limited resource, taking the time to prepare elaborate meals becomes more of a treat or an indulgence as a weekend hobby, regardless of who is cooking. At the end of a busy day, the convenience of occasional fast food cannot be matched in the home kitchen. The food eaten out or brought in, then, symbolizes the outsourcing of care work and domesticity within the constraints of the fast pace and harried nature of daily life, especially on weekday evenings.

*Symbolic boundaries*. Symbolic boundaries "are conceptual distinctions that we make to categorize objects, people, practices and even time and space" (Lamont 1992:9). Symbolic boundaries are created and maintained through access to cultural resources in addition to economic capital, providing ways for groups to draw different exclusionary and inclusionary boundaries beyond the economic.

Boundaries are shaped by cultural repertoires to create rules, norms, and status symbols for specific groups to distinguish themselves from others, particularly when they do not have access to economic power (Lamont 1992, 2000). Although the boundaries are usually taken-for-granted and rooted in available resources, unlike cultural capital, boundaries can be manipulated, changed, and adjusted to meet particular social situations

and to resist domination. Food choices can be a way to draw such boundaries, by the consumption or rejection of particular foods or foodways. This can be in terms of concern about food production or moral judgment about the consumption of specific foods, such as junk food or fast food. However, the maintenance of a boundary can result in group norms, which may serve to maintain the status quo and continue subordination of the group itself (Bettie 2003; Holland and Eisenhart 1990; Lamont 1992, 2000; Wilkins 2008; Willis 1981). Thus, symbolic boundaries built around food can be supported and reinforced both by individuals and the state.

*Ethical concerns*. Ethical considerations regarding the production of food can be a source of symbolic boundaries. Ethical consumption is "people purchasing and using products and resources according not only to the personal pleasures and values they provide, but also to ideas of what is right and good, versus wrong and bad, in a moral sense" (Starr 2009:916). Ethical food purchases may be in terms of the product (vegetarian vs. omnivore), location (grocery store vs. food co-op), or production (organic vs. conventional). However, the decision to buy ethically is not only a question of personal morals or beliefs, as Martha Starr contends, but it is also social. Ethical purchasing decisions are not driven by "a universal sense of 'right and good,' but by particular issues that have gained public attention" (Johnston, Szabo, and Rodney 2011). In addition, ethical consumption is a social act: people are more likely to buy ethically when others do as well (Starr 2009).

The motivation for ethical consumption also matters in remaining within symbolic boundaries. According to Jesse McEntee (2010:786), the local food movement can be divided into two groups, depending on their motivation for eating local. The

"contemporary local" seeks to support local farmers and encourage food purchasing on a local level, while the "traditional local" seeks to procure fresh and affordable food. While both have similar goals - to eat foods that are grown and/or produced locally - they do not have the same ideological convictions supporting them. Thus, while people may have the desire to support local sustainability due to their environmental and community concerns, they have other options, unlike someone growing their own, and possibly only, affordable source of vegetables.

Thus, motivation helps to draw a boundary between people with similar intentions, and that boundary is reinforced through the food decisions that they make. When motivations are weak or impersonal, people can move fairly easily from one side of the boundary of ethical consumption to the other. However, when motivations are strong, so is the boundary; people tend not to stray from ethical consumption. For example, people who choose to be vegetarians for ethical reasons have stronger conviction towards vegetarianism than do people who are motivated by health reasons (Hoffman et al. 2013). *Junk food consumption*. One type of food, junk food, is widely considered to be unacceptable or unworthy to eat. Not only do specific foods, as consumer goods, become classified as more or less worthy, but so do the groups who consume those foods. The classification of some foods as "junk" food, and their consumption can serve as a continuing distinction, either reinforcing or challenging other symbolic boundaries.

There is no standard definition of junk food; as one of my respondents said, "anything can be made unhealthy." Junk food is typically conceptualized in popular discourse as food and drinks that are high in fat, sugar, and salt (Kessler 2009; Moss 2013). Whereas fresh and natural foods are deemed to be healthy, highly processed and

artificial foods are considered to be unhealthy and impure (Griffith 2004; Gusfield 1992). However, it is important to remember that even seemingly natural foods can be transformed into a junk food through breading, frying, and dipping. Fast food and soda are often held as the most problematic, as well as symbolic, junk foods, particularly in the United States (Fantasia 1995).

For most people, the question of whether a food is healthy or unhealthy is not a simple yes/no answer. Most people think of food along a continuum of "good foods" to "ok foods" to "bad foods." Issues of quantity and quality of the foods in question also blur the line between healthy and unhealthy. Whether an apple grown using conventional methods is "junkier" than an organic apple is a matter of definition and ethical boundary making, even while the standards themselves for organic produce remain ambiguous (Rigby and Bown 2007).

As a specific category of junk food, the consumption of fast food occurs at all levels of society, but the meanings attached to fast food consumers in different classes vary. Research shows that there is either no difference in fast food consumption by income (Fryer and Ervin, 2013) or that consumption of fast food is highest among "middle and upper middle class" consumers defined as earning between \$40,000 and \$60,000 (Kim and Leigh 2011) or higher incomes over \$75,000 (Dugan 2013). The false stereotype of a heavy fast food consumer is a person from a low socio-economic status (Goody 1982), when in fact people with low incomes (less than \$30,000 per year) are the *least* likely to eat fast food weekly (Dugan 2013). However, the stereotype of a fast food eater as younger does seem to hold true. McDonald's own marketing research has found that 77 percent of sales come from their most frequent consumers, "super heavy users"

who eat at McDonald's three to five times a week and are typically male and 18 to 34 years old (Fortin 2009; Weinstein 1999:122).

In addition to using the type of food to draw symbolic boundaries, the quantity of food consumed can also be a way of discerning worth and value. A "civilizing of appetite" has occurred, wherein "concern with 'weight-watching' is very widespread" (Mennell 1996:323). Gluttony becomes unacceptable, accompanied by explicit judgment of people who either do, or look like they do, eat "too much" (Boero 2013; Saguy 2013). McPhail, et. al (2011) found that Canadian teenagers use health morals related to fast food to engage in boundary making work of being a "healthy" or "good" person across class lines. People who eat too much, specifically too much junk or fast food, are on the wrong side of the symbolic boundary and are thus deemed less worthy, regardless of their class status.

*Influencing transgressors.* One way to deal with people who do not eat and drink within acceptable boundaries is to try to influence their consumption of specific foods or drinks. Policies and campaigns can encourage the consumption of desirable foods, or alternately, discourage the consumption of unacceptable foods, either through restriction or taxation. Whether the influence is towards the positive or negative, the consumption of certain products is stigmatized.

*Encouragement.* Another way to police a food-related symbolic boundary is to offer a reward to encourage the desired behavior. As an example, to encourage the ethical consumption of locally grown and produced foods, some communities establish local food ordinances (Shirley 2013). At the consumer level, organic producers engage in marketing campaigns to emphasize the health benefits and quality of organic food (Paul

and Rana 2012). In terms of sales, supermarkets compete to appear the most "green" in order to attract consumers interested in ethical consumption (Burch, Lyons, and Lawrence 2001). In addition, expanding access to and the availability of fresh and whole foods can be a way to encourage consumers to make desired food choices. *Restriction.* An alternate way to police a food boundary is through punishment: to impose restrictions or penalties for consuming the undesirable food. As an example of a restriction, in 2012, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg proposed banning the sale of sugary drinks larger than 16 ounces (Grynbaum 2012). This proposal gained significant press in the national media, sparked a sometimes-mocking national discourse, and was often mentioned by my respondents during interviews. Local courts twice invalidated the drink size limit in 2013 (Grynbaum 2013), and the New York Court of Appeals upheld those decisions that the city was overstepping its authority by limiting sizes on sugary drinks (Grynbaum 2014).

*Taxes.* In addition to a restriction on serving sizes, multiple attempts have been made to use taxation as a motivation to change behavior (Shughart 1997). Five states, including Arkansas, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia, along with the city Chicago, currently impose a small "sin" tax on retailers for soda, and other localities have attempted to restrict the consumption of sugary drinks through taxation. Two California ballot initiatives were rejected in 2012: in the city of Richmond, a license fee to sell soda (Brown 2012) and in the city of El Monte, a 1-cent tax per ounce of soda, which had the explicit intention of the city council to raise revenue; the health benefits were just an added bonus (Allen 2012). A 2014 ballot initiative to tax soda passed in Berkeley, California, while a similar initiative failed in San Francisco (Aliferis 2014; Ferris 2014).

The broadest policies instituted to date have both been outside of the United States. In July 2010, Denmark instituted a 25 percent sugar tax on ice cream, chocolate, sweets, and soft drinks. An additional "fat tax" on all foods with more than 2.3 percent saturated fat went into effect in October 2011. Both taxes were highly contested within Denmark, particularly by the food industries, which predicted the cost to producers of over 1 billion kroner (~\$162 million) (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service 2011). The predicted negative consequences of the taxes, however, did not have time to occur; both the sugar tax and fat tax were rescinded in 2012 due to a loss of tax revenue to the state ("A Fat Chance" 2012). To date, Mexico is the only municipality to successfully implement a tax on high calorie foods, chewing gum, and soda in 2013 (Wilkinson 2013). Stigma. Attempts such as these to influence what foods people eat, either through encouragement or discouragement, may seem like simple fiscal policies, but they all come with a moral connotation. In the case of restriction or taxation, the state determines what foods are acceptable and unacceptable to eat, thereby establishing symbolic boundaries of value and worth. And if one chooses to eat unacceptable foods, one must pay the financial cost and/or the social price of stigmatization.

A similar example is the social consequence of policies to discourage tobacco usage, which is a marked stigmatization and social unacceptability of smokers as a group (Alamar 2006; Nuehring and Markle 1974; Stuber, Galea, and Link 2009; Viscusi 1995). Likewise, studies of the framing of the "obesity epidemic" as a failure of individual responsibility draw a distinct boundary between people who eat healthy food and those who eat junk food (Adler and Stewart 2009; Saguy 2013). Even nicknaming an excise tax as a "sin tax," or an excise tax on junk food as a "fat tax," stigmatizes people by highlighting "something usual and bad about the moral status of the signifier" (Goffman [1963] 1986:1). Admittedly, even the key phrase in this study, the widely used term "junk food" to describe highly processed and fast food, itself includes a level of judgment.

As food increasingly means more than simply sustenance, multiple meanings and definitions emerge and become reinforced, and those meanings can influence the solutions groups envision for perceived problems (Dobbin 1993). Using food as fodder for exposé can both create and reinforce a consumer's ethical considerations about their purchases. Similarly, using food as entertainment turns food into something that must amuse and provide a compelling story. People begin to talk about different foods, cooking techniques, and restaurants like the subject of a favorite television show or movie, in part because food has actually become the topic of television shows and movies. Not only do the foods people eat serve as ways to distinguish between groups, but so do the food entertainments that they do (or do not) enjoy, and the way that they can, and do, talk about food. As some foods are deemed more acceptable, other foods become burdened with the label of unacceptable, which may result in a restriction or a tax. Consumers must navigate all of these varying definitions within a food culture that is dynamic, ambiguous, and shifting, requiring them to create their own ways of individually experiencing food.

# MICRO-LEVEL CHANGES IN THE FOOD EXPERIENCE

Under conditions of a rapidly changing food system, as well as a dual experience of an expanding of acceptable food options and a strengthening of boundaries between different types of food, people must create their own micro-level understandings about

food. Not only must they make choices about what they eat, but they also must work through the emotions that may become intertwined with food. They must take their understandings of what they *should* eat, as well as what they actually *do* eat, to maintain and re-create their own reflexive eating identities in alignment with both.

#### Identity Theory

One way to explore the relationship between the broader social structure and the individual self is in terms of identity (Stryker 1980). As Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke (2000:285) discuss, the identity theory of Structural Symbolic Interactionism has followed two strands, either concentrating on how social structures affect the structure of the self, which then affect social behavior, or concentrating on the "internal dynamics of self-processes as these affect social behavior." Eating identities can be seen from both sides; a combination of the importance of external structural roles as well as internal self-conceptions.

*External structural roles.* On the structural side of identity theory, "social roles are expectations attached to positions occupied in networks of relationships; identities are internalized role expectations" (Stryker and Burke 2000:286). Identities relate to the roles held in society, which vary throughout the life course. As one moves from childhood to adolescence to adulthood through the experience of adult-role transitions, these new roles and relationships change and create new identities. New identities become frameworks for conceiving of oneself in relation to oneself, as well as in relation to others. In this respect, the self-perception of an adult eating identity is forged through adult-role transitions and differential ways people are thought of and think of themselves after experiencing the transitions (Bisogni et al. 2002). For example, cultural and media

expectations may allow adolescents much more leeway in eating junk food and/or fast food, whereas the same behavior by adults may be frowned upon. Similarly, becoming a parent or caretaker might inspire one to be a good eating role model (Silva and Pugh 2010), or taking on the social role of a foodie might motivate one to learn about the different varieties of, and uses for, new and trendy foods (Johnston 2010; de Solier 2013). *Internal mechanisms.* On the internal mechanisms side of identity theory, people must engage in "self-verification," where they "bring situationally perceived self-relevant meanings into agreement with the identity standard," or the "set of (culturally prescribed) meanings held by the individual which define his or her role identity in a situation" (Stryker and Burke 2000:287). In this respect, identities relate to self-perception. Rather than being related directly to social roles culturally considered "acceptable" by the outside, identity work is more of an internal process. Regardless of one's position in society, or network, a healthy eating identity, for example, is forged through personal feelings of responsibility and consciousness. Self-perceptions are inherently reflexive rather than imposed from the outside social structure. In this case, a person's choices may be driven by their own desire to feel good about themselves and think of themselves as healthy.

Although eating identities can be seen as a combination of both strands, under conditions of dynamic modernity (Giddens 1991), internal mechanisms become more powerful in identity work. As external structural roles become amorphous and decoupled from traditional rules, the feedback one receives from one's own internal mechanisms, or self-perceptions become stronger. This self-perception can be reinforced or negated by the feedback received — or perceived — from family, friends, and peers, demonstrating

the social and relational nature of food and eating (Coveney 2000; Ilmonen 2011; Julier 2013; Mennell 1996; Milner 2004; Pugh 2009; Stead et al. 2011). The demand for reflexivity results in an ongoing and dynamic process of creating and maintaining an identity, in this case an eating identity, which reflects how individuals see themselves, and others, as eaters.

#### Eating Identities

Food has previously been linked with social identity (Bisogni et al. 2002), but for the purposes of this project, I am considering an "eating identity" to be the combination of both what people do with and believe about food. Thus, a person's eating identity is a function of the foods that they eat, as well as how they talk about food.

*Expansion of "acceptable" foods.* Whether cooked at home or ordered in, the number of types of foods available is staggering. This is the challenge of the "omnivore's dilemma": humans must choose from a countless potential of foods (Pollan 2006). Without set rules about what to eat, people are left to find their own way through a multitude of prevailing diets with often starkly contrasting paradigms. Consumers face an increasing challenge and confusion to know what they should eat, as well as an increasing ability to pick and choose what works for them. In nutrition circles, the concept of bio-individuality argues that no one diet works for everyone (Lipski 2012), but this flexibility means that consumers must constantly search from an infinite number of food combinations for the one that works *for them.* So, while Americans spend over \$60 billion in the diet and health industry each year (Williams 2013), confusion reigns about which foods are either acceptable or unworthy to eat.

*What to eat.* As famed 19<sup>th</sup> century gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1854:25) said, "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are." This famous quote highlights the relationship between what people eat and their identities, but the question remains how people decide what to eat. Much of the nutrition literature (Bisogni et al. 2002; Conner and Armitage 2006; Furst et al. 1996) focuses on developing conceptual models of food choice that present consumers as rational and choice-driven. In contrast, much of the sociological literature admits that while people may have food rules (Counihan 1992), their everyday food choices are more relational, dependent on context and situation (Ilmonen 2011; Mennell 1996). People draw upon a variety of understandings to make sense of their world, develop rules, and direct their eating behavior.

*Food rules*. Rules about food are a way that people can make order of the world around them (Counihan 1992:55), and include both foods that are included, as well as those that are refused. In some cases, the rules are temporal, such as only eating fruit in the morning or not eating meat on Fridays, or locational, such as not eating meat outside of the home or eating whatever you desire while on vacation. The rules may also align with a specific medical diagnosis, or with a self-perceived food intolerance (Moore 2014). Food rules can be loose, allowing for flexibility and variation, or tight, requiring strict adherence. The strength of the rules may also vary depending on the particular food in question, such as junk food, or on the specific situational context. Food rules are not unconscious habits; people are *aware* of their rules, and they follow them (Ilmonen 2011:115), or as I found, many at least try to.

*Food choices.* In general, important predictors of food choices include education (Bere et al. 2008; Counihan 1992) and gender (Coveney 2000; Kim and Leigh 2011; Wansink, Cheney, and Chan 2003). Specifically, studies conducted with a gendered perspective of food consumption have shown decidedly different consumption patterns between women and men in terms of eating in alignment with one's ethnic identity (Counihan 2005), eating junk food (Counihan 1992; Namie 2011; Taylor 2011), or eating local foods (Little et al. 2009). In addition, food can be an expression of ethnic heritage (Counihan 2005; Inness 2001b; Julier 2005; Zafar 1999).

Although people have food rules, and for the most part do follow those rules, their actual choices do not always line up. This gap between what they say and what they do (Hays 1996) may be due to external circumstances of access or due to internal emotions and experiences. The availability of particular foods in the local foodscape may constrain or expand the options people have for what they actually choose, regardless of their food rules.

*Foodscapes*. The process of deciding what to eat takes place in particular foodscapes. Gisele Yasmeen's (2008:525) articulation of a foodscape "emphasizes the spatialization of foodways and the interconnections between people, food, and places. 'Foodscape,' drawn from 'landscape,' is a term used to describe the process of viewing [a] place in which food is used as a lens to bring into focus selected human relations." In her research about foodies, Josée Johnston (2010:3) also uses the term "foodscape," but to describe only the "cultural spaces of gourmet food."

Like Yasmeen, I consider the importance of both the overall American foodscape, as well as more regional and local foodscapes. Unlike Johnston, instead of focusing on

only the culture of gourmet foods, I emphasize both the structural and cultural spaces of a broad range of foods available from which to choose. Thus, I am more in alignment with Norah MacKendrick's (2014:16) commentary about the importance of including "institutional arrangements, cultural spaces, and discourses that mediate our relationship with food" in the concept of a foodscape. I use the concept of a foodscape to include the combination of both the food system, or how food is produced, distributed, and sold, *and* the food culture, or how food is thought and talked about.

Foodscapes are both nested and dynamic. They are nested because local foodscapes exist within regional, as well as the larger national American foodscape. They are dynamic because foodscapes at all levels are continuously changing and evolving. For example, one aspect of the growing Food Justice movement is increasing access to locally grown and healthy food in local foodscapes, in opposition to foods highly processed in the industrial food system across the national American foodscape (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010).

*Availability*. The availability of fast food versus fresh food is often cited as influencing food selection (Fantasia 1995; Kim and Leigh 2011). Lower socioeconomic areas without easy and local access to grocery stores, or "food deserts," tend to have a high concentration of fast food restaurants, making residents particularly at risk for food-related diseases (Kwate 2008; Rose and Richards 2004; Walker et al. 2011; Whelan et al. 2002). As previously stated, there is either no difference in fast food by income (Fryer and Ervin 2013) or that fast food consumption is highest amongst middle and upper middle class people (Kim and Leigh 2011) and upper class people (Dugan 2013). However, fast food and junk food consumption is often portrayed as a predominantly

lower class activity, a perception that is reinforced by availability. Although an admittedly low-cost, convenient, and high-caloric density option for people with limited means, the convenience and accessibility of fast food are the driving forces for people who can afford to choose other foods (Furst et al. 1996).

The accessibility of fresh foods in many local foodscapes has increased with the growing number of farmers markets across the nation from 1,755 in 1994 to 8,144 in 2013 (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2013). Approximately one-quarter of farmers markets accept SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits as payment, and the program continues to expand to other farmers markets (USDA Food and Nutrition Service 2014).

*Food emotions.* In some cases, the emotional aspect of food and eating may influence food choices and affirm or override their food rules. Norbert Elias ([1939] 2000:60) describes a "civilizing process" since the 16th century, resulting in an increasing level of control over emotions and impulses, along with an increasing level of shame about bodily functions, including eating. This regulation, and more importantly self-regulation, becomes moral value and extends to food and eating. A progressive civilizing of appetite has resulted in an expectation that individuals should be able to control their own eating. People are expected, and expect themselves, to live up to certain standards of healthy eating. Having a civilized body is important, one that is "tightly contained, consciously managed, subject to continual self-surveillance as well as surveillance on the part of others" (Lupton 1996:22). However, people do not always control their eating, and often experience guilt, or "the anxiety produced by the fear of transgression: where the thoughts or activities of the individual do not match up to the expectations of a normative sort" (Giddens 1991:64). Research has shown the highest guilt-inducing foods include chocolate cake (Kuijer and Boyce 2014), potato chips (Wansink et al. 2003), and fast food (Taylor 2011). Some consumers perceive fast food and sodas as addictive (Sanders 2009), creating an emotional desire that can overwhelm even well-established food rules. But for others, eating fast food can create positive emotions of connection or nostalgia.

As Rick Fantasia (1995:204) highlights, "fast food is identified abroad as a distinctively 'American' commodity; its cultural representations are likely to be strongly suggestive of what is viewed abroad as a distinctly American aesthetic, way of life, or experience." The growth of suburbs, as well as changes in demographic and inter-state transportation are inextricably linked with the growth of fast food across the nation (Jakle 1999). Fast food is defined as "American" food, with strongly held beliefs about its place in both popular culture and personal nostalgia.

Food can both be a source of and trigger for memories (Lupton 1996:32; Sutton 2001). A meal or particular food can create positive or negative memories from its flavors, textures, or even its visual presentation. In addition, eating, or just thinking about, certain foods can evoke memories and long-forgotten emotions. Memories of special occasion and holiday foods are tightly linked in people's memories (Sutton 2001). Everyday foods, as well as junk foods, can bring up strong memories, which are highly social (Sutton 2008). Many of my adult interviewees recall with pleasure eating Happy Meals and playing at McDonald's as children, although they would not choose to eat at McDonald's as an adult. Thus, memories of childhood trips to fast food restaurants can elicit at the same time fond memories, as well as disgust. With hindsight, definitions and memories of junk food vary and can be changeable.

In addition to the typical examples of eating fast food and soda as children, candy can also be a strong trigger for memories and emotions, as candy and childhood are so intertwined (Dusselier 2001; James 1982; Mintz 1985). Memories and current experiences of eating candy make it a unique food product. Although candy may not be defended as healthy, some see defining candy as bad as like attacking childhood itself (Clark 2005). The memories of foods eaten in the past and the emotions that memories attach to specific foods or particular situations can be a strong influence on food choices, sometimes not in alignment with current food rules.

#### CONCLUSION

Considering the importance of external social roles and internal mechanisms on one's eating identity is complicated by a changing food system and dynamic food culture. While considerations of food being used to explicitly create rules and identities can be found amongst connoisseurs (Strong 2011) or foodies (Johnston 2010; de Solier 2013), food is less explored as a way to create an identity amongst people who do not necessarily embrace that external social role,<sup>9</sup> revealing a gap in the literature that this project seeks to address.

As Isabelle de Solier (2013) argues, food and identity have expanded beyond macro-social identities, such as race, class, or gender, into micro-identities. However, I contend that this expansion into everyday micro-identities and "internal mechanisms" of self-verification (Stryker and Burke 2000) occurs precisely *because* structural and cultural changes have required it. For foodies or connoisseurs, it is a choice to be

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> I did not specifically include or exclude foodies in my sample. However, none of my respondents identified themselves as or used the term "foodie."

interested in food and eating. But even people for whom "foodie" is not a social role to which they aspire, must engage in a self-verification process to ensure that their perception of themselves as an eater aligns with the identity standard.

As the food system changes under conditions of dynamic modernity, conflicting expert systems create a multi-faceted food culture, wherein people are forced to create their own identities and make their own decisions about what food they eat. The way people think about and talk about food changes, as does the way that they experience food. These changing conditions affect everyone, not just people who consciously create an identity as a connoisseur or foodie. Instead, food is used more broadly to create different reflexive eating identities, which provide varying levels of ease or conflict for people as they navigate the changing American foodscape.

# **CHAPTER 3 - DATA AND METHODS**

The study's primary data collection includes in-depth qualitative interviews with adult consumers to examine their impressions, beliefs, and behaviors about food, eating, and potential policies to influence junk food consumption. Respondents were encouraged to tell their own stories about food and eating for a deeper understanding of their assumptions, cultural logics, and sometimes conflicts between what they believe and say and what they actually do (Hays 1996; Zukin and Maguire 2004).

I utilize ethnographic content analysis in order to engage in an ongoing process of reflexive interaction with the interview responses rather than a strict coding scheme, using "constant comparison for discovering emergent patterns, emphases, and themes" (Altheide 1996:13). Qualitative analysis of narrative responses within the framework of demographic and consumption differences provides a broader picture of the respondents, as well as allows for deeper understandings of patterns and clusters of experience. Quantitative analysis of national, state, and local indicator data helps provide context and an empirical foundation for changes in the foodscape, as well as prevalence of food-related diseases.

### POPULATION AND SAMPLE

A battle between "competing ideologies" (Swidler 1986:274) of health versus freedom of choice, the sanctity of the individual versus the good of the state, and the cost of health versus the cost of pleasure occurs in the arena of food and eating. As consumers are key players in these negotiations, it is critical to include an analysis of their cultural logics. Because everyone must eat for survival, the broadest population for this study includes everyone. However, due to considerations of scale and feasibility, the project focuses on

a specific subset of adult consumers over the age of 18: those with at least some college education who live in a food-focused location.

Research has shown that education is an important predictor of food choices for oneself (Andrews, Netemeyer, and Burton 2009; Bere et al. 2008; Counihan 1992; Moorman and Matulich 1993), and one's family (Fernández-Alvira et al. 2013). Thus, all respondents have at least some college education in an attempt to ensure at least a basic level of nutritional understanding and also to approximate social class. Although nonprobability sampling does not provide a statistically representative sample, quota sampling ensures that relevant categories of people are included in the sample (Neuman 2003).

The project's sampling frame includes college-educated adults over 18 living in Davis, California and Charlottesville, Virginia, two college towns with vibrant and popular farmers markets and local food movements. While there is more to food choices than just economic resources, we cannot ignore the fact that money provides easier access to fresh and healthy food. Although my respondents were deliberately sampled to approximate middle and upper-middle class consumers, several of my respondents with limited financial means explicitly refuse to compromise on their food choices. However, this refusal could be a reflection of privilege due to their education, e.g. their class, in that they have the social and cultural capital to choose whether or not to compromise. Similarly, people with robust financial means have the ability to select food based on what is cheap, fast, and easy, if they want to. But by focusing on people who, in theory, have the financial resources and physical opportunity to consume high quality food, I am able to explore the meanings created by affluent people who have easy access to any food that they might want. In the end, this study is a "careful observation of how culture, social relations, and economic processes interact" (Zelizer 2011:400).

## **Research Locations**

My respondents are split almost evenly between the two research locations, with 40 interviews (52%) taking place in and around Davis and the remaining 37 (48%) interviews occurring in and around Charlottesville. Although neither Davis nor Charlottesville could be described as "Anytown, USA," an explicit goal in theoretically selecting these two sites is to have two food-focused locations with a high level of availability of fresh and local foods, demonstrated through long-standing and highly attended farmers markets, as well as strong and explicit local food movements. I intentionally wanted to talk to people who have easy access to a wide range of foods, both locally grown and highly processed.

*Farmers markets*. The Davis Farmers Market started in 1975 as the first farmers market in California, among one of the first in the nation, and currently runs on Saturday mornings and Wednesday afternoons year-round in Central Park. During the summer months, the Wednesday afternoon market becomes more of an early-evening family event, "Picnic in the Park," including additional prepared food vendors and a live band. The Davis Farmers Market also runs two auxiliary markets, on the University of California, Davis campus and at the local Sutter Davis Hospital (Brennan et al. 2012). The farmers market is a weekly social event, described as

...a market in any town where the public good is put to the use of the people, where the surrounding soil is fertile and worked, and where people of different faiths and purposes on the planet are willing to slow down, gather together, and shop while they swap the news. (Brennan et al. 2012:21)

The Charlottesville City Market, established in 1972, precedes the Davis market, but has a more limited schedule, running only on Saturdays from April to November (Ireland 2014). The Charlottesville Farmers Market also runs smaller satellite markets in various parks around the area on different days of the week, but only from May to September, including "Farmers in the Park," a growers-only market. Due to a shorter growing season and more inclement winter weather, during December, the City Market becomes the "Holiday Market," with more emphasis on gifts and decorations for the holidays.

I was able to informally observe farmers market activities in Davis (2011-2013) and Charlottesville (2013-14). Both markets are heavily attended on a weekly basis, varying with the weather changes. Although the Davis Farmers Market occurs year-round, the cooler and rainy winter months (December to February) are decidedly smaller. The different physical locations of the markets provide some of the biggest differences, as the Charlottesville City Market is located in a hilly parking lot, while the Davis Farmers Market is located under a permanent and dedicated structure in a large flat park. However, both markets seem to utilize their physical locations well, with a wide variety of vendors in every possible space, and both markets accept SNAP (Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Benefits) tokens for purchases. In both cities, the farmers market is a core element of social, commercial, and food activity; a place to enjoy local people, as well as local produce and products.

*Local food hubs.* In addition to vibrant farmers market scenes, both Davis and Charlottesville are cultivating informal identities as 'local food hubs,' with restaurants in both towns focusing on using local produce, meats, and beverages such as beer and wine

(Bizjak 2008; Ireland 2014). In addition, the California state capital of Sacramento, located adjacent to Davis, has recently embarked on a formal identity campaign as the "Farm to Fork Capital of America," with regional events, tours, workshops, and a spotlight at the 2014 California State Fair (Pierleoni 2014). While the higher cost of local and/or organic food came up in several interviews, my intention of selecting these locations is to bracket the issue of availability. If someone wants to seek out fresh, healthy, and local food, it can be found in both of these cities, even on a limited budget. Although these two cities have similar local foodscapes, they also meet the requirement of research locations with varying structural and behavioral characteristics and racial and socioeconomic demographics, as described in the next sections.

*Structural and behavioral characteristics*. According to the *USDA Food Environment Atlas* (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2011), the counties in which Davis (Yolo County) and Charlottesville (Albemarle County) reside exhibit several similarities in food-related indicators, but also several distinct differences. Both counties have almost identical levels of per capita fruit and vegetable consumption (56.3 pounds in Yolo vs. 56.0 in Albemarle), empirically supporting my sampling based on the level of access to local produce and focus on fresh food. Both counties also have similar levels of per capita soda consumption (56.0 gallons in Yolo vs. 63.0 in Albemarle), fast food restaurants per capita (0.65 restaurants in Yolo vs. 0.58 in Albemarle), and fast-food restaurant sales (\$761.45 in Yolo vs. \$721.82 in Albemarle). However, the two counties differ in terms of percentages of adults who are obese (27.2% in Yolo vs. 23.9% in Albemarle), or diagnosed with diabetes (6.7% in Yolo vs. 8.6% in Albemarle). Interestingly, the proportion of obese adults is higher in Yolo County, but the percentage of adults with diabetes is lower. This hints at the problematic nature of conflating obesity and foodrelated illnesses, such as diabetes (Boero 2013; Henderson et al. 2009; Moffat 2010; Saguy and Almeling 2008; Taylor 2011). The two counties fall into the same (lowest) category of heart disease mortality rate for adults over 35 years old: between 122.5 and 306.2 per 100,000 people (Centers for Disease Control 2014).

*Socioeconomic and ethnic characteristics.* Comparing the two cities directly, Davis has a larger population (66,205 people) compared to Charlottesville (44,349 people), as well as a higher median household income (\$61,535 compared to \$44,535 in Charlottesville) (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). Similarly, a larger percentage of adults in Davis (69.5%) have a Bachelor's degree compared with 48.1 percent of adults in Charlottesville. In addition to differences in income and education, Davis and Charlottesville also differ in terms of racial diversity (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Both have similar percentages of white residents (65% in Davis, 69% in Charlottesville). The African American population is larger in Charlottesville (19%) compared to Davis (2%), but both the Asian (22%) and Latino (12%) populations in Davis are larger than in Charlottesville (6% Asian, and 5% Latino).

*Research location comparison.* In summary, as shown in Table 1, these two areas have key similarities in terms of the foodscape and food consumption, but marked differences in terms of select food-related diseases and demographics.<sup>10</sup> While this variation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> My sample admittedly does not accurately reflect the racial and ethnic make-up of my research locations. However, among my sample, the only concept that differed by race/ethnicity is the Logic of Heritage, discussed in Chapter 6. It is likely that stronger differences would have emerged with a more ethnically diverse sample.

highlights that the relationship between food, eating, and food-related diseases may be mediated by other demographic characteristics, these two research locations provide an interesting backdrop for discussions about food and eating.

	YOLO COUNTY, CA	ALBEMARLE COUNTY, VA
Fast-Food restaurants per capita	.65	.58
Fast-Food restaurant sales	\$761.45	\$721.82
Fruit-Veg consumption per capita (pounds)	56.3	56.0
Soda consumption per capita (gallons)	56	63
% Adult diabetes	6.7%	8.6%
% Adult obesity	27.2%	23.9%
Heart Disease death rates, 2008-2010 Adults, Age 35+ <sup>11</sup>	122.5-306.2	122.5-306.2
	DAVIS, CA	CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA
Population (2013 estimate)	66,205	44,349
Median household income (2008-2012)	\$61,535	\$44,535
% BA or higher (age 25+)	68.4%	48.1%

Table 1 – Research Location Comparison, By County And City

# Recruitment

Interviewees were recruited in Davis and Charlottesville using purposeful sampling, in that the selection of "particular types of cases for in-depth investigation" (Neuman 2003:213) was to gain "insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Age-adjusted average annual rates per 100,000.

a sample to a population" (Patton 2004:40). I was interested in talking to people who knew at least something about food, were willing to talk about food, and had a wide range of views about food (Rubin 2012:61-62). This was done by using colorful images of different foods on the recruitment flyer and postcards, along with the title "Twinkies or Tofu" in large letters. This title was intentionally provocative, and several respondents commented on how the flyer caught their eye and they immediately came down squarely on one side or the other. In an attempt to attract people with a wide variety of eating behaviors, the flyer was modified for the last two months of recruitment to include more stereotypical junk foods, although this change did not seem to impact the type or number of respondents recruited. By agreeing to the interview, respondents were likely to be people interested in talking about food for themselves and their families (Bisogni et al. 2002; Furst et al. 1996; Johnson et al. 2011). However, I did speak to people with different levels of interest in food. Some respondents participated because they love and are interested in food and eating, but many others are not particularly food-focused. Regardless of their level of interest in food and eating prior to the interview, every respondent answered each question thoughtfully, often telling lengthy stories about different foods and the contexts in which they eat them.

Interviewees were solicited using the aforementioned recruitment flyers and postcards handed out and posted in public places, such as cafes, restaurants, hair salons, public bulletin boards, and on telephone poles at busy pedestrian intersections. No one I knew personally was interviewed, but my own friends and acquaintances referred a few interviewees to the study. In addition, a handful of the interviewees were referred by their friends who had also completed the interview, but to reduce the risk of creating an

entire sample from a network of similar people who are not representative of the general public, no more than one person from each seed interview was interviewed so as to not become repetitious (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981:157). For example, one respondent, Molly, described her group of friends in Davis as all eating the same "severe" way that she does, so I decided not to seek referrals to other possible respondents from her, because again, the goal was to hear from people with a wide range of views about food. Recruitment ended when I had reached an overall sense of how a range of adult consumers talk about food and eating (completeness), as well as when I did not hear much that was new from each additional respondent (saturation) (Rubin 2012:63).

## **IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS**

The final analysis included 77 in-depth ethnographic interviews, which took place during 2012 and 2013. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, and all but three were in public spaces, such as coffeehouses, restaurants, offices, or parks. All of the respondents, listed by pseudonym in Appendix B, were engaged, interested, and took care with their responses. Several respondents mentioned throughout the conversation that the interview raised questions in their own minds that they would have to think about later, and a handful of interviewees contacted me with unsolicited emails after the interview with follow-up thoughts.

#### Interview Protocols

All interview protocols were developed in consultation with the research literature, as well as with faculty members. Protocols were pilot-tested in 2012, and all protocols were

reviewed and approved by the University of Virginia Institutional Review Board (IRB-SBS #2012-0179-00).<sup>12</sup>

*Pre-interview information sheet.* Prior to the interview, respondents completed a short survey with questions regarding demographics, their smoking status, political views and voting behavior, and their recent consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks, fast food, and foods that *they* consider to be junk food. Responses on the information sheet helped classify respondents according to their general consumption patterns, as well as helped to provide context for the in-depth interview responses. The Pre-Interview Information Sheet is included in Appendix C.

*Interview guide and analysis*. In-depth semi-structured interviews included questions regarding understandings, attitudes, and behaviors around food, specifically junk food. The interview questions began by probing responses from the Pre-Interview Information Sheet, specifically about the foods that the respondent ate that *they* thought were junk food. Questions explored definitions of junk food and healthy food, typical eating habits and how they came about, what the respondent ate as a child, as well as an assessment of a hypothetical person who eats a lot of junk food on a regular basis. The interview also

<sup>12</sup> All respondents signed and dated a written Informed Consent Agreement, and verbally agreed to have the interviews recorded and transcribed verbatim. All identifying details, other than state of residence, have been changed to protect respondent's identities, and all names are pseudonyms self-selected by the respondent, reflecting their preferred gender and ethnic identity. Any reference to symptoms or illnesses, whether medically diagnosed or not, were voluntarily self-revealed. I am not a medical professional, and make no claims of diagnosis.

explored thoughts about possible interventions to change people's eating behaviors, specifically what the government could do to influence the foods that people buy and consume. Several questions also addressed tobacco consumption and excise taxes; those results are reported elsewhere (Darling 2014). Appendix D presents the final Interview Guide.

Overall, the general approaches of Grounded Theory Method guided my coding, memo-writing, analysis, and writing processes (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss [1967] 1999). From the start, I created interview-specific memos as soon as possible after each interview, recording first impressions, thoughts, and contextual details about the respondent and the interview itself. These interview-specific memos and observations were invaluable in identifying patterns, and in simply recollecting each of the interviews as the analysis progressed. I also created thematic memos in order to summarize conceptual categories as I noticed connections and patterns from conducting the verbal interviews. I augmented or refocused these memos, as needed, when additional interviews provided new insights and tested my initial categories. These thematic memos became the foundation of my initial formal coding scheme, allowing me to further refine and retest my conceptual categories with analysis of the full transcripts.

Once all 77 interviews were completed, verbatim interview transcriptions were compiled and coded using NVivo qualitative analysis software. I engaged in reflexive and iterative coding, allowing key themes and concepts to emerge from the interviews themselves, with a progressive focusing towards specific variables and codes (Chambliss and Schutt 2013). After a first pass coding using the baseline coding scheme established from my initial memos, I reviewed the transcripts repeatedly for additional categories and coding, and to identify new and emergent ideas.

Codes were applied at the sentence or paragraph-level to include as much detail from the respondent's own words as possible; quotes included herein are verbatim from these transcripts. Applicable quotations for each code were reviewed both in aggregate for all respondents, as well as among subsets of respondents, as appropriate. As an example, responses coded as regarding so-called "guilty pleasures" were markedly different depending on the respondent's eating identity. In addition, I explored differences among demographic categories traditionally of interest to sociologists, such as age, gender, race, and education, within the transcripts. The next section provides a complete description of the key variables included in the analysis.

# PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

In recruiting interview respondents, I sought a diverse set of education levels, occupations, genders, ages, and parental statuses.<sup>13</sup> The 77 interviewees are almost evenly split between the two location sites, 52 percent living in California and 48 percent living in Virginia. The 63 white respondents (82% of all respondents), four African American respondents (5%), six Asian respondents (8%), and four Latino respondents (5%) result in an oversampling of white and an undersampling of nonwhite populations in my research locations. This is admittedly a limitation of my study, and I anticipate that stronger differences between respondents would have emerged with a more ethnically diverse sample, particularly in terms of the number of respondents using the public health

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> A qualitative list of respondents by pseudonym is included in Appendix B, while Appendix E presents a quantitative aggregate profile of respondents.

model and drawing upon the Logic of Heritage. As previously noted, the only concept that differed by race/ethnicity in my sample is the Logic of Heritage, and although undersampling nonwhites could have suppressed the expression of this logic, I was able to explore its content and implications (See Chapter 6).

My respondents represent a wide range of education and occupation levels, from just a few college courses to professional degrees. All of the respondents have at least some college; almost two-thirds (65%) had earned a Bachelor's degree or higher. Most of my respondents are employed in some way; a few are unemployed or retired, several are full-time students, hold one or more part-time job(s) in the service or retail industries, are current or retired professionals, or are stay-at-home caretakers. The 48 women (62%) and 29 men (38%) range in age from their early 20s to their early 70s.<sup>14</sup> I interviewed several parents with grown children, and 16 women (21%) and 7 men (9%) with young or adolescent children. Because consumption issues are political issues, I sought respondents from along the political spectrum: self-reported as conservative (9%), moderate (36%), or liberal (55%), with two people refusing to identify. Reflecting current prevalence data, six respondents (8%) are current tobacco smokers, but 19 people (25%) referenced smoking in the past during the interview.

I classified respondents by how many times in the past week they self-reported consuming fast food, sugary drinks, or something that *they* considered junk food. While the definition of what they consider junk food varies widely, 43 percent of respondents

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Throughout this text, respondents are identified by their age decade (e.g., "in her 30's").

report a high level of junk food consumption<sup>15</sup> (six or more times per week), 21 percent consume a medium level of junk food (three to five times per week), and 36 percent consume a low level of junk food consumption (less than three times a week). I also classified respondents based on their interview responses with an eating identity.<sup>16</sup> *Balancers* (39% of all respondents) have flexible rules about what they eat. *Slippers* (35% of respondents) have rules that they attempt to adhere to, but they tend to slip in their actual behavior and choices. *Controllers* (26% of respondents) are strict in their eating habits, with clear rules to which they closely adhere. Each of these eating identities is discussed in-depth in Chapter 4.

In addition to classifying respondents by eating identity, respondents were also classified by their use of one or more explanatory models described in Chapter 5, which they use to describe and explain issues of food, eating, and food-related diseases. Over

<sup>15</sup> I derived a measure of the level of junk food the respondent eats from a quantitative count of the number of times people 1) ate fast food; 2) drank a sugar-sweetened drink; and/or 3) ate something that *they* considered to be junk food, as self-reported on the Pre-Interview Information Sheet.

<sup>16</sup> While there is a relationship between *level* and *identity*, they do not serve as proxies for one another, as *level* is a measure of frequency, while *identity* is a function of alignment between food rules and behaviors, as well as thoughts about food and eating. For example, Controllers tend to be low junk food consumers, but not all low junk food consumers are Controllers. Both Controllers and Slippers have rules, but Slippers tend to lapse. So although all three eating identities have rules, Slippers may not always adhere to their rules, and may thus have higher levels of junk food consumption.

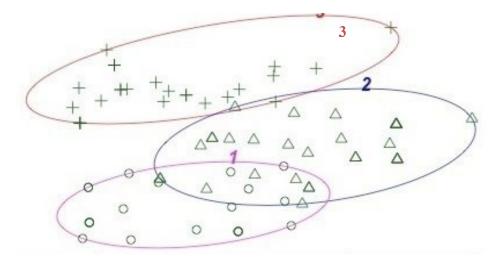
half of my respondents (58%) use the *medical model*, which focuses on using scientific knowledge to describe and explain causes and consequences of and individual's eating behavior. Just under half of my respondents (49%) use language of the *food industrial complex model*, which is critical of the overall food production and distribution system. Only 14 percent of my respondents refer to elements of the *public health model*, where socioeconomic and environmental factors impact eating behaviors and result in food-related diseases. The final classification of respondents was in terms of the cultural logic(s) described in Chapter 6, upon which they draw to make sense of and talk about themselves as eaters. The six cultural logics described in detail in Chapter 6 include the Logics of Health (96% of my respondents); Morality (65%); Elaboration (57%); Connection (55%); Choice (47%); and Heritage (19%).

Eating identities, explanatory models, and cultural logics are different, but not entirely distinct, concepts. Eating identities reflect a combination of what people eat and how they think and talk about themselves in terms of the food that they eat. Explanatory models are intended to describe and explain why and how something works, or how a problem, such as food-related diseases, exists. In contrast, cultural logics are employed to understand the deeper layers of meaning. As an illustration, the medical model explains a food-related disease, such as obesity, as a result of an individual's over-eating, and assumes that if a person eats fewer calories, they will be a healthy weight. Undergirding this explanation is the cultural Logic of Choice; it is possible and good that a person can choose what to eat in the first place (Bellah 1985). And this belief in the value of both restriction and personal choice can be seen in the Controller's strict adherence to a special diet.

# Cluster Analysis

Understanding food and eating in the American foodscape requires a multidimensional consideration of how people talk about and think about food. While the next three chapters present the concepts of eating identities, explanatory models, and cultural logics as separate, it is important to also consider how the concepts intersect and overlap. In order to visually represent this interconnecting relationship, I conducted a k-means partitioning cluster analysis to uncover structures in the data and quantify similarities between cases (Field, 2000:1). I analyzed binary variables representing the respondents' eating identity, which explanatory model(s) they use, and from which cultural logic(s) they draw. The findings shown in the plot below highlight three overlapping clusters of respondents, clusters that align perfectly with the three eating identities.

Figure 1 - Cluster Analysis of Eating Identities, Explanatory Models, and Cultural Logics



Cluster 1, represented by small circles, consists of 20 respondents, including all of the Controllers. These are the respondents with the most extreme and rigid food rules, as well as the most elaborate justifications for how and why they eat the way that they do.

A representative member of this cluster is Ann, whose biggest junk food indulgence is fried plantain chips, which she recently decided that she will *never* buy again.

Cluster 2, shown as triangles, identifies 30 respondents, including all of the Balancers. They have the most flexible and broad food rules, and seem to have the most alignment between what they say and what they do. A representative member of this cluster is Bradley, who will not judge his fast food-eating roommate, wants to be able to order an extra large Cherry Coke, and gets "grumpy" if he cannot have a Mountain Dew with his friends.

Finally, Cluster 3, indicated by the plus symbol, is comprised of 27 respondents, all of whom represent the Slipper eating identity. These respondents have their own, sometimes detailed, food rules, but they experience contradictions between their rules and their behavior. A representative member of this cluster is Tara, introduced in the opening vignettes as a recent Vegan who makes her favorite junk food of cauliflower "wings" and tofu "sausage" dip at home, often after a bad day. Tara's emotional conflict about eating quinoa reflects an element of anxiety about her Vegan diet.

This cluster analysis reinforces the strength of my qualitative typology of identities by quantitatively categorizing respondents into separate and distinct clusters and highlighting similarities between members within each eating identities. This is important because the eating identities are only three of the twelve binary variables included in the cluster analysis, but the clusters and the eating identities line up perfectly. For example, all of the people with the Controller eating identity (and only Controllers) are in Cluster 1, and this cluster analysis indicates that Controllers are more like other Controllers than they are like Slippers or Balancers. The cluster analysis also indicates that although the members of each eating identity are most similar to each other, there are also some similarities between members of different eating identities in terms of the explanatory models and cultural logics that they employ. This analysis supports the argument that understanding how people make sense of food and eating requires more than just knowing their eating identity; it is important to also consider explanatory model(s) and cultural logic(s). In short, the overlapping clusters shown on the plot indicate that the eating identities are only one component of how people understand food. This means, for example, that there are some Controllers (shown as circles on the plot) who are similar to Balancers (triangles on the plot) in the cultural logics and explanatory models that they use – indicated by their proximity on the plot – despite having different eating identities.

This overlapping of clusters reinforces my argument that it is important to consider the full combination of three eating identities, three explanatory models, and six cultural logics. The eating identities are the key, but not sole, focus of my analysis. The general tone, rules, and stories of the respondents in each cluster align with the differences I found in my sample in how the three eating identities think about food, use different explanatory models for food rules, and draw upon different cultural logics to make sense of food, eating, and food-related diseases.

Initially I was interested in why people who have access and the ability to eat fresh, whole, and local foods might still eat junk food, soda, or candy on a regular basis. This dissertation now focuses on a more interesting question that emerges from the stories my respondents tell, which is the relationship between one's eating identity, the

explanatory models that one uses to describe and explain food-related problems, and the cultural logic(s) from which one draws in order to make sense of food and eating.

# **CHAPTER 4 - EATING IDENTITIES AND BEHAVIORS**

Much of the nutrition literature focuses on developing conceptual models of food choice that present consumers as rational and choice-driven. In contrast, much of the sociological literature admits that while people may have explicable "food rules," (Counihan 1992) their actual every day food choices are more relational, dependent on context and situation (Ilmonen 2011; Mennell 1996). While some people are highly vigilant in monitoring and enacting their identities, others are more relaxed about their choices, as well as any conflicts that may arise (Bisogni et al. 2002). In a constantly shifting foodscape, a food choice that is perceived to be healthy to one person may be junk food to another. I argue that when the options are limitless, people are forced to create and maintain their own individual reflexive eating identities (Giddens 1994).

This chapter explores the reflexivity of self-identities around food, as well as how food choices may be a combination of rational, clearly articulated self-identities disrupted by habitual, unconscious, or unconsidered behaviors, a process that requires constant selfmonitoring. The focus of this chapter is on the definitions, construction, and maintenance of eating identities through reflexive "lifestyle" choices (Giddens 1991). I have identified three specific eating identities: Balancers, Slippers, and Controllers, which differ in the combination of 1) the food choices that people actually claim to make and 2) the extent to which those behaviors align with their normative expectations of how they think they should eat.

### EATING IDENTITIES

My respondents differ in both their desire and ability to either eat or avoid certain foods, particularly highly processed junk food. Three main eating identities reflect the

respondent's food rules, self-disclosed consumption of what they considered junk food, as well as the stories they tell about what they eat. The group that I am calling *Balancers* is the largest group (39% of all respondents), followed by *Slippers* (35%), and *Controllers* (26%). The following section describes each of these eating identities in greater detail. There is a relationship between the eating identities and the amount of sugar-sweetened drinks, junk food, and/or fast food that they eat, but an eating identity reflects more than just the quantity of junk food consumed. Members of each eating identity have a different experience using food in a reflexive project of the self, ranging from ease to anxiety to discipline.

# **Balancers**

My respondents with the first eating identity, the Balancers, acknowledge that junk food may not be the healthiest food option, but they enjoy eating it regularly or occasionally as part of a balanced diet. Thus, their attitudes align with their behaviors. This group adheres most closely to the old adage of "everything in moderation." They are not willing to limit themselves, or their options, believing that they know what they like to eat and that they are in the best position to make decisions for themselves. Given their comfort with eating junk food as part of a balanced diet, it is not surprising that 60 percent of Balancers consume a high level of junk food (more than six times in the past week), compared to 17 percent eating a medium level (3-5 times) and 23 percent eating a low level (0-2 times in the past week) of junk food. Overall, this identity is one of relative ease and stability around food and eating, and Balancers tend to eat, and enjoy, the widest variety of foods.

*Eating habits of Balancers*. The emphasis for Balancers is to eat "everything in moderation." In no way do Balancers eat unconsciously, or necessarily voraciously. Balancers are conscious of what they eat, but they acknowledge the importance of treats, either daily or on special occasions, such as holidays, vacations, sporting events.

Last time I had some real junk food was the Super Bowl. We went over to someone's house, of course my husband wanted chips and dip that wasn't made yet, but we made it. I made a cheese dip; at least I had vegetables with it. I also made a ranch dip. They had sausages in barbecue sauce, and some sort of salami. [What makes those real junk food?] The high fat. The high fat content for me and of course the nutrition of the vegetables were real good, but putting all that fat on them is not always good. The sausages have all the chemicals in there. - Monique, female, 50's, CA

Balancers know that sometimes their choices are higher in fat, salt, or sugar than ideal, but they want to have choices in what they eat, and feel that restricting on a rigid diet does not work.

This emphasis on the fun and enjoyment of food and eating carries over into what Balancers eat on a regular basis. When asked what they eat, many Balancers state that they eat whatever is available, or whatever previous purchases are in the refrigerator at the end of the day. Again, this is not unconscious eating, but rather a lack of concern or worry about food. Many Balancers describe purchasing and eating unhealthy foods simply because they are available, or because they sound good, but again, they are not overly worried about it.

Most of the time actually I'll look for healthier options unless I'm looking to like I really haven't had fast food in a week or so and [I'm] looking for that burger that's just going to clog my arteries. [Laughs] - Norman, male, 30's, CA

Although Norman "look[s] for" healthier food options, sometimes he just wants a burger, and so he eats one. He goes on to describe his favorite burger as a Smashburger Barbecue Burger with a Fried Egg, and when I ask what he likes about it, his answer is enthusiastic: "Everything. The bun. The meat. The barbecue sauce. The bacon. Fried egg! [laughs] It's just awesome." Many Balancers talk about just enjoying food itself, detailing the sensory aspects of food. A variety of flavors, sauces, textures, tastes abound in the Balancers' diets, simply to make food taste good. Norman also explains why he likes the energy drink Full Throttle; he "love[s] the taste of it. I don't know, it's like a citrus-y flavor. Like, honestly, it says that it's citrus, but it tastes like liquid gummy bears to me." Balancers acknowledge that some foods may not be the best choice, and some foods make them feel better than others.

Like Norman, Cleo describes her favorite junk food, fried chicken, with broad smiles and clear enjoyment.

[Tell me the last time you had fried chicken.] Last time was probably a couple months ago. We had Popeye's at the grand opening...It was delicious. I felt really gross afterwards, but it was good at the time. It was really heavy and I felt like my arteries were getting clogged. Yeah, so it wasn't the best choice, but it was really good. [Smiling] It was really delicious. [Do you think you might have it again?] Popeye's? Oh, yeah. It's not something I would have all the time, but it's still good. – Cleo, female, late teens, VA

Even though Balancers seem to take great pleasure in their food, some describe their

indulgences as guilty pleasures, especially if it makes them feel ill afterwards.

You definitely don't feel good after you eat it, so that's why I don't get it very often, but it's kind of like a guilty pleasure kind of thing. I think I was with my friends and we were all on the way home...and it was just [that we] wanted to stop. And so I got a burger....It's that thing you know you shouldn't have, but sometimes you like to have it. - Jimmy, male, 20's, CA

However, one key element of the Balancer eating identity is that while they may feel a

little bit of guilt and/or indigestion when they indulge, they do not feel shame. As

Anthony Giddens (1991:65) argues, "shame should be understood in relation to the

integrity of the self, while guilt derives from feelings of wrongdoing." Because they

accept flexibility in their diets, indulging is not shameful for Balancers, it is just a guilty pleasure.

Balancers are not happy eating the same thing every day. They acknowledge that

in addition to taste preferences and mood, sometimes the variety and quantity of what

they eat depends on the context.

You seem to eat more when somebody else is [there to] share a lunch with, you know. Like when you're just by yourself you're usually not that hungry. It's not a social thing, so you just get a snack or something and that's it. - Paul, male, 60's, CA

Many times when Balancers eat junk food, it is because of the situation, whether it is

helping them study, keeping them awake during a late night shift, or going out with

friends.

My other kind of junk food item this week would've been a piece of cake. It was down in San Diego. I was visiting a friend and we went to this restaurant that specializes in desserts and it was like a four-layer chocolate cake with cream in it and chocolate frosting, and that was like the big one and I ate half of it which is totally uncommon to me but my friend commented like, "You're going to eat this?" Like, what are you talking about? But it was just the heat of the moment, the experience, because you had like a \$9 piece of cake. I wanted to make sure I ate it and it didn't go to waste. So it was kind of that type of a thing. ... I did feel guilty but I also felt like, "Okay, you're in San Diego. It's the experience," like kind of let the mind over matter. Just be like, "Okay, you'll be fine. You didn't eat the whole piece. You left it over," and then I was like, "I'm going to go to the gym in the morning so I don't feel so bad about... - Connie, female, 20's, CA

Although Balancers enjoy a variety of food with a few guilty pleasures, they are not completely immune to concern about what they are eating. Even though Connie desires and enjoys the cake while on vacation, she still feels a need to rationalize her decision through not wanting to waste money, or by reminding herself that she can work it off in the gym. Balancers use this flexibility and acknowledgement of situational factors to develop their own calculus or equation about what to eat.

I think moderation, we have to live life in moderation as well. You can eat junk food very nicely in moderation...balance it out with the good stuff. - Liz, female, 40's, VA

Rather than worrying about or tracking every morsel that they are eating, Balancers tend to take a more holistic approach in their decision-making around food. They may make their calculations depending on their level of activity, like Connie and her chocolate cake, or make trade-offs. Balancers consider their options and make conscious decisions. Some Balancers do spend time planning their meals, or at the very least they consciously decide what they will eat from meal to meal. Monique, the maker of multiple dips for a Super Bowl party, describes weighing her options when going out for a celebratory dinner.

[We went out for] an anniversary...to Red Lobster and had crab and then I wanted something to dip in butter, but I decided to get just the broccoli. I tried to not have the cole slaw. I tried to keep the oil down. - Monique, female, 50's, CA

As a perfect example of balancing, Monique is willing to make high fat dips and snacks for one celebration, yet restricts her choice at another celebration. Of course, it must be noted that her choice of "healthy" broccoli was in order to have something to dip in butter.

Because of the openness and willingness of Balancers to eat a little bit of everything in moderation, there is not much struggle within this identity. Although Balancers still engage in self-monitoring, there does not seem to be much conflict between what they say and what they do, because they accept, and often embrace, flexibility in their diet. Overall, Balancers have a very positive tone about food, including just a feeling of "oh well" if they eat outside of their plan. They feel that they can balance out any poor eating with activity or with better choices at another meal. The Balancers' use of food in a reflexive project of the self seems to be one of enjoyment and relaxation. This is in sharp contrast to the next eating identity, the Slippers, who do not experience such ease and alignment in their diets.

#### Slippers

The Slippers try to avoid junk food, but tell stories about slipping or "falling off the wagon" in their eating, either consciously or unconsciously. I am using the word "slipping" to indicate eating something unintended or unplanned, or something outside the person's desired eating plan. The slipping can be either unconsciously or consciously done.

Whereas the Balancers tell stories of eating junk food or fast food with laughter, Slippers' stories have a harsher tone. This is the only group whose attitudes and desires do not match their behaviors and choices. These eaters express the most anxiety about their behavior aligning with their identity, and thus, have the most difficult time engaging in a reflexive project of the self. The key element of the Slipper identity is that there is a gap between what people say they want to do, and what they actually do (Hays 1996). And importantly, this gap causes some kind of distress for the person. Overall, this identity is one of relative angst and anxiety.

Interestingly, though not surprisingly, the Slipper eating identity is the only one with a demographic difference: 78 percent of Slippers are women; in contrast, only 22 percent of Slippers are men. Although there are more women in the sample than men, this gender imbalance is evident only in the Slipper identity. And even though my male

respondents eat higher levels of junk food than my female respondents, the women I spoke with are more likely to express concern or worry about their actual diet not aligning with their aspirational diet. Thus, the example quotes in this Slipper section are mostly from women. Guilt is a common theme for several of my respondents, but especially amongst female Slippers: guilt over "knowing better" but not being able to control oneself, guilt (and physical illness) after eating junk food, and guilt about the food choices they do make.

*Eating habits of Slippers.* Slippers' level of junk food consumption reflects the ambivalence many feel about eating a healthy diet; 48 percent of Slippers consume a high level of junk food, compared to 22 percent eating a medium level, or 30 percent eating a low level. The relatively high percentage of Slippers who eat a low level of junk food has two possible explanations. One scenario is that the interview may have occurred during a "good" week, when they were "on the wagon," and not slipping from their aspirational diet. The second possibility is that some people see eating even the smallest amount of junk food as slipping. Thus, for many Slippers, it is not necessarily the amount of junk food that they eat that matters, but whether they eat any foods outside of their desired eating plan at all. When Slippers talk about eating a food outside of their aspirational diet, they often give a reasonable rationalization. For example, several respondents said that they might decide to eat something like potato chips or cookies because the foods look so good that they cannot resist. Or, they know that they will be hungry later, so they should eat now when food is available. They might be tired and need something to get through working all day. Or, they may just feel the need for a particular food to make themselves feel better.

I love food. You can put me down as a food lover. I love eating and I love food. There [are] people who don't love food that much, I can't relate at all. So, there's a whole range of emotions, or if I'm feeling like I need a heavier meal for some reason, like for grounding. - Jen, female, 50's, CA

Given these scenarios, including possible physical and emotional desires, Slippers will indulge themselves. The key difference is that while Balancers indulge themselves with pleasure, Slippers enjoy what they are eating at first, but describe subsequent feelings of intense guilt, fear, or shame. Slippers may express guilt about other people making more healthy food choices, or they may fear a loss of control; that once they start eating junk food they will not be able to stop.

Out of all of the eating identities, issues of overweight seem to be the most salient for the Slippers. Although a few Controllers discussed in the next section describe being "heavy" as kids, several Slippers are currently trying to manage their weight, mostly unsuccessfully. As an example, Shawna describes how she and her sisters go back and forth in dieting, describing herself as easily falling back into old eating habits.

[I] got comfortable. Yeah, that was my problem I think. So comfortable....You don't care because you felt like you lost weight, and then you felt better, so you weren't so like focused on it. Because [my boyfriend] and I went on diets. I lost 50 pounds, and I didn't gain all of it back all the way, but gained a lot of it back, and now I'm back on a diet. I think it was a year ago in August when we started it. Yeah, it's bad, now I'm back on. - Shawna, female, 20's, CA

While the concept of yo-yo dieting is by no means uncommon, it is easy to see how decisions outside of one's eating plan can add up, especially over time. For example, people from every eating identity express concerns about metabolism changes as one ages. Dylan, a young woman in her late teens, judges her friends who eat a lot of junk food.

I think they know it's unhealthy, but they don't know exactly what can happen. They just have this idea like oh, it's unhealthy, but they don't actually see the effect right now, so they assume they have no reason to stop. Whereas my understanding...is when they were young, they could eat anything they wanted and nothing ever happened to them. Once they were past their prime and their body metabolism starts to slow down and they start to see health effects. Then once they cut out the unhealthy foods, they found pretty quickly their body became much healthier. - Dylan, female, late teens, VA

Whereas a Balancer will acknowledge the slip and make accommodations in physical activity or future meals, Slippers may fall into a pattern of repeated slips and negative emotions until they have to significantly change their eating to bring it back into alignment with what they want.

*Discomfort around food.* Slippers seem to have an overall discomfort around food and food issues. For example, Nora talks about her discomfort eating out alone, feeling that people are watching her or judging her - not for what she is eating, but because she is eating alone. Even though she later comes to the conclusion that no one is probably really watching her, her anxieties about food and eating come to the forefront in regards to eating out. Food choices are highly personal, but only Slippers express defensiveness about what they eat. They might attempt to normalize their slipping by stating that everyone has their weakness or temptation, or as Slipper AnaLisa put it, "we all have our own idiosyncrasies."

Although they might use the idea of uniqueness as an excuse, Slippers criticize the eating behaviors of people who rigidly control their eating (i.e., Controllers). To Slippers, people who refuse food offered to them or who would prefer to not eat anything rather than to lower their standards are "snobby" or elitist.

I try not to get too high and mighty about the whole fast food thing. I mean, I...we don't eat fast food. My husband completely will not eat any fast food, whatsoever. I'm like more middle of the road. If I'm driving down to southern California and I'm stopping, you know, in Kettleman City, and the only thing to eat is fast food, I grab myself a burger, and that's like the best part of the drive, right? - Sara, female, 30's, CA

Sara describes how she makes food choices at home for her family in alignment with her husband's strict food values, but she herself does not want to get "high and mighty." However, it is not clear whether this derision for people who refuse food is actually an expression of populism, a recognition of the privilege inherent in the ability to refuse food, or a reflection of the Slippers' own guilt and shame that they cannot say no to their own temptations.

Well, the problem is that mac and cheese tastes great, so you know, twist my arm, that's all you have available? Ok, then I guess I'll eat it. I'm not going to not eat that and be like well, there's not a healthy decision available, so I guess I won't have dinner tonight. - Christina, female, 30's, CA

A Slipper will not avoid food just to follow their food rules. If there is nothing else to eat, they will deviate from their script, or slip.

*Aspirational versus actual diet.* The stories Slippers tell about the foods that they eat reveal a gap between their aspirational and actual diet. Several Slippers initially claim that they do not eat any junk food, but during the course of the interview, they (and I) realize that they actually do. AnaLisa defines junk food as "really cheap ingredients," and does not think of the 24 Cheez-Its that she eats every day as junk food until pressed about it, even though she literally counts out the Cheez-Its into a special container every morning. But instead of dismissing or trying to justify the contradiction, she actually stops the interview to say, "I'm going to have to change mine on that sheet [the pre-interview questionnaire] because I forgot." A similar omission occurs with Nora, who defines junk food as "processed, usually high in sugar and carbohydrates." She initially states that she never eats junk food, but later admits to eating two Keebler chocolate chip

cookies with lunch every day for the past ten years. They have to be Keebler, and they have to be chocolate chip. These two women do not think about the foods that they prefer and eat habitually as junk food until they are asked to deliberately articulate their definition of junk food.

Another example is Jamie, who describes himself as a lifelong vegetarian, endurance athlete, and very healthy eater, has to pause the interview mid-way to question whether he thought liquids could be considered junk food.

[How do you define junk food?] I think of junk food of having any of the following qualities: highly processed, artificially flavored, being inexpensive, and available, and widely distributed through chains. ... I'm trying to be really cautious of not exempting stuff that I consume on a pretty regular basis. I'm trying to decide on whether I consider Diet Coke in the category of junk food because that is really something I consume every week. – Jamie, male, 50's, CA

Jamie later describes his wife as having a gap between her "aspirational diet and actual diet" and as "hypocritical" for occasionally eating fast food, yet he has to stop and question his own Diet Coke habit. He does not think about his own behavior in the same way that he thinks about his wife's choices, until the gap is brought to his attention during the interview (Pugh 2013). Slippers, especially, struggle with the effect of these contradictions on their emotional landscape, particularly when they involve another person.

Food decisions are made up of several small choices throughout the day, and Slippers seem to have the hardest time aligning the outcome with their intentions. If they eat a food that they consider outside of their food plan, they feel anxiety. This anxiety is unique to Slippers, and results in a unique type of reflexivity. While the reflexivity of Balancers reflects more of an easy calculation of what they should eat, for Slippers, their use of food in a reflexive project of the self is one of constant worry and consideration, often with poor results. This is in contrast to Controllers, described next, for whom reflexivity also results in constant consideration, but with positive reinforcement. *Controllers* 

The most restrictive eaters, the Controllers, mostly avoid junk food, although they have very different ideas about which foods are healthy options. This group includes a variety of dietary restrictions including strict Vegans and devout followers of the Paleo diet. Regardless of what they deem to be the optimal diet, Controllers' beliefs about food match their behavior.

*Eating habits of Controllers.* Given the sometimes severe restriction in what they choose to eat, it is not surprising that 65 percent of Controllers consume a low level of junk food, compared to the 25 percent who eat a medium level, or the 10 percent who eat a high level. The high junk food eaters are two men, but they are highly unusual Controllers in that they had eaten a high level of junk food only in the past week. One man, John, says that he consumed an unusual amount of junk food during a 100-mile bike ride the previous weekend. The other man, Joe, reports drinking several sugar-sweetened coffees and eating fast food in the past week in order to spend time with and comfort his daughter, but he is very restrictive in his thoughts about food. Thus, eating identities are about more than just what someone eats, but also about how they talk about food, in general. Overall, this identity is one of rigidity and restriction, but with a sense of comfort in such a high level of restraint. While almost everyone I spoke with talks about the health aspects of food and the relationship between food, eating, and food-related diseases, Controllers talk about food and health in the most fervent way. There is a common goal amongst Controllers to make daily food choices in consideration of their

long-term health, rather than short-term pleasure. Younger Controllers focus on longterm prevention of food-related diseases, while older Controllers try to undo previous damage or prevent further deterioration.

Oh, it [food-related illness] is not going to happen to me. I had that same feeling up until age 30. Um. I worked with a guy who said when you hit 30, it doesn't work the same way, and I kept saying "Nah, nah, you don't know...not me...I'm different." And then I hit 30 and I was like, "holy crap, he was dead on." ... [shows me his knuckle] See this, this is gout, ok. You literally, that is a daily reminder to me. I tell people. If I pick up a hamburger, in the corner of my eye, I see a messed up finger caused by gout, so....does that make me want to eat a hamburger? No. Absolutely not. - Jim, male, 40's, CA

Jim's gout serves as his daily visual reminder of what he should and should not eat. For the most part, Controllers use food to control their current ailments, and their current health status continually reinforces their food decisions. After a trip to the emergency room with a heart ailment, Juaquin's concerns about the popcorn that he enjoys increased:

[b]ecause of the oil and I know that's just taking my - yeah, my sugar levels go up as a result, my blood pressure goes up as a result of the salt, and my cholesterol level also, my HDL's and LDL's are gonna go.... It's a real fear. There's [sic] consequences. - Juaquin, male, 50's, CA

Similarly, John and Melissa both have diagnosed celiac disease, and both describe the immediate consequences of eating incorrectly. Melissa's vigilance is enhanced because she also uses an insulin pump to control her diabetes. For these Controllers, the physical symptoms they will experience if they eat incorrectly are a daily reminder to eat well. Unlike the Slippers who are willing to endure illness, physical discomfort, and emotional turmoil in order to eat their favorite foods, many Controllers explicitly use food as medicine to cure or prevent physical ailments, officially diagnosed or not, and abstain from foods that make them feel sick. Controllers demonstrate a certain level of pragmatism when talking about their own decisions, but are commonly cynical or resigned when talking about other people's choices. Controllers, who are very informed about food and rigid about what they will and will not eat, believe that everyone has the same access to information, and that other people just make bad choices.

Most of the people I know who just consume a lot, like, that's their regular diet, are probably just kind of lazy when it comes to food. They don't feel like cooking and they don't feel like bothering to take the time and effort to see what's good for them and they don't want to know what McDonald's chicken nuggets are actually made of. They're just going to eat what's fast and easy and in it goes and then it takes a toll on them. - Melissa, female, 30's, CA

Controllers use moral language to maintain symbolic boundaries (Lamont 1992, 2000)

between healthy eaters (themselves) and non-healthy eaters (others). Many Controllers

describe their boundary-making work and express this type of judgment about people

who eat junk food. However, some claim that it is not worth the effort to try and change

people's behaviors, especially other adults. Children are the only people worth trying to

change. Melissa continues with this type of cynicism:

So then I think part of what turns into a problem is not knowing that that education is available to you. How are you going to know to seek out, you know? So how you actually get it into the adult population to pass it down to their children to start with is a problem. So I don't know. It sounds really, really bad probably but maybe target the kids and if the parents don't figure it out and they die in their 50s at least the next generation has got it for theirs. - Melissa, female, 30's, CA

Although most Controllers have not written off the current generation in favor of the

next, they also do not want to preach, or to come across as self-righteous.

A buddy of mine, he was like hey, man--he doesn't have a car--he's like hey, can you take me to the grocery store? So we're walking in the grocery store and I warned him, I'm like okay, I want to let you know you're gonna hate me by the end of this grocery trip. So we're walking through and he picks out things and I'm like dude, really? Everything that he's picking out I'm like uggh, ohh, don't get that. He'd picked up some Lil' Debbie oatmeal cakes. I'm like do you see how long an ingredient list that is? It's like a novel. And he's like all right, Clark, shut up dude. I'm like okay. But I do feel like he actually chose a little bit better things that he would normally just because I was there. And I didn't mean to do it, but it was like--I'm like how can you do that to yourself, how can you just disregard the one thing that is most valuable in life, which is your health and body? - Clark, male, 20's, VA

Many Controllers do worry about what other people eat, especially their friends and

family, but feel that it is up to each person to decide what and how to eat. Thus, while

Controllers are very rigid in their own eating, they tend not to interfere with other

people's choices. However, they clearly judge people who eat foods they consider to be

unhealthy options.

I don't think very highly, I guess. It's.... I have really negative attitudes about junk food...I think it's like really impulsive. Totally unnecessary. That you're not going to die if you don't get the garlic fries or whatever and that it's just like over the top indulgent. - Sophie, female, 20's, CA

Despite their emphatic focus on the relationship between food, eating, and food-

related disease and health, it is important to note that most Controllers will not give up

taste for nutrition. Many Controllers speak in great detail about the healthy foods that

they eat, and how creative they are to eat delicious food that is also healthy for them.

I do eat a lot of starch and so for instance this morning I love steel cut oats and I tend to go for the savory as opposed to the sweet. Not because I think it's healthier but just because of my taste buds, I like putting salsa of any kind in hot sauce, or hummus, or guacamole. Very rarely have I had it sweetened or add in some kind of a dairy substitute. And then I also like - been doing a lot of making my own style of french fries, which are without the fry. I just cut them in little sections and put them in my toaster oven and then I do enjoy squirting on my Trader Joe's organic ketchup. - Tom, male, 60's, CA

Of all of the eating identities, Controllers do the most research themselves to find out

about food. While other people mention seeing movies or getting ideas from television

on The Food Network, Controllers are most likely to actively seek out documentaries, get

information from government agencies like the USDA, or read books by nutrition experts such as Dr. John McDougall or Michael Pollan. Controllers explicitly want to be informed and learn as much as they can about food.

Good quality food is a priority for Controllers; many are restrictive in terms of where they shop. Several only shop in local cooperative stores, or only at farmers markets. While they acknowledge that organic and whole foods often cost more money than conventional foods from a chain grocery store, Controllers see a direct and immediate link between food, eating, and food-related disease. And the Controllers with whom I spoke have the privilege to refuse to sacrifice the food that they perceive to be critical to their long-term health for money.

I will try to budget my money for food, but I will not ever try to tell myself you shouldn't eat good food because it costs too much. It's my highest priority. - Kelly, female, late teens, CA

Although several Controllers describe living relatively modest lives, most do not compromise on their food choices to save money. If they cannot afford organic berries, for example, they simply forego buying berries at all, rather than purchasing conventional (non-organic) berries.

However, several Controllers do acknowledge that they may be sacrificing their personal relationships for their food, even if they will not sacrifice quality. Food and eating are highly interactional, and being so rigid in their eating, Controllers are often left out of the social fun. Controllers' relations with others may include friends giving them weird looks or making comments. For example, one of the Slippers I interviewed, Jen, is good friends with one of the Controllers I spoke to, Morgan, who details all of the restrictions she has for herself and her daughter, including eating only organic low sugar

whole foods with no plastic, and tells stories of going to parties and events where she could not eat anything or where her young daughter ate junk food and was violently sick. During her interview, Jen refers to Morgan by name as "super controlling." Although Controllers feel secure in their food decisions, they often feel like others judge them because their diet differs from others around them. It seems that Jen's unsolicited comment about Morgan confirms the validity of this feeling of judgment. It seems that Slippers judge Controllers for being too rigid, Controllers judge Slippers for being weak and lazy, and Balancers seem to just wonder what all the fuss is about.

Despite a perception of increased scrutiny, authenticity is important to Controllers. Kelly's (Controller) mantra about only eating foods that she is "proud to put in [her] body" contrasts sharply with Christina's (Slipper) asking herself "why am I eating this?" as she is halfway through a package of orange Hostess cupcakes. For many Controllers, restricted eating is only one aspect of a larger lifestyle focused beyond food to health and wellness more generally, which Molly describes as "all of [her] choices lining up." Controllers also tend to think of food as part of broader environmental issues. Ladison describes trying to encourage her mother to purchase more organic foods, stating that "it isn't about taste anymore; good food has to also be good for you and the whole system."

Although the Controllers tend to be very rigid in their eating rules, many admit that they are not perfect. It is important to note that as Controllers select their foods, most do not adhere to a rigid binary of good versus bad food. For most, there is a continuum that ranges from good food to ok food to junk food. As described previously, Controllers try to avoid what they consider to be junk food, even to the point of not purchasing conventional berries, but they will occasionally concede to eating "ok" food. However,

sometimes their own eating rules are too rigid for the situation, which may demand that they may eat something that they consider to be relatively "ok" food in order to seem normal. Harry describes eating pies and cookies during the holidays to "pacify" his family, and Molly describes eating an occasional piece of bread at work functions if it would be "rude or inappropriate to decline." Yet, however flexible a continuum from good to junk may seem, some of the Controllers' rules can be quite rigid. Even though Molly will eat bread to not seem rude, she will not buy it for herself, and she makes it clear that she will *never* eat anything that has touched plastic, regardless of the situation.

When Controllers do eat junk food, it is only a tiny bit and is usually of the best quality, such as the finest organic dark chocolate. Controllers also describe highly unusual circumstances in which they will allow themselves to eat small amounts of junk food. For example, Matityahu describes that once a month "to confirm [his] citizenship [he] stops at the Wendy's because they have better fries. [He] likes to get a large order of fries and eat them in [his] lap" during his commute home from work. However, he refuses to eat a Wendy's cheeseburger because the patty is "too gnarly." So even though he will eat the french fries, the hamburger meat is too "horrific, hormone-laden, [and] toxic."

For most Controllers, there is not even a second thought in selecting foods that align with their food rules. Whereas Slippers express more anxiety about their choices, Controllers describe not having to stop and think about their possible choice. Clark describes it as "muscle memory" to reach for healthy food; the positive meaning Controllers give to healthy foods reinforces their choices. Others describe the level of discipline or training they feel they have done over the years, so it is now perceived as

automatic, and any negative feedback they receive does not sway their self-restraint. Paige describes her way of eating, especially around other people, as "a test of self control, but nobody controls my body but me." Still, she "get[s] a lot of snarky comments."

Overall, Controllers tend to be highly rigid in their eating habits, and allow themselves deviation only under the most extreme circumstances. As stated previously, there is wide variation in what Controllers consider to be healthy and actually eat, but there is strict alignment between their aspirational and actual diet. For Controllers, their use of food in a reflexive project of the self is one of clear focus and commitment, which works for them. Yet, while Controllers do not express the anxiety of Slippers, neither do they express the ease of Balancers.

*Contradictions and eating identities.* In the spirit of Sharon Hays (1996), the use of cultural logics to deal with contradictions between what one says and what one actually does with food is at the heart of this project. Allison Pugh (2013:48) suggests that "figur[ing] out the conditions more likely to produce more or less contradiction" can highlight the cultural problems people face. My findings suggest that one's eating identity is related to the extent and experience of contradiction.

In terms of food choices and eating behaviors, I find that contradictions are most likely amongst people who value healthy, disciplined, and controlled eating and have rules for what they believe they should eat, but who do not live according to those rules. As previously described, Balancers demonstrate a relaxed ease about food and eating, enjoying and eating a wide range of foods. Controllers demonstrate a confidence about

food and eating, with clear rules that they follow and value. Thus, Balancers and Controllers experience very little contradiction.

Of the three eating identities, the people I identify as Slippers express the most anxiety about food and eating. Slippers provide the strongest and most direct illustration of contradiction, and the analytical category itself has contradiction at its essence. Slippers clearly manifest a level of worry and concern about food and eating, even if they do not articulate that anxiety verbally. Their tension derives from a feeling that there is something that they think they should be doing that they do not want to, or cannot, do. They want to eat what they believe is healthy, and many say that they do eat according to their rules, but that they indulge or succumb to cravings, boredom, or busy-ness. The contradiction of Slippers highlights their agitation about lacking discipline - about being out of control. They have failed at the "civilizing of appetite" (Mennell 1996:323).

# FOUNDATION OF EATING IDENTITIES

The reflexive nature of eating identities means that they must be maintained and can change, but it is important to consider the foundation of eating identities. While it is beyond the scope of this project to determine the exact process by which people select and adopt an eating identity, previous research has emphasized the importance of families in early socialization to food and eating (Anving and Sellerberg 2010; Johnson et al. 2011), and thus, in establishing early food rules and eating identities. Harry, a Controller who is now in his 20s, describes himself growing up as a "fat kid," who now "draws a hard line" in his eating because all of his childhood foods "became verboten."

I think it starts when you're young and it's just like, oh you know you're a kid have a piece of candy you know you're going to burn it off anyway. You're just going to run around on a sugar high for a little while. As you continue to mature and no

one really ever stops you and is like, hey you know, that's not really that nutritious and you should not eat all that crap. - Harry, male, 20's, CA

Although the reflexive nature of eating identities means that they can, and must, be continuously maintained and recreated, the foundation of many beliefs about food and eating can be traced back to previous experiences and important role models and agents of socialization.

# Impact as Caretakers

Almost one-third (31%) of the people I spoke with have at least part-time responsibility for a child under the age of 18. Respondents who care for children talk at length about the issues they confront in feeding their own children, with different issues arising at different ages. For caretakers of young children, sometimes the goal is just to get them to eat anything, even if it means feeding them something the adult considers to be junk food. In addition, several caretakers mention the lure of the PlayPlace at McDonald's, even amongst children who have never been there. Caretakers of pre-teens and teenagers try to balance their children's increasing autonomy with their desire for them to eat healthy foods. The parents of grown children describe a role reversal, wherein their *adult* children's ongoing "watchful presence" witnessing what they eat inspires them improve their eating (Silva and Pugh 2010:618).

I used to drink diet sodas, and then my...My son is 31 and he...was very upset because he was hearing about diet soda and how horrible it is for you and all the artificial sweeteners and all that, so I promised him that I'd never ever drink diet soda again. - Sarah, female, 50's, CA

Conversations about children are the most emotional for my respondents. For example, Slipper Sara cries for several minutes talking about how hard it must be for busy dual-income parents or single parents just trying to feed their kids with limited time, money, and options. Representing all three eating identities, Christina, Sarah, and

Morgan all describe at length, and with great concern, overweight and obese teenagers

they see in their community.

[T]here's so many fat kids. There's so many kids who are just not able to do athletics. And you get little bitty kids, [to the interviewer] maybe you're much younger, but I look at the kids now and the weight that they are. The average kid on the higher weighted average kid would have been a "fat kid" when I was little. And I look at kids at the pool in the summertime and they're just [as] roly-poly as they're little. - Morgan, female, 50's, CA

In addition to respondents who are full-time caretakers for children, many

additional respondents spend time with children who are not their own, such as children

of friends, neighbors, nieces or nephews. Many of these part-time caretakers face

challenges in feeding kids things that they would not themselves eat.

With my niece and nephew it's a...and I guess I'm just as guilty as a perpetrator. Like what do you want for lunch? Oh peanut butter and jelly and you get the stuff out of the cupboard and it's all the national brands like the Skippy and the Sara Lee bread and you know the Smucker's jam and all the market-dominant choices and not necessarily the healthiest stuff. And I mean you could make a pseudohealthy peanut butter and jelly if you want to get all like the gourmet or whatever. - Harry, male, 20's, CA

While Controller Harry is rigid in his own eating, he does not want to overstep

boundaries with his sister, so he feels complicit in feeding children something he will not

eat himself. On the other side of the healthy/unhealthy dichotomy, several respondents

also describe giving children natural healthy foods that they do not usually get at home.

[T]hey like to come over and go in the pool with me, so whenever they come over I always have cookies and crackers, but my food is healthy. My cookies are from Whole Foods and they like going to Oksana's because I have snacks, but when they're home and I see what they're eating, oh my God, I mean they're eating these candies that are just all chemical, but I don't say anything because they're not my children and I can't say. But I'm like my God, do they not see what those kids are eating? So they're just eating food, junk candy from the dollar stores, junkie places like that. ... Yeah, and it's all, it's all chemical, artificial colors,

preservatives, it's nothing good. It's not real, it's not healthy. - Oksana, female, 50's, VA

While there are common themes of concern about what children eat and how they learn to eat, there is also a theme of hope about children that all is not lost. As children, many of my respondents ate McDonald's, candy, and soda, and they say that they turned out fine. In addition, there is a clear adherence to the idea that eating identities only continue through maintenance, as well as the neoliberal idea of therapeutic selfhood (Silva 2013), wherein any negative habits from childhood can change through reflexive efforts.

# Impact of One's Own Childhood

Several respondents talk about the influence of their own parents and childhoods, and how their experience as children link directly to their eating now, for better or for worse. While Kelly's mother, who is a chef, taught her about the importance of fresh foods, Sophie describes her mother's subscription to *Cooking Light* magazine as the foundation of her highly restrictive eating. Even more directly, Slipper Erica describes her mother's disordered eating habits as having an ongoing effect on her own self-described disordered eating. Several people tell stories of their parent's cooking or eating habits, as well as their attempts to get them, as kids, to eat healthy foods.

We definitely had like potato chips and things like that in that house, but there was a lot of foods that we were just like never had. I remembering growing up they had like Dunkaroos, like these cookies in this disgusting little frosting cup. And every little kid in class had them, but mother was like no, that's just disgusting. And now I totally get why. But I think our main treat was that we had ice cream in the house like always. When I was very little though, like my mother tricked us, she lied to us, so when we asked for a cookie, she handed us a Ritz cracker and she told us for years that those were cookies, so we didn't actually have a real cookie until when of my older siblings went to a friend's house and had chocolate chip cookies. So it was like hey, you've ben lying to us. So they'd just come out with Cookie Crisps, that cereal, so we'd be like mom, we want cookies, so she'd hand us three or four of those little Cookie Crisp cereal" — Becky, female, 20's, VA

Looking back, Becky, also a Slipper, tells the story of her mother's subterfuge with a little laughter, and although she says that she "totally get[s] why," words like "tricked" and "lied" indicate that her mother's behavior had an impact on how she defines junk food today. It is easy for many of my respondents to describe how, for better or for worse, their childhood eating habits shape their food rules as adults.

#### Food Rules

People develop strict or loose food rules, which reflect beliefs about the world and are used to guide their decisions in order to maintain their eating identity (Counihan 1992). These food rules form the standards by which people reflexively judge their eating behaviors. While people have personal food rules categorizing good and bad (Douglas 1972), those rules may be rigidly followed or flexibly adjusted, depending on their eating identity. Just because people have and use these rules does not mean that they never stray or deviate. Sometimes they do not follow the rules exactly due to situations they find themselves in, perhaps due to emotions that they cannot handle, or to not having any other option than to break the rule. While some of the most extreme Controllers that I spoke with might elect to not eat anything instead of breaking their rules, for most people, as Harry says, "self-preservation comes before any like cognitive rule you set for yourself." This section discusses the challenges Slippers and Controllers face in making and trusting their food rules.

*Who makes the food rules?* Food rules can be developed in a variety of ways, including based on personal history or experience (including childhood), from folklore, or from personal research. Many of my respondents vaguely cite "the internet" as their source of information about which foods are good to eat, but there is not a clear and agreed upon

source amongst my interviewees. As Anthony Giddens (1991:84) argues, "experts can always be turned to, but experts themselves frequently disagree over both theories and practical diagnoses." One source of official rules about what is healthy to eat is a government agency, such as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Many of the people I spoke with grew up during the time when the USDA's Food Pyramid was the government-sponsored food rule. However, it is important to note that even the USDA changes its definitions "in significant ways to reflect the emerging science" (Post 2011:2). In June 2011, the USDA replaced the traditional Food Pyramid with MyPlate, a new design in an attempt to be more understandable, but also to shift to an equal balance of proteins, grains, fruits, and vegetables, along with dairy. Although the USDA recommendations can be helpful to guide people, under shifting expert systems (Giddens 1991), the agency and its recommendations can be accepted by some, but become suspect to others, particularly Slippers and Controllers.

[T]he USDA food chart is not really what we should be eating. I think it does a lot of harm and I think it came about from subsidies and political lobbies and that's not what our bodies need. - Elena, female, 40's, VA

I think that's a very good intention, but I don't agree with the food pyramid. ... I think because like the food pyramid style of eating has been kind of ingrained in like society's mind for several decades and also because there are big food companies pushing the cheap processed foods, and bread and stuff. - Dylan, female, late teens, VA

Two of my respondents, both Slippers who have different food rules, express the same sentiment against the Food Pyramid: Elena eats gluten-free and Dylan follows the Paleo Diet, yet both are critical of the USDA's recommendations. In addition to criticism of the official food rules, expert systems continue to be in flux in the current foodscape wherein formerly fringe diets become the mainstream. When Veganism, Paleo, or even simply favoring organic foods moves from, as Controller Morgan describes, "the trendy California hippie way" to the mainstream, who decides what is a right and healthy food choice?

It takes, I think, oh, a wise person, maybe a little bit of a rebel to go along with the new thinking that maybe we shouldn't listen to everything the USDA puts out. You've gotta do your own research. - Molly, female, 50's, CA

Placing the onus on individuals to do their own research also places the responsibility for developing their food rules squarely at the feet of individuals. Under conditions of dynamic modernity, when there is no one agreed-upon definition and the rules are constantly changing, it is the individual's responsibility to determine what is best for them, and to engage in a constant reflection of whether what they are doing is right and healthy. The challenge that this project poses is highlighted in a 2012 survey that I mentioned previously: half of people surveyed thought it was easier to do their own taxes than to figure out how to eat in a healthy way (International Food Information Council Foundation 2012:12).

*Uncertainty.* Several of my interviewees discuss getting information from a variety of experts, ranging from reading books by best-selling nutrition authors such as Michael Pollan to consulting their own personal doctor or nutritionist. The people who mention consulting such experts overall seem content with the information they receive. However, the information varies, and sometimes changes over time, leaving people confused about what is actually the correct information. This is most clear in my respondents' discussion of Dr. John A. McDougall; at least three interviewees specifically refer to him, and his vegetarian diet program, by name. Over decades, Dr. McDougall's diet prescription has expanded to include more starchy plant-based foods. However, this

contradicts other nutritionists who argue in favor of more leafy green plants. This debate within a small corner of the vegetarian/Vegan community highlights the contradictions faced in a time of multiple expert systems. Even experts who agree with the fundamentals of an eating regime like Veganism can disagree on the details, leaving their followers in a state of confusion.

With such shifting expert systems (Giddens 1991), even people with the most intense food rules sometimes get turned around about what to eat, especially in terms of the carbohydrate versus protein, or plant and grain-based diet plans. Molly, one of the most intense Controllers with whom I spoke, talks about following Dr. McDougall's aforementioned plan for decades, which is heavy grain/carbohydrate based, but that she feels better when she eats a more protein-based diet. "So I'm in a quandary about what to eat. [Laughs] Honestly." Here is someone who has read and researched food for decades, yet still is confused because advice of her trusted expert conflicts with what her body tells her. Although acknowledging the knowledge that experts hold, the lack of established rules in a postmodern foodscape requires consumers to look within themselves to determine what works best for them.

As previously mentioned, less than one-third of my respondents (28%) have ultrastrict diets, including Vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free, Paleo, which parallels national trends (Koeller 2012). Their high level of animation during the interview may be an issue of self-selection, wherein people with strict diets tend to spend more time thinking about their diets and may be more inclined to want to talk in great detail about food. It is important to note, however, that even people without strict and specific diets had, and could articulate with pride, their food rules, sometimes in minute detail.

*Uniqueness.* Many of my interviewees see their food choices as so much part of their identity that they seek validation that they are unique and unusual. Many of my respondents are not concerned about judgment, and seem to take pride in what they perceive to be distinctive eating habits. Controller Antonia is extreme in this desire, even claiming during our interview that, "I bet you haven't heard from anyone like me before." When interviewees express concern about whether I might judge their answers as weird or unusual, my standard response is to validate them by saying that "everyone is unique and has their own food rules." Most people seem to interpret this as acceptance and validation, and go on with their stories of their perceived idiosyncrasies. However, when I try to appease Antonia, she looks visibly disappointed that I did not fully validate her uniqueness. This is not just social acceptability bias, wherein respondents say what they think interviewers want them to say (Chambliss and Schutt 2013). For many people, food is how they distinguish themselves as individuals.

#### **REFLEXIVE MAINTENANCE OF EATING IDENTITIES**

Maintaining an identity requires effort and action in order to keep the perception of an identity in alignment with the standard of the identity (Stets and Burke 2000). Thus, it is no surprise that people need to continuously adjust their food rules in order to reflexively maintain and re-create their eating identities. The people I spoke with who attempt to project a healthy eating identity, for example, go through extraordinary efforts in order to maintain their diet, and thus the alignment between their identity and their behavior. But within a busy modern lifestyle, actions must be taken to make this process as convenient as possible.

If one element of successfully maintaining a healthy eating identity is convenience, a big part of that is planning. As an example, Becky talks at length about how she plans her meals. Every day she fills her tumbler with almond milk, which she then drinks almost all the way down, and then re-fills the mug with coffee in order to have a nondairy creamer on-the-go. Becky says that it is not just packing a brown bag lunch, but the whole process: shopping, meal planning, cooking, preparing, timing, etc. Becky relates how her eating plan goes haywire on the weekend because she misses breakfast, and sometimes lunch, because she is making up for lost sleep. She maintains her Vegan diet, but her level of consistency and control requires forethought and consideration, which is incredibly time-consuming. Maintaining an eating identity truly is a *project*.

## Rigidity of Rules

Not only is it up to individuals to develop their own rules without clear guidance, they also must decide how rigidly they will stick to those rules. For example, Becky's rules become looser on the weekends. Special occasions or holidays are the most common times people are willing to loosen their food rules for the situation. For example, several people specifically mention Halloween as an occasion when people who otherwise do not eat candy will indulge (Clark 2005). Several respondents describe the nostalgia of trick-or-treating, demonstrating how candy and childhood are so intertwined in that one holiday (Dusselier 2001; James 1982; Mintz 1985). Holidays can provide a particular challenge to some people's food rules. As previously described, Harry will eat pies and cookies over the holidays to "fit in," although he admits that it is "not torture" to eat those things, just "nudging" from his family. Other people and circumstances can impact the level of adherence to food rules, and thus, the maintenance of an eating identity.

Many respondents' key strategies for sticking to their rules is keeping certain foods out of the house, and/or preparing foods in a healthy way. Eating out with friends can either provide an opportunity to splurge or a challenge to one's food rules. Food rules may need to be more flexible when eating out compared to when eating at home. This may be because the eater does not have control over what was available and/or how it was prepared, or because eating out provides access to tempting foods not normally available. In particular, people with very restrictive diets, such as Vegans, find eating out difficult because they do not want to compromise on their food rules.

I feel like I'm a burden sometimes, like you know, when people are trying to go out to eat or something like that, I'm like oh, I can't eat that. They're like hey, let's go to Five Guys! I'm like, they don't eat my food, like I don't eat that food at all. It's just the worst. Like those Thai chains, they're all fried food, they're all--I went to Buffalo Wild Wings and I was like do you have anything non-fried? And they're like well I guess there's salad...Like you know, if I don't wanna be a pain in the group's butt or something, I'll go there, I know they'll have salad, but usually I don't like to spend \$8 for a salad when if I can go to Bodo's and spend \$5 for their avocado bagel sandwich, even though bagels are kinda bad. - Clark, male, 20's, VA

A few respondents describe abstaining from eating entirely if there is not anything

appropriate to eat, and food rules determine this appropriateness. Clark, a Vegan

Controller, also describes how he really wants peanut butter cups when he sees his

friends eat them, but he abstains because they are not Vegan, even though they are his

favorite candy.

[L]ike there's plenty of times where I see somebody eating Reeses cups and I'm like can I get my hands--like just ask them if you can have some. Like I want to eat it, but I know I shouldn't. - Clark, male, 20's, VA

While Clark does not give into temptation because of his commitment to Veganism, some people, like Controller Hope, explicitly try to relax about their rules so as to not seem too rigid.

What I do is ride the middle of the road sometimes when I'm with my family. It doesn't necessarily tip the balance and I don't think that I shouldn't be eating this, and I just do it. Because I don't want to appear really fanatical about my diet, you know, Oh, Hope won't touch that or Hope, you know, I don't like that. - Hope, female, 70's, CA

While the level of rigidity varies greatly depending on their eating identity, every person I interviewed has some kind of food rules, and talks in some way about how their rules affect their interactions with other people. Some of those food rules are fairly steady, but for many of my respondents, their food rules are in a constant state of flux.

#### Changing Food Rules

Using food in a reflexive project of the self means that it is possible to change the way that you eat in order to change your eating identity. The incentive for changing one's food rules can be simply getting older, experiencing a health crisis, or responding to an external policy intervention. However, not all changes are permanent, and maintaining new food rules may be challenging, thus highlighting the ongoing and reflexive nature of food choices and eating behavior.

*Aging and food rules*. Getting older clearly impacts my respondents' food rules. Previous research has shown that fast food consumption tends to drop as people age, with peak consumption for both men and women between the ages of 20 and 39 (Fryer and Ervin, 2013). Not surprisingly, I also found a close relationship between age and consumption, and the threshold age for my respondents also is around 40 years old. Half of my respondents under age 40 (50%) eat a high level of junk food, compared to 37 percent of those over 40 years old. Regardless of their eating identity, younger interviewees eat more junk food and drink more sugar-sweetened drinks. Younger respondents of all eating identities, including Slipper Mark, are more likely to think that it is possible to "burn off" any junk food that is eaten.

Twenty years ago, when there weren't as many computers if any, you would be outside playing all the time. You'll see with the younger generation today, we are becoming an overweight society. And it's a combination of that too much sedentary lifestyle and a quick fix from a fast food joint. - Mark, male, 20's, CA

Although a larger proportion of younger respondents talk about the relationship between eating and activity, it is mostly as an example of their own strategies for managing their food and eating. However, older respondents also acknowledge, in hindsight, that they used to be able eat differently when they were younger and more active. As people age and experience medical problems, their food choices and eating behaviors may change, as well.

*Fateful moments*. For some, dramatic dietary changes are in response to a health crisis, such as a diagnosis of celiac resulting in immediate abstention from gluten, or because of an inspiration or imperative to start a specific and restrictive diet. These events can be considered "fateful moments," or "transition points which have major implications not just for the circumstances of an individual's future conduct, but for self-identity" (Giddens 1991:142).

A drastic, diet-changing event does not even need to be experienced oneself. As an example, Clark sees his father and uncle complaining about all of their physical ailments as a "wake-up call," prompting him "then and there" to eat Vegan in order to avoid the same fate of overweight, arthritis, and knee replacements.

With the first experience of a "fateful moment" of diagnosis of a food-related disease, such as diabetes or celiac, several of my respondents describe learning a lot and reading a lot, but that there is less research after eating for their diagnosis becomes a

habit — it becomes tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1966). For example, although he does not adhere to his prescribed diabetic diet, Balancer Jay talks about getting a lot of information from doctors and nutritionists after he was first diagnosed, and because Jay's wife has primary responsibility for shopping and cooking, his "fateful moment" required that she increase her knowledge about which foods are appropriate. They do not really read or research much any more because Jay reports that now his wife "just knows" which spaghetti sauce to get.

It is clear that perspective is a big part of how people react to these fateful moments. Most of my respondents with medically restricted diets seem accepting of it, for the most part. Most just find a way around eating restricted foods. Many of my respondents express a sense of empowerment in not eating certain foods, both to demonstrate their ability to choose and the value of taking responsibility for their own health. Although the responsibility does fall on the individual, the individual also can reap the psychic and emotional rewards of being in charge of their own food choices and eating behaviors.

The issue of dieting and restriction comes up frequently during the interviews, mostly in a negative way. As an example, even though Controller Kelly has quite rigid and restrictive food rules, she talks a lot about food rituals and how "sad" she is when people diet. She says that her main focus is what she is "allowed" to eat, but then she immediately scratches that and says what she "gets" to eat. She does not consider her limited diet as restrictive, but rather as helping to support her health.

However, without a specific diagnosis or physical symptoms, a secondhand wakeup call may not be a "fateful moment," since the changes are not long-lasting. For example, Slipper Malou describes "flirtations with Veganism," but that she does not have the determination to stick with it. Similarly, even people who strictly follow highly specific diets like macrobiotic (Antonia) or Paleo (Paige) or vegetarianism (Molly), all Controllers, continually seek new information, almost like a hobby. Thus, people may throw themselves into specific diets more as a constant searching for what to eat, expressing more of a seeker mentality where the pleasure is in discovering a new and allegedly better way to eat. In contrast, most of my respondents with specific medical diagnoses figure out what they have to do and stick with it without variation.

Regardless of the incentive, dramatically changing one's food rules may be easier said than done. Many of my respondents express concern that if people who eat a lot of junk food want to change their diet, there would need to be a "transitional phase" to wean themselves off junk food and onto healthy food. For example, Controller Jim believes that if someone who eats a lot of fast food would try to eat as many beets as he does, their "stomach would just turn flips."

*Reactions of others.* As in any identity performance, the reaction of others is key (Goffman [1959] 1990), and a stronger reaction from others may come in response to more extreme food rules. As previously described, many of my respondents seem to take pride in the uniqueness of their food rules and eating behaviors, even if they think that others (including myself) might judge them. John, a Controller, describes his eating chili for breakfast as "weird," and although people ask him what he is doing, he claims not to care. I have previously described the comments and reactions some respondents have received while eating with family and friends. So, the question remains, why do people engage in behavior that they know will receive a negative reaction from others? Why do

they have such an attachment to being different? Are they seeking some kind of reaction?

I argue that it is about personal identity — food rules serve as badges of individuality. Many, but not all, people have autonomy over the food that they eat in a way they do not have in many other areas of their lives. Yes, there are financial constraints for many people, either real or perceived medical constraints for others, and structural constraints for all of us in terms of what is available, but what we ingest seems to be the last bastion of deregulation and social freedom. Several people complain about the cost of eating organic or local food, but many of my respondents with the most extreme eating identities claim that they prefer to go without eating than to compromise the quality of the food they eat. However, a level of privilege underscores this type of hyperbole: the most extreme eaters in my sample have the financial and social resources to reject an offered food that they perceive to be inappropriate. In reality, perhaps with the exception of someone with severe diabetes or celiac, it is hard to imagine even the most restrictive eater choosing starvation over an undesirable food.

The most extreme and unique examples may just be popping first into people's minds, but my respondents' stories speak to the fact that food is an element of identity, and that people think of themselves, and others, in terms of food. Although some people like to think of themselves as unique, the three distinctive eating identities presented in the beginning of this chapter emerge as patterns of eating behaviors and beliefs about food. As described, particularly for Slippers, just because people think that they know what they should eat, that does not mean that they actually eat what they should, or what

they claim they want to eat. There may be room for explicit intervention in encouraging people to change their food rules.

*Role of the government in changing behavior*. Despite the "Do-It-Yourself philosophy of neoliberal governance, in which the care of the self is increasingly one's own responsibility, not that of the state" (de Solier 2013:26), the state, through subsidies and taxes, and food corporations, through processing and marketing, still has an impact on the choices available to people in the creation of their eating identity. Even without experiencing a fateful moment, people can be encouraged by governmental policies to change their food rules and eating behavior. However, the type of intervention seen as acceptable varies by eating identity.

Balancers seem quite cynical about whether the government is actually able to influence what people consume. The most common activity Balancers suggest is for the government to focus on including more fruits and vegetables in school lunches. However, outside the federally subsidized school lunch program, Balancers feel it would be difficult for the government to do anything because it would be too much like forcing people to change. Again, the Balancers value the opportunity to make their own choices about what they eat, and they trust themselves and others to make the right choices.

While Balancers focus on the futility of governmental attempts to influence people, Slippers are the most vocal that the government should not influence consumers in any way. There are common themes among the Slippers that the government should not regulate what people do in their own homes, nor should it be involved in business decisions of private corporations. This group describes the government as the most paternalistic, but also blames this on consumers. As Katherine complains, "we're making

the government like our Mom and Dad" by consenting to government restriction of food, such as limiting soda sizes or serving low-fat milk in schools. However, this resistance to government intervention may be because many Slippers believe it would be ineffective. This group, more than any, feels helpless to stop themselves, or to be stopped through government intervention, from slipping in their food choices.

In contrast, Controllers seem to hone in on the government's ability to provide information and education. There is definitely criticism of the government among Controllers, including a criticism of FDA recommendations as being based in economics, not science, yet the overwhelming sentiment among Controllers is that the government does have a responsibility to influence consumption. On the production end, Controllers highlight subsidies on corn and dairy as problematic. On the consumption side, Controllers mention the government's power to increase social awareness, provide nutritional information, and increase access to healthy food options. This group values protection, and seeks change coming from regulation and restriction of the food industry, as well as changes in federal subsidies that they see as supporting an injurious industry. This aligns with the Controllers' contention that everyone should have access to the same information, and then it is up to each individual to make the right choice. Thus, all three eating identities agree with the importance of personal behavior, but differ in the extent to and means by which the government should intervene to influence behavior.

In addition to government agencies, private agencies also engage in multi-million dollar social marketing and public health campaigns to influence consumers' food choices and eating behaviors to address rising rates of obesity and obesity-related diseases (Huhman and Patnode 2013; Signorelli and Perlov 2013; Yancey et al. 2013). However,

I argue based on my findings that any such government or social intervention programs are doomed to fail if they do not acknowledge the differences between the eating identities in how food and eating carry deeper meanings because consumers must now make food choices in the absence of clear truth or guidelines. Government interventions and other social programs must consider how different eating identities might react to the proposed program.

# SUMMARY OF EATING IDENTITIES

Faced with a constant barrage of choices and changing information and contexts, people must constantly take in new information to either maintain or re-create their eating identities. Food decisions reinforce eating identities, marking the eater's place in a changing foodscape, as well as vis-à-vis other people.

The following table visually summarizes the three eating identities in terms of the level of effort spent thinking about food, the level of alignment between food rules and eating behavior, and the related level of comfort with food and eating. The last column lists an overall keyword for each eating identity.

	Effort	Alignment	Comfort	Keyword
Balancers	-	+	+	ease
Slippers	+	-	-	worry
Controllers	+	+	+	discipline

Table 2 – Summary of Eating Identities

Whether eating is an acceptance of "everything in moderation," a back-and-forth of being "on or off the wagon," or a "severe" restriction of certain foods, eating identities

provide a framework to understand how people think and talk about themselves and others in terms of food and eating. As discussed in the next chapter, the three eating identities use macro-level explanatory models in different ways to describe and explain issues of food-related diseases, as well as develop more specific definitions of particular foods.

# CHAPTER 5 - MAKING SENSE IN A CHANGING FOODSCAPE

As people are "forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options" (Giddens 1991:5) about what to eat, they often have to make determinations and distinctions for themselves. This chapter presents a broad analysis of different definitions my respondents construct and use for understanding what junk food is and how their definitions change based on their own situation. Distinctions between the eating identities are apparent in various definitions of junk food as people attempt to make sense of a changing foodscape. The chapter concludes with a discussion of three macro-level explanatory models used to frame and explain problems relating to food, eating, and especially food-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. I find that while the different explanatory models inform the understanding of each of the eating identities,<sup>17</sup> respondents within each eating identity use the models in a slightly different way.

# DEFINITIONS: WHAT IS JUNK FOOD?

One of the biggest challenges in talking analytically about "junk food" as a specific type of food is determining what junk food actually is. Part of this project is to understand what people consider to be junk food for themselves, and how they talk about their consumption of junk food. The Pre-Interview Survey includes a question about how many times in the past week the respondent consumed something that *they* consider to be junk food. At this point in the interview, almost every person stops and thinks, often

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> The eating identities are described in-depth in Chapter 4. In short, Balancers want to (and do) eat a wide variety of foods, Controllers severely restrict the foods that they eat, and Slippers have rules that they want to follow, but often break their food rules.

making faces and jokes as they answer the question. When I ask about what those foods were, my respondents often preface their definitions with phrases such as "for me" or "in my diet," reflecting a feeling of uniqueness and desire to engage in moral relativity in order to not judge others or be judged oneself.

While every interviewee is able to describe what they think junk food is, the definitions may not be straightforward, and may emerge during other areas of the conversation. Although I explicitly ask which foods they consider to be junk food, my respondents' definitions and feelings about junk food also come through in talking about what they consider to be healthy, or in their descriptions of their own or others' eating habits. Thus, the coding of definitions extends well beyond the specific interview question about definitions. Across the transcript, I analyzed respondent's definitions of food using codes for major food groups and nutritional values, descriptions of junk food, the quantity of food, as well as binary distinctions between unhealthy/healthy foods, junk/comfort foods, and naughty/treat foods. But in general, junk food is seen as being highly processed and lacking in any nutritional value.

One challenge of the contemporary American foodscape my respondents describe is how to manage abundance. As a whole, we have too many choices, and these choices may change over time. Instead of seeking calories to survive, we seek calories to satisfy, and as people become desensitized to tastes, they may need higher quantities of food to be satisfied (Moss 2013). Although the specific foods that are mentioned as junk food vary, my respondents overall definition of junk food can be summed up as "too much" of something. However, the distinction of what "too much" is varies depending on the

respondent's eating identity. This section highlights how definitions of junk food vary dramatically depending on one's eating identity.

# Balancers

Balancers, with their well-rounded and more omnivorous diets, tend to focus their definition of junk food on "foods with little nutritional value" or anything with too much "sugar, salt, or fat." Zack, for example, describes junk food as "white flour, sugar, just really.... Virtually devoid of fiber and nutrients, anything other than fat, calories, some protein." In this definition, the "too much" is in terms of the actual ingredients.

Balancers are more likely to eat "naughty" foods or treats that provide nutrition despite being too caloric, which again distinguishes them from junk food. For example, Roxanne's distinction is that "naughty is too many calories... because more calories than I need is what I shouldn't be doing, but it's not junk food, so it will fill me up."

For Balancers, overall, junk food seems to be foods with empty calories that do not really give them anything, either nutritionally or emotionally, and are often eaten mindlessly or while on-the-go. One common perception by Balancers is that it may not just be the food itself that matters, but also *how much* of a food is eaten that makes it problematic.

Well I don't think junk food is that bad. It's just the quantity if you eat a lot of it, you know, like cookies and stuff like that. I mean, we do have like cookies, but we don't eat 'em all. You know, just have ...sometimes a light dinner and then later on have a couple cookies and a little bit of ice cream or something like that. Oh uh...I don't think... I don't think junk food is that bad if you don't... unless you just really...that's all you eat or you don't...or you eat large quantities of it. - Paul, male, 60's, CA

The focus of the interview is on how people currently choose and talk about what they eat, many people also talk retrospectively about the junk food that they *used* to eat. This

remembrance might be from decades ago, or just a few months, but often reflects a lower quality or higher quantity of foods than the Balancer eats now.

#### Slippers

Slippers, who attempt to follow stricter diets, often claim that their food rules preclude them from eating most junk food, which is highly processed. However, Slippers, often acknowledge that they are able to find or create junk food within the parameters of their aspirational diet, especially when a craving hits. Tara describes making junk food at home, demonstrating this ability to find foods within restrictive rules, yet which satisfy the "too much" definition of junk food.

So I make a lot of my own junk food. One of my favorite things to make is this fake sausage dip, so it's Tofutti chorizo, and Tofutti (so a lot of soy based products), and Tofutti sour cream and then like half a jar of salsa, with tortilla chips. I love it and my boyfriend loves it too, so he asks me to make it a lot, so I make it and we eat it and it's really good. I think there was one other--oh, these wings. We take cauliflower and use almond milk and cornmeal to bread them, and then pour like Frank's Redhot sauce and put them in the oven. And then you make a fake blue cheese out of Veganaise and tahini, it tastes just like the real thing. So I consider that to be junk food that I eat. Not every week, but pretty regularly. - Tara, female, 20's, VA

So, while many people would not consider baked cauliflower to be junk food, for Tara, the meaning the food has for her, as well as the context in which she eats it, makes the cauliflower wings a junk food - within her definition. She describes how she makes these foods after she has had a bad day or for a celebration or party, situations in which many other respondents also describe eating what they consider to be junk food.

Although respondents from each of the eating identities describe the emotional comfort that eating junk food can provide, many Slippers also make a clear distinction between comfort food and junk food. While junk food is often described in terms of its physical attributes, such as ingredients or processing, comfort food is described in more

sensual terms such as taste or texture, or memories. For example, Jan speaks reverently about eating the food she ate as a child growing up in Georgia.

Comfort food may elicit good feelings, like peach cobbler is not junk food, but that's kind of a comfort food. Reminds me of my dad and brings back good memories. Or say for me it's a Sunday dinner with fried chicken, beans, so that's comfort food. - Jan, female, 50's, VA

Thus, comfort foods are often put into a separate category. While not foods eaten on a regular basis, or considered healthy, foods that elicit happy memories or comforting sensations are not considered the same as junk food. Thus, comfort foods *mean* something and *do* something for eaters, and thus are described in quite different ways.

Like the distinction between junk foods and comfort foods, the differences between healthy and unhealthy foods do not seem to be the direct inverse. The dividing line between healthy and unhealthy is blurry for many Slippers, and they articulate a "range of unhealthiness" (Jen, female, 50's, CA) or things that could *seem* healthy, like an organic granola bar, but that they believe are actually unhealthy. Definitions of healthy food often relate to freshness and preparation. For example, Elena describes healthy food as "organic, non GMO, good lean protein, not a lot of sugar, not a lot of processed sugar, not a lot of processing in the ingredients, five ingredients or less," a basic viewpoint reflected in many of my respondents' emphasis on the quality of freshness and wholeness as a marker for healthy foods.

### Controllers

For the respondents with more restrictive diets, the Controllers, junk food is "too much" of a food, such as Ann's fried plantain chips<sup>18</sup> or Juaquin's popcorn, which others might <sup>18</sup> Plantains are members of the banana family. They are a starchy, low in sugar variety that is cooked before serving as it is unsuitable raw. They are used in many savory dishes

consider to be a healthier choice. For these respondents with rigid food rules, however, the "too much" is in terms of quantity and preparation. Out of all of my respondents, the Controllers who follow specifically defined diets, such as gluten-free, Paleo, or Vegan, are the most clear about their definitions of junk food, often reflecting the food that their diet restricts, such as breads, desserts, or fast food.

While the healthy/unhealthy distinction can be difficult for some, many Controllers are critical of claims made by food producers as being healthy, requiring consumers to be detectives and "look for less chemicals, dyes, and not just the presence of vitamins, [but] naturally occurring vitamins. They make things sound like it is healthy but some of it is fabricated" (Joe, male, 40's, VA). Again, while the Controllers I spoke with seem to have the most confidence about not being fooled by the food industry, this level of confusion and uncertainty is present in many of the interviews, even with Controllers, on multiple topics.

#### Fast Food

For all three eating identities, a shared shorthand definition of junk food is to equate it with national fast food chains, such as Taco Bell, Burger King, or McDonald's. However, even with this common parallel definition, distinctions still emerge. Although the interview does not include questions about different fast food restaurants, several respondents can articulate an informal ranking of fast food restaurants, wherein Taco Bell and/or Chipotle are seen to be the best or healthiest, and McDonald's is seen as being the worst or unhealthiest. This informal ranking reflects a combination of the quality of the

somewhat like a potato would be used and is very popular in Western Africa and the Caribbean countries. They are usually fried or baked. (Grab Em Snacks 2009)

food and the number of healthy options on the menu, particularly in terms of individualizing orders. For example, several people I talked to describe Chipotle as just protein, rice, beans, and vegetables, and therefore not a bad choice in terms of fast food options. Similarly, several people talk about the virtues of the plain bean burrito and "fresco menu" at Taco Bell, which replaces many of the higher calorie cheeses and sauces with fresh pico de gallo salsa (Taco Bell 2014).

In addition to variation in a general definition of junk food, my respondents highlight even more fine distinctions between other foods. While foods may fall under a general junk food definition of "too much," the classification of those foods as "junk" is challenging when the situation or specific foods are taken into consideration. Whatever the details of a general definition of junk food, a common feeling about junk food is captured by Zack's comment that "…nobody should be eating this."

#### Junk Food Eaters

Like the shared general consensus about fast food as representative of junk food, most of my respondents are able to think of someone that they know who eats a lot of junk food. The interview prompt asks people to describe "someone who eats a lot of junk food regularly" in general, rather than focusing on a specific person. However, when people do know someone who eats a lot of junk food, they tend to speak specifically about that person in their life.

Interestingly, most people describe extremes; either they know someone who eats a lot of junk food and is morbidly obese and visibly unhealthy, or they know someone who eats a lot of junk food and is thin and "can afford to eat junk food [because] they have a really fast metabolism" (Cleo, female, late teens, VA). But even if someone does not fit

the stereotypical image of a junk food eater, they are seen as likely still at risk. For example, Jimmy, a man in his late 20's living in California, describes a friend who eats McDonald's four to five times a week and is "as thin as a rail but the numbers as far as his health, like cholesterol and that kind of stuff probably aren't good ... but you really wouldn't be able to tell."

While not everyone can think of an example of someone who eats a lot of junk food, none of my respondents describe someone who eats a lot of junk food and is just "fine" as they are. For many respondents, age and physical activity are seen as almost protective factors, in that they used to be able to eat that way "when they were younger" (Norman, male, 30's, CA) or "when I was running and working out every day I could eat as much as I wanted, even fast food, and not gain weight" (Mark, male, 50's, VA). Along these lines, descriptions of a young person who eats a lot of junk food, even if they exercise regularly, are often followed by a warning caveat that their eating habits will "catch up with them" someday. This is interesting because although some of my respondents themselves eat quite a bit of junk food, their descriptions of other people are often more extreme.

In summary, the general shared definition amongst my respondents is that junk foods have too much salt, sugar, and/or fat. Beyond that basic definition, however, one's eating identity impacts how one specifically defines junk food. While Balancers tend to think of junk foods as having empty calories, Slippers are more inclined to define junk foods as problematic and differentiate between junk food and comfort food. Finally, Controllers tend to have the most clear definitions of what junk foods are, usually the foods that are not included in their own food rules. However, members of all three eating

identities often conflate junk food with fast food. Overwhelmingly, my respondents believe that people who eat a lot of junk food on a regular basis are harming themselves and their long-term health.

# DEFINITIONS: HOW DO THEY CHANGE?

In addition to variation in the content of definitions, personal definitions of junk food can change over time due to increased information or experiences. The ability and willingness to change definitions allows people to use new information to reflexively modify their eating identity. Some respondents attribute these changes to developments in broader understandings of nutrition, experiences with their own increased knowledge, receiving a medical diagnosis, or from moving to a different area. Despite the homogenization (Mennell 1996) and predictability (Ritzer 2008) that mass production of foods brings, food culture and food availability are still very much regional (McIntosh 1995). Several of my respondents had moved to different parts of the country and world over the years, and describe dramatic changes in their definitions of what junk food is, depending on where they lived.

### Balancers

Balancers tend to eat the widest variety of foods and have the most relaxed food rules. Many Balancers engage in researching and learning about different foods, and seem to be the most willing to change their rules and definition of what junk food is.

While one of my main arguments is that competing expert messages about food are contested, several Balancers describe their own increased awareness and knowledge of nutrition. As they learn more about what they believe to be healthy and unhealthy, their personal definitions of junk food change accordingly. For example, Ruth has been a

vegetarian and concerned about health and eating for many years. She considers herself very knowledgeable about what is good for her to eat; yet she describes how she is continuously learning. As described previously, her most recent understandings come from the book *Wheat Belly* (Davis 2011), which argues that wheat has been genetically processed and modified from its original form, even just in the last 20 years, making it toxic. Paradoxically, Ruth says that she actually likes wheat:

...it's not that I want to cut it out, I just want it to be good. It's okay I think to eat wheat, there's other issues, but the issue with wheat is...what's been done to it. So if the wheat was okay, maybe the way my grandmother and great grandmother ate it, then it would be okay. - Ruth, female, 60's, VA

So while Ruth does not want to define something that she sees as natural as junk food, she now considers wheat, even if it is whole wheat, to be junk food. She has not been diagnosed with an intolerance to wheat or with celiac disease, but she has now learned and accepted that wheat is something she should avoid.

An actual medical diagnosis of a food-related disease, such as diabetes, celiac, or heart disease can dramatically change one's definition of what is appropriate to eat, but not always. For example, Jay is a man in California in his 70s diagnosed with diabetes who describes a piece of pie, a food that he acknowledges raises his blood sugar, as a "special treat" or something for special occasions, rather than as a junk food to be avoided entirely.

Finally, the region in which someone lives can affect their food definitions. Region matters more than just in terms of availability; even a domestic move can spark dietary changes. Connie is a Balancer originally from the Midwestern United States, now living in California. She moved several times over the past few years, and each move changed her eating incrementally towards what she describes as a healthier diet.

So it was a huge environmental change. I think it would've been bigger from the Midwest straight to here [California], at least at the East Coast that was a little transition here. It's kind of that, "We need junk food but it's not as highly looked upon but it's still okay," and then you move here, especially in this area, and it was just like, "No way. You don't do that. You go get your [Community Sustained Agriculture] boxes and you eat healthy and eat local." It's just a complete change on everything so it was a big shock to the system. - Connie, female, 20's, CA

Connie describes each move as a change, but that moving from the Midwest to the East, then to the West Coast softened the transition; her changes occurred gradually over time. The impact of time on changing behavior does not necessarily require a change in physical location. As previously discussed, it may just be a change in perspective that comes with age and maturity.

# Slippers

As Slippers seem to have the most nuanced definitions of junk foods, including distinguishing comfort foods from junk foods, they often have more room for leeway in their definitions. A food that was once considered a junk food can be easily recategorized as a comfort food, should the need arise. Thus, Slippers seem to change their definitions of junk food due to extreme changes in their lives.

As an example, Mohingar is a woman in her late 40s living in Virginia, who recently moved back to the United States after 10 years of living overseas. She remarks explicitly how her diet changed dramatically when she first moved out of the United States, as well as the changes she has seen since returning.

I tend not to eat the junkie cheap stuff anymore. I lived overseas for 10 years and had a lot of homemade food, so when I came back I could taste a big difference. And I gained a lot of weight when I came back and I wasn't eating more, I was just eating more processed stuff. That's what I attribute it to, the food and what they put in it. So I try to pay a lot more attention to food. - Mohingar, female, 40's, VA

When she lived overseas, she describes relying much more on street food vendors, which while fast, were closer to home cooking than fast food in the United States. As part of her culture shock in returning to the United States, Mohingar has had to re-think what she defines as junk food.

In addition to the example of moving as an adult, many Slippers describe eating differently now than from when they were younger, and in most cases, they now eat better than they did as young adults. Several respondents from each of the eating identities marveled at how they had survived or made it eating junk food as kids and young(er) adults, although Slippers are the most likely to continue some of those old habits.

You know, it may not even be the food itself, but just...it's just the habits that people have. They're eating too god-dang much. You know, that's why they're fat. It's not necessarily the food. And again, you're, you know, the human body can tolerate a lot of damn abuse [laughs]. You know, I smoked many...I'm surprised I'm in this good of health. Hopefully I am, but uh... you know, you can drink all the sugar. I mean, how many Cokes have I consumed in my life, you know? - Mario, male, 50's, CA

Mario is a Slipper who follows a very strict diet six days a week, but still drinks an occasional soda on his splurge day. Thus, even though he does not eat as much junk food as he used to, he still thinks of soda as junk food and drinks it occasionally.

# Controllers

Because they define junk food as the foods that are contrary to their food rules,

Controllers do not seem to change their definitions very often. If they do change their

definitions of junk food, it often results in their food rules becoming even more rigid and

extreme. Their definitions tend to only change due to a serious event or a personal

transformation, such as a medical diagnosis.

As an example, Melissa has been diagnosed with both diabetes and celiac (gluten intolerance), so she makes careful food choices with the explicit intention to manage both of her conditions as much as possible. The diagnoses were not simultaneous, so with each diagnosis, she was forced to revise her thinking about what she eats to be in alignment with her new dietary restrictions. She uses how she feels physically, rather than simply the nutritional content, as her determinant of whether something is junk food or not. Melissa concedes that her definition of junk food has...

...expanded a lot. ... From things like cakes and cookies and Hostess Twinkies to pretty much anything that is going to drive up my blood sugar and cause any GI upsets. I don't eat red meat. I have very, very little dairy. ... I don't add dairy to anything. Fast food, anything processed and packaged, for the most part, I don't bother with. It's junk food to me. But I understand that my definition of junk food includes a lot more than the average person's definition. - Melissa, female, 30's, CA

Melissa describes her definitions of junk food as broader than the typical person, due to her dual diagnoses. However, she reflects a general pattern in Controllers of defining junk food as the very foods that they seek to avoid.

In summary, changes in definitions can come from many sources, with varying effect. A medical diagnosis and a physician's advice may or may not change someone's definition of junk food. In addition to a doctor or other health care professional, the impact of friends, family, and community cannot be overlooked in changing one's definitions. The malleability of definitions can be helpful in navigating a changing foodscape, but it can also cause challenges when definitions conflict with eating behaviors.

# CONTESTED DEFINITIONS

Overall, my respondents' definitions of junk foods, comfort foods, and healthy foods, as well as perceptions of people who eat a lot of junk food, are a function of their eating identity, and they vary dramatically. Controllers and Slippers, with their more restrictive food rules, are much more definitive about what constitutes junk food in their minds, as well as the dangers of eating "too much" of those foods. Balancers, with their more relaxed rules, define junk food as "too much" of particular ingredients like sugar, salt, or fat, or certain foods like cookies, but their classifications are more general and flexible.

What is of particular interest is how definitions of different types of food can be flexible and reflexive, yet become fixed once a new definition is made. Several of my respondents within each of the different eating identities have experienced dramatic transformations in their definitions and eating habits, through either personal or situational changes. They made changes based on their own personal knowledge and experiences, yet they are now able to remain firm in their newfound convictions as being right.

In the broadest sense, there is a shared general understanding that junk food is highly processed with too many artificial ingredients and little nutritional value. However, this general understanding does not mean that there is agreement in the specific details. The varying definitions my respondents provide help begin the exploration of what junk food is, but the very fact that the definitions vary provides an opportunity to dig deeper into the relationship between specific definitions and broader explanations, understandings, and solutions.

Contemplating solutions is difficult when definitions are contested, especially when those definitions are contested amongst experts. In particular, if it is a goal of nutritionists to reduce the amount of junk food people eat, that first requires an agreement of *what junk food is*. The lack of consensus forces people to make their own decisions, not only about what they believe junk food is, but also what should be done, if anything, to encourage people to eat less junk food.

As an example, both Malou (a Slipper in her 30s) and Dennis (a Balancer in his 20's) talk about the pizza available at the same local cafe in Davis, California. While Malou defines the pizza as junk food because of the white flour and high-fat cheese, Dennis defines the pizza as full of nutrients, such as protein and vitamins. Both respondents explicitly believe that they should be able to purchase the pizza if they want to, yet both define the specific food in very different ways. I argue that the eating identities serve as the central, but not the only, categories of understanding how people make sense of food, eating, and food-related disease. The next section describes three explanatory models that help describe and explain issues of food-related illnesses.

# EXPLANATORY MODELS

Frames provide general definitions of situations that guide perceptions and interpretations of what is going on (Goffman 1974). They provide a structure or framework for understanding issues, and place potential social problems in a larger context. Simply put, "frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (Gitlin 2003:6). For the purposes of this project, macro-level explanatory models, or frames, matter because they reflect cultural values, popular discourses, and cultural logics (See Chapter 6) to describe

and explain how food, eating, and food-related diseases might be a problem. Whereas cultural logics provide understandings and help motivate actions, the adherence to different frames or models reflects different ideas about whether and how to address food-related problems, or not (Saguy 2013).

This section explores how adult consumers use three different explanatory frames, or models, in their understanding of food, eating, and food-related diseases. Two of the explanatory models are common and widely used in popular discourse, while the third emerged from this research. The first, the *medical model* (Laing 1971) emphasizes the importance of using scientific nutritional information to identify and remedy food-related diseases, and the second, the *public health model* (Winslow 1920), emphasizes the importance of environmental factors in causing disease. I identify a distinct and new third model used by a significant percentage of my respondents, the *food industrial complex model*. This new model acknowledges the medical model's focus on the importance of nutritional information and the public health model's focus on improving environmental factors, but contends that even with perfect nutritional knowledge and a supportive environment, food-related diseases may continue to be a problem due to corporate, industry, and political policies. These three models compete for salience and dominance in the general discourse and common public opinion.

How people think about food, and junk food in particular, reflects the model(s) they use to describe and explain the causes, consequences of, and remedies for food-related disease. Interviews were coded for comments or stories that reflected the main concepts or ideas of each model. While the vast majority of respondents (75%) focus primarily on

one model, 19 percent use the language from two models, and five percent express ideas found in all three models.

### The Medical Model

The phrase "medical model" was first used by R.D. Laing (1971:39) to describe what he saw as a problematic shift towards identifying mental illness as a medical problem. Laing describes the medical model as based in the physician's education and worldview: when the patient has a complaint, the physician takes a history, conducts an examination and further investigation in order to make a diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment prescription. In this model, illness and disease have a knowable cause, and physicians who use scientific knowledge are the experts. Almost two-thirds (63%) of Balancers use the language of the medical model, strongly valuing their use of scientific nutritional knowledge to know what they should and should not eat, and claiming any modification of behavior needs to come from individuals themselves.

Erving Goffman ([1961] 2007:340) was critical of the use of the medical model in psychiatry, referring to it as a "tinkering services model," wherein the patient goes to the physician to be "fixed," much like a customer brings in a bicycle to be repaired. He criticized "our giving up our bodies to the medical server, and his rational-empirical treatment of them" (Goffman [1961] 2007:340). In his critique of mental hospitalization, Goffman ([1961] 2007:351) points out that under the medical model,

whatever the particular character of his 'disorder,' he can in this setting be treated as someone whose problem can be approached, if not dealt with, by applying a single technical-psychiatric view. That one patient differs from another in sex, age, race grouping, marital status, religion, or social class is merely an item to be taken into consideration, to be corrected for, as it were, so that general psychiatric theory can be applied and universal themes detected behind the superficialities of outward differences in social life. Goffman specifically criticized a "one size fits all" mentality in the field of psychiatry, yet it is easy to see how his argument can extend into other areas of health and wellness, including the nutritional sciences.

*Nutritional Science.* Within the medical model, food-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, have identifiable causes, such as overeating, but also can be prevented or remedied by individual behavior, such as healthy eating. In this section, I focus on one primary remedy for food-related diseases: choosing foods that are deemed by science as nutritionally healthy and avoiding foods determined to be nutritionally unhealthy.

The history of nutrition as a quantifiable science dates back to the late 1700s. While the details have changed with advances in science, technology, and knowledge, the general idea behind nutritional science is to understand in a quantitative and scientific way how the body uses food (Carpenter 2003). Under this model, junk food is defined simply based on nutritional content. Efforts to encourage primary care physicians to advise their patients about nutrition has been to frame nutrition in the language of the medical model, including identifying patterns of risk, detecting symptoms, and diagnosing nutrition-related conditions (Ross 1998; Ross and Rosenberg 1999).

Deborah I. Levine (2013) argues that the professional, medical approach to obesity emerged in the early 1900s, around the time of a series of letters between President Taft and a physician hired to address his unacceptable level of obesity. The predominant focus of the contemporary discussion around food-related illnesses, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, continues to be framed in terms of a medical model, which includes one remedy for food-related diseases: changing personal behavior based on the

latest in nutritional science (Adler and Stewart 2009). In the medical model, food-related illnesses have a clear etiology that can be measured, diagnosed, and treated. Along the same lines, if disease can be diagnosed and treated, its etiology can also be prevented. For example, one measure of obesity is the Body Mass Index, a standardized calculation of height and weight. Since height remains relatively stable during adulthood, the scientific way to reduce this measure of obesity is to reduce body weight by consuming fewer calories and/or burning more calories through activity. Thus, the responsibility for and prevention and treatment of obesity under the medical model falls on the individuals themselves to change their behavior. The widespread framing of an "obesity epidemic" in terms of personal behavior is reflected in the fact that almost two-thirds of my respondents (58%) talk about elements of the medical model, including eating as a cause of disease, and personal responsibility for any consequences.

*Personal responsibility and behavior*. Of key importance for people who use language reflecting the medical model, especially for Balancers, is valuing personal responsibility to both prevent food-related illnesses and treat any consequences that come from eating behaviors that do not align with nutritional science.

[Talking about removing soda vending machines from schools.] As a mom I feel it's my responsibility to teach my kids about healthy foods so they can make choices. I don't think the choices need [to be] removed from sight. Life is about balance and you should be able to have the occasional diet soda, but the more than occasional broccoli, you know. I think it's a tough debate. I listen to the arguments, but I guess I don't want anybody making those choices for me. I don't feel comfortable with people making choices for me. But go to the State Fair and you feel like somebody better start making choices for some people because they're not making the right one. — Starr, female, 50's, CA

Although Starr does not want anyone telling her what she can choose from, she

acknowledges that some people may not be able to resist when faced with the temptation

of deep-fried Twinkies, deep-fried Snickers, or even a deep-fried stick of butter at the State Fair. However, the ideal of the medical model is that eating a deep-fried stick of butter may result in heart disease, but both that cause and consequence are the responsibility of the individual.

The argument behind the medical model is that food-related diseases have an identifiable cause, often a function of personal behavior, as well as a predictable consequence.

...if I wanna buy a super size drink, I'm healthy otherwise, so why shouldn't I be able to do that? There are people buying small drinks that are way more out of shape than I am and probably shouldn't have it all, but they're continuing their bad habits and I'm maybe having an indulgence. - Samantha, female, 20's, VA

Samantha's comment reflects both the Balancers' focus on variety and choice, as well as the challenge of conflicting definitions about the appropriateness of food and eating. The same behavior could cause disease in one person, but could be seen as just an acceptable treat or indulgence, without great consequence, for someone else.

Within the medical model, the focus is on treating the individual, and changing

personal behaviors based on scientific reasoning. The only way to address issues of food

choices and food-related health or disease is to encourage people to make better

nutritional choices and engage in better behavior.

I heard something recently though, where some I think he's a mayor or something in New York is trying to ban like super-sized sodas. That's...I'm so mixed on that because there are so many overweight [people] in this country that the intention is so pure, but the thought of it is so...[pause] it's so evil. Which is weird. Because it's like saying, no. I'm sorry, you don't know me but you're not going to tell me I can't have an extra large Cherry Coke. If I want that, I'm going to have that. But then again I understand what the intention is. Is this because he wants to try and create a healthier America and that's good, but you can't do it for them. What you need to do is just say, hey, this is bad for you and stop being so lazy and get on the treadmill. - Bradley, male, 30's, CA It is clear from the Balancers who refer to the medical model in their understandings about food, eating, and food-related illness that although it might be admirable to try and encourage people to behave better, that encouragement cannot come from limiting options.

Specifically, the medical model argues that in order to modify behaviors, consumers must increase their information and their own motivation for change. Controllers, in particular, support the value of self-motivation and self-direction.

As far as the adage 'if you want something done right you have to do it yourself.' You have to be your own consumer. You have to be the one. Like if you care enough you should look into it yourself. Don't wait for someone else to tell you. Develop critical thinking skills and learn to research things and decide for yourself what is this and what is that. Should I be consuming this or not? - Harry, male, 20's, CA

Within the medical model, not only is the choice of what to eat a personal one, but the researching and gathering of information is also the responsibility of each person. In the medical model, the scientific nutritional information is out there, but it is up to the consumer to obtain it and then make a rational choice based on that information. Controllers, in particular, take this responsibility upon themselves, which is then reflected in their food choices.

*Policy proposal: menu labeling.* One example of a policy favorable to the ideals of the medical model is improving information provided to consumers through product labeling and/or posting calories on menus. New York City was the first locality in April 2008 to require calories be posted on menus at restaurants with 15 or more locations (NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene 2008). The 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, as implemented by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, now

requires all restaurants with more than 20 locations to post calories (U.S. Food and Drug Administration 2013).

Well, for instance....the first time I walked into McDonald's and I saw the calorie count on the board, I was like awesome. You know what it made me do? Turn around. I was like, "are you kidding me? I'm not eating that." And I left. Um....Or...it would lead me to make a choice, but I'm saying that's what it did to me. I was like, forget that! - Jim, male, 40's, CA

Menu labeling is acceptable under the medical model because it is simply providing information that allows people to make an informed choice. Options are not limited, and people are not forced into making a choice they would not otherwise make. For many Controllers, like Jim, menu labeling does change behavior; seeing the calorie count creates sticker shock and impacts his behavior. But for others, it is just additional information to ignore.

[I] remember when we had to post the calories and California made [restaurants] post the calories for all the things, people don't care. Like people who care are the people who were already investigating themselves, and that's what I've noticed. There are some people who go, oh that's a lot of calories, um...they won't get it. Or some people will say, oh that's a lot of calories, but I'll still get it. - Guy, male, 20's, CA

Although several respondents in this project specifically recall seeing calorie counts and either making different choices or leaving the restaurant entirely, research has been mixed whether posted calorie counts have any impact on people's consumption choices at fast food restaurants (Bollinger, Leslie, and Sorensen 2011; Downs et al. 2013; Elbel et al. 2009; Ellison, Lusk, and Davis 2013; Farley et al. 2009; Schwartz et al. 2012). In alignment with Guy's first-hand observation, recent research has found that it is mostly people who are already health-conscious and focused on calorie counts who most take notice of the posted information and act on it (Gregory, Rahkovsky, and Anekwe 2014).

Even with perfect information, which foods are locally available may be the bigger

problem, one addressed by the public health model described in the next section.

The Public Health Model

The Public Health Movement began in the United States during the early 1900s, focusing

on the prevention of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, typhus, and influenza.

Rather than acting as a "police power" enforcing quarantines, C.-E.A. Winslow

(1920:30) argued that public health should be:

the science and the art of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting physical health and efficiency through organized community efforts for the sanitation of the environment, the control of community infections, the education of the individual in principles of personal hygiene, the organization of medical and nursing service for the early diagnosis and preventive treatment of disease, and the development of the social machinery which will ensure to every individual in the community a standard of living adequate for the maintenance of health.

While early public health activities focused on containing outbreaks of contagious disease throughout the community, Winslow's argument in 1920 mentions the relationship between health outcomes and social problems, in his case, infant welfare and poverty. The philosophy of the public health model that he proposed, and which has become widely accepted today, is that improving the physical, social, and economic environments in which people live will improve health outcomes.

Applied to food and eating, the public health model argues that food choices are limited by environmental influences (Swinburn et al. 1999). Unlike the medical model, which focuses on individual choices made with perfect information, the public health model emphasizes the challenges large groups of people face in terms of access to healthy food options. Within the public health model, even with perfect information, people cannot make good choices because of environmental factors or limited community resources.

Environmental resources. The focus of the public health model is on prevention;

preventing people from making unhealthy choices by changing the local environment and

limiting access to unhealthy options. Alternately, the public health model encourages

people to make healthy food choices by increasing the opportunities to make healthy food

choices. With its focus on access and availability, the public health model highlights

regional and class differences, seeking to address local resources that either prevent or

limit healthy choices (Adler and Stewart 2009).

While the choices that people make for themselves matter, this model

acknowledges that the options available are constrained by the environment in which they

live. Healthy food may be lacking, or unhealthy food may proliferate. Many of my

interviewees discuss both of these limitations as being problematic.

The grocery store that's across from [the park in a lower income area], if you go in there, it's alcohol and junk food, you know. What you're labeling junk food, and that's what's available. So if it's between like not eating. The basic desire to feed your child, then... It's demonizing to not be able to buy some kind of food for your child. - Pearl, female, 30's, VA

While Pearl, a Balancer, describes the lack of healthy options in a lower income area of

the town in which she lives, issues of availability hit Christina, a Slipper, closer to home.

There's McDonald's open 24 hours less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile from my house that's a drive through. I could easily hit that to/from every which way everywhere I go. There's actually...a McDonald's less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile [from my house]. If I make a right turnout...to go to work, less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile, there's another McDonald's. ...[R]ight next door a wonderful organic [restaurant]. Love that place. Anytime you go there, it's 45 minutes to wait to get something and there's no parking. Totally. I would eat there every day. - Christina, female, 30's, CA We Are All Foodies

Although Christina explains that she can financially afford to eat out at restaurants other than fast food, she feels that the proximity and convenience of fast food restaurants in her immediate area limits the reality of her choices. If she wants to be efficient with her time, she opts for fast food.

In addition to financial and physical resources, time is also a finite resource that must be taken into account in food choices. Just as Christina describes the ease in which she can access fast food 24 hours a day within a half-mile of her house, Norman (a Balancer in his 30's in California) describes how much easier it is for him to eat fast food as he commutes between his two part-time jobs. He would rather go home and take a shower between jobs than take the time to make a healthy lunch. Since he drives past multiple fast food restaurants on the way to his second job, it is just easier to grab "those tacos with the parmesan cheese on the shell and the fried burrito that would leak like orange juice all over your hands," which he loves even though they make him feel "crappy."

Several of the Balancers and Slippers I spoke with describe how much easier it is to make unhealthy choices because the food is quick and easy. It is much more convenient to grab something quickly, and most of the time the quick grab is something unhealthy. However, this does not need to be the case. The public health model seeks to change behavior by changing the options available in order to prevent people from making an unhealthy choice in the first place.

The assumption of the public health model is that if healthy options are more readily and easily available, people will be more likely to make a healthy choice instead of an unhealthy choice. For example, many of my respondents describe an informal

ranking of the healthiest fast food options. An initiative in alignment with the public health model is to expand healthy choices at fast food restaurants, such as the "fresco" option at Taco Bell. Thus, changes in the environment impact food choices by changing what is available to choose from in the first place.

*Policy proposal: New York City soda restrictions.* As mentioned previously, my respondents criticize former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's proposal to reduce the consumption of unhealthy junk food by banning the sale of sugary drinks larger than 16 ounces under the medical model as an example of restricting choice. However, when considered within the frame of public health model, other respondents see this proposal as a positive step to limit the amount of sugar-sweetened drinks available.

I don't see any problem with what the City of New York is doing, for example, limiting soda size. I think that we know that there is absolutely no benefit to drinking soda. Zero. There's zero benefit to drinking a soda. It's a negative health impact, drinking soda, in fact. So if we know that and the City wants to say, look, I'm not going to stop you from drinking soda, but let's just not sell Big Gulps, because again, free, cheap, and easy equals more consumption. So we say, ok, we obviously have a health epidemic in our country, let's do something to help people, and you can't tell people not to drink soda... It's It's just a deterrent. It's like OK, so go if you want to buy two sodas, go for it... you know, if you still want to drink 24 ounces of soda, you can do that, and we're not going to stop you, but [pause] I don't think you can tell people...the big one out there now they're going to force us to eat broccoli, right? OK, c'mon now, let's not be ridiculous about this. - Sara, female, 30's, CA

Sara, a Slipper, agrees with the proposed policy in New York City, and responds to the criticism about it limiting choice and/or being a slippery slope with derision. She argues that people can still make the choice to drink soda, limiting the size just serves as a "deterrent."

A common theme that comes through in my interviews is that many people *wish* they could make better choices, or wish they could seek out healthier options, in part by changing their environment to make it easier to eat healthy or by changing the food itself. Several people feel like the limitations on their options are because of the actual food products themselves, specifically in terms of processing and modification. The food industrial complex model addresses these specific limitations.

#### The Food Industrial Complex Model

In addition to the two most commonly accepted models for understanding food and eating behaviors, I have identified a third new model, which I call the food industrial complex model. This model borrows from Dwight D. Eisenhower's ([1961] 1987) idea of a "military industrial complex," contending that financial interests of national food companies and policy interests of legislators and regulators combine to create a food system in which people cannot make good choices, despite their best efforts.

The food industrial complex model extends the two previously discussed models in that it acknowledges that consumer choice can be a cause of and remedy for food-related disease, as well as criticizing the structural constraints imposed by environmental resources. However, in this model, the issue is not the neighborhood or socio-economic environment in which people live, but rather the production and distribution of food itself that explains the problem of food-related diseases.

As a whole, the Balancers are largely uncritical of the food industry. In contrast, Slippers are the most critical of the food industry (67% of Slippers use the language of the food industrial complex model), largely due to their own personal experiences. The Slippers tell stories of feeling "addicted" to sugar or fast food, or being attracted by salt, We Are All Foodies

sugar, or fat, bright and colorful packaging, and the convenience of junk food. Over half of the Controllers (60%) use the language of the medical model, but mostly to validate their own choices in what they eat and to be critical of others who make what they perceive to be subpar food choices. In addition, half of the Controllers (50%) refer to the ideals of the food industrial complex model, and are critical of the food industry for selling poisons and toxins, or as Morgan puts it, "pure crap." Overall, almost half of all interviewees (49%) use language reflecting the food industrial complex model and talk critically about the food system, expressing some variation of Malou's statement that, "it has to become less profitable to encourage people to have unhealthy habits." *Processed food.* Within the food industrial complex model, obesity and other foodrelated diseases are caused by cheap, fast, and easy highly processed food. While the issues of cheap, fast, and easy also emerge under the public health model, the challenges of low cost and high availability posed by fast food, specifically, are expanded to all foods. Many respondents express extensive criticism about the processing of all foods, and how processing can turn even seemingly healthy food into junk food.

There is a very common feeling amongst many of my respondents from all three eating identities that the changes that take place in food when it is highly processed are problematic. However, there are clearly different levels of processing, which my respondents seem to be trying to understand and articulate for themselves.

Well, it seems the further you go from its natural beginning, the more you engineer, the more you modify it, the more I'm in question of it. I can't say that it's all unhealthful, but it starts to make me wonder – the further we go from what nature made it and should've started with. - Roxanne, female, 50's, CA

Even if the processing does not reach the level where the food becomes unhealthy, there is still a suspicion that comes from companies "doing something" to natural foods, either for profit or for convenience.

Here's one: oatmeal. Clearly really good for you, it's gonna do all of these things for you. That's great. And then Cheerios are made out of oats so they get to put the little label on but what they don't tell you is that they pummel that stuff into a very, very fine powder, so it's instant, it can be digested almost instantly. So, any of the benefits from it, boom, but they're still able top put that little heart sticker label on the side. - Juaquin, male, 50's, CA

Thus, when corporations become involved in food production, seemingly healthy food can become unhealthy by processing, yet companies can still claim that it is healthy.

This feeling of a sense of corporate irresponsibility, or even subterfuge, is a common sentiment amongst the people who refer to elements of the food industrial complex model, especially Controllers. There is a frequent feeling of food manufacturers trying to dupe or trick consumers into thinking something was healthy or was going to be good for them. While most of the Controllers who use the language of the food industrial complex believe that they are too smart to fall for the industry tactics, some Controllers accept and even praise the manipulation of foods to make them seem healthier. Peyton, for example, lauds the food manufacturers because they made her favorite foods seem more acceptable because they appear healthier and help her stick to her own food rules.

They have things I used to think of as junk food, now they tweaked those and they have low fat, even low calorie, so they've kind of tweaked those or added these fillers or whatever to make them less junkie. ... Well now you can go and they have Breyer's carb smart, Breyer's fat-free, low fat, so they tweak those. And even with some potato chips and that sort of thing, I don't know if they're still using Splenda or Smart Ones, different things. - Peyton, female, 30's, VA

The tweaking of foods to make them either lower calorie or lower fat can give people permission to eat foods they would not otherwise eat, and may actually increase their ability to follow their food rules. The increased processing of available products is even more critical for people with dietary restrictions, such as gluten-free foods for people with celiac, or sugar-free food for people with diabetes. However, even as the food options for people with special diets broaden, those products are still subject to the perceived problems inherent in processing.

[T]here's a gluten-free store here [in Midtown Sacramento], and when I first started working here I would go there often, and I finally said, "it's gluten free but the stuff is still in boxes, it's still processed." So you know... - Molly, female, 50's, CA

So even though Molly can find gluten-free pasta and Peyton can find fat-free ice cream, a critique informed by the food industrial complex model is that those products still have something done to them, and are therefore unnatural or unhealthy.

However, especially for eaters with special dietary requirements, manufactured foodstuffs can have at least one positive aspect of processing: the predictability that comes from mass production.

For [my pizza], I use a gluten-free crust. It's like a really thin...the entire crust is like 60 grams of carbs. ...I can make my own, but when I get the-- it's Udi's — their brand. I know exactly what the carb count is for my insulin. Some stuff I used to make on my own but I can't now because I can't get the carb count just right, or haven't yet. So there are a few things I get that are in bags, but not much. - Melissa, female, 30's, CA

Melissa, a Controller like Molly and Peyton, is very clear that she uses her food choices to manage her diabetes and celiac diagnoses, and like Peyton, highly processed food is part of her health management strategy. So while some people who are dedicated to eating unprocessed foods, such as Molly, would consider a gluten-free frozen processed pizza crust to be junk food, for Melissa, this highly processed food provides a way for her to enjoy foods and keep her blood sugar on target. Melissa sees the standardization that comes from mass manufacturing as beneficial, but it is critical for her health that the ingredient list and nutritional content be accurate.

*Labeling and packaging.* The issue of food labeling is important to many of my respondents, including the labeling of dubious health claims on products or the failure of California's Proposition 37 in 2013, which would have required manufacturers to label foods with genetically-modified ingredients (Tata 2013). Several of my respondents are critical of the lobbying efforts of food manufacturers in general, as well as specific efforts to defeat this particular ballot initiative in California. Within the food industrial complex model, there is a feeling of being powerless against corporate interests, and being unable to make good decisions due to false or questionable claims. Interestingly, even when the labeling is technically correct, there is some research that finds that labels indicating that foods are "low-fat" encourage people to eat more (Wansink and Chandon 2006). Similarly, foods can appear to be healthier when manufacturers adopt smaller serving sizes, which reduces the listed number of calories, fat, and sugar grams per serving, thereby influencing consumers' level of consumption (Mohr, Lichtenstein, and Janiszewski 2012).

Under the food industrial complex model, it is not just what is *in* the food (the ingredients), but also what the food is in (the packaging) that can make it junk food. Malou, a Slipper, describes junk food as foods wrapped in plastic; therefore, it is the substance of the packaging that is important. The issue of packaging relates to the previous discussion of labeling.

Like there's definitely junk food that's packaged and marketed as being like "natural" or "healthy" and I think that's pretty manipulative as well. And I've been susceptible to that too. Like, oh like this cool kind of retro-looking package that like and it's telling me all about how potatoes are organic. - Malou, female, 30's, CA

Rather than the material used or claims made, Kelly, a Controller, emphasizes the "loudness" of the packaging in terms of color, font, design, etc. She uses Cheetos as an example of junk food, which comes in "loud packaging." The power of using colorful images and icons by food producers, particularly to entice children, has been widely documented in multiple countries (Elliott 2012; Hebden et al. 2011, 2011; Pires and Agante 2011). Thus, packaging is important as a way to attract consumers, but also as a way to inform them of the messages the producers want to give about the food. Packaging is symbolic in terms of the five senses: seeing bright colors and busy designs, hearing the crinkly plastic and smelling Cheetos when the bag is first opened, feeling the rush of air when popping open of a can of soda, and tasting the metallic can when you drink it. Other research has found that these sensory characteristics do influence food choices (Bublitz, Peracchio, and Block 2010; Chandon 2013; Chandon and Wansink 2007).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the introduction of plastic packaging around the time of World War II changed the way food is transported. Interestingly, several of my respondents mention plastic food wrappers as signaling a food as unhealthy. Two female Controllers in their 50's living in California reflect the criticism of the food industrial complex model by vehemently refusing to eat anything wrapped in plastic. For example, Molly will not eat any foods, even organic fresh fruit, if they are served on a plastic platter, and Morgan only uses glass or metal containers. Both of these Controllers' aversion to plastic is not only because of what the plastic wrapping signals or symbolizes, but because of the perceived unhealthiness inherent in the plastic itself. For these two women, the plastic package is a pollutant, as well as a symbol of pollution contained inside (Douglas 2004).

One of the key goals of processing is to make foods shelf-stable, an attribute also granted by sealing food in plastic. Like the plastic packaging, shelf-stability is often seen by Controllers as one of the characteristics that makes food "junk."

By default I want to go with the cellophane candy wrapper kind of stuff where it's more plastic than cardboard. I don't know why the paper makes it more nutritive but the plastic is definitely a barrier. ... Like it's saran-wrapped or whatever. Like how it's single serving and everything like that. Homogeneous. - Harry, male, 20's, CA

Packaging can be for longevity and shelf life, as well as for attraction and enticement. It

is through the packaging and labeling that food companies make claims about their foods

and inform consumers about nutritional values. The food industrial complex model

compensates for a gap in the medical model in that when the claims and/or the

information provided by manufacturers are questionable, consumers are unable to engage

in rational decision-making. But with inaccurate, incomplete, or deceptive information,

consumers can feel ineffectual in their role as decision makers.

*Ingredients*. Not only is the production process and packaging seen as unhealthy and sometimes deceptive, but under the food industrial complex model, specific ingredients

can encourage unhealthy food choices.

I think the processing often encourages you to eat more. Um, I think if you had some of the foods in there... like if you had whole grain baked products as opposed to processed white flour or sugar, I don't think you'd eat as much because the fiber in all would just fill you up, so I think the more you go from the natural, you have a tendency to have to eat more to feel full. - Roxanne, female, 50's, CA

People who use the ideas of the food industrial complex model talk a lot about how ingredients are made problematic by processing, to the point where the ingredients

We Are All Foodies

themselves become unidentifiable or unpronounceable. Several of my respondents question where ingredients in their food come from. For example, Jim, a devout vegetarian Controller in his 40's in California, describes taking a bite of a burrito, "...and that orange grease stuff came out of the bottom. I'm like, what the hell is in there that's spewing orange grease out of my vegetarian burrito?" In his mind, there should not be any ingredients in a vegetarian burrito that result in orange grease. It is important to note, however, that not everyone I spoke with thinks orange grease in their food is gross. Recall that Norman, a Balancer, specifically likes that aspect of the tacos he eats from his favorite fast food restaurant as he is driving between his two part-time jobs.

Critics of the food industry also question the origin of and transformation of certain ingredients, which they sometimes learn about in food exposés in the popular press. For example, Monique, a female Balancer in her 50's in California, describes "reading…in *Reader's Digest*. It was a certain amount they add…the natural flavoring was coming from a beaver. It was raspberry or something else. It has a little muskiness. It is musky when you think of raspberry. It must come from an animal." Although she is vague in her recollection of the story, Monique is clearly critical of this particular "natural" flavoring ingredient. Starbucks provides a specific example of a company that faced a public relations problem over the use of questionable "natural" ingredients. Starbucks was using beetles as an FDA approved "natural food coloring" to dye their strawberry-flavored drinks red (Gasparro 2012).

In addition to questions about where ingredients come from, there is also a question among some about where food is going.

They have done terrible things to the wheat. Chemicals have changed it; they have changed the gluten and proteins. There is that book out, Wheat Belly, where you cut all the wheat out and you will lose weight. - Monique, female, 50's, CA

The book that Monique mentions here, *Wheat Belly: Lose the Wheat, Lose the Weight, and Find Your Path Back to Health* (Davis 2011), is also plainly visible on Ruth's desk during her interview, and both women (separately) refer the book often. Ruth and Monique are both Balancers who are greatly concerned about the perceived transformation of wheat, to which Ruth attributes high levels of cancers and other foodrelated diseases. Among other concerns related to problematic ingredients is the issue of manufacturers intentionally using "addictive" ingredients.

*Addiction.* Despite the admission by many of my respondents of consuming products they *believe* are unhealthy with questionable ingredients, my interviewees seem to care about health and making good choices, however they define them. But for some, despite their best intentions, they may not be able to act accordingly. There can definitely be a contestation, personal struggle, or fight, especially for Slippers, with food "addiction."

It's the same as gambling – oh it's fine, I don't need to gamble at all – cold turkey, but then oh, I'll play this lotto ticket. Just like having [in a higher voice] *one little brownie.* It's fine – and all of the sudden I'm back at the casino. That's how I liken it – just like a regular addiction. - Christina, female, 30's, CA

Although some people reveal feelings of shame and personal responsibility for their addictive eating behaviors in alignment with the medical model, my respondents also attribute some of the blame for addictive ingredients on the manufacturers themselves. This idea is also seen in popular documentaries and books about food in that food manufacturers are using food science to create more and more addictive foods (Kessler 2009; Moss 2013).

Literature within the sociology of addiction describes addiction as an "enslavement to a substance or activity," (Weinberg 2011:298) most often referring to alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. Interestingly, my respondents are much more willing to use the label "addiction" to describe regular tobacco use rather than regular junk food consumption. There is a stronger pattern of blaming and shaming the victim in terms of junk food eaters as "lazy, unconscious, or stupid," compared to tobacco smokers as "addicted, plain and simple." Several of my respondents state that it has been drilled into them since a young age that tobacco is addictive, but there have not been the same arguments about junk food. Although most of my respondents make a distinction between tobacco and junk food, many acknowledge a belief that junk food also has addictive properties.

I think my daughter might be addicted to french fries. She might have an actual addiction. When given the choice, she'd have french fries from anywhere and she actually said she was gonna conduct an experiment and go to all of the restaurants and taste test the french fries blindfolded so she would know the absolute best french fry... I have one child addicted to fries and another that's definitely addicted to soda. He is 14. I go in his room and there might be four cans of soda he's gotten through the night. - Starr, female, 50's, CA

Nutrition research has found that carbohydrates are the most likely nutrient to be addictive (Richards et al. 2007), which is also reflected in my respondents' beliefs about food addiction. Whether it is soda or french fries, my respondents informed by the food industrial complex model blame food manufacturers in the same way as tobacco manufacturers have been blamed for cigarette addiction. However, while tobacco manufacturers have had to admit culpability and pay damages since the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement of 1998 (Haile 2009), lawsuits filed to date against food manufacturers, such as Pelman v. McDonald's in 2003 (Fortin 2009), have not yet found food companies liable as producing an addictive product. Policy proposal: change government/corporate policies. Several of the people who

talked about the food industrial complex model, especially Slippers, express a feeling of

powerlessness that highlights a possible arena for change. Particularly for Slippers,

change needs to come from government policies, specifically by addressing government

subsidies.

I would subsidize small farms and get that food into places and make it affordable for people who are choosing a McDonald's, or you know, whatever. And my friends are always saying why isn't there fast food that's healthy? - Jen, female, 50's, CA

In addition to changing government funding in the food industry, the ideals of the food

industrial complex model argue that consumers need to be given full and true information

about their food, and how it is manufactured.

I think the government should be more honest. Just like the whole GMO thing really pisses me off with food, like I think labels should be very clear. And I recently did a paper on this and learned a lot about the milk, like dairy industry, and like the whole Got Milk campaign. It was kind of fraudulent because they have all this information--I mean they have all this advertisements about how milk is so good for you when really nothing has been proven or whatever. So I was just like wow, like I always grew up seeing like Got Milk and the government's behind the...so you know, that's like...kind of misleading. - Ava, female, late teens, VA

Under this model, it is the government's responsibility to ensure that the food available is

accurately labeled with truthful ingredients and nutritional values.

I'm not a free market capitalist when it comes to [food safety]. I do believe that we need government protection from unsafe products. Be they demands on the auto industry to meet certain standards and provide certain kinds of protection. Because on their own they will do what the Ford Motor company did with the unsafe Pinto, which I owned at one time. - Tom, male, 60's, CA

Because food industry players are suspect within the food industrial complex model, the

government is seen as an entity that can step in to protect consumers. People who use the

language of this model argue that at the very least, the government should not encourage

and enable the highly processed food industry. As Mohingar, a Slipper, succinctly puts it, the government should "lower the price, subsidize fresh fruits and vegetables and farmers. Stop getting paid by Monsanto."

#### **Overview** of Models

Although my respondents buy into elements of both the medical and public health models of food, eating and food-related diseases, my findings indicate there is a larger structural contestation at play, especially amongst Slippers and Controllers. Criticism of both government subsidies and corporate food production provides a new explanatory model that describes and explains the problem of food-related disease as not simply something that can be resolved on the individual level, or a function of the local community environment.

Controllers are *critical* of the food industry for their manipulation of ingredients and focus on profits at the expense of healthy food options. In contrast, Slippers *blame* the food industry for the addictive nature of the food (sugar and fast food), as well as the convenience. In other words, while Controllers criticize fast food companies as profitseeking for opening so many restaurants and using poor but inexpensive ingredients, Slippers blame the fast food companies for having such a tempting and cheap product. Overall, many of my respondents describe themselves and others as struggling to counteract the cheap, fast, and easy nature of highly processed junk food that is subsidized and supported by corporate and government interests. The definitions that people create and the explanatory models that they use to navigate this changing foodscape are a function of their self-reflexive eating identity. While understanding different definitions helps us to understand how people think about particular foods, the explanatory models provide a frame to explain and describe issues of food, eating, food-related disease, and eating identities from a broader structural perspective. In a different way, cultural logics provide the taken-for-granted assumptions that help individuals make sense of changing definitions and support and reinforce the reflexive maintenance of their eating identity. The stories presented in the next chapter highlight how cultural logics perform a mediating function between individual eating identities and the larger food system.

# CHAPTER 6 - THE CULTURAL LOGICS OF FOOD

Examining everyday ordinary activities, including food choices and eating behaviors, can tell us something profound about how people understand the world. While the definitions discussed in Chapter 5 may vary depending on circumstance and context, the cultural logics, or narratives, discussed in this chapter tend to be more consistent. And whereas the explanatory models presented in Chapter 5 describe and explain how and why food and eating might result in problematic food-related diseases, cultural logics are shared beliefs and ideas that can help understanding deeper meanings of food and eating. Although most people select from multiple logics depending on the situation and context, the logics from which they choose remain relatively constant. The stability of cultural logics makes them reliable tools to help make sense of a changing world. In an era of information overload and unmanageable abundance, people need cultural models to guide them in how and what to eat. In this way, cultural logics serve to moderate the relationship individuals have with the larger food system and to explain and justify their eating behaviors, particularly when there is a disconnect between what they say and what they do.

This chapter explores six different cultural logics that people can pull from their "cultural tool-kit" in an attempt to explain their understanding of eating and the behaviors in which they engage (Swidler 1986). I found that the extent to which people draw on each of these logics relates to their eating identity, which is a function of their personal consumption of what they consider to be junk food, as well as the stories they tell about food and eating. More importantly, the way that my respondents *use* each of these logics varies depending on their eating identity. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the logics are interrelated and intertwined and do not always align with behaviors.

## CULTURAL LOGICS

Cultural logics are comprised of many shared everyday ideas and behaviors that reinforce each other, and in this case, serve to reinforce common sense ideas about what is acceptable to eat or not. Initial understandings of the types of logics I expected to find came from within the literature, particularly the seminal works in the sociology of food by Anne Murcott (1983), Majorie DeVault (1991), and Stephen Mennell (1996), as well as key works in the sociology of cultural logics and boundaries by Ann Swidler (1986), Michele Lamont (1992, 2000), and Sharon Hays (1996). Starting with the ideas of what food is, and can be, as discussed by these authors, I identified six cultural logics through iterative coding of the interview transcripts. The best way to think about each of these six cultural logics is that they help explain what food and eating *do* for people. Almost all of my respondents draw from more than one cultural logic.

- Logic of Health: food determines health or disease (96%)
- Logic of Morality: food demonstrates worth and value (65%)
- Logic of Elaboration: food demonstrates knowledge, taste, cultural capital (57%)
- Logic of Connection: food can comfort, soothe, and uplift, or cause guilt and shame, especially in relation to other people (55%)
- Logic of Choice: food provides options and freedom (47%)

• Logic of Heritage: food enacts personal history and communal foodways (19%) The list presented above and the main sections of this chapter discuss the logics as separate and distinct, in descending order of usage. However, the multiple cultural logics are simultaneously at work in the larger cultural discourse. It is clear that although these logics may differ conceptually, they are multidimensional. People can use different We Are All Foodies

logics at different times in their stories to explain their motivations and to justify how they eat. In fact, almost all of my respondents (96%) reference more than one cultural logic, and 79 percent draw from more than two logics. Only three of my respondents (4%) have adopted one logic wholesale. For the most part, my respondents select bits and pieces from each cultural logic depending on the situation, circumstances, and the eating behavior in question. Overall, I find that logics serve a dual and dichotomous purpose in that they can be used to explain both the *selection* of and the *rejection* of specific foods.

I find that my respondents are savvy in their use of these cultural logics to justify and explain the decisions that they make around food. Even people who have highly articulated ideas about food and eating may not always behave in the way that they want. In this way, the cultural logics provide powerful explanations for any gaps that emerge between what people say and what they do with food and eating (Hays 1996).

## The Logic of Health

In the Logic of Health, food is solely, or at least mostly, chosen and eaten for the physical health benefits that it imparts. Almost every person I spoke with (96%) elicits this logic, at least in some small way.

Humans need food to survive, although self-proclaimed "breatharians" (Klimo 2008) profess to be able to live on air alone. At its very basic form, food is only required for maintenance and to keep the body going. This "nutritional attitude" (Ilmonen 2011:106) is the idea behind the development of Soylent, the manufactured food product that provides all of the nutrients a human body needs, without any of the taste, flavor, or scent of food (Ferriss 2013; Manjoo 2014). Many of my respondents talk about food as

simply sustenance, but more often, food takes on specific meanings. Within this logic, food is a way to achieve health and wellness. While all three eating identities think about food as sustenance, each identity uses the Logic of Health as a justification in a slightly different way. The Logic of Health simultaneously reinforces the flexibility of food rules for Balancers, the breaking of food rules for Slippers, and the rigidity of food rules for Controllers.

*Balancers*. As detailed in Chapter 4, the Balancer eating identity overall is marked by flexibility and ease. For Balancers, the Logic of Health is used to justify eating a variety of foods. In part, Balancers evoke the idea of calculating calories-in and calories-out, but they also talk about how food is just one component of their overall health.

Balancers, especially young Balancers, tend to take a mental inventory of what they are eating and what they are doing in order to achieve what they believe is the right balance. For example, Jacques describes how his gym routine provides wide leeway in his dietary choices. "If I'm going to the gym five times a week, which I try to do, then I can eat pretty much, I allow myself to eat whatever because I usually burn off more calories than I can intake." Although Jacques' description of allowing himself to eat "whatever" may be a bit hyperbolic, this idea of allowing is key for Balancers. If they exercise, Balancers allow themselves to eat more. But this calculation is highly contextual and not all exercise is the same. Jimmy is a competitive athlete, and his diet differs dramatically when his water polo and swimming seasons end; Hostess Ho-Ho's are definitely no-no's when he is competing, no matter how much he is in the pool.

Rather than a strict calculation, Cleo describes her decision-making as more holistic; she decides what to eat by simply asking herself whether she worked out that day or not. However, this simple question can lend itself to distortion, as Samantha judges that her collegiate athlete sister overestimates the number of calories she can, and should, consume during their lunches together. Lily just generally avoids foods that she believes will have negative consequences for her physical activities.

I run every single day and so I don't really eat a lot of junk food just because if I know I'm going for a run later, I know it'll make me feel sluggish and gross. Then if I run in the morning I just feel healthy, so I'll eat healthy for the rest of the day. - Lily, female, late teens, VA

Lily's motivation to eat healthy throughout the day is feeling good during her daily runs. Therefore, for many Balancers, food and activity act in a circular fashion; just as healthy food helps Lily feel good during her runs, her runs inspire her to eat healthy foods.

The Logic of Health also helps Balancers justify their ideals of flexibility and enjoyment while also feeling good. While on vacation recently, Connie ate a special \$9 piece of cake, which was unusual for her. Although she describes enjoying eating the cake, she remembers feeling ill after eating it, "[j]ust because since I wasn't used to it. That's also why I don't eat a lot of junk food because my body's just like, 'No, we're going to punish you. Here you go.'" Although Connie says that she enjoyed the cake in the moment, she is conscious to not eat in excess on a regular basis.

[E]ven when I go visit home in the Midwest, we eat some of the food that I normally had growing up but smaller quantities or not as much or kind of substitute some other things into it because when I go home my body says like, "No, you can't eat this." It just isn't going to work. So I know either, take it easy, or be sick inside where it's going to be hell. So I know, like, I might to try to do somewhat of a transition but still keep a healthy diet. - Connie, female, 20's, CA

Despite their desire for variety, Balancers acknowledge a link between food and overall health. After Albert, a man in his 50's in Virginia, was diagnosed with a hereditary neurological issue, his doctor suggested that he eat a strict Vegan diet. He and We Are All Foodies

his wife Prudence overhauled their entire food rules, and as a result, he says that he has "already gained three years of health value in two months." With such noticeable improvement in such a short time, both Albert and his wife say that they will eat whatever the doctor tells them to. Prudence says that they are having fun exploring new recipes and restaurants, and would be willing to continue to make dietary changes, if necessary. They say that if Albert's doctor tells him to be gluten-free in addition to being Vegan, they would "be there in a minute." For them, food is a way to manage or reverse disease, yet they find pleasure in eating food that is also good for Albert's health. *Slippers*. In contrast, for Slippers, the Logic of Health is often used as a justification for breaking their food rules. The Logic of Health reinforces their concern about eating what they think they *should* be eating.

As an example, Mario follows Tim Ferriss' (2010) *Slow Carb Diet*, which requires eating six days of low carbohydrate meals comprised of beans, vegetables, and protein, and one day of eating anything and everything in order to reset the metabolic rate. Although the "Dieters Gone Wild Day" is framed as a healthy component of the diet, Mario has found over several months on this diet that his desire to indulge on the cheat day has diminished as his physical reaction to his favorite foods has become more negative.

There has to be some planning, OK, because [pauses] you know, the thing is, I keep saying OK on my splurge day I'm going to have this, I want to go downtown and have this pizza, and... you know all this.... I'm going to have all these meals. Now, by the end of breakfast, I'm, you know, I'm sugared out. I've eaten French toast with all the syrup I can pour, [gestures pouring] I put butter on there. I'm going agh... I'm just not feeling well. That's the problem with splurge day. I'm not feeling all that good by noon. And I can't eat that much, you know....There's even on the splurge day by meal time, by dinner time, I, you know, I'm fed up. - Mario, male, 50's, CA

We Are All Foodies

Thus, although Mario still eats junk food on his cheat day, and believes the claim that intentionally eating junk food one day per week is healthy, he feels better if he rations his unhealthy eating, even while splurging. Mario draws upon the Logic of Health to make sense of the conflict he experiences between the divergent claims of his chosen diet plan, conventional wisdom about nutrition, and his own physiological reactions.

Another way Slippers can use the Logic of Health to justify their slips is to describe food as "preventative medicine," or to help them manage other parts of their lives. For example, AnaLisa uses coffee and chocolate as her "drugs" to manage her busy-ness and stress. She describes drinking coffee in the morning and eating chocolate at night as a way to remain calm and steady in her life.

Finally, Slippers draw upon the Logic of Health in the description of their aspirational diet, which they may or may not follow. For example, Ellen describes herself as not eating gluten because it makes her feel uncomfortable and bloated. However, she recently ate cake at her granddaughter's birthday party, saying, "[i]f I am served something that may be glutted with wheat or whatever and I am being entertained, I eat it." It is unclear whether this contradiction can be attributed to the faddish nature of being gluten-free, or if perhaps it is just a slippage in her language. In either case, Ellen uses the Logic of Health to describe her desire to be gluten-free, but easily dismisses the principles of this logic when presented with a tempting food at her granddaughter's party, relying on the cultural script of being a grateful guest.

*Controllers*. Finally, Controllers draw upon the Logic of Health to justify their regimented diets as being the optimal for health and physical wellness.

As previously described, Balancers tend to use the Logic of Health in a rather holistic calculation of calories-in versus calories-out. In contrast, Controllers use the Logic of Health in a consideration of the relationship between exercise and eating under very specific circumstances. For example, the weekend prior to our interview, John had completed a long bicycle ride, which changed his eating for the weekend.

We biked 100 miles up the Canal, and it was pretty hot and burned a lot of calories from mountain bikes on the trail. So we just sort of ate as much as we could on the trail. We had a huge dinner when we got off the trail and we just basically grabbed anything that we wanted... I mean, we were just starving and we were burning more calories than we were putting in and so we just didn't try to not--, anything that looked good, we just grabbed it. - John, male, 30's, VA

Normally, John avoids sugar in an attempt to stabilize his blood sugar levels, but because of this ride, he allowed himself to eat gummy bears. Although he felt at that time that his body *needed* physical sustenance, he clearly enjoyed the special treats during the ride, during which "the rules were off."

However, Controllers are critical of an undisciplined or unconscious approach to

using exercise to offset unhealthy eating. Guy believes people can be mistaken in

thinking that they are balancing their calories out.

They'll like work out an extra 15 minutes, which isn't very much, like on a treadmill or elliptical or something like that and it's because they ate a brownie or something like that, but it's kind of like you're actually backtracking because you ate more sugar and calories than you actually worked out now. - Guy, male, 20's, CA

The calculation of calories-in versus calories-out requires a level of knowledge that many

people may not have, and may require ongoing adjustments as levels of activity change

over time. For example, until recently, Morgan's teenage daughter had played a high

level of soccer almost year-round. Along with the hormonal changes during adolescence,

Morgan feels it is her responsibility to caution her daughter against continuing to eat in the same way when her activity levels have dropped significantly.

The only thing I've tried to say is, you know, you're not playing soccer, and you're not growing up any more. You could eat anything you wanted to. Your family history tends to put on weight, tends to get heart disease, and you're not going up anymore and when you have a stop and a lull and you're not riding your bike and you're not playing three soccer games and you're not having practice, and you continue to eat like this, you will get fat. It's a simple matter of what goes in has to be expended out or you will gain weight. And things will not fit you. [laughs] And you have to expend what you're putting in. If you're eating all that junk food, you will gain weight. You will see it. You're not... as active. And you're no longer growing two to four inches a year [laughs] so watch it. - Morgan, female, 50's, CA

In the Logic of Health, food is inextricably linked to health, and as the quote above from Morgan indicates, weight. Controllers draw upon the Logic of Health in a pragmatic way to talk about what is going on today, as well as the impact of eating in the future.

Juaquin eats a very healthy diet, only purchasing food available at the local farmers market. However, one weakness that he does indulge in is popcorn. Although many people consider popcorn to be healthy, eating it causes Juaquin to worry about the damage he might be doing to himself when he eats it. However, he is willing to accept the damage he believes he is doing to his body by eating popcorn because of the pleasure he receives by eating it. Due to a previous medical scare, he draws upon the Logic of Health to describe the consequences and damage that he is doing to himself as immediate, yet he occasionally continues in the behavior. Similarly, Jim draws upon the Logic of Health to describe seeing young men eating junk food without consideration of the short or long-term physical ramifications:

Like, yeah, doesn't that hamburger look good, and yes it's quick and easy, and I'm sure it tasted great, but you're going to regret it soon. And that soon may not be for some of you for 10 years, or for some of you it's going to be in a hour, and

you're going to ignore that for the next five years, but you're going to regret it. - Jim, male, 40's, CA

Embedded within the Logic of Health are the medical consequences of eating, both positive and negative. When Paige, for example, wanted to change her body, she "talked to [her] physician about it...cut out carbs, fats, sugars, fruits, cheese, yogurt, milk...subsist on protein and vegetables for a while... So for me, junk food is basically anything that has refined and added sugars." Interestingly, when she received negative feedback from family members about her eating plan, she "kinda snapped, I said 'I went on a diet prescribed by a doctor, it's my life, my right to do what I want as long as I'm not imposing it on you!" Thus, she uses the legitimacy of her physician as her justification, and it works to quiet her critics. However, while Paige draws upon the Logic of Health to valorize her physician's knowledge, Molly invokes the Logic of Health to deride the medical profession, that if she was diagnosed with an ailment "…certainly the last place I'd go is to a Western doctor to get a pill. If he… if I had something and they said, here's a prescription… I'd go do all my research and figure out how to not take that prescription, with food and exercise."

For Controllers with medically diagnosed diseases, the Logic of Health provides the strongest and most salient motivation and justification for their eating behaviors. The best example of this is Melissa, who has both celiac and diabetes, and has "had to change [her] diet drastically for a few different diagnoses, and it's hard each time. It gets easier the more you have to do it because you kind of get used to how things run." Although one of the advantages of her using an insulin pump is greater flexibility in when and what she eats, she must still carefully manage how many carbohydrates she eats (American

Diabetes Association 2013). For Melissa, there is absolutely no question about what she should be eating, and her food rules are intractable.

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However, as the story about John's bike ride points out, Controllers are not perfect, and the power of the Logic of Health can become weakened under specific circumstances. Molly describes having "gluten issues" and saying that gluten is "toxic," but that she is not 100% gluten-free:

I don't eat bread, really. I don't eat pasta. Of course if I'm at an event and that's all there is, I will eat it. I'm not going to die if I eat it, but I will never choose it; never cook it for myself." .... "I've... occasionally I eat a piece of bread, but.... I don't usually buy it for myself. If it's served to me in a context that it would be rude or inappropriate to decline, but... No, I don't. - Molly, female, 50's, CA

While Controller Molly and Slipper Ellen in the previous section both draw strongly from the Logic of Health in their avoidance of gluten, both do still employ, and valorize, their ability to change their mind, depending on the context in order to follow a more appropriate, and polite, cultural script.

## *The Logic of Morality*

In the Logic of Morality, food demonstrates goodness and rightness of the person and/or the food that they eat. In this logic, people use morality as a justification for what they do or do not eat (Lamont 2000). This cultural logic is at the heart of rules across many religions about which foods are acceptable at which times (Freidenreich 2011), but the logic extends beyond religious boundaries (Coveney 2000). Although foods are described as good or bad within the other logics, this logic emphasizes the feeling of value or pride in the food decisions one makes. Almost two-thirds (65%) of people I spoke with evoke some element of this logic. When people draw upon this logic, they are not talking about the nutritional value of the food (the Logic of Health), or how the food makes them feel in relation to other people (the Logic of Connection), but rather they are talking about how the food elevates their value and standing in their own minds.

Again, the benefit of the Logic of Morality depends on one's eating identity. The Logic of Morality shapes how Balancers justify their moderation as righteous, how Slippers judge themselves when they break their rules, and how Controllers reify their own extreme food rules as optimal.

*Balancers*. The Logic of Morality often reflects feelings of pride or disgust about certain foods (Douglas 2004) and about oneself. Balancers can use the Logic of Morality to justify any rules that they might have for themselves, as well as acknowledge their own value in not being too rigid or extreme in their eating identity. Moderation, for Balancers, is often most valued.

Kat talks extensively about purchasing "clean" fish, such as salmon or trout at her local grocery store. She also has plans to eat out on the evening of our interview at Red Lobster, with an intention to...

...do the scaly fish or soup and a salad...because to me the shrimp, the shellfish is close to pork, it's a bottom dweller. So I feel that if I'm gonna fall off and have something, I'll eat least have the mussels, but I don't want the pork chop...because it's lighter. You know, because they're bottom dwellers. - Kat, female, 40's, VA

Although to some people, fish from the grocery store or Red Lobster is not high quality or value, for Kat, the choice of which fish she consumes is a marker of her worth or value. She will eat salmon but not shrimp,<sup>19</sup> because to her, shrimp are bottom dwellers akin to pork. While she does not mention religion specifically, this definition of morality aligns with several interfaith food edicts to not eat pork or crustaceans

<sup>19</sup> The Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch (2014) recommends avoiding both salmon and shrimp under certain conditions.

(Freidenreich 2011). It is also worth noting that she uses the phrase "if I'm gonna fall off and have something," implying that she might make a decision that does not align with the choices she wants to make. But even if she "falls off," she still has value limits on what she is willing to eat. She will not completely abandon her limits about shellfish; that boundary is non-negotiable.

For Balancers, the idea of goodness and quality extends to the nutritional values of

food as well. Jay believes that his four- and six-year old grandchildren can make

decisions that provide enough nutrition to be acceptable choices.

What he does is eat a lot of the French fries. And he'll eat the kid cheeseburger and if he's full, then he'll just pull the meat off and finish that up with the cheese and not the bread. The six year old, she is off cheeseburgers, so she'll have chicken tenders [laughs], which I really wouldn't consider those junk food. ...Because I think the amount of protein they have relative to like the breading and the other parts is pretty good. - Jay, male, 70's, CA

Although Jay believes that the nutrition his grandchildren get from fast food is "good enough," several of the caretakers I spoke to lament the "limited palate" of the young children in their lives, but express varying degrees of trying to mold that palate. As previously described, both Jim (a Controller) and Jay (a Balancer) describe good parenting as successfully getting the children to eat anything, and sometimes fast food for

dinner is acceptable if the right choices are made.

I love it. I'm glad it exists. It's perfect for those times when you need something fast. I think most places offer a healthy and an unhealthy choice. You have to choose. I do think they cater to kids, that they use kids as their marketing. And even more now they're catering to young adults and being very diverse in advertisements. So McDonald's will have commercials with the African American young people, and Latino young people. They're really trying to lock down some markets. ...The clown, the toys, that you can get a prize inside your "Happy Meal"...it assumes if you eat this you will be happy. So I think they really push that. Then the parents succumb to the "Let's go to McDonald's, Burger King..." you know. - Starr, female, 50's, CA

Starr acknowledges the power of fast food marketing in enticing children and teenagers, and in encouraging parents to concede to their children's wishes (Linn and Novosat 2008; Namie 2011). Although Starr laments her teen daughter's addiction to french fries, she still says that she is glad fast food is available because it is convenient for her as a parent. Thus, several Balancers do not see eating fast food, or feeding it to children, as diminishing their own value or worth.

Reflecting the multidimensional nature of cultural logics, Roxanne turns the tables and uses the Logic of Morality to describe others, her co-workers.

Well, I work at the University, at the Vet School. So the majority of the residents that I work with who work on very tight schedules and really odd hours and sadly, a lot of their days start with a soda and you know, something they can grab. Or in the wee hours, they'll go to fast food, so I think sadly, their choices. They might not even be necessarily what they want to choose if they had more time, but yeah, they live a lot on those food. - Roxanne, female, 50's, CA

In this short description, Roxanne twice uses the word "sadly" to describe the choices her colleagues make. She attributes a different desire to them, and while she understands the circumstances that determine their choices, she feels badly *about* them, rather than *for* them. She later acknowledges the guilt that some of the residents express in choosing what they eat; yet she still laments their choices as being unworthy.

*Slippers*. Although Slippers commonly draw upon the Logic of Morality, their usage has the most negative tone, often in terms of criticizing oneself or by feeling criticism from others. Slippers often invoke the Logic of Morality as a way to punish themselves when they break their own rules or to validate themselves when they successfully follow their food rules.

As an example, Elena has a strong desire to align her food choices with her beliefs in what is good for her. But her feelings of self-worth come not only from her own assessment, but from others', as well.

[To c]heat is go off script, go off what I know to be beneficial for myself...and I think other people's expectations. Like I don't want to — I have an issue with people being hypocritical, and so for me to say yes, I'm gluten-free and I come over to your house, I'll bring my own food or what have you, I cannot then go out in public and be munching down on pizza, and bagels and pretzels. That's ridiculous. There's a bit of honor to it....[to m]yself, to honoring my own convictions and representing them well and consistently. - Elena, female, 40's, VA

Thus, for Elena, the Logic of Morality provides a way for her to use her own food choices to feel good about herself in her own eyes, as well as in the eyes of others. This use of food to gain esteem from others can also come from the food choices made for others, especially children.

As previously mentioned, parents of all eating identities talk about how the foods that they serve their families reflects their value and worth as caretakers (DeVault 1991). Both the quality and quantity of the food reflect their value as parents, sometimes spanning generations. Jan says that when she was growing up in Georgia food was always present, a pattern that continues into current family gatherings.

For parents it was a sign of affluence and wealth and having a lot on the table. That was important. But mine is I want there to be plenty to eat and I still suffer from that, like if everything is eaten then something is wrong, I didn't have enough. Which doesn't make sense, but it's a knee jerk reaction. I don't think it's intrinsically Southern. I think Italian people feel it too, but that feeling of oh, dear, if someone eats the last of it then I didn't have enough. I'm 58, I gotta get over that. - Jan, female, 50's, VA

Jan describes "bowls of candy," PopTarts, Twinkies, and Cokes available for the kids at family events to eat whenever they wanted. So, in this case the Logic of Morality provides a way to justify serving more food than is needed for the gathering. Jan and her family are less interested in the quality of food that they feed their children at this particular event, but still find their value as parents in being able to ensure everyone is well-fed.

While Jan finds value and worth in providing a high volume of food for her family, regardless of the quality, other parents describe the challenges and attacks on their selfworth that they face in providing healthy food for their children. Like Starr, Sara argues that it is sometimes challenging to make a home-cooked healthy meal as a busy parent, and that "bad" food choices do not make someone a "bad" person or parent.

Like, I don't think people who eat junk food are bad, I just think sometimes they don't have the time, the resources, the education, or...the...the...knowledge to make better choices. [Crying] It's really hard. I can't imagine if I was a two-person, working household, getting home at 6 o'clock at night [voice catches] and trying to feed them. I couldn't imagine that. So I know why people make choices that they do. And I wish we had better options. - Sara, female, 30's, CA

The feeling that what you feed your children can measure your worth as a person, or a parent, can come from within, or from other family members. Jamie calls his wife's eating "hypocritical" because she wants their young daughter to eat healthy, yet she eats fast food fried fish at Long John Silver's. Similarly, Jen, for example, feels judged as a parent by her sister-in-law, who cooks everything from scratch, including grinding her own flour.

[O]ne day she's like "well, you don't care so much what your kids eat." And compared to her, I don't. I really don't. If they go out and they eat something that's junk food, as long as, you know my daughter is gluten free, there's no sliding on that. I'm like "whatever." ... You've talked to [Morgan]. She's more on the Nazi side than I am. So, she's like, she doesn't want her daughter having any coloring. And she talks about it all the time. I think it's boring. It's like, we live in this society, they're going to eat. That's not my personality, I'm not super controlling like that. So I just think it's better in a way to be like that. - Jen, female, 50's, CA

We Are All Foodies

Jen has felt guilty for years comparing the food she makes with what her sister-in-law feeds her family, yet in the same statement positively compares herself to her friend, whom I also interviewed. In the end, however, she turns the Logic of Morality in her own favor by implying that she is "better" because she is a bit more relaxed, yet still she keeps her daughter, who has celiac disease and must remain gluten-free, safe.

While some respondents draw upon the Logic of Morality to justify their own decisions, a few Slippers use the Logic of Morality to contest the conventional wisdom of what is good or bad to eat. Just as Sara criticizes labeling parents who feed their children fast food as "bad," Erica, who discloses an eating disorder, wants to complicate the issue of good or bad food. On the one hand, people beg her to "just eat something," but then they turn around and say, "you know that's junk food. You know that's bad for you." In response, she wants to say, "it's more complicated than that." She is judged for her disordered eating, both in the amount of food she eats or does not eat, as well as the specific foods she eats. Thus, Erica uses the Logic of Morality as a powerful tool to address this link between food and worth, in order to explicitly separate her value and worth as a person from the food that she either eats or does not eat.

*Controllers*. The Logic of Morality is a particularly useful tool for all eaters, but especially for Controllers, in explaining why they restrict or avoid certain foods. Within this logic, Controllers can use the language of morality, value, and worth to justify their occasionally extreme choices, with little risk of pushback.

As previously described, several of the Controllers I spoke to describe skipping meals if they believe that there is nothing available that fits within their food rules. And

the discomfort may not just be from the food itself, but from how it is prepared and/or presented.

If there's nothing good to eat, I probably won't eat. I won't go to Mr. Pickles [sandwich shop]. I won't go to.... I'll come here [cafe where we met], which I'm glad this restaurant is here. I won't go to a place; I'll not eat. And that maybe is not healthy for me personally, but that's just my choice....[I am] severe. I mean there are many times at work, which is a different community than when I go home, they've got the microwave in there and the plastic forks and knives and everything, and um...there are times when we have a gathering, and I'll just stand there and look at everyone. "Why don't you [try one]".... Politely no thank you without preaching. What's really tough is when someone brings in a homemade platter of something, "oh, do you want one?" [makes sour face] The people that know me would put grapes or oranges on it so that I'm not totally out of the food celebration...or on a plastic tray. Like ohhh, why? - Molly, female, 50's, CA

As previously described, Molly will not eat anything that has touched plastic. But because her explanations are couched in morality, it is difficult for others to challenge her choices. How can one of Molly's co-workers convince her that it is ok to eat grapes or oranges from a plastic tray? Her reasoning is true and completely justified, for her. Thus, although the Controllers choices may seem extreme, the Logic of Morality provides a powerful motivation and indisputable justification.

However, one challenge in using the Logic of Morality is that it takes a certain level of discipline to use it consistently, as well as resources to make the appropriate moral choices. It is one thing to turn down a homemade treat from a co-worker when you know you can afford to purchase your own food in alignment with your moral code. It is more challenging for Controllers to use the Logic of Morality to restrict their choices when they have limited resources, either money or time.

For example, Hans talks about valuing healthy foods. However, his current financial situation does not allow him to engage in what he considers to be ethical

behavior, such as purchasing fresh, organic fruits and vegetables, or recycling to save the planet.

[Farmers markets] are convenient, but they are very expensive. Why would a working class person go, it is a middle class thing? Poor people don't recycle unless there is a reason. The best recyclers in this town are for scrap metal, where you take it somewhere and get something for it. These farmers market are geared towards upper class upper middle class. There is a big divide in food in this country...the healthy nuts are part of the upper class or are wannabes and are rich. [Former New York City Mayor] Bloomberg and the people he hangs out with, they are not going to be drinking a slushie. - Hans, male, 50's, VA

Hans frames his derisive critique of morality in terms of socioeconomic class and the ability to make particular choices. Not only do financial resources allow people a wider range of choices, but at least for Hans, resources allow people to take their choices to the extreme and become "healthy nuts." There are parallels between Molly's description of herself and Hans' description of people with the resources to make choices. Molly invokes the Logic of Morality to describe her decisions in positive terms, while Hans describes people like her in negative terms. However, elsewhere in our conversation, Hans makes it very clear that he *would* eat differently *if* he had the financial resources to do so.

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, almost every person uses the Logic of Health to talk specifically about selecting or eschewing foods based on their nutritional values. Using the Logic of Morality, Kelly clearly frames her food choices not in purely factual terms, but rather in how the foods make her feel *about* herself.

I don't really have rules about food, but I have a uh....just kind of a mantra when I'm in the grocery store [laughs]. It's like if I'm not proud to put this in my body, then don't buy it. Because if I buy it, then I'll eat it because I'm not going to, like, throw it out or anything... Not proud, but if I feel good about....if I like check in with myself and I feel good about this. If I'm like, "would this build a good me? And does this make me happy?" If the answer's yes, then yeah, it's fine to buy. And if the answer is like, I don't really...want to be made of Cheetos, you know, then then I just don't buy it. - Kelly, female, late teens, CA

Kelly's mantra is not solely linked directly to the nutritional content of the food, as within the Logic of Health, but it is more about whether she believes that it builds a "good me." She eats mostly fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and describes the junk food she most recently ate to be a cheese quesadilla. Kelly concedes that while many people would not consider this to be junk food, for her, "this is not one of the things that I'm proud that will make me a good body, you know, so... I ... It's not junk food as society would consider it per se, but like it is... it doesn't follow the qualification for me of good food." Like many other Controllers, Kelly is comfortable with using the language of the Logic of Morality to make sense of her food choices.

The Logic of Morality provides the language to consider decisions about food as reflecting a feeling of worth and value as a person, and for some, as caretakers. While there may be financial, social, or regional limitations in the choices that consumers can actually make, the Logic of Morality provides a way for food choices to reinforce their own beliefs about themselves and others. When Balancers and Controllers draw from this logic, it tends to be more positive; for example, food A is good, and by eating it, I am a good person. In this way, the positive reinforcement Controllers feel for every decision that they make that follows their rules serves to reinforce the rigidity of those rules. In contrast, Slippers are the most likely to apply this logic as a negative attribution to themselves or others, that food B is bad, and if someone (including oneself) is eating it, he/she is (I am) a bad person. The negative reinforcement of food decisions reinforces the judgment that Slippers feel for themselves and others, increasing their overall feeling of anxiety and unease about food and eating.

By couching food in the language of morality, people can use food to bolster their own image as a good and moral person and also judge other people's worthiness by what they eat. However, because cultural logics are versatile, the same logic can also be used to separate the value of the food from the value of the person, such as Controller Erica's description of problematizing others' criticism of her eating junk food. Or more insidiously, the language of morality can be used to judge and punish oneself, a cycle in which many Slippers engage.

## The Logic of Elaboration

In the Logic of Elaboration, how one eats and talks about food is a way to distinguish oneself (Bourdieu 1984). Approximately 57 percent of people I interviewed draw upon this logic, talking about the foods that they eat in great detail, with great flourish, and sometimes with a hint of snobbishness. Douglas Holt (1998:15) describes this way of speaking as "elaborated discourse," wherein people develop "finely grained vocabularies to tease out ever more detailed nuances within a category, the expression of opinionated and often eclectic evaluations of alternatives, and the ability to engage in passionate appreciation of consumption objects meeting one's calculus of "quality" within a category." Thus, the language used to discuss food is a way for people to elevate their own status, and possibly decrease others' status.

Douglas Holt's (1998) concept of a "calculus of 'quality" focuses on how the calculus of quality is developed through class and habitus. I also find a very marked and varied "calculus of quality" related to understandings of what food is, but I find that distinctions and elaborations about food and eating can also be understood in terms of a person's eating identity. The Logic of Elaboration supplies Balancers with an

understanding of themselves as adventurous, gives Slippers a feeling of competence around food, and provides Controllers with a standard for quality and acceptability. *Balancers*. Balancers can invoke the Logic of Elaboration to demonstrate the extensive variety of foods that they enjoy, as well as their willingness to eat new and different foods if the occasion arises. One element of the Logic of Elaboration is an openness and adventurousness to try new things. Whether it is a new food or a new recipe, eaters can use this logic to demonstrate their willingness and daring. While this adventurousness around food is a trademark of the foodie (de Solier 2013), I also found it amongst people who do not explicitly claim that identity.

I saw something on the menu that I've never had before and wanted to try it and it was bone marrow and I tried it and it was disgusting looking because it was literally the bone that was like sliced and you gotta get in there with your fork and scoop it out and slab it on your prosciutto and all that and ... it was... I mean on your crostini I mean, and...it was good [voice raises]. It wasn't something I might ever try again. I always say I'll try anything twice, so one more time and if that's it then whatever, but um...it's mostly just I try and branch out and just try to try new things, so.... - Bradley, male, 30's, CA

While it might have simply been a slip of the tongue, Bradley's confusion between prosciutto and crostini implies that although he knows the words, he does not easily utilize the language of knowledge and distinction of the foodie. However, he clearly and enthusiastically embraces the spirit of the logic in his desire to "try anything twice."

This openness and adventurousness does have its limitations. The Logic of Elaboration is about refinement, and for a Balancer, this also means moderation. Thus, for a Balancer, a desire and willingness to try new things does not translate into a bacchanalian feast of indulgences. As Sunshine describes, "I love to read menus and I love to see the wonderful food that is offered, but I recognize, I am disciplined with what I eat." Balancers who evoke the Logic of Elaboration might like to look at and talk about all of the delicious and exotic possibilities available to them on the menu, but they do not necessarily indulge with frequent meals out. Many of the Balancers I spoke with enact the Logic of Elaboration in their own kitchens.

Within this logic, cooking is not simply a means to create food for sustenance, but rather it is a way to demonstrate skills and ability and express creativity. While no one I interviewed is a professional cook or chef, several people of all eating identities draw upon the Logic of Elaboration to discuss their perception of their own culinary skills. The Logic of Elaboration can be evoked to describe impressing oneself, as well as others. Bradley, who earlier describes ordering bone marrow, also enjoys being creative and cooking for his friends.

Usually I just see something in there and I just whip it up. I'm pretty skilled in the kitchen, and I try to kind of improvise. It's funny, I get a lot of inspiration from that show on The Food Network – Chopped. I love that show – if there's a favorite cooking show, that's mine. And I always try to find things and throw them all together and see what happens and even friends of mine [are] like "dude, will you make me dinner? [Laughs] and his girlfriend, and so I would go over there just to you know do that and hang out, have a couple beers, sit in the hot tub and all that. - Bradley, male, 30's, CA

Bradley's description of improvising, having a couple of beers, and sitting in the hot tub

may not meet the stereotypical vision of a culinary wizard. However, he draws from the

Logic of Elaboration to describe his abilities, and what he is able to do with them. In

some cases, cooking skills can be used to encourage people to eat something they

normally would not, or to increase their culinary taste.

I am a cook and I cook fabulous dishes, and I have fed people vegetarian spreads and they have no idea. They assume they are eating meat and they're not. And my husband, when I was married, was in the military and most the times we did you know, the cookouts and stuff like that. [They] never asked because again, the attraction of the fresh vegetables and fruits always was an attraction. - Ruth, female, 60's, VA Like Bradley, Ruth draws upon the Logic of Elaboration to describe her cooking skills as entertaining others, but in her case, she uses her skills to deceive. However, the Logic of Elaboration can go beyond simply differentiating quality.

It's flavor *and* quality. Because for beef, the fact that we can have such cheap beef and the fact too that they're grain fed, it's not the same flavor. It's another food when you feed them differently, so... you know, and more ... I think this is becoming more and more popular or aware that people are "wow, this doesn't taste the same" or older people who will say, "I miss the flavor of something" and then you go back to grass-fed beef and they'll say "there it is. There's that flavor." So, some of it is going back to what was once better. - Roxanne, female, 50's, CA

Roxanne's example of grass-fed beef demonstrates how elaboration involves knowing *why* different foods taste differently, which goes beyond taste preference and distinction to a higher level of knowledge and skill.

*Slippers.* As discussed previously, one element of the Slipper identity is a general disconnect and discomfort around food. Slippers often draw upon the Logic of Elaboration in order to describe the challenges that they face in finding foods that they find satisfying, as well as trying to talk themselves into enjoying particular foods that they think that they *should* eat.

As an example, AnaLisa describes an organic mixture of peanut butter, sesame butter, cashew butter, and almond butter that she makes herself because she cannot find nut butters in the store that satisfy her palate. Similarly, Sara draws from the Logic of Elaboration to valorize the stir fry that she makes at home as superior to takeout from a Chinese food restaurant, partly because she can use higher quality ingredients and avoid additives like monosodium glutamate (MSG). These two Slippers draw upon the Logic of Elaboration to specify their knowledge about the ingredients in these particular foods, as well as to emphatically emphasize their skill in making foods taste better. We Are All Foodies

*Controllers*. Finally, Controllers can draw upon the Logic of Elaboration to extol the virtues of the foods that align with their food rules, as well as the rules themselves. One element of the Controller identity is the discipline to follow one's own food rules, but not at the expense of good food. Like the other identities, the Logic of Elaboration is often evoked in terms of cooking and food preparation. Several Controllers feel that the food that they prepare themselves is better than what they can get in most restaurants.

No, taste...I need the taste. I'm actually a... this sounds horrible to say, but it's true....a very very good cook. There are very few restaurants that make food better than what I make, so....going out on my normal day. Yeah, bean and cheese burrito, whatever. You guys aren't going to make anything to impress me anyway, I don't really care. I'm here because I need to eat something. Which is odd because I'm a very food and taste-driven person, but like I said, [local restaurant] is not going to impress me. It's just not going to happen. - Jim, male, 40's, CA

For Controllers like Jim, not only is he more "impressed" with his own food, his abilities as a cook also allow him to maintain control over the ingredients that are used, similar to Slipper Sara and the MSG. Thus, the Logic of Elaboration can be invoked to explain knowledge about different nuances of particular foods. While many of the distinctions may be couched in the Logic of Health, such as claiming that organic vegetables are healthier, the "superlative" language that Controllers use in the Logic of Elaboration goes

beyond a preference for healthier foods.

I miscalculated my financial aid budget so I'm living pretty modestly I guess. But I mean I'll eat, the meats I consume I guess it falls in line with the rest of my kind of odd little paradigm. It's got to be like all the superlatives, like organic, pasture-raised, all the feel good stuff so you feel like you're making a conscious choice or you're voting with your dollar sort of thing. ...[M]eats I'll buy from the farmers market primarily. - Harry, male, 20's, CA

Although Harry describes living modestly on a student budget, he only eats meat from farmers he knows. For him, it is not a taste issue, but rather that he knows what quality

of foods he should eat, and is willing to use his meager funds to purchase only what he perceives to be the highest quality.

When asked where they get their information about what the best foods are for them to eat, many people do not have particular places they go, but just a sort of unconscious knowledge that has been collected over time here and there from unremembered places. Most of my respondents report accumulating their information over the years from a variety of unremembered sources. Controllers, especially, claim to "just know a lot" about nutrition, and several explicitly avoid getting new information from others. Instead, they describe themselves as the expert amongst their friends and family, who come to them asking for advice.

I did at first, and I've kind of given up. There's.... only I can do so much. I said, I give two minutes of my time. So I have a limit how much time I'll give somebody, and then I'll back off. - Molly, female, 50's, CA

Interestingly, while this expert status can provide a feeling of superiority for some Controllers, Molly feels that is a tiresome burden to share their food and nutrition knowledge when she feels it is not being heard.

*Taste capital.* It makes sense that people who make their lives around food, such as chefs and restaurateurs, can talk at length about the finer points of the foods that they are preparing or serving. In addition, the self-identity of a foodie (de Solier 2013) or connoisseur (Strong 2002) includes a richly descriptive vocabulary in talking about food. However, I find that even people who do not work in the food industry, or claim a foodie identity, also use the language of the Logic of Elaboration to talk about the food that they (and others) eat. While they may not engage in the same caliber of "culinary talk" as elite chefs do amongst themselves (Fine 2008:202), I argue that the Logic of Elaboration

We Are All Foodies

is used by all three eating identities to demonstrate food knowledge, skill, and what I am calling "taste capital."

Several works in the study of culture have discussed the value of and desire to demonstrate cultural omnivorousness (Bryson 1996; Peterson 1992), and food can be considered using the same lens (Warde, Martens, and Olsen 1999), even amongst foodies (Johnston 2010). Although there may be some value in being willing to eat anything, the Logic of Elaboration provides a way for people, depending on their eating identity, to use food to demonstrate their perceived superiority and distinction around food.

By arguing that eating identities matter in the use of the Logic of Elaboration, I do not dismiss the ongoing importance of class, or at least the perceptions of class differences. High Cultural Capital (HCC) is considered to be relatively rare and needs to be protected by those who have it (Corrigan 1997; Holt 1998). Due to my sampling strategy, I consider my respondents to all have high cultural capital, and many express a desire for people with Low Cultural Capital (LCC) to "eat better." They argue that they want people with LCC to eat vegetables, yet in the same breath, many of my respondents claim that people with LCC will not like vegetables. Ruth, a Balancer, tells a story of buying vegetarian pizza for a resident event in a public housing area, and being told that "they won't eat it."

I order the thin crust veggie pizza and they told me folks would not eat that over at [housing project]...and I said yeah, they will. No, they want meat. I said but it's got a lot of color on it, you know. I said as humans we like to go look at color, so it was gone. It was gone, it was literally gone. And they're normally used to their diet is that meat, cheese...but it was gone. It had spinach on it. ...There were a couple of kids that looked at it and said oh, no, I want this one [pointing to the meat pizza]. And I said you eat which one you want, I said but that's got extra stuff on it. I said it was special and special people could eat it. And it did, it was different compared to the plain cheese and a pepperoni, which I don't even know what pepperoni is. You know, it's something made up, you know. And then you

185

had this glorious, pretty veggie. And the crunch because it was thin crust. - Ruth, female, 60's, VA

Ruth's experience in this situation is that people with LCC will eat the vegetarian pizza if

they are encouraged that it is "special." She acknowledges that the vegetable pizza was

"different," and that some kids had to be coerced to try it, but that they actually did try it,

and liked it.

My respondents want vegetables and other healthy foods to be accessible, but many

can still claim their superiority or social distance because they are the ones who actually

eat and enjoy vegetables.

A lot of things too...about people being unhealthy and thinking it's good, is a lot of people, um, when they become like overweight and they eat all these high sugar and high, like all these fake products in there, their tastebuds become desensitized, and when they try and eat like natural herbs and garlic they don't taste it as much because their tastebuds and senses aren't acute anymore because they've been so overwhelmed with the fake stuff, so they don't get pleasure off of stuff I'd find all this flavor from, they wouldn't even think – they wouldn't even get flavor off it. And it takes a while to get the flavor from it, because the body has to become used to it because it's not fake. [Like the sweetness of fruit vs. the sweetness of candy?] Exactly. Like an apple that's super-sweet, people who are really overweight or who never eat real food, they won't even think it's that sweet. Just like, it's kind of like an interesting paradox, I don't know. - Guy, male, 20's, CA

Guy, a Controller, describes himself as having a refined palate because he eats what he believes to be healthy food. He argues that he can enjoy natural flavors in a way someone who eats a lot of junk food cannot. It is not that the junk food eater does not have the right taste in the Bourdieuan sense, but rather he or she does not have the right *tastebuds*. However, the way foods taste can change; several of my respondents talk about how the flavors of food change after changing their diet. For example, after his doctor put Albert on a strict Vegan diet, he says that soda, which he used to love, now just tastes like metal and salt. Mario says that he is able to taste the difference between

American Coke and Mexican Coke (Coca-Cola imported to the US from Mexico), and goes out of his way to get Mexican Coke from a specialty market for his splurge days.

In addition to being able to distinguish particular tastes, there is also an element of taste capital that comes from the types of food someone can comfortably consume. Many of my respondents describe feeling sluggish or having a stomachache after eating fast food, and that they "just can't eat that way." There is an element of pride in not being able to function at peak levels after eating junk food, especially in terms of athletic activities. Similarly, several people also expressed a pride in being able to digest healthy, whole foods. Jim, a Controller, describes in great detail his love for his centrifugal juicer, but he feels that some people would not be able to handle the juice it creates.

I believe that their body is...the metabolism has gotten to the point where they need whatever is in that food. They wouldn't do as well eating healthy foods because they're not going to get that immediate sugar rush. That immediate, you know, rush from the carbohydrates. And, you know, like, I eat a lot of beets. Their stomach would just turn flips if they eat beets. You know, so...yeah, there's definitely a transitional phase they would have to take. If you take one of those people and say you're going to eat this, it would have negative reaction for a.... a few days, at least. - Jim, male, 40's, CA

Like Guy, the Controller who claims that he is able to taste natural flavors, Jim argues that he is able to digest natural foods, including beets, in a way and quantity that other people cannot. Like the people who told Ruth that her vegetarian pizza would not be eaten, Jim does not think people accustomed to a fast food diet would be willing to go through a "transitional stage" in order to comfortably eat as many vegetables as he does.

Despite not considering themselves as foodies, every single person I spoke with can talk at length, and often in great detail, about the foods that they eat and about food in general. This is likely a function of the sampling method, engaging people with at least some college who are willing to talk about food. Part of having rules about eating, We Are All Foodies

whether you stick to them or not, is that you can describe, discuss, and validate the rules to yourself and to others. Not only do Controllers tend to see their ability to maintain control over their food choices as positive and affirming, they also talk in great detail about the positive qualities of the foods that they do eat. In contrast, Slippers can sometimes seem defensive in the level of detail they use in talking about food, especially when describing the foods that they perceive to be healthy. It is important to note, however, that this study does not include a nutritional knowledge test, but rather relies on people's perception of their own knowledge, as well as their self-reported motivation to search for information (Andrews et al. 2009). I found the level of knowledge my respondents believe that they have surprising. Many of my respondents skillfully draw from the Logic of Elaboration in the intricate language that they use about food and eating.

## The Logic of Connection

Over half of my respondents (55%) draw upon the Logic of Connection, wherein food and eating produce an emotional response, are described using emotional feeling terms, particularly regarding the relational aspects of food and eating. In this logic, people can use food to bolster their mood, and consider how they will feel after eating a particular food, especially when in the company of others. Eating foods they consider to be bad can also result in feelings of guilt and an attempt to avoid eating that food (Counihan 1992), yet the emotional comfort the foods can provide may override any feelings of guilt (Wansink et al. 2003). Because food can either bring people together or keep them apart (Julier 2013), the social nature of food comes into play in this logic, and many of the

188

emotions summoned by food are either in relation to, or while physically with, other people.

From the special quality and quantity of foods presented on feast days during medieval times (Mennell 1996; Strong 2002) to the importance placed on the contemporary Thanksgiving turkey, the link between food and group celebration has been long documented. Not surprisingly, the Logic of Connection often relates to special foods for special occasions or eating occasions with other people. For example, the last time many of my respondents report eating junk food is in situations out with friends, such as celebrating someone's birthday.

Whether the feelings are positive or negative, in the Logic of Connection, people use food in an attempt to emotionally satisfy themselves, and others, either emotionally or physically. Within this logic, food can satisfy a craving, provide comfort, or celebrate, and is described using the language of feelings and emotions. Seventy percent of Slippers (70%) draw from the Logic of Connection, compared to half of Balancers (50%), and an even smaller percentage of Controllers (40%). The Logic of Connection allows Balancers to express any conflicts they do have about food, allows the Slippers to convey the struggle they feel about food, and allows the Controllers to reassert their strength and control over food as temptation, even if it distances them from others. *Balancers.* The Logic of Connection is helpful to Balancers because it provides them with a way to express any contradictions that they do face about food, because often those contradictions involve other people. While in general, the Balancer eating identity is marked by ease and comfort with food, this does not mean that Balancers do not feel or experience any negative emotional or relational power of food.

189

Right, because I know I'm an emotional eater, if I have a bad day and it's there, am I gonna be able to resist it? Yes, I can because I have to bring it into the house for the others in my family. I don't keep it all out of the house because my kids like potato chips and they don't over eat them. They'll make a sandwich and put a handful of potato chips on their plate. They're good. Me, the whole bag. If I'm gonna eat potato chips, I'll eat the whole bag. I'd say Lay's potato chips would attack me, literally the whole bag. - Starr, female, 50's, CA

Balancers seem the most willing to embrace and accept the emotions that can come with food and eating, when, like Starr, they do experience those emotions. Even though she feels "attacked" by a bag of potato chips, she still buys them and keeps them in the cupboard in order to keep her family happy.

As part of their calculation about what to eat, several Balancers describe indulging in junk food on weekends after eating well and exercising all week. These "indulgences" are seen as rewards for a job well done. And for many people, this use of food as a reward has its roots in childhood. Zack, a Balancer in his 50's in California, remembers being "quite a heavy kid with parents that food was…food was a reward. Food was…you do…it was a joke in my family that…well, let's not worry about this thing, let's have two desserts." Ava says that she notices this same pattern in her family during interactions with her two year-old cousin.

...they feed him pretty good whole foods, like he eats avocado, which is great, and fruit. But yeah, sometimes I wonder how much they're giving him like sweetwise because it's like oh, he's so cute or he's being good, just give him that. I'm like isn't there other ways to deal with that? And I had noticed like in my family, food is always like a reward or something to look forward to, and that [if he behaves]...he gets to eat more animal crackers. - Ava, female, late teens, VA

These childhood patterns often continue into adulthood for many people in a variety of ways.

[M]y mom because she will feed me until I am about to explode just because whenever I'm like, "I worked out today, I don't want to gorge myself, that'll defeat the purpose"...she's like no, come on, make yourself another plate. - Arthur, male, late teens, VA

During our interview, Arthur expresses frustration with his mother's advice about food, and says that he turns more to his father for support in his healthy eating. Arthur talks with pride about his father's recent weight loss, healthier eating, and increased level of exercise, and does not see his mother as understanding his goals and how he feels about food.

While it may be difficult to say no to friends and family, interactions with food servers and strangers can also create emotional reactions about food.

[T]he guy was like "do you want a meal with that?" Because we said we just want the grilled chicken sandwich, no mayo on it and they said, "oh well do you what you want to make it a meal?" and we said no we don't want to make it a meal and he was like "what, you don't want to make it a meal, I mean you're going to get this big cup of soda and you're going to get something sugary on the side?" and we're like nope we don't want that. He seemed totally shocked. - Kat, female, 40's, CA

Up-selling to a full meal may be common at a fast food restaurant like Kat describes, but her refusal of food in this interaction is still met with surprise. On the other hand, when a Balancer wants or is offered something someone else has that they do not think they can accept, feelings of envy or jealousy can emerge. For example, Bradley uses the Logic of Connection to describe the emotional toll of trying to eat healthier after the diagnosis of a heart issue while out with friends who do not have such restrictions.

Because here, it's like, and it sounds so stupid – you know, ['dude' voice] – my friends are drinking Mountain Dew, why can't I? You know what I mean. You know, grumpy Bradley. [Mimics a pout.] - Bradley, male, 30's, CA

When his inability to drink a Mountain Dew like his friends makes him "grumpy," Bradley intellectually labels his feelings as sounding "stupid," but the feeling is very real. The Logic of Connection provides Bradley a way to explain his wanting a Mountain Dew We Are All Foodies

not in terms of taste or flavor, but in terms of the emotion of jealousy for what his friends have.

Balancers express envy not only about seeing people eat specific foods, but also in a more general sense. Although they seek balance and may indulge periodically, again, Balancers do not eat everything in sight, yet may envy people who seem to be able to eat whatever they want without any consequences.

Sometimes I'm jealous just because some people can do it [eat junk food] and it doesn't affect them at all. Their body just metabolizes it better. They can handle it, they work out more, whatever it might be. So sometimes I do have that jealousy of like, "you can eat that whole piece of cake and have no issues" and then I eat my little bites and have this guilty [behavior]. - Connie, female, 20's, CA

The jealousy is not only about the perceived lack of physical consequences, but also a perceived lack of emotional consequences. Again, Balancers are not gluttonous or unconscious of what they eat. Many of the Balancers describe others as eating whatever they want in a happy-go-lucky way, without fear or guilt. Although there is a common concern about the long-term consequences of others' food decisions, for many of my respondents, there is also a marked envy of others' seemingly blissful ignorance. *Slippers*. Slippers draw upon the Logic of Connection to describe the struggle that they face when their eating behavior does not match their aspirational diet, especially when they interact with other people. In addition, the emotional comfort and celebration that food can provide can easily override rational motivations, resulting in breaking one's food rules. Thus, the Logic of Connection serves as the primary means of justifying the Slippers' slips. Many Slippers specifically use the word "craving" in describing wanting to eat a particular, usually unhealthy, food, often while eating out with friends.

I never crave really healthy foods. You know, I don't know, like salsa and dip just doesn't do it for me. Every once in a while [I crave onion rings], yeah, but then we

192

were at Friday's After Five and I smelled them and it was like oh, no... - Jan, female, 50's, VA

Commonly craved foods align with common definitions of junk food discussed in Chapter 5: salt, sugar, and fat, and are most often triggered through the senses: smelling or seeing a desired food, either in person or on television, or even just thinking about a specific food or flavor. Most Slippers accept that they just like those types of foods, and that is why they crave them. While the Logic of Connection can be utilized to explain physiological cravings, it can also be drawn upon to discuss the emotions that arise before, during, and after eating the craved food.

The discussion of addiction in Chapter 5 introduced Christina, a Slipper who most explicitly and overtly describes her addiction to sugar. She speaks not only of the physical feelings of addiction she feels for sugar, but she also draws from the Logic of Connection to describe how succumbing to her addiction makes her feel bad about herself, but also makes her feel like other - and in her mind ordinary - Americans who overeat.

I was on a sugar bender. And [laughs] my husband actually went to the store to get us some...um...it wasn't predominantly sugar...he had to go for another reason...cream...I don't remember, but anyways half of the reason was just to go get snacks to watch a movie and he brought back um...orange Hostess cupcakes. And the bad part is because I'd already eaten so much sugar I started out going "this is great" and by the end I was like, "why am I eating this?" I finished them. Does that make me a bad person? [Laughs] It makes me American – Happy Fourth!" [our interview was on the 4th of July] - Christina, female, 30's, CA

Christina draws from the Logic of Connection to explain not only her physical craving for sugar, but also the emotional feeling of disgust while she was eating the cupcakes compounded by a feeling of shame, even a week later. She asks if eating the cupcakes makes her a bad person, and then goes on to describe her eating sugar as "as bad as shooting heroin, I swear." However, for a brief moment while eating the cupcakes, she is comforted and feels "great," and even afterwards she is able to link her perceived gluttony to a broader American culture. The Logic of Connection provides Christina with justification for her decision to eat the cupcakes because she feels powerless against the craving, and also provides correspondence with a dominant cultural value of excess.

In addition to providing a justification for satisfying cravings, Slippers also draw upon the Logic of Connection to use food as a comfort in a negative situation, or as a reward for something positive. For several Slippers, the quality of their food choices diminishes as their stress levels increase. In some cases, an unusually bad day can trigger eating particular foods. As described in Chapter 4, Tara makes Vegan "sausage" dip...

...if I'm having a really bad day, like emotional...like the way I emotionally eat is I'll go by [a local health food store] on my way home and get the ingredients. It's so easy, you dump it in a pot and then when it's warm, it's done." - Tara, female, 20's, VA

When food is used for comfort, people often draw on the Logic of Connection to explain attempting to keep the foods out of sight or easy reach. Tara waits until she has a bad day to pick up the ingredients for her dip; she does not keep them in her pantry. Given a particular situation, she consciously acknowledges that she needs comfort and purchases the ingredients to specifically fill that emotional need, but having it in the house all of the time may be too much temptation to eat it. In contrast to Starr, who keeps potato chips on hand for her family, Tara is single and can elect to keep tempting food out of her home, until she needs it.

In addition to a Slippers' feeling of deserving a treat or reward for a bad day, it can also come from a perceived accomplishment. I'll eat steak once a month. I'll eat meat once a month. I'll go get a massage, and then get a steak. Working out, or playing tennis, you gotta get a work out in, take a shower, and go get a massage. And afterwards you have to reward with some protein, protein is important but not in excess, so once a month. - Mark, male, 50's, VA

Whereas a Balancer might use activity to counter poor eating, Slipper Mark thinks about physical activity as something that deserves a reward: a massage and a steak. Whether it is small treat or a full meal, many Slippers evoke the Logic of Connection to justify rewarding themselves with food.

In addition to making food choices based on particularly good or bad days, other Slippers describe a more daily or regular use of food as comfort. AnaLisa reports feeling relief from a chronic pain condition when she eats food. Other people, particularly students, describe the boost they feel eating chocolate or fast and easy foods while studying. Feeling bored also results in people eating foods they might not otherwise.

My mom bought Cheez-its. I'm not gonna eat them though....because they're really bad for you in calories, even if you eat just a little bit, still...I just won't eat it. I might, I cave...if I'm sitting at home bored....it might happen if they're still there tomorrow. [Laughs] Like tomorrow is my day off, I might have some. - Shawna, female, 20's, CA

Even though Shawna starts out saying that she is not going to eat any of her mom's Cheez-Its, she admits that if she is bored, she will probably eat them.

Food not only provides comfort in difficult situations, but the opposite can also be true. The multidimensional nature of cultural logics means that the Logic of Connection can also provide a way for food to be problematic in positive circumstances, such as celebrations. In social situations where food is present, eaters may experience pressure to eat foods that do not align with their food rules. One option is to give in to the feelings of pressure and eat it, while another option is to remove oneself from the situation. While this removes the prohibited food from sight, it also serves to separate people from the group dynamic.

So, I went to my nephew's soccer game and he's not allowed to eat any gluten, and all the kids were having pizza and someone offered him pizza, and they offered it so sweetly. And he was like 11, and he goes "no, I don't eat that," kind of snobby. And he just walked away and then we just left while everyone else was eating their pizza and I really saw that as a problem. He was fine with it because he's on board with his family, but it really cut him off from all these kids and food brings people together and if you're not participating in food... So, I think it would have been better for him to have had a snack that he brought and then stayed with them - Jen, female, 50's, CA

Jen's young nephew removes himself from his teammates to avoid eating pizza, and she sees this as problematic (Pugh 2009). Not only does she describe her nephew's response as "kind of snobby," but she feels sad that he is "cut off" from the other kids because he could not eat the pizza. Although she does not mention anyone else in the group having an issue with him not eating the pizza, or leaving, she believes the situation was not resolved in the most positive way. Thus, even if there is not direct pressure to eat something, people can feel ostracized simply by refusing to eat what everyone else is, especially if they are perceived to have an attitude about it.

My friends all think....they hate going out to eat with me because...waiters blanch when they see me coming. ...It's just persnickety. People, my friends just go [makes a rolling eye face] oh god, am I with her? I think we all should be upfront about what's acceptable and what's not. - AnaLisa, female, 60's, CA

While it is unclear whether AnaLisa's friends actually feel this way when they go out to eat with her, she perceives judgment from them, and from food servers, about the number of questions she asks and the substitutions she wants in her order. However, she claims to know what she wants and what she will eat, and so no amount of perceived judgment changes her ordering process. It might seem that one way to resolve the emotional toll of peer pressure is to eat away from other people, as Jen's nephew did, but eating alone may pose its own emotional challenges. Not only do people eat differently when they are with other people, but for some, especially Slippers, eating alone can cause anxiety.

[I]t's the first time in a very long time I've been alone. Um... it's hard to eat alone, particularly dinner. Um.. I'm trying to get better at it. So, if I had a partner here, I think I would eat out a lot. But there's just something.... And I think that's coming from me. Whenever I go out alone, I see a lot of people eating alone. They aren't watching you [Nora], get on with your life. - Nora, female, 50's, CA

Both AnaLisa and Nora express discomfort with eating out, but from different

viewpoints. Whereas AnaLisa feels concern about having dinner companions who might judge how she eats, Nora feels concern about not having dinner companions at all. The Logic of Connection is a particularly powerful sense-making tool for Slippers, given their high level of discomfort and concern around food and eating.

*Controllers*. Finally, the Logic of Connection allows Controllers to express the feelings that they have about food in a way that supports their own food rules. While the Logic of Connection can provide a Slipper with a justification for eating something outside of their food rules, most Controllers do not tend to give into their cravings, and will resist. Clark eats a strict Vegan diet, but still experiences cravings for non-Vegan foods:

There's certain parts of foods that I don't eat anymore that I guess--like bacon, I still love the smell of bacon, but cooking raw, like raw meat being cooked, I can't stand it. - Clark, male, 20's, VA

As a Controller, Clark draws upon the emotional element within the Logic of Connection to resist giving in to temptation, partly because of the commitment he has to being a Vegan along the lines of the Logic of Morality, but also because of the emotional disgust he feels at the thought of raw meat. Although bacon is often joked to be a "gateway meat" for vegetarians (Barclay 2011) and people who keep Kosher (Fishkoff 2010:229), the thought of cooking meat evokes a negative emotional reaction strong enough to counteract any cravings Clark might have....at least for now.

Although the Controller eating identity is marked in general by discipline and control, this does not mean that Controllers are super-human. It may be infrequent, but Controllers can, and do, use food as an emotional reward for doing something well. For example, Juaquin eats a highly restricted diet due to recent medical issues that sent him to the emergency room, and describes that he practically has "to save a life" to allow himself to eat peanut M&Ms. He later admits that he is exaggerating, and he actually eats peanut M&Ms twice a month, but to him, the M&Ms are such a great reward, when he does something extraordinary for someone else, he feels that he has earned them.

In addition to understanding how people feel individually about food, the Logic of Connection is particularly helpful in understanding the relational aspects of food and eating. As described with the other two eating identities, group eating situations are often fraught with challenges, and this can be especially difficult for Controllers who have the most rigid food rules that they do their best to follow.

Or just you know, you're going into the coffee room or you know on your break at work and there's a box of candy or something someone brought in for the week. Or someone's birthday and there's a cake and you're kind of obligated to eat it, just that sort of stuff. There's a lot of calories kind of foist at you culturally and you're kind of like the bad guy if you don't indulge along with everybody else, because you're the minority in that situation. - Harry, male, 20's, CA

Even for Controllers, the emotions of guilt and remorse can emerge from not eating food that is offered. Again, while a Slipper might draw upon on the Logic of Connection to provide an excuse or justification for eating treats with other people, Harry, a Controller, We Are All Foodies

expresses discomfort from feeling pressure from others in interactions to eat something he does not want to eat.

In contrast to the feeling of peer pressure, not eating what other people are eating can also evoke feelings of pride or superiority. Sophie describes her reaction seeing her friends eating hamburgers and french fries, while she orders a garden salad, as affirming her decisions without denying their choices.

Part of it is that like if they're going to be self-indulgent like that, have that, they should go ahead and do it because I don't know, I'm not doing it, maybe it will make me feel better about not doing it. Weird superiority thing. And then also I get really irritated when people tell me how I should eat or should or shouldn't eat, and in my place, I don't want to do that to them. - Sophie, female, 20's, CA

Sophie draws on the Logic of Connection to not only explain her feeling of pride that she

is eating a salad, but also a feeling of empathy for her friends that keeps her from saying

anything to them about their food choices. She does not want to "irritate" them in the

same way others irritate her when they comment on her food choices.

In addition to different feelings whether someone is eating alone or with a group,

what people eat also depends on whether they were alone or in a group.

I think if it's a social thing it's let's have fun, let's do that. But if you do it by yourself, which is probably frequent, that it has an emotional need--I'm gonna give myself an emotional indulgence. I deserve it because I've maintained my weight, or I ran a marathon. It's usually some compensatory reward or I'm depressed, I like to eat Fritos kind of thing. - Matityahu, male, 50's, VA

Thus, for Controllers especially, there is a sharp distinction between eating unhealthy junk food as part of a group celebration compared to eating it while alone. The Logic of Connection provides Controllers with an emotional justification for their restrictive food rules and eating behaviors, as well as when they bend their rules in group situations. Regardless of how different eating situations and circumstances result in different uses of the Logic of Connection by the different eating identities, the end result is a description of food that is steeped in sentiment and relations with others. Yet, despite this desire for connections, eaters still often have a choice in which foods they select.

## The Logic of Choice

In the Logic of Choice, food represents freedom and the opportunity to select from a variety of options. Within this logic, being able to choose freely is paramount. It does not matter whether people actually eat the foods that they talk about, they just want to be *able* to eat them, if they want. Colin Campbell (1983:282) describes this desire as a function of consumption itself: "The crucial feature of the role of the modern consumer is the primary obligation to want to want under all circumstances and at all times irrespective of what goods and services are actually acquired or consumed."

Almost one-half of the people I spoke with (47%) draw from the Logic of Choice in some fashion, often in terms of keeping their options open, *just in case* they ever decide that they want to eat certain foods. People who do eat junk food regularly want to continue to have that option because they feel like it is their right to choose. In contrast, people who just want to have the chance to change their mind also use this logic. For example, the logic can be used by someone who never drinks soda to imagine someday wanting one, and wanting a soda to be available to them, any time, any place, and in any size. Similarly, the Logic of Choice provides people the freedom to eschew junk food for healthy food.

Within the Logic of Choice, consumers are responsible for regulating their own behaviors and decision-making (Henderson et al. 2009). Regardless of what people

actually eat, this logic addresses issues of personal choice and personal responsibility. The Logic of Choice argues that all choices should be possible, even with limited resources, and that people have the responsibility to make the best choice they can. However, this piece of the logic comes into stark contrast with the public health model, which is critical of the limited possibilities from which people have to choose.

The limitations of accessing fresh and healthy foods are clear both in the sociological literature and during my interviews. Several neighborhoods in the study locations could be classified as food deserts or oases, with limited grocery store and/or restaurant options (Kruger et al. 2014; Rose and Richards 2004; Walker et al. 2011; Whelan et al. 2002). While several of my respondents appreciate that the local farmers markets in both cities accept SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), the issue of cooking knowledge and culinary skill may be such that even if people had access to nutrient dense foods, it still may be easier and more efficient to go to McDonald's instead.

I think it's hard to find other options, you know, and most families don't do that. Most families have a carful of kids they cart around and fill up on McDonald's. I think everything is very fast paced these days...seems like there isn't a lot of time, especially in America, that people take time to cook and enjoy their food, at least people I've known from other countries and what I've learned in classes. I think that's a big part of it. I think when you get off work and there's Taco Bell or McDonald's on the way home, it's easy. It's definitely the easy way out compared to going home and making pasta, which sometimes is just as easy. - Mark, male, 20's, CA

Although Slipper Mark claims that it is sometimes just as easy to make pasta at home,

that may not be an option.

[I]f you give them a bag of dried beans and rice, they don't know what to do with it. So if you're going to have a food stamp program, which I believe we should have a food stamp program, then part of that program is that there are some

education and cooking classes. This is what you're allowed to buy, and this is what's healthful for your family. - Roxanne, female, 50's, CA

Despite Balancer Roxanne's emphasis on education, within the Logic of Choice, it is still up to the individual to select the best option from what they are able to purchase. The Logic of Choice includes an emphasis that eaters should be able to purchase whatever meets their particular need at the time. Research has shown that the recent economic downturn does not necessarily change food-related behavior (Smith, Shu Wen Ng, and Popkin 2014), but financial resources do affect food choices. Several of my respondents have the privilege to exercise the Logic of Choice in what they select, or even to go without, rather than compromise the quality of the food they eat.

We also have to acknowledge people have many different priorities in their selection of foods, which may be more relational than nutritional, as discussed in the Logic of Connection. So for some people, pre-packaged food is not only easier, but it is also more accepted by others, and eating like one's peer group may be a higher priority than one's health (Coveney 2000; Milner 2004; Pugh 2009; Stead et al. 2011). This logic provides the Balancers with an explanation for why they seek diversity in their diets, the Slippers with a justification for loosening their rules, and the Controllers with a motivation and reason for restricting their diets.

*Balancers*. Balancers can use the Logic of Choice as a justification for their desire to eat a variety of foods. Balancers want all options to be available, allowing individuals to take personal responsibility and make the best choices for themselves, without intervention from a "nanny state" or from judgment from others.

I'll [g]ive you an example. My roommate. The guy is the best roommate I've ever had, but he's also the laziest person I've ever known. He's...you know...32 years old his room looks like a 6 year old's. The other day he pulled... like we

couldn't find any cups in our cupboard and we're pulling, uh...like...he came out of his room and he had like stacks of glasses in each other like 10 of them and then like trash bags in his room, that sort of thing of like McDonald's wrappers all that kind of stuff. And he's got a lot of stuff on his plate, so there's also the convenience because he's busy. He doesn't really have time to cook so you know, I'll give him that benefit of the doubt. - Bradley, male, 30's, CA

Despite all of Bradley's negative comments about his roommate in terms of him being

lazy and messy, he still "gives him the benefit of the doubt." Bradley does not judge his

roommate for eating fast food on a regular basis because he believes it is his choice and

because Bradley accepts and validates the justification that his roommate is too busy to

cook or clean his room.

As discussed previously, Balancers often link eating junk food with physical

activity. Increased activity can be one way to make up for poor eating decisions,

especially if friends call out those food choices.

I feel like there's one of two ways with people like that, like if, I guess it depends on how your friends are. If you're eating a lot of junk food, sometimes your friends will be like dude, you're gonna get fat, quit doing that...and you'll stop or go to the gym afterwards. - Arthur, male, late teens, VA

While Bradley explicitly will not judge his roommate, Arthur describes his friends as willing to step in and say something if they think a friend is making a bad food choice. However, within the Logic of Choice, it is still up to that individual to make the change, either by eating differently or working off the food in the gym.

Although the Logic of Choice allows that any choice is a valid one, sometimes the health implications of providing a choice becomes an issue. Starr describes the conflict her health care company faces between the Logic of Health and the Logic of Choice.

We have a regular caterer we use and they make this devastating delicious beer bread.<sup>20</sup> Well, the CEO said no more beer bread. If we're to be models of health, then we can't have our members come in and serve them beer bread, so no more beer bread. Members pitched a fit! We brought it back because the members said mm-mm [shakes head], my choice, I'll decide. We're a member driven association, so if that's what they want, that's what they get. So now we just order less. We try to encourage the salads, don't have sandwiches. - Starr, female, 50's, CA

The health impact of eating certain foods goes beyond which foods are offered at corporate meetings. Although food-related diseases are personally experienced, for some, the social costs of illness collide with the ideals of personal choice and responsibility within the Logic of Choice.

*Slippers*. Slippers often evoke the Logic of Choice to justify their decisions to eat outside their food rules. In addition, the Logic of Choice reinforces their sense of worry and concern in that they may have too many options from which to choose.

Interviewees with all three eating identities feel themselves responsible for their own choices, and like Balancers, Slippers do not place blame on others for their choices as readily as they blame themselves. Instead, many of my respondents rationalize others' choices to eat fast food or junk food as a function of their lack of financial resources, knowledge, or time.

And while many respondents criticize the structure of the food system using the language of the food industrial complex model and the dearth of fresh or healthy food and broad availability of cheap, quick, and easy using the language of the public health model, the Slipper identity is marked by blaming and shaming themselves when they choose poorly, however they may define it.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> I have eaten the beer bread made by this particular caterer, and can affirm that it is "devastating delicious." The recipe for the beer bread can be found in Appendix F.

After Nick describes the "nice" meals that his vegetarian girlfriend cooks, he stammers in describing the fried chicken he recently ate at a local fast food restaurant as "a little disappointing, it was okay, but it was like honestly as I was eating it, I'm like I can't believe I'm, like it's just so ridiculous." In an attempt to improve his overall diet, Nick had tried to stop eating fried food. Later in the interview, he admits that he feels guilty about eating the fried chicken instead of something vegetarian.

An example of potentially contradictory choices is Sara's description of her husband's vegetarianism outside of their home. Although she uses the language of the Logic of Morality in adhering to his moral standards when cooking for him and their children, she equivocates and draws more on the Logic of Choice in her description of being more lax in her own choices.

He's a vegetarian outside of the house. But simply because of the humane certified thing. I'm not that picky when we're out. I should be, but I'm not. We're not out that much, but I try to be. [Why do you think that you should be?] Well, I feel like....um...I know [pauses] This is [my husband's] thing with the humane certified, and I totally support him and I think that we're better off, and I mean, we do exclusively, [pause] well I would say 99.9% of the time organic milk for the girls, those kind of things. But you know, we go to a restaurant and I just order a milk because I just....life's complicated enough. That's the way I feel. So, um...[pause] yeah. - Sara, female, 30's, CA

Sara acknowledges the misalignment between her agreement with her husband's moral standards and her choices in actual day-to-day life. However, the fact that her "normally clear and concise language devolves into convoluted halting syntax" indicates a deeper emotion that drives her choices (Pugh 2013:51) and how multiple logics can intersect. Slippers can use the Logic of Choice to describe any emotional fallout that may arise from breaking their rules.

When I said that people make a "careless decision" when they decide to eat junk food often, I was not excluding myself at all. I am not separating myself from

"others." I'm most certainly not saying that I have made or do make the best decisions for my health all the time, and I do not categorize myself as some elitist health nut with superior self-control when it comes to food. Everything I said about "people"...applies to me, too. - Trisha, female, 20's, CA

Trisha readily includes herself in her judgment about food decisions, but many Slippers

argue that the ability to choose is personal.

[Y]ou can make good decisions at McDonald's – they have a few if you pick and choose. Um..you can do the same – you can make some bad decisions at um...Whole Foods. You can get mac n cheese, you can get mashed potatoes, which have no [laughs] nutrient whatsoever in them. You can get bad stuff at Whole Foods, just like you can anywhere else. It's just marketed differently. - Christina, female, 30's, CA

For Slippers, the Logic of Choice provides the rationale that is up to the consumer to take

responsibility for knowing what they are purchasing and exercising their ability to make

good choices, no matter what the circumstances. This ability to choose can be

problematic for Slippers, however, in that then when they choose to break their food

rules, they only have themselves to blame.

Controllers. For Controllers, the Logic of Choice can be used to validate and justify their

choices of extreme eating, as well as to judge people who choose to eat differently.

Although the foundation of the Logic of Choice is the ability to choose freely without

intervention, Controllers seem the most willing to opine about others' choices.

For example, Joe discusses his wife and stepdaughter's unhealthy eating with unmasked derision and scorn. Although he allows his daughter to eat candy when she needs comfort, he seems skeptical as to whether his wife, who has some "bad habits" of her own, will be able to help his stepdaughter establish good habits. In a markedly more positive tone, Jim describes his struggles while parenting his four year old.

The 4 year old, I wrestle with that every day. She likes junk food. She has a hard time eating what I would consider regular food. So as a parent you weigh the

"I've just got to get food in my kid's belly." Will they eat the chicken nuggets? Yes, they'll eat the damn chicken nuggets, buy the damn chicken nuggets and feed them. Um... and I'm really thinking we're at the point where we need to turn this around. My current plan is honestly is to be an example and just say, "this is what Daddy eats...eat this....this is better." Rather than saying "No, you cannot do this" because I don't think that is going to work in the long run. - Jim, male, 40's, CA

Although it is reasonable for Jim to want to positively influence his young daughter's

eating habits, most people do not want others dictating their food choices, even indirectly. For example, Sophie receives negative feedback from her friends as they drink beer and eat garlic fries and she orders a side salad.

And then someone commented about "you're at [a brewpub] and you got a salad?" Which I've gotten before and I'm just like...I'm pretty set on that side salad....Their opinions on what I eat are pretty far down the list on what I consider. - Sophie, female, 20's, CA

Sophie does not change what she orders due to her friends' heckling, but neither does she try and talk to her friends about their orders, which she described as impulsive and self-indulgent. She also describes that while drinking her friends often smoke cigarettes, which she also sees as impulsive and self-indulgent. Although she is very clear in that she will talk to her friends about not smoking, she vehemently will not talk to her friends about eating junk food when they drink alcohol. She says that "the huge consensus [is] that it's ok to tell your friends not to smoke and you know...I guess...peer pressure thing, it's totally acceptable when it's against smoking." But when asked about food, she says "it's a personal thing."

*Nudge.* While food choices may be seen as a "personal thing," one idea, libertarian paternalism (Thaler 2008), is to let people make their own choices, but to also acknowledge that people do not always act rationally, and might want help in their decisions. If someone, like the government, offers that support or another opportunity to

make a good decision, aka a nudge, people would be able to take advantage of that. The idea is that by being able to choose the better choice, it could be better for everyone. Choices are not limited; people are just encouraged towards the best option.

A common suggestion for a nudge made by my respondents, especially Balancers, is to change the type, quality, and quantity of foods kids are offered in school cafeterias. Several of my respondents mention Jamie Oliver, the British chef who is trying to revolutionize America's school lunch program, and the resistance he faces from school officials and parents. A nudge would be to provide better choices, but not force anyone to eat anything they do not want to.

So, technically you can bring your lunch with whatever kind of food you want in it, but we are going to offer that the school sponsored lunches are going to be healthier. - Erica, female, 20's, CA

Another example is the previously mentioned "fresco" menu at Taco Bell, which gives consumers a choice to purchase either a healthier or standard taco. However, nudges may not be so neutral and value-free (White 2013) because a nudge requires some sort of judgment about the right direction to nudge someone.

## *The Logic of Heritage*

Although the Logic of Heritage is the least commonly invoked logic during the interviews (19% of respondents), the respondents who draw from this logic have a strong link to their food traditions and histories. Some people passionately describe refusing to eliminate specific traditional or meaningful foods, even if they cause illness or physical distress. Like the Logic of Connection, this logic induces strong feelings that may override any reason or judgment about what is the best food choice to make. My respondents, particularly African American, Asian, and Latino respondents, elicit the

Logic of Heritage to discuss treasured family recipes, ethnic heritage (Counihan 2005; Inness 2001b; Julier 2005; Zafar 1999), regional traditions and foodways (Edge et al. 2013), and the importance of their memories of specific foods (Sutton 2001).

Given the wide range in ages of my respondents from age 18 to over 70, memories and recollections of family food traditions range from the recent to the distant past. Regardless of timespan, the link to family can be reinforced through eating specific foods or engaging in family meal traditions. For members of each eating identity, the Logic of Heritage can provide an understanding for the struggle some respondents face integrating family recipes and traditions with their current food rules. Specifically, the Logic of Heritage can help Balancers explain why they eat certain foods, and can help both Slippers and Controllers explain how family pressures may (or may not) force them to break their own rules.

*Balancers*. The Logic of Heritage gives Balancers a means to explain why they eat the foods that they eat on a regular basis, particularly if some of their food habits differ from the mainstream Standard American Diet<sup>21</sup>. For example, Liz describes her daily food as a hybrid between "Western style" and "traditional Indian."

Like morning is American, Western style, like we have cereal, or bread or always coffee, tea, milk, orange juice. Breakfast is always that. We can make an Indian snack along with it, but it's American/Western. And for lunch, actually morning is cereal, lunch is sandwich and dinner is traditional Indian, so traditional Indian means we have whole wheat tortilla, you have a veggie dish, you'll have a lentil dish and rice. - Liz, female, 40's, VA

<sup>21</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, the "Standard American Diet" is a diet with "excess consumption of calories from refined carbohydrates, fatty meats, and added fats and that lacks many nutrients found in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables" (Grotto and Zied 2010:603).

We Are All Foodies

Liz describes much of her family's diet as Western, but that she tries to make her home cooking more traditional. She goes on to explain how her father was very health-conscious, raising her on "lentils, vegetarian and Indian food, whole wheat flour and rice." She learned how and what to cook from her father, and continues the tradition with her son. Although she describes her son and husband as preferring a more Western diet, she still tries to integrate her family food traditions into her Western food choices. For example, Liz tries to get her pre-teen son to put the contents of his Taco Bell burrito in a homemade whole wheat tortilla, like she ate while growing up. Although her son has not actually tried her idea yet, she continues to encourage him to eat his favorite foods in a more traditional way.

*Slippers*. The Logic of Heritage highlights the frequent challenges Slippers face in aligning their eating behaviors to their rules, and in some cases can provide another excuse for breaking their rules. For example, an often-heard challenge is what a vegetarian, such as Becky, does around the family Thanksgiving table.

Yeah, that's kind of since I moved away from home. My parents don't get that as much, so when I go home I eat differently than I do when I'm here because I try to be kind of respectful of their cultural leanings. And so you know, on Thanksgiving I will eat a couple bites of turkey because it makes my mother happy. - Becky, female, 20's, VA

While a Controller might make arrangements for other foods to be available that fit in with their eating rules, in her efforts to "be respectful of their cultural leanings," Becky will bend her food rules to align with her family's eating habits, at least while she is home for the holiday.

However, not all Slippers use family or traditions as an easy excuse to break their rules. This may be a function of decisions made once a year at Thanksgiving versus daily

210

food choices on a regular basis, but a contrasting example is Dylan, who is willing to contradict her family's cultural foodways to eschew rice and bread on her Paleo diet.

[M]y parents are kind of skeptical because they're real used to like the Chinese way of eating with lots of rice. And then they've never seen bread to be a problem, but they have, I guess, become more conscious of what they eat now. - Dylan, female, late teens, VA

Dylan's satisfaction with her Paleo eating plan gives her the discipline and strength to

contradict her family's eating patterns, yet she describes the contradiction using the Logic

of Heritage. However, despite her willingness to refuse to eat carbohydrates served by

her parents, Dylan does contradict herself and will eat traditional wheat-based (non-

Paleo) dumplings if she has a free coupon.

*Controllers.* Finally, only 20 percent of Controllers draw from the Logic of Heritage, but it can be a cultural tool for them to justify, if only to themselves, eating foods outside of their normal diet.

There is this Korean soup that has blood in it, I don't really like that. It is gross, but I deal with a lot of gross things, and I don't get easily grossed out, but I don't like the taste. I steer clear of a lot of things, but if someone offered I would probably eat it. - Ladison, female, 20's, VA

Ladison's describes her typical diet as locavore<sup>22</sup> vegetarianism, so a Korean blood soup is something she would try to avoid, but that she would accept it if it was offered to her by her family. The challenge some people face in saying "no" to offered food is also discussed in terms of the Logic of Connection, but it becomes more difficult when the food offered is part of a family or holiday tradition. Slippers and Controllers might draw from the Logic of Heritage to justify bending their usually strict rules and eating different

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> A "locavore" is someone who eats foods grown locally whenever possible.

foods in order to make their parents happy or to keep the peace during holiday or other family gatherings.

*Food and memory*. In some ways, the Logic of Heritage often highlights a fissure between the past and the present. However, sometimes the memories people have about food are not fond. Several people I spoke with, Slippers especially, express dismay and disgust about the food they ate while growing up.

My mother was first generation German. She married my father who was military, so she was trying to cook American food...lots of Betty Crocker, canned vegetables with heaping spoonfuls of Shed's Spread in the microwave. There's always a meat of some sort, a starch and a canned vegetable every day, so she did buy some fresh stuff, but a lot of it was kind of processed. And I think...I think about that and yeah, I mean I've had so much good food in my life since being out on my own that I'm just like ugh, I can't buy that stuff. Little Debbie, we grew up eating Little Debbie. My daughter wanted to eat those and I'm just like uh-huh. Kool Aid. No, I can't do Kool Aid because we had to drink Kool Aid every day. And it's just [cringing] Well, all those colored drinks and I'm also concerned about food dyes and all that stuff, so it does make me cringe. So my kids get lemonade when it's on sale, and milk sometimes, although they don't always drink it and lots of water. Some juice, not a lot. - Mohingar, female, 40's, VA

Roxanne tells a similar story of the influence of highly processed American food on her

family's immigrant and traditional eating habits. In her family, the conflict arose between

her father's occupation in the processed food industry, and her mother's cooking heritage.

My own mother is German. Raised as a butcher. Knew meats, knew basic foods, and was and is a pretty good cook. But then my father worked for an [American] food company,... so I think about some of the horrendous junk we ate as... because my dad would bring it home, you know. The cheese puffs and not good peanuts and stuff, so we tended to eat that because we got it, and we went to margarine, even though my mother was raised with butter... - Roxanne, female, 50's, CA

Both Mohingar and Roxanne remember their mother's ethnic food heritage as overruled

by their American father's provision of foods in line with the Standard American Diet.

Neither woman includes these highly processed foods as part of her diet today, but both

acknowledge the struggle to make different choices today for the benefit of their health.

Similarly, Elena, who eats gluten-free for her health, describes the power of her

memories of foods she used to eat.

We're going to Puerto Rico in the fall. There will be things there that I will eat and I will just be sick, that that's how it will be because it's my cultural food. And I don't get there all the time. Fried and greasy and salty all the way. They're made with batter, cod fish fritters, empanada, something called an alcapurria, which is [stops and thinks] actually, that might be safe, I don't know. It's ground meat on the inside with olives and capers, then the outside is usually yucca. And just, I don't know if they dust it in flour, but things like that. When I was in Puerto Rico I had one and I just felt nauseous the whole day. And I'll just deal with it. ... There are very few things [worth it to eat]. I mean I think if I went, I grew up going up and back to New York all the time and when we were in New York, I'd have to go to Ferraro's and I would have to have some pastry. And I could get the three little ones and that would be enough. It's not like I have to binge. A small amount of something usually is fine for me if I'm going to cheat. And the only time I've cheated is Puerto Rico in two years." - Elena, female, 40's, VA

Whereas Mohingar and Roxanne draw upon the Logic of Heritage to describe foods that

they ate in the past, Elena uses the same logic to describe a future hope of eating the treasured foods of her childhood, even though the foods will undoubtedly make her sick. Mohingar's favorite junk food is pastries, but she is not willing to eat Little Debbie snacks ever again because she believes they will make her feel ill. In contrast, Elena will eat her favorite junk foods *knowing for sure* that she will be immediately sick. Elena tries to rationalize her choice by saying that a small amount of gluten is "fine,"<sup>23</sup> but this distinction highlights the conflict that arises sometimes between the cultural logics people draw from and the food choices that they actually make.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> People experience a range of symptoms with wheat and gluten intolerance, but someone who is truly Celiac will be sick for days by cross-contamination with even a trace amount of gluten (Ahern 2014).

#### CULTURAL LOGICS VERSUS BEHAVIOR

The consideration of the cultural logics that people use to understand their world becomes complicated when you try to make the link to actual behavior. Most people are highly skilled at drawing from a different logic and changing their story when confronted with a situation in which their preferred logic does not work (Swidler 2001). However, when that shift is not done early enough, or smoothly enough, examining cultural logics in the stories people tell can illuminate a gap between what people say and what they do (Hays 1996). For some, a misalignment between their food rules and their actual behavior can result in feeling that their personal biography is not justified or unitary (Giddens 1991). This may cause feelings of guilt or self-criticism, especially when comparing oneself to someone one holds in high esteem. The potential for negative emotional consequences from this misalignment is particularly evident amongst the Slippers in my study.

In some cases, the misalignment is not evident, such as for Oksana, a Slipper who engages in "honorable" display work (Pugh 2013) describing in great detail how she brings filtered water from home to drink at work because she does not want to ingest chemicals in the tap water at her office. While she describes this during our interview at her office, the "schematic" data she presents are repeated gestures to and sips from a cup of the filtered water in her hands. Oksana's contradiction is that the cup is made from Styrofoam, a recently named "known human carcinogen" (Murray 2011). However, Oksana does not indicate that she is aware of this contradiction, so her perceived alignment between the cultural logics that she draws upon to make sense of food and eating and her actual behaviors is maintained. However, when a misalignment does become evident, people can and do use other cultural logics to justify and animate their eating behaviors. For example, I have previously described AnaLisa's realization during the interview that she would have to change her sheet to reflect the 24 Cheez-Its that she "forgot" that she eats every day. In this case, the gap between what AnaLisa says and what she does is disruptive, both to her own understandings of food and eating, as well as to the interview process. This example also highlights the symbolic importance of food in people's lives. Later in the interview, AnaLisa explains that she had recently lost a lot of weight, and had "made a deal" with her dietician to limit herself to only one ounce of Cheez-Its and one ounce of chocolate per day. Clearly, the Cheez-Its create a "visceral" emotion for AnaLisa meaningful enough to be included in her negotiation and food rules. While she would consider Cheez-Its as "junk" food based on her own stated definition, she can still draw upon the idea of moderation in the Logic of Health and/or the idea of tradeoffs in the Logic of Choice to justify her negotiation and quantity restriction.

These contradictions between logics and behavior are minor, and it could be argued that they are simply evidence of people's fallibility; that most people do not live lives of rigid control. All of the people who describe these slips are quite food-savvy and conscious about most of their food, but there are these little breaks or hiccups in their thinking and consciousness that crop up. And they just may not think about the disruptions until they are brought to their attention. As Allison Pugh (2013:51) argues, as the interviewer, I am able to catch these non-verbal and verbal mis-steps to explore the deeper meanings that drinking filtered water or counting out daily Cheez-Its have for my respondents. Regardless of how minor they might seem, it is important to consider these gaps between what people say and what they do because they can cause real challenges. Some people, Slippers especially, struggle with the effect of these contradictions on their emotional landscape, particularly when they involve another person.

## SUMMARY OF CULTURAL LOGICS

In summary, I find that my respondents are savvy in their use of the multiple logics to justify and explain the decisions that they make around food, as well as any disconnections that occur. The three eating identities each use the logics in different ways, as presented in Table 3 below.

Logic of	Balancers	Slippers	Controllers
Health	flexibility	breaking of rules	rigidity of rules
Morality	righteous moderation	means of self-judgment	reification of rules
Elaboration	adventurousness	competence	quality, acceptability
Connection	express any conflict	convey struggle	strength & control
Choice	diversity	loose	restricted
Heritage	legitimacy	excuse	family pressures

Table 3 – Summary of Benefits of Cultural Logics by Eating Identity

There may be occasional discrepancies between what they say and what they do, but my respondents draw from these multiple logics to justify and make sense of their food choices and eating behaviors. While the basic foundation of their eating identity may be somewhat stable, the details can be fluid and dynamic, as required in a reflexive project of the self (Giddens 1991).

Although the cultural logics do not provide a clear-cut link between culture and behavior, analyzing the logics, and their contradictions with behavior, helps to understand "cultural action" (Pugh 2013:62). Cultural logics provide the way for people to explain changes, slippages, or contradictions in their rules or behaviors, without losing consistency in their overall eating identity in the context of a constantly changing foodscape.

## **CHAPTER 7 - DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Dramatic changes in the food system over the past several decades have focused on increased manufacturing and processing, which in turn has changed the relationship that people have with food. My respondents indicate that they engage in a constant consideration of their food decisions to ensure alignment between what they believe they should eat and what they do eat (Hays 1996). Largely, this consideration is framed in a context that implicates food as the primary determinant of health. It may not even be the food itself, but rather the quantity and/or frequency in which it is eaten, which is problematic. Rather than being able to rely on established guidelines or recommendations and shared definitions of which foods are healthy, and in what quantity, my respondents describe doing their own research to determine which foods are appropriate *for them*.

The overall empirical finding of this dissertation is that within a changing food landscape, people must create and maintain an eating identity, which is rooted in both (1) ideas about what one should eat, and (2) what one actually eats. People draw upon different cultural logics to make sense of food, eating, and their food choices, as well as to explain any discrepancies that may arise between what they think they should eat and what they do eat.

## SOCIOLOGY OF FOOD AND EATING

While my respondents understand their decisions about what to eat as highly personal, and the broader culture may concur, and see such decisions as a function of physiological, psychological, emotional, and biological needs, food choices are actually socially patterned. Previous research in the sociology of food has focused on the impact of social identity, such as race, class, gender, or education, on food choices (Bisogni et al.

2002). My understanding of food choices builds on more recent research on the relationship between food and individual identity (de Solier 2013). My main argument is that under conditions of dynamic modernity<sup>24</sup>, all people, even those without a self-proclaimed interest in food, use food to construct a self-reflexive identity (Giddens 1991). Those eating identities inform which foods, and in what quantities, people think that they can, and should, eat.

Each of the people that I interviewed has his/her own important personal biography around food, yet all operate within a changing food system and food culture. Regardless of the specifics of the eating identity, the process of creating and maintaining an identity is one of continuous adjustment over the life course. Most importantly, it is the individual's ongoing responsibility to create and maintain this identity. In the face of shifting expert systems, including criticism of formal experts such as the USDA's guidelines, consumers are required to do their own research. However, although the requirement to maintain and re-create one's eating identity falls on the individual, there are external limitations on the choices that people have. Sociologically, I understand my respondents' experiences with food and eating as demonstrating how a seemingly personal behavior such as eating is subject to social, structural, and cultural changes at multiple levels.

As evidenced by my respondents' skillful use of multiple cultural logics, the meanings that food has extend beyond simply as a determinant of health. However, the conflation between food and health is common in both the popular discourse, as well as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> "Dynamic modernity" is marked by conditions in which the pace, scope, and profoundness of social change are faster and more extreme (Giddens 1991).

amongst my respondents. I specifically ask respondents what they "do" eat, not what they "should" eat. However, my respondents quickly make the move from what they do eat to what they should eat, by virtue of how they describe food and eating. The goal of my analysis here has been to question this conflation and tease out the importance of food in identity work, beyond simply food's impact on health or disease.

In order to untangle this fusing of food and health, this concluding chapter analyzes food and eating behaviors through multiple lenses (Radway 1991). The first perspective is that of the eaters themselves. How do my respondents talk about food, and how do their personal narratives about food and eating express equating food with health? The second perspective is that of a cultural analyst. How can I use sociological theories and concepts to make sense of the stories my respondents tell? The final perspective is that of a policymaker. Since most governmental and health policies are based on this assumption that equates food and eating with health, how can policymakers use an understanding of eating identities to formulate more acceptable and successful policies? This chapter discusses how, from each of these different perspectives, eating identities fulfill different functions.

#### PERSONAL NARRATIVES

First and foremost, the *personal narratives* of my respondents demonstrate how they see and understand the world in which they inhabit and are presented throughout this dissertation. The accounts people give are critical to understanding how they experience food and eating in their own lives (Orbuch 1997), and "food can hide powerful meanings and structures under the cloak of the mundane and the quotidian" (Sutton 2001:3). The stories my respondents tell about their everyday food rules and eating behaviors reflect

their beliefs about the relationship between food, eating, and food-related disease or health, as well as demonstrate how food rules can change depending upon the situation. Many of my respondents tell stories of receiving a specific and irreversible medical diagnosis like celiac or diabetes, even secondhand, and adjusting their food rules and eating behavior accordingly.

The answer to the question "what do you eat" is much more than a simple recitation of a list of foods. Instead, the rich stories that my respondents tell describe a process of creating and maintaining their own personal eating identities and managing their own eating behaviors in a world without clear or widely accepted definitions or taken-forgranted assumptions about food. From the perspective of the eaters, eating identities are different ways to organize food and eating, often towards the goal of health.

### The Power of the Mundane

Exploring a specific yet seemingly mundane food, such as oatmeal, highlights the capacity of stories to unpack the conflation of food and health, as well as the power of eating identities as an analytical tool. The fact that 22 percent of my respondents mention eating oatmeal for breakfast on a regular basis points to the value that people see in this rather plain and simple food. Reflecting the concerted marketing effort on the part of the oatmeal industry to gain the halo effects of a "heart-healthy" label (Chandon 2013), my respondents describe oatmeal as part of a "healthy" breakfast, even as some also describe the amount of sugar in the oatmeal.

The following discussion of each of the eating identities includes this example of a very simple food. The different ways in which people with each eating identity describe oatmeal demonstrates the "fact" of eating the same food on a regular basis is less

important than the different meanings ascribed to that same action. From the perspective of an eater, food and eating behaviors, even of simple foods like oatmeal, are seen as a signal of individuality or to demonstrate their own uniqueness.

#### Eating Identities

As detailed in Chapter 4, eating identities are the combination of the food choices that people *actually* make and their normative expectations of what they think that they *should* eat. Subject to frequent self-scrutiny and modification in an ongoing selfreflexive project, again, it is my respondents who connect what they *do* eat with what they *should* eat. I ask them specifically about how they define foods as healthy or junk foods, as well as what they eat on a regular basis. Reflecting popular discourse, my respondents equate the foods that they define as healthy as foods that they should eat. The challenge or ease that members of each eating identity face in eating the foods that they define as healthy is evident in the stories that they tell about food.

The three distinct eating identities that emerge from these stories highlight differences in the ways people eat and whether how they eat aligns with what they think they should eat. Members of each of these eating identities describe their definitions of food and their motivations for drawing on various cultural logics in different ways. Continuing with the example of oatmeal, the 17 people who mention eating oatmeal for breakfast on a regular basis are evenly split amongst the three eating identities discussed in the following sections, and not surprisingly, they describe the oatmeal differently depending on their eating identity.

*Balancers*. My respondents who are Balancers focus on the mantra of "everything in moderation" and describe valuing their own ability to make decisions for themselves.

Members of this eating identity talk about food and flavors in terms of ease and comfort, and express a willingness to bend any rules that they might have if given the opportunity to eat something desirable. Balancers tend to describe oatmeal as good because it "sticks with you all day" and that the little bit of sugar in it is "ok."

Balancers tend to focus on what junk foods lack in terms of nutrients in a rational calculation of calories in versus calories out. Balancers, particularly if they are young adults, may use physical activity both as a counterbalance to and a deterrent from overeating. They seek variety and balance in their diets, and as discussed in a later section, tend to draw upon different cultural logics in order to justify this diversity in the foods that they eat. In fact, Balancers tend to believe that it is healthy to eat a variety of foods, including indulgences and treats.

*Slippers.* The Balancers' lack of anxiety is markedly different from the eating identity of the Slippers, who have food rules that they want to adhere to, but occasionally, or frequently, say that they "fall off the wagon," resulting in anxieties and difficulties about food and eating. Slippers describe the hardest time aligning their eating behaviors with their healthy intentions and food rules. They experience almost constant worry and concern, often with poor results in terms of eating what they think that they should eat. In the mundane example of oatmeal, Slippers tend to describe eating oatmeal as healthy, but worry about additional sugar, either that they add themselves, that is added during the processing of instant oatmeal packets, or that is added by a restaurant, such as the oatmeal<sup>25</sup> served at McDonald's.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> The fruit and maple oatmeal with brown sugar served at McDonald's contains 32 grams of sugar, the same amount as in their cinnamon rolls (melts) (McDonald's 2014).

Reflecting the blending of food and ideas about health, Slippers are more likely to emphasize the distinction between junk food and comfort food, where junk food is unhealthy, but comfort food is better because it provides emotional support. Thus, the lines between healthy and unhealthy are blurry and can be deceiving, especially for Slippers. The Slippers tell stories that employ cultural logics in an attempt to justify when their actual diet, which they may perceive to be unhealthy at times, does not align with their aspirational diet, which they valorize as being healthy.

*Controllers.* People with the final eating identity, the Controllers, have a high level of focus on the foods that they eat, and they tend to avoid junk food. Controllers describe a wide variety of ideas about which foods are healthy, and therefore appropriate, to eat. However, in a foodscape<sup>26</sup> without set rules or definitions, there is no way for their ideas about what is healthy to eat to be wrong. The Vegans feel that their beliefs about which foods are healthy are correct, just as much as the Paleo eaters do. Controllers are picky about where they shop and the foods that they buy, focusing on local and organic foods. They are finicky about their oatmeal as well; Controllers tend to only eat homemade or steel cut oats, which they describe as healthy because they are "whole grains." Many Controllers acknowledge their high level of fastidiousness about food, and accept that in their unwillingness to compromise the food and eating behaviors that they perceive to be leading them to health, they might be compromising relationships with others.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, I use the concept of a "foodscape" as including both (1) the food system, or how food is produced, distributed, and sold, *and* (2) the food culture, or how food is thought and talked about.

Overall, Controllers' stories about food reflect a level of certainty and confidence, rather than the ease of a Balancer or the anxiety of a Slipper. Instead, the stories about and accounts of food and eating that Controllers tell display a strong focus and commitment towards what they perceive to be healthy eating, and tend to define junk food as the foods that they avoid in their usually restrictive diets. Finally, the Controllers tend to use the logics to not only defend the restrictive nature of their food rules, but also to justify their reasons for eating outside of their food rules on rare occasions.

#### Summary

The stories my respondents tell of their perceived idiosyncratic food rules are patterned. Multiple respondents described in this section eat oatmeal on a regular basis because they think it is a healthy breakfast option. Yet the oatmeal is manufactured, cooked, and labeled in different ways, and the rules and anxieties constructing "oatmeal" vary widely. In this one simple food, then, we can understand the connection my respondents see between food, eating, and health, as well as how their eating identity informs how they think about the food. Thus, these three eating identities not only provide an analytic framework for understanding how people eat, but the identities also structure relational differences in how people think and talk about food.

#### CULTURAL ANALYSIS

While the personal narratives of my respondents are informative, and quite often entertaining, this section presents a different interpretation: a cultural analysis of the stories that they tell. To this end, I use sociological theories and concepts presented in Chapter 2 and the three macro-level explanatory models described in Chapter 5 as a framework for understanding the link between food, eating, and food-related illnesses. In

addition, the six cultural logics detailed in Chapter 6 provide a way to understanding motivations and justifications for eating behaviors.

The near unanimous use of the Logic of Health by my respondents indicates how strongly the cultural value of "eating right for your health" impacts how people think and talk about food. As a product of the same foodscape as my respondents, I struggle myself as a cultural analyst to disentangle the blending of food and health in my own understanding. Identifying that my respondents use the same explanatory models and cultural logics in very different ways depending on their eating identity indicates that from an analytical perspective, eating identities are the focal point of a larger constellation of understandings and meanings about food and eating.

#### Explanatory Models

The three macro-level explanatory models described in Chapter 5 provide a useful analytic framework to analyze the origins of the link between food, eating, and food-related diseases in my respondents' stories. These structural explanatory models are academic attempts to make sense of the link between food, disease, and health, speak to large-scale solutions, and are used widely in the broader general discourse.

The different explanatory models compete precisely because the contemporary American food system is changing under conditions of dynamic modernity. The medical model emphasizes that the solution to food-related disease is found in personal responsibility using expert scientific information from doctors and nutritionists, which aligns with the neoliberal ideal of individual self-sufficiency (Foucault et al. 1988; Giddens 1991; Gordon 1991; Peters 2001; Pugh 2014). But the public health model emerged after the 1920s arguing that maybe personal responsibility is not enough; the

environment in which people live matters. More recently, with the increase in processing and manufacturing of food, I argue that the food industrial complex model is a new way to consider how the food industry itself may be culpable for food-related diseases.

The models indicate different areas for action, either at the individual consumption level, the community level, or at the industry level. My respondents mostly use language reflecting the medical model (59% of respondents) and the food industrial complex model (47%), but less so the public health model (14%). The assumptions underlying the models are often in direct conflict, arguing that individuals need to change their personal behavior, neighborhoods need to change what food is available, or corporations and politicians need to change how food is produced and marketed. As food options have changed and become more highly processed, it is clear that consumers have had to create their own definitions and understandings to make sense of a changing foodscape.

However, these definitions do not just get pulled out of thin air. My respondents, for example, have strongly shared definitions of junk food rooted in the assumptions of these three models. Junk food is fast, cheap, and easy, often highly processed food with little nutritional value that is high in salt, sugar, and fat.

These personal definitions and rules for what is appropriate to eat often exist in the face of competing expert systems. If the medical model is right, then people are responsible for following scientific and nutritional guidelines to create an eating identity that makes them healthy. But if the public health model is right, then people are not responsible for creating a healthy eating identity; their health is more properly understood as a function of the environment in which they live. Finally, if the food industrial complex model is right, then again, people are less responsible for creating an eating

identity that brings them to health, as a more structural capitalist agent is to blame for food-related diseases.

The competition of these macro-level models leaves individuals to puzzle out for themselves on the micro-level what they believe is true about food, eating, and foodrelated diseases (Foucault et al. 1988; Giddens 1991; Gordon 1991; Peters 2001; Pugh 2014). And regardless of the definitions people have about what makes food junk, or the model(s) that they use, the stories my respondents tell indicate that they feel on their own, and often confused, in determining what is appropriate to eat, and what they should avoid. In the context of these competing and conflicting explanatory models, I argue that individuals must create eating identities and use available cultural resources to make sense of not only their decisions, but also the environment in which they live.

## Cultural Logics

In large part, the determination of what is or is not appropriate to eat is grounded in the cultural logics of food and eating. Not only do cultural logics provide the taken-forgranted assumptions at the basis of different understandings about food and eating, but they also represent the milieu in which people live and draw upon to make sense of the world. I understand from the stories my respondents tell that draw upon cultural logics that these logics provide both motivations for food choices, as well as justifications when what they say and believe about food does not line up with their behaviors. By exploring the stories that people tell about the foods that they eat, I can analyze how people use cultural logics in order to "keep a particular narrative going," in their "ongoing 'story' about the self" (Giddens 1991:54).

From the sociological literature and the stories of my respondents, I identify six different cultural logics that people use to talk about food: the Logics of 1) Health; 2) Morality; 3) Elaboration; 4) Connection; 5) Choice; and 6) Heritage. Reflecting the overall focus of this chapter, all but three of my respondents (96%) draw from the Logic of Health, wherein food is used to maintain life, and food choices impact health both positively and negatively. In this logic, the key factor in food decisions is how the food will make one physically feel, for better or worse.

In addition to Health, many of my respondents draw from multiple other logics depending on the situation and context in question. Sixty-five percent of my respondents draw upon the Logic of Morality, wherein food demonstrates the moral worth of the person eating it. Thus, food decisions are based on judgment of oneself, and of others. The issue of judgment extends into the Logic of Elaboration, used by 57 percent of my respondents, in that how people talk about food is a way to distinguish or enhance their status. In this logic, food decisions are grounded in what people think the decisions say about them and their level of "taste capital." Within the Logic of Connection, 55 percent of my respondents talk about food as providing comfort and describe food in emotional and relational terms, such as having cravings when with friends and family, or wanting to eat something to make themselves *feel* comforted, happier, or satisfied. Food decisions are based on current feelings, interactions, and/or the anticipated feelings that foods can evoke. The Logic of Choice, which 47 percent of my respondents utilize, is based in the idea that consumers should be able to make choices for themselves and face any potential consequences. In this logic, the key factor in food decisions is the freedom to select anything and everything from among the multitude of choices available in the

contemporary foodscape. Finally, although the least drawn upon (19% of my respondents), the Logic of Heritage focuses on the traditions, histories, and memories of food. Food decisions in this logic are an attempt to stay connected to or re-connect with traditional or familial foodways.

The Logic of Connection and the Logic of Heritage are the most likely to be used to justify eating foods that contradict people's standard food rules. In part, this is because the perceived emotional or social reward from eating a typically forbidden food outweighs any rules the eater may have about that particular food. Because the logics are multi-dimensional and varied, people can use them in different ways, even at the same time. Thus, the logics can be interwoven and combined to make a coherent story about food and eating.

Overall, I find that people are quite savvy in their use of logics to explain their beliefs and behaviors and to justify their choices, especially when faced with contradictions between what they believe they should be eating for their health and what they actually eat. My respondents, for the most part, skillfully and seamlessly select an alternate cultural logic in their "tool-kit" to make sense of any potential incoherence (Swidler 2001). It is important to note, however, that the use of cultural logics is not just as a means to justify food choices after-the-fact, but also as a reinforcement for one's eating identity and for one's future food choices. In summary, I argue that in a changing foodscape without clear rules and definitions, my respondents must draw upon different cultural logics at different times to make sense of food and eating, and if necessary, justify their eating behaviors.

## FOOD POLICY

The final perspective addresses the assumption that food is directly related to health outcomes that is widely reflected in the popular discourse and public debate regarding governmental policies and interventions around food and eating. By understanding the different ways my respondents link food and health, depending on their eating identity, we can make better sense of potential policy proposals. From the perspective of the health improvement and disease prevention movement, eating identities relate to the level of acceptance for policies and proposals to influence how consumers eat and/or drink.

Governmental policies to address problems of food, eating, and food-related diseases by influencing what people consume tend to align with one of the three previously discussed macro-level explanatory models, with varying levels of success. Most proposals follow the medical model's emphasis on addressing personal behavior based on nutritional and medical science by seeking to restrict consumption, such as size limits on high calorie sodas (Grynbaum 2012) or taxes on high fat junk food (Bittman 2010, 2011; Ferris 2014). However, proposals such as these are not guaranteed to pass legal or popularity tests. For example, in November 2014, voters in Berkeley, California approved a soda tax, while voters in San Francisco rejected a similar tax during the same election (Aliferis 2014). Other policies, such as ordinances to encourage the availability of fresh and local food, attempt to address issues of access in the public health model (Shirley 2013). Policies to regulate production, such as limitations on claims made on packaging, attempt to address corporate deception along the lines of the food industrial complex model (Wansink and Chandon 2006).

While advocating change at the personal level in alignment with the medical model may seemingly be the easiest suggestion, the lack of available options, perceived "addictive" additives in, and/or false claims about the foods available may make personal change nearly impossible. Arguing, as my respondent Mario does, that people are just "eating too god-dang much" disregards the structural issues at play in food production and distribution. My findings about the importance of eating identities provide a way to understand some of the resistance to such individual-level policies, which continue to be proposed.

Not surprisingly, support for various government or public interventions varies by eating identity. While Balancers support direct intervention with children by improving school lunches, Slippers support government interventions in the food industry to address issues of food processing and "addictive" ingredients. Controllers support just providing information and education and allowing people to make their own choices. Attempts by the government to influence food beliefs and behaviors have met with varied success in part, I argue, because the proposed policies do not address differences in people's beliefs and perceptions, depending on their eating identity.

However, the reflexive nature of eating identities means that they are not set in stone, and food rules can be altered and adjusted as circumstances change. In fact, the need to continuously adjust food rules in order to form, reflexively maintain, and recreate one's eating identities has become a requirement and an individual responsibility in a post-modern and constantly changing foodscape. This would then imply that the medical model, with its emphasis on personal responsibility and choice, is correct, and policies should focus on individual behavior. However, people are limited in just how

much they can adjust. For example, if the modern food industrial system is tainting the food supply with genetically modified organisms, as many of my respondents claim, then people cannot make choices for themselves because their options are limited. When the type and form of foods available is constantly changing, and corporations are largely responsible for dictating the playing field, how much agency do individuals actually have to complete the reflexive project of the self that is demanded of them by modernity? We, as consumers, are expected to engage in this on-going reflexive project of the self, but that project is highly constrained.

Policies such as taxing soda in order to influence what people eat and drink seem to add to the struggle consumers face in their relationship to food. For example, the tight link health advocates make between food and health might mean that even the eaters most at ease and comfort with their diets, the Balancers, are not eating appropriately if they occasionally drink a soda. Similarly, a Paleo Controller who adheres to her eating rules may be seen as eating inappropriately if her high consumption of eggs, for example, does not line up with currently accepted government guidelines or nutrition advice (McIntosh 2000).

To be politically successful, governmental policies to influence how people eat and drink will need to help alleviate anxiety around food and help consumers find alignment between what they believe they should do, what they want to do, and what they actually do with food. Until and unless policymakers address the varying views and behaviors of the different eating identities, policy proposals will neither find broad support, nor be effective.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

I contend that the need to continuously adjust food rules in order to form, reflexively maintain, and re-create one's eating identity becomes an individual's responsibility in a post-modern and constantly changing foodscape. Similarly, I argue that we all, as eaters, do the same identity work that foodies<sup>27</sup> do, perhaps to differing degrees. However, these arguments are based on a small and non-representative sample of eaters in two theoretically selected locations, which limits the generalizability of my findings. This section details the specific limitations of my study, along with the possibilities for future research to begin to address additional questions that emerged from this project.

#### Limitations

The findings from this study are generalizable in terms of how shared understandings are developed, negotiated, and become represented in material, specifically ingestible, products. While these findings are not intended to reflect all consumers everywhere, they do begin to question stereotypes and assumptions about junk food and fast food eaters. Clearly, the biggest limitation in this study is in the sampling frame. As described in Chapter 3, interviews purposely include only adults with at least some college in two cities on the West Coast and in the Mid-Atlantic region. Both cities, Davis, California and Charlottesville, Virginia, have long-standing and vibrant farmers markets and tout themselves as local food hubs. My intention was to hear from consumers who likely have at least some nutritional education or information, as well as the economic and local

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> I use the term "foodies" to reference someone who both "genuinely enjoys food…
[and] engage[s] in identity politics and status distinctions through their eating practices"
(Johnston 2010:4).

resources to make the food decisions that they want to make. However, due to the small scale, limited, and self-selected nature of respondents, this study cannot be — and is not meant to be — representative of all consumers. The goal is to understand how these consumers who theoretically have the means, motive, and opportunity to eat fresh, local, and unprocessed food talk about food and eating.

Another limitation in this study is in its broad nature of inquiry. Because I want to hear the stories that people want to tell, my interview questions are purposefully openended. Although my Interview Guide presented in Appendix D provides a roadmap through the interview, the questions are largely semi-structured, allowing respondents to dictate what they believe is important to talk about. For example, several interviews include long considerations of the virtues of eating organic foods, while other interviews include discussions about the particular foodways of the research site. Thus, while the interviews provide a broad understanding of the wide range of issues around food and eating important to my respondents, the interviews do not provide deep understanding of specific or targeted food-related issues.

A final limitation in this study comes from the unverifiable nature of self-reporting. When I ask my respondents what they eat on a regular basis, I have no way of knowing if that is what they actually do eat. I have no reason to believe that any of my respondents were not telling the truth, but I cannot deny the possibility that someone who reports eating oatmeal everyday as part of a healthy breakfast could also include a doughnut or two. However, for the purposes of this study, I am less interested in the validity of my respondents' stories, as much as the reliability. Other than a few specific contradictions

discussed in the empirical findings, my respondents overall demonstrated a consistency in the stories that they tell about food and eating.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, my study does do what I intend it to do: to understand the stories that relatively affluent and educated consumers tell about food, specifically junk food. In addition, these limitations and findings create further questions that can serve as the foundation for exciting areas of future research.

#### Future Directions

Each of the following areas for future research could expand my current findings and begin to address some of this study's limitations. In addition, these future directions could provide greater insight into the power and importance of eating identities in a dynamic and changing foodscape.

*Social identity.* Because this study deliberately sampled to approximate middle and upper-middle class consumers and targeted locations with a high level of food focus and availability, future research clearly needs to include a broader sample, both in terms of respondent characteristics and locations.

I anticipate that among people with a high school education or less, the six cultural logics identified in this study would hold true, additional logics may be identified, and the way that people draw upon the logics might differ. In particular, problems of access and availability may override and/or modify the salience of the logics. Using the Logic of Choice as an illustration, the number and type of options available from which to choose becomes much more narrow with limited financial resources. However, given the broader cultural value attached to the ideal of the freedom of choice (Bellah 1985), eliciting the Logic of Choice may be even more emotionally salient under conditions of

economic constraint and limited options. If one only has enough money to purchase food from McDonald's Dollar Menu or Taco Bell's Dollar Cravings Menu, the variety of options on those menus is highly valued. I have focused in this study on what cultural logics do for people in terms of how they think about food, and a more socioeconomically diverse sample would likely broaden those understandings.

A related question is whether people with different demographic characteristics and in different locations create similar self-reflexive eating identities. As discussed previously, it is much easier to refuse to eat food that does not align with one's food rules when there is no concern where one's next meal is coming from. When consumers have more limited financial resources, more limited food availability, or less cultural capital to legitimately reject food, can the Controller identity, for example, remain salient? Origins of eating identities. The major finding of this study is the importance of eating identities in how people consume, talk about, and think about themselves in terms of food and eating. One question that emerges from this finding is the process by which different people create different eating identities. What makes someone a Balancer instead of a Slipper? Although I briefly discuss the importance of childhood and important agents of socialization, this type of causal or formative inquiry is beyond the scope of this project. A project including a deeper questioning into the reasoning and emotions behind one's eating identity would provide a more thorough understanding of the mechanisms that result in different eating identities. Going even further on this strand of inquiry, a longitudinal study could ask: how and why do eating identities change over time? *Medical diagnosis.* Although it was not an intentional component of this study, several respondents self-disclosed their medical diagnoses and/or physical ailments. As

discussed previously, people react to these "fateful moments" (Giddens 1991) in very different ways. A future longitudinal study could start at the point of a diagnosis of a food-related illness, such as diabetes, celiac, or heart disease, and follow whether and how that diagnosis impacts eating identity and/or behavior. For some of my respondents, there is an immediate transformation of diet and eating identity, but others face a greater struggle to integrate the new food rules into their identity. What factors lead to differences in reaction to such a diagnosis over time?

*Food and memory*. The study of food and memory is traditionally found in Anthropology (Sutton 2001), but the field of regional food studies is expanding, particularly in the southern United States (Edge et al. 2013). Future research could expand on the issue of how people remember foods from their past, and how they situate those memories within their current food rules. For example, for many of my respondents, favorite foods from childhood become comfort foods in adulthood within the Logic of Heritage. How do people go about reconstructing those familiar tastes and flavors under their current food rules? When food production changes, do people long for previously available foods<sup>28</sup> and flavors? How do people manage the challenge of honoring traditional family or ethnic foodways that conflict with their food rules? Do they savor those foods and interactions as distant memories, or under what conditions will they indulge in them? Will they make concessions to appease loved ones, or risk the relationship by sticking to their rules?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Several of my respondents mentioned the bankruptcy and sale of Hostess in late 2012, which meant that Twinkies disappeared off of store shelves for a few months until July 2013 (Kim 2013).

## CONCLUSION

It is likely that the current trajectory of the food system towards increased processing and manufacturing of foods and the increase of food and eating for entertainment will continue into the foreseeable future. Similarly, the implication of food and eating as directly related to health and wellness is unlikely to change. While there are pockets of resistance amongst people who have the resources and inclination to avoid, for their health, the highly processed junk foods available for consumption, most people eat according to what is easily available in their local grocery store or at chain restaurants. Even within locations with strong local food identities, such as my two research locations, the predominant type of food available is highly processed and manufactured, and these options continue to increase. The qualities of "cheap, fast, and easy" dominate most people's food choices in a fast-paced post-modern world. And if one perceives those foods to be unhealthy, as most of my respondents do, eating those foods has implications for how one views oneself, and others, who eat those foods.

At the same time, the expansion of food rules with different definitions of acceptable foods creates a foodscape of endless possibilities for those with the financial resources, and creates ongoing confusion for everyone. As options and potential temptations increase, the struggle for people to create and maintain a self-reflexive eating identity that aligns what they believe that they should eat, what they want to eat, and what they do eat, will also increase. Thus, although eating identities may differ depending on economic and social resources, they are a requirement in the post-modern world that matter more than just in regards to what and how we eat. People will continue to be forced to navigate this changing foodscape on their own, drawing upon the cultural logics

at their disposal to make sense of food and eating, and to motivate and, if needed, justify their eating behaviors.

I argue that creating an eating identity is an agentic way of dealing with the macrostructural level changes and constraints, and culture provides the way to understand the stories people tell about this process. Food and eating are part of the identity work that we do every day, and how we think about food impacts not only how we think about ourselves, but also each other and the broader social world, far beyond just in terms of health. As sociologists, we need to think about food and eating as a dynamic and reflexive component of identity just as we think of traditionally sociological categories of race, class, and gender.

I contend that thinking about the importance of food for foodies (Johnston 2010; de Solier 2013) ignores the broader impact of a changing foodscape. The use of food in identity work by foodies is an optional and personally satisfying endeavor. We must consider how the structure of the food system and the culture of food converge to create a situation in which *all* people are forced to construct an eating identity. The stories my respondents tell indicate that for many, the process of creating and maintaining an eating identity is not always smooth, easy, or pleasurable, but instead it is often a struggle. In response, my respondents use the cultural logics at their disposal to make sense of shifting definitions and changing self-understandings. My key finding is that everyone is subject to these forces, and we all must create a self-reflexive eating identity, not because we choose to, as foodies do, but because it is a requirement of living within a modern foodscape that is constantly changing and expanding.

# APPENDIX A - TOP 10 BESTSELLING COOKBOOKS

Publishers Weekly, as of June 29, 2014, Accessed July 25, 2014

1	Guy on Fire: 130 Recipes for Adventures in Outdoor Cooking	May				
	Guy Fieri, Author, Ann Volkwein, With	2014				
	William Morrow & Company, \$29.99 (342)					
2	The Southern Cake Book					
	Southern Living, Author	2014				
	Oxmoor House, \$22.95 (256)					
3	The Paleo Kitchen: Finding Primal Joy in Modern Cooking	Jun				
	Juli Bauer, Author, George Bryant, Author	2014				
	Victory Belt Publishing, \$34.95 (327)					
4	Against All Grain: Delectable Paleo Recipes to Eat Well & Feel Great:	Jul				
	More Than 150 Gluten-Free, Grain-Free, and Dairy-Free Recipes for D	2013				
	Danielle Walker, Author, Danielle Walker, Photographer, Jennifer					
	Skog, Designed by Victory Belt Publishing, \$34.95 (368)					
5	The Complete Cooking for Two Cookbook: 650 Recipes for	Mar				
	Everything You'll Ever Want to Make	2014				
	America's Test Kitchen, Manufactured by	-				
	America's Test Kitchen, \$29.95 (440)					
6	The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Food from My Frontier	Mar				
	Ree Drummond, Author					
	William Morrow & Company, (293)					
7	The Oh She Glows Cookbook: Over 100 Vegan Recipes to Glow from	Mar				
	the Inside Out	2014				
	Angela Liddon, Author					
	Avery Publishing Group, \$25.00 (336)					
8	Superfood Smoothies: 100 Delicious, Energizing & Nutrient-Dense	May				
	Recipes	2013				
	Julie Morris, Author					
	Sterling, \$16.95 (198)					
9	Weber's Big Book of Burgers	Apr				
	Jamie Purviance, Author, Linda Kelen, Illustrator, Tim Turner,	2014				
	Photographer					
	Oxmoor House, \$21.95 (255)					
10	Nom Nom Paleo: Food for Humans	Dec				
	Michelle Tam, Author, Henry Fong, Author	2013				
	Andrews McMeel Publishing, \$35.00 (277)					

APPENDIX B - TABLE OF RESPONDENTS
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Name	<u>Gender</u>	State	Age	Education	Political Views	Eating Identity
Albert	Male	VA	50's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Balancer
Alvin	Male	VA	60's	BA	moderate	Balancer
AnaLisa	Female	CA	60's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Slipper
Ann	Female	VA	40's	BA	liberal	Controller
Antonia	Female	VA	60's	Some college	liberal	Controller
Arthur	Male	VA	18+	Some college	liberal	Balancer
Ashley	Female	CA	40's	BA	conservative	Slipper
Ava	Female	VA	18+	Some college	liberal	Balancer
Becky	Female	VA	20's	BA	moderate	Slipper
Bradley	Male	CA	30's	AA	liberal	Balancer
Christina	Female	CA	30's	AA	moderate	Slipper
Clark	Male	VA	20's	Some college	liberal	Controller
Cleo	Female	VA	18+	Some college	liberal	Balancer
Connie	Female	CA	20's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Balancer
Dennis	Male	CA	20's	BA	liberal	Balancer
Dylan	Female	VA	18+	Some college	liberal	Slipper
Elena	Female	VA	40's	Some college	liberal	Slipper
Ellen	Female	VA	60's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Slipper
Erica	Female	CA	20's	Grad/Prof	moderate	Slipper
Gertie	Female	VA	18+	Some college	moderate	Balancer
Guy	Male	CA	20's	BA	liberal	Controller
Hans	Male	VA	50's	Grad/Prof	moderate	Controller
Harry	Male	CA	20's	AA	moderate	Controller
Норе	Female	CA	70's+	Grad/Prof	liberal	Controller
Jacques	Male	CA	20's	BA	liberal	Balancer
James	Male	VA	20's	AA	refused	Balancer
Jamie	Male	CA	50's	Grad/Prof	refused	Slipper
Jan	Female	VA	50's	BA	liberal	Slipper
Jay	Male	CA	70's+	Grad/Prof	moderate	Balancer
Jen	Female	CA	50's	BA	liberal	Slipper
Jim	Male	CA	40's	AA	moderate	Controller
Jimmy	Male	CA	20's	Some college	moderate	Balancer
Joe	Male	VA	40's	BA	conservative	Controller
John	Male	VA	30's	BA	liberal	Controller
Juaquin	Male	CA	50's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Controller
Julie	Female	VA	30's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Slipper
Kat	Female	CA	40's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Balancer
Katherine	Female	VA	40's	AA	moderate	Slipper
Kelly	Female	CA	18+	Some college	moderate	Controller

Name	Gender	State	Age	Education	Political	Eating
					Views	Identity
Ladison	Female	VA	20's	Some college	liberal	Controller
Leopold	Male	CA	20's	BA	liberal	Balancer
Lily	Female	VA	18+	Some college	liberal	Balancer
Liz	Female	VA	40's	Grad/Prof	moderate	Balancer
Malou	Female	CA	30's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Slipper
Marc	Male	CA	20's	Some college	moderate	Slipper
Mariah	Female	CA	40's	AA	conservative	Slipper
Mario	Male	CA	50's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Slipper
Mark	Male	VA	refused	Grad/Prof	moderate	Slipper
Matityahu	Male	VA	50's	Grad/Prof	moderate	Controller
Melissa	Female	CA	30's	Some college	moderate	Controller
Mohingar	Female	VA	40's	BA	liberal	Slipper
Molly	Female	CA	50's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Controller
Monique	Female	CA	50's	AA	moderate	Balancer
Morgan	Female	CA	50's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Controller
Nick	Male	VA	40's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Slipper
Nigel	Male	VA	40's	BA	moderate	Balancer
Nora	Female	CA	50's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Slipper
Norman	Male	CA	30's	Some college	moderate	Balancer
Oksana	Female	VA	50's	Some college	moderate	Slipper
Paige	Female	VA	18+	Some college	liberal	Controller
Paul	Male	CA	60's	BA	conservative	Balancer
Pearl	Female	VA	30's	BA	moderate	Balancer
Peyton	Female	VA	30's	BA	conservative	Controller
Prudence	Female	VA	50's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Balancer
Roxanne	Female	CA	50's	Grad/Prof	moderate	Balancer
Ruth	Female	VA	60's	Grad/Prof	conservative	Balancer
Samantha	Female	VA	20's	BA	conservative	Balancer
Sara	Female	CA	30's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Slipper
Sarah	Female	CA	50's	BA	liberal	Balancer
Shawna	Female	CA	20's	Some college	moderate	Slipper
Sophie	Female	CA	20's	Some college	moderate	Controller
Starr	Female	CA	50's	Grad/Prof	moderate	Balancer
Sunshine	Female	VA	50's	BA	moderate	Balancer
Tara	Female	VA	20's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Slipper
Tom	Male	CA	60's	BA	liberal	Slipper
Trisha	Female	CA	20's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Slipper
Zack	Male	CA	50's	Grad/Prof	liberal	Balancer

## APPENDIX C - PRE-INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET

1. What is your age? [ ] 18-20 [ ] 21-29 [ ] 30-39 [ ] 40-49 [ ] 50-59 [ ] 60-69 [ ] 70+

- 2. What is your gender? [ ] male [ ] female
- 3. What is the highest grade of school or degree that you have received?
  - [] Some High School [] High School Diploma/GED [] Some College

[]AA []BA

[] Graduate or Professional Degree

4. In general, how would you describe your views on most political matters?

[] liberal [] moderate [] conservative

- 5. How often do you vote in presidential elections?
  - [] Never [] Sometimes [] Often [] Always

6. Do you consider yourself (select all that apply):

[] African-American/Black [] Asian [] Hispanic/Latino

[] Native American or Alaskan Native [] Pacific Islander [] White

7. In a typical week, how often are you primarily responsible for the care of someone under the age of 18?

[] Never [] Less than half a day [] Half to one full day [] 2-6 days [] 7 days 8. How long have you lived in this state?

[] Less than 1 year [] 1-5 years [] 6-10 years [] Over 10 years

9. Do you currently smoke cigarettes? [ ] No [ ] Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ pack(s) per week

10. In a typical week, about how many sugar-sweetened drinks do you drink?

[]Zero []1-2 []3-5 []6-10 []11-15 []16-20 []20+

11. In a typical week, how many times do you eat at a fast-food restaurant?

[]Zero []1-2 []3-5 []6-10 []11-15 []16-20 []20+

12. In a typical week, how many times do you eat something that you consider to be junk food?

[]Zero []1-2 []3-5 []6-10 []11-15 []16-20 []20+

## APPENDIX D - FINAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

(Note: does not include informal probing questions)

*I am interested in your experiences and stories about food, specifically "junk" food.* 1. You mentioned on your questionnaire that in the past week you've eaten something you consider to be junk food \_\_\_\_\_ times. Tell me, what were those food(s)? 2. What makes something "junk" food? (probe with pictures: soda, diet soda, fast food, candy, chips)

a. Using this description, what is/are your favorite "junk" food(s)?

b. Can you describe your experience the last time that you ate this food?

3. Using that same description, tell me about the last time your kid(s) (or a kid you saw) wanted to eat "junk" food?

4. Do you know anyone who eats "junk" food regularly? How would you describe them?5. Do you think eating junk food is unhealthy? Why or why not?

6. Do you think most people think of eating "junk" food as unhealthy? Why do you think people eat it, then?

Now I'm interested in talking a bit more generally...

7. Tell me a little bit about what you typically eat.

8. How do you decide what TO eat?

9. How do you decide what NOT TO eat?

10. Where do you go for advice about what to eat?

11. Walk me through the last time you purchased something to eat or drink.

We talked earlier about tobacco...

12. Can you describe the last time you smoked/you saw someone smoking?

13. Describe the characteristics of someone who smokes tobacco.

14. Do you think most people think of smoking tobacco as unhealthy? Why do you think people do it, then?

There have been efforts on all of the products we've been talking to reduce consumption.

15. What role, if any, should the government have in influencing what people buy?

16. What could the government do to influence what people buy or don't buy?

Specifically, all of the products we've been talking about have extra taxes on them, or have been proposed to have extra taxes on them.

17. What do you predict the reaction would be if there was an extra tax on "junk" food?18. Would you be in favor of a tax on junk food? (Probe: conditions for acceptance, earmarked for health care).

# APPENDIX E – PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Element	<u>n</u>	Definition	Question Text and Posponse Categories
Logic of Health	77	R's discussion of food as related to health	Response CategoriesCoded from transcripts1 - yes (96%)0 - no (4%)
Logic of Morality	77	R's discussion of food as related to values or worth (self- or others)	Coded from transcripts 1 - yes (65%) 0 - no (35%)
Logic of Elaboration	77	R's discussion of food to demonstrate specialty knowledge, skill	Coded from transcripts 1 - yes (57%) 0 - no (43%)
Logic of Connection	77	R's discussion of food in terms of interactions with others, feelings, or emotions (positive or negative)	Coded from transcripts 1 - yes (55%) 0 - no (45%)
Logic of Choice	77	R's discussion of the importance of making his/her own choices of food	Coded from transcripts 1 - yes (47%) 0 - no (53%)
Logic of Heritage	77	R's discussion of food in terms of memory, history, or ethnic foodways	Coded from transcripts 1 - yes (29%) 0 - no (81%)
Level	77	R's level of junk food consumption per week. Sum of Sugar, Fast Food, and Junk Food	High = 6+ times (43%) Medium = 3-5 times (21%) Low = 0-2 times (36%)
Identity	77	R's eating identity as coded in analysis – combination of eating beliefs and behaviors	Balancers (39%) Slippers (35%) Controllers (26%)
Medical Model	77	R's discussion of the Medical Model (e.g., nutrition, cause, consequence, choice as remedy)	1 - yes (58%) 0 - no (42%)
Public Health Model	77	R's discussion of the Public Health Model (e.g., neighborhood or community resources, availability of junk food)	1 - yes (14%) 0 - no (86%)

(From Pre-Interview Sheets or Coded From Transcripts n = 77)

Element	<u>n</u>	Definition	Question Text and Response Categories
Food Industrial Complex Model	77	R's discussion of the Food Industrial Complex Model (e.g., subsidies, additives, ingredients, processing, packaging)	1 - yes (49%) 0 - no (51%)
Characteristics			
Age	77	R's self-reported age	What is your age? 1 – 18-20 years (10%) 2 – 21-29 years (24%) 3 – 30-39 years (13%) 4 – 40-49 years (16%) 5 – 50-59 years (25%) 6 – 60-69 years (9%) 7 – 70+ years (3%)
Gender	77	R's self-reported gender	What is your gender? 1 – male (38%) 2 – female (62%)
Grade	77	R's highest level of education	What is the highest grade of school or degree that you have received? 1 – Some high school (0%) 2 – High School Diploma/ GED (0%) 3 – Some College (25%) 4 – AA (10%) 5 – BA (27%) 6 – Graduate or Professional Degree (38%)
GradeGrad	77	R's education <u>recoded</u>	What is the highest grade of school or degree that you have received? 0 - no BA (35%) 1 - BA or higher (65%)
Political Views	75	R's political viewpoint	In general, how would you describe your views on most political matters? 1 – liberal (55%) 2 – moderate (36%) 3 – conservative (9%)

Element	<u>n</u>	Definition	Question Text and Response Categories
Race/Ethnicity	77	R's self-reported race/ethnicity	Do you consider yourself (select all that apply):
			<ul> <li>1 - African</li> <li>American/Black (5%)</li> <li>2 - Asian (8%)</li> <li>3 - Hispanic/Latino</li> <li>(5%)</li> <li>4 - Native American or</li> <li>Alaskan Native (0%)</li> <li>5 - Pacific Islander</li> <li>(0%)</li> <li>6 - White (82%)</li> </ul>
State of Residence	77	R's current state of residence	1 – California (52%) 2 – Virginia (48%)
Voting	76	R's level of voting activity	How often do you vote in presidential elections? 1 – never (9%) 2 – sometimes (7%) 3 – often (12%) 4 – always (72%)
Caregiving	75	R's caregiver status of a child	In a typical week, how often are you primarily responsible for the care of someone under the age of 18? 1 – never (69%) 2 – less than half a day (5%) 3 – half to one full day (1%) 4 – two to six days (8%) 5 – seven days (16%)
Lived in State	76	How long R has lived in current state	How long have you lived in this state? 1 – less than 1 year (4%) 2 – 1-5 years (13%) 3 – 6-10 years (7%) 4 – over 10 years (76%)
Smoke	77	R's current use of tobacco products	Do you currently smoke cigarettes? 0 - no (92%) 1 - yes (8%)

Element	n	Definition	Question Text and
	_		Response Categories
Sugar Drinks	77	R's consumption of sugary drinks	In the past week, about how many sugar- sweetened drinks did you drink? 1 - zero (48%) 2 - 1-2 (18%) 3 - 3-5 (12%) 4 - 6-10 (12%) 5 - 11-15 (4%) 6 - 16-20 (3%) 7 - 20+ (3%)
Fast Food	77	R's consumption of fast food	In the past week, about how many times did you eat fast food? 1 - zero (58%) 2 - 1-2 (30%) 3 - 3-5 (9%) 4 - 6-10 (3%) 5 - 11-15 (0%) 6 - 16-20 (0%) 7 - 20+ (0%)
Junk Food	77	R's consumption of junk food	In the past week, how many times did you eat something that <i>you</i> considered to be junk food? 1 - zero (23%) 2 - 1-2 (45%) 3 - 3-5 (19%) 4 - 6-10 (9%) 5 - 11-15 (2%) 6 - 16-20 (2%) 7 - 20+ (0%)
Tax	77	R's level of support for taxes on junk food	1 - yes (55%) 0 - no (45%)

## APPENDIX F - EDIBLE EVENTS' BEER BREAD (SACRAMENTO CA)

## Beer Bread

3 cups flour 3 T sugar 1 T baking powder 1 t kosher salt 1 can of beer ½ c of melted butter

Mix the first five ingredients together Pour into 9x5 loaf pan Pour <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> cup of melted butter on top and sprinkle with kosher salt. Bake for 35-40 minutes at 400.

Source: https://timac.wikispaces.com/file/view/Beer+Bread+from+Edible+Events.doc

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