University of Cincinnati

Date: 11/6/2015

I, Kristen M. Tomko, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology.

It is entitled:
Understanding Food Choices of Cincinnati Women: A Life-course Perspective

Student's name: Kristen M. Tomko

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Clement Jeffrey Jacobson, Ph.D.

Committee member: Daniel Murphy, Ph.D.
Understanding Food Choices of Cincinnati Women: A Life-course Perspective

A thesis submitted to the

Graduate School

of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Department of Anthropology

of the College of Arts and Sciences

by

Kristen Tomko

B.A. Eastern Kentucky University

May 2013

Committee Chair: C. J. Jacobson, PhD
Abstract

This purpose of this study is to describe and better understand how women of two generations remember, evaluate and describe their past and present food choices. To do this, a sample of eighteen females from the Cincinnati, Ohio area participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews about their past food choices, present food choices and the foods being prepared for their children. Qualitative analysis of interview transcripts revealed some thematic similarities among the informants in each generation. The older generation evaluated and expressed their food choices based on whether the foods yielded high quantities, whether the foods were low-cost, and if the foods were convenient to make. On the other hand, the younger generation evaluated and expressed their food choices based on whether the foods were organic, “less processed,” contained fewer additives and were homemade. Both generations were influenced by the political and economic environment in which they grew up. This study suggests that WWI, industrial farming, and packaged food manufacturing tended to impact the older generation’s food purchasing decisions. The younger generation, as suggested by this study, seem to be influenced by the organic movement and new agricultural technologies including genetically modified crops and the use of pesticides. This study suggests that food choices are complex, multifaceted, and often times specific to one area or region, but important to study none the less. Future research is needed on younger generations in order to better understand how food choices are being impacted by more recent historical and economic events.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the faculty in the Anthropology Department who devoted a lot of time and effort in helping me to complete this part of my academic journey. I would especially like to thank my committee members, Dr. Jeff Jacobson and Dr. Dan Murphy, for all of their time, effort and patience. A huge thanks to my support system in both school and life, Laurin Heitkamp and Dayna Reale. I don’t know how I would have got through grad school without you two. Also, I would like to thank all of the informants who let me into their lives. I am forever grateful for your kindness. Finally, I want to thank my parents, my brothers, and Travis Hunt. Thank you for always being there and for believing in me. This wouldn’t have been possible without your support.
# Table of Contents

**INTRODUCTION**........................................................................................................................................... 1

**BACKGROUND** ........................................................................................................................................... 3

**METHODS** .................................................................................................................................................. 6

**PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT** .................................................................................................................... 6

**DATA ANALYSIS** ....................................................................................................................................... 7

**RESULTS** ..................................................................................................................................................... 7

**SOCIALIZATION OF FOOD HABITS** ........................................................................................................... 8

**HOME COOKED VS. CONVENIENCE** .......................................................................................................... 13

**ORGANIC FOOD** ....................................................................................................................................... 18

**DISCUSSION** ............................................................................................................................................... 23

**STUDY LIMITATIONS** ................................................................................................................................. 28

**FUTURE RESEARCH** .................................................................................................................................... 30

**REFERENCES** ............................................................................................................................................. 31

**APPENDIX** .................................................................................................................................................. 35
Introduction

Human dietary habits and food-ways have been central topics of study for biological and cultural anthropologists since the beginnings of their disciplines, due in large part to remarkable variations in human diets across time and place. Food-ways and subsistence strategies in smaller, less complex societies range from foraging (hunting and gathering), to pastoralism, to horticultural practices. In larger, more complex societies, non-mechanized agriculture or intensive agriculture and trade predominate. In terms of dietary variation, hunter-gatherer societies change their diets seasonally and must rely on a greater variety of food types (Lieberman et al. 1993). Subsistence horticulturalist and agricultural societies are relatively more limited in the variety of foods they produce and eat (Johnson and Earle 2000). With the rise of intensive agriculture and trade within and among modern urban, industrialized, and globalized societies, dietary variation and variety have been greatly enhanced. As a result, food choice has become a reality for many and an important topic of study for anthropologists and others across the human sciences.

“Choice” is a highly contingent term. While some people refrain from or choose to eat certain foods because of taste or allergies, entire groups of people sometimes choose not to consume foods due to religious and other belief systems (Meyer-Rochow 2009). Despite this, the individual has a certain degree of agency in the foods they choose to consume. The globalization of food production and consumption has influenced how people think about food. Where we once were limited to foods that were grown in our communities, we now have access to foods that are produced around the world (Phillips 2006). While globalization comes with its own complexities, food choice is highly influenced by the governing social structures that every person lives under. Despite individual agency, these structures both inhibit and promote the agency of its people by deeming what is socially acceptable to eat.

Social structure, historical events and the economy strongly impact what foods are available for individuals to eat. Not only does society shape what people eat, but it also shapes how people think
about and remember their experiences with food. These experiences and memories of food are also shaped by cultural values and norms, and food memory is an extremely “multilayered and multidimensional subject with social, psychological, physiological, symbolic dimensions” (Holtzman 2006). Scholars from the field of anthropology are especially concerned with food and memory because “the sensuality of eating transmits powerful mnemonic cues, principally through smells and tastes” that help them to better understand people cross-culturally (Holtzman 2006). In societies in which sugary, high-fat and additive laden foods are inexpensive and universally available, these powerful cues can also contribute to diet-related health problems.

In recent decades, diet-related health problems have occupied the attention of nutritionists, health professionals, and governmental agencies as part of efforts aimed to make changes in eating habits among Americans. A Greater Cincinnati Community Health Status Survey found that nearly 2 out of every 3 residents in the region are either overweight (33%) or obese (31%) (Wolgin 2010). The region’s obesity rate has slowly been climbing since 2002, and obesity-related health problems such as cancer, heart disease, and Type 2 diabetes increasingly burden taxpayers who contribute to public insurance systems such as Medicare and Medicaid.

It is often culturally dictated whether a certain person or group of people is able produce and consume certain foods. It is often based on a person’s “culture, their class, and their family organization, [as well as] the overall economic structure of their society” (Counihan and Kaplan 1998). Men’s and women’s ability to “produce, provide, distribute, and consume food is a key measure of their power” and due to the role women often have in raising their children and deciding what they eat, the experiences, preferences and behaviors of women are particularly important in understanding contemporary dietary habits (Counihan and Kaplan 1998). Recent generations of women in the US have witnessed considerable change in the way food is produced, distributed and marketed. In this rapidly
changing food environment, women are the key to a better understanding of contemporary food choices and the political and economic influences that accompany them.

The purpose of this study is to describe and better understand how women of two generations remember, describe, and evaluate their food choices at different stages of their lives. By asking Cincinnati women to reflect on their eating habits, we can better understand the role that cultural influence and historical events have on women of different generations. It is the aim of the study to shed light on individual food choices in hopes of helping health policymakers begin to better understand the steps needed to make changes.

Background – Food and Anthropology

Food production and distribution have advanced over time to allow people to have greater access to the foods they want and need. Where people once led nomadic lives of food insecurity, people today simply drive down the street to the grocery store where they have access to a variety of foods year round. In contrast, preindustrial societies often ate the same foods throughout the year because their food selection was based on the seasons. Globalization has given more people equal access to foods from a variety of different cultures. This is demonstrated by the variety of countries and cultures one can find represented in the grocery store. Thus, food is no longer simply a necessity for life, but a cultural expression of it.

The anthropology of food and eating has been a growing field in the discipline since the early 20th century. While food had been studied by anthropologists before this time, it has grown in popularity among scholars in the field since about 1965 when Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas made significant advances to a “structuralist vision of food and eating” (Mintz and DuBois 2002). The most extensive work in the anthropology of food can be summarized into a number of categories which include: single commodities and substances, food and social change, food insecurity, eating and
identities and food and memory. Each of these categories encompasses a variety of different topics related to food and eating.

Many anthropologists tend to limit their food studies to a specific region or culture. In these instances, foods that are vital to the culture’s livelihood are the focus due to their role in the community. There are a number of studies that use food, such as tomatoes, saffron, bananas and salt, to address broader processes in the communities in which they grow (Smith 1994; Willard 2001; Jenkins 2000; and Kurlansky 2002). Other landmark studies in this category include Mintz’s (1985) study of sucrose, and Ohnuki-Tierney on rice (1993).

Food in relation to social changes is also a common theme among anthropological ethnographies. Common topics of social change include changing intergroup relations, mass production of foods, biotechnology, movements of peoples, and the globalization of foods (Mintz and Du Bois 2002). Among these topics, the relocation of migrants, refugees, and colonizers have been highly discussed as sources of dietary change. Historically in the field, studies surrounding Arab communities in Detroit, Chinese migrants and children, Belizeans, and aboriginal people have all been the focus of various anthropologists (Lockwood and Lockwood 2000; Goody 1998; Jing 2000; Wilk 1999; Dennett et al. 1988).

Another popular topic among anthropologists is globalization and access to food. One of the biggest topics is hunger and famine both inside and outside of the U.S. The problem of food insecurity is most extensively reviewed by Johan Pottier in his review Anthropology of Food: the Social Dynamics of Food Security (1999). In this review, Pottier focuses on a number of different topics including intrahousehold allocation of resources, gender inequality, effects of the Green Revolution, constraints on small food markets, local agricultural knowledge and effective ways to inhibit famine (Mintz and DuBois 2002). Recent studies within the field include McDonald’s (2010) review of food security as it relates to topics such as global trends, the world food system and malnutrition. There have also been
recent studies on how public policy and structural adjustment affect food insecurities around the world (Okongwu and Mencher 2000; Pfeiffer and Chapman 2010).

More recently and most pertinent to this study, there has been a concentration on food and memory and how they work together to represent ethnic identity (Sutton 2001). In his theoretical account of the relationship between food, memory and culture, Sutton advocates that that the relationship between food and memory differs from other memory connections and that these relationships are culturally specific and vary across cultures. Food and memory is also a heavily gendered subject.

Another popular topic of food and identity is the discussion of how food is sometimes gender specific and the role of women as gatekeepers to the kitchen. Counihan (2004) examines how gender has changed since the end of World War II. Her recount elevated awareness of the “changing nature of modern life” as expressed through food. In a study with Japanese mothers and their children, Allison (2001) described how mothers are given the power to represent state ideologies and carry on cultural tradition through the preparation of their children’s lunches (obentōs). Women also use their roles in the kitchen to establish control. A long-term ethnographic study with Hispanic women in rural Colorado demonstrates how women “challenge subordination and strive for agency through their food-centered life histories.” They utilize their roles in the kitchen to “survive demeaning and disempowering structures and ideologies” while also “[generating] beliefs and tactics that resist domination” (Counihan 2012). In order to describe and better understand food choices of Cincinnati women and how they relate to history, economics, and public health, it is crucial to study women since they often assume the role of food providers.
Methods

This study used open ended, semi-structured interviews as its data collection strategy to describe and better understand adult perceptions and memories of their own food habits, and how they are described and evaluated. Interviews lasted between 25 and 50 minutes and consisted of a checklist of open-ended questions concerning topics such as participant current diet and grocery shopping habits; foods eaten as a child; moments of change in dietary habits; and food habits of participant’s own children. The interview was preceded by a brief demographic history including age, race, income, religion, income and hometown. A list of the interview questions can be found in the Appendix.

Participant Recruitment

Eighteen females divided into two age groups agreed to participate in this study. The first group consisted of adult females 60 years and older while the second consisted of adults ranging from 25-40 years old. The older group had ten informants and the younger had eight informants. Inclusion in the study was based on two characteristics of the informants. First, the person had to fall within one of the two age groups. Second, I required that informants have at least one child to be considered part of the study.

In selecting informants, I endeavored to maximize variation in gender, race and socioeconomic status. However, all of the informants were female and most were Caucasian due to availability and willingness to participate. The majority of the older group was recruited through a Cincinnati senior center while younger informants were recruited by snowball sampling. I recruited younger informants in coffee shops, libraries and through a middle school. All of the younger informants were selected by convenience sampling and were interviewed in the location of their choosing. With permission, data was collected through audio recordings of the interviews and field notes. After data collection, interviews
were transcribed verbatim to aid in data analysis and comparisons between groups. All identifying data were removed.

Before data collection could begin, permission had to be granted from the senior center in which recruitment was to take place. I randomly chose the senior center where I recruited informants from internet search of the area and I called the executive director to obtain consent to recruit. The executive director of the senior center agreed to let me visit the center to post a recruitment flyer and talk to any members that attended that day. All informants were volunteers and no incentive was given to partake in the study. After a verbal agreement to participate was made, I made an appointment to conduct the interview at the location of the participant’s choosing. On the day of the interview, the participant was asked to sign an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved consent form in order to show their written, informed consent (Appendix). Additionally, informants were asked to give verbal permission to be audio recorded.

Data Analysis

After each interview was finished, the recorded audio files were transcribed verbatim and field notes were added to each in order to aid in analysis. When all of the interviews were over, I read through each one and coded key phrases and were analyzed for thematic similarities.

Results

In order to better understand food habits and memory, I asked informants to reflect on and describe their past and present food habits for themselves and their children. When they were recounting these memories, the informants often unconsciously evaluated their choices. From the interviews with both groups of women, three themes arose. The first theme considers the inclusion of
children in meal preparation and how meal time was considered family time for some families, and for others it was only a meal. The socialization of food habits is a key theme because of its implications for future food habits. The second theme in this study was the role of ‘healthiness’ and ‘taste’ in food decisions. Informants articulated varying degrees of an optimal ‘balance’ between these food qualities. Finally, the role of organic food was especially thematic due to its importance to the younger generation and the seemingly lack of organic use among the older generation. All three of these themes are broken down by generation in order to demonstrate the significant variation within and between the generations.

Socialization of Food Habits

   For many informants in this study, old and young, cooking was a part of their lives from a fairly young age. While some learned in their teens, others learned once they got married and started have families of their own. Whether their parents included them in food preparation often had an influence on how the participant felt about cooking and the food choices they made. Furthermore, their inclusion or exclusion from childhood cooking impacted whether or not they taught their own children how to cook. Overall, memories of childhood habits seemed to impact how the informants felt about current food choices and how they choose what to cook for themselves and their families.

   Many informants talked about how they are passing on their ideas about food to their children. Anna tells a story about the children in her family being taught to try new foods. She says that the kids are expected to taste new foods at least once every time the food is prepared for a meal. The children are encouraged to try new foods and if they do not like them, they are not forced to eat them. They also include children in food preparation so they learn how to cook from a young age. Anna thinks that food habits and eating right “start when [children] are little. They observe more than you think. They’re learning that way.” She says of the two children in her family, “they’ll both end up cooking I’m sure,
because we include them in food activities.” Julie, a mother of eight, also agrees that children learn through observation. She remembers that even though she never directly taught her children how to cook, they all ended up being fairly good cooks. She attributes these skills to the fact that they were present in the kitchen when she was preparing meals.

Elsa, however, says that her grown daughter prioritizes her career over cooking. She says that she has tried to teach her daughter how to make her German mac and cheese (spaetzle), which her daughter loves, but her daughter does not want to learn because she does not have time to cook in the evening. Her daughter and her family eat out quite often, which Elsa thinks is a waste of money, instead of making home cooked meals.

Brianna, like Elsa’s daughter, was often preoccupied with her own activities. She says of her teenage years, “I knew right away that I was not a cook. My mother never included me in that and I had my own things to do and I just never thought about it.” As a result, she never really learned to cook and remembers how she would take her son to a delicatessen, “but I didn’t really cook, you know, like a normal mom.” Now, she says that her son and his family eat at restaurants a lot. She does not think this is a wise decision because it is not very healthy. Brianna’s daughter-in-law always has sweets and desserts around, which Brie remembers avoiding as a child because she did not want to gain weight.

Jeannie remembers that she did not start cooking for herself until she moved out of her parent’s house and got married at the age of 21. She does not remember cooking much as a child because her mom did not have much of an opportunity to teach her. Jeannie does not really remember what her mother used to cook “because I didn’t participate in that.” In school, Jeannie took a home economics class and began learning to bake. She would bake things at home that she learned in class. It was not until she moved out that Jeannie began learning how to cook. Jeannie did not teach her children to cook because “When my kids were at that age, I was working full time and there just wasn’t time to spend on
things like that. [I had to] get the meal ready because they were hungry. Well I was too after working all day. You didn’t cook for fun, you did it because you were hungry.”

During Wendy’s childhood, she remembers how her family used to sit down for meals together whenever it was possible. Meal time was family time in Wendy’s house. She would walk home for lunch and then get a ride back to school. Dinners were also said to be family time, regardless if the entire family was present. This was made possible by the housekeeper who cooked and cleaned for the family. Wendy, 82, practiced this tradition with her children. Today, she recalls how her children make an effort to have sit down dinners with their own families regardless of all the evening activities.

All of the kids do sports and you have to do dinner around sports but my one son doesn’t have dinner till 7. But it’s ready at 7 and they sit down. But like I said, it’s fun to watch [my daughter-in-law] cook. She makes all of these fancy things. So anyway, I do think [family meals] are important. I think these kids are learning to cook.

While many of the older informants did not learn to cook until they were older, meals were typically viewed as family time for the household. Children would set the table and do some food preparation, such as setting the table and chopping vegetables, but were ultimately left out of the food making process. In contrast, the younger generation in this study often learned to cook in their family homes alongside their parents and expressed a desire to continue this tradition with their own children.

Many in the younger generation spoke of trying to involve their children in food preparation in order to teach them the value of food. Kelsey, a mother of two, talks about letting her children help her in the kitchen. She lets them measure things and mix ingredients. She says that she wants them “to enjoy cooking and to know what to do in the kitchen.” Kelsey expresses that she is not very confident in the kitchen and she wishes she had learned more about cooking when she was younger. Melanie also likes to include her daughter in meal preparation. She says that last Christmas, she let her daughter help ice the sugar cookies and add sprinkles. Other days, Melanie lets her daughter watch her French fries
cook in the oven. Melanie fondly reminisces of her childhood and how she learned to cook from a young age with her father. While he was a “basic cook,” she learned about the importance of food from a young age. She continues this tradition by involving her daughter when she cooks. As her daughter gets older, Melanie says she will continue to involve her daughter with meal preparation.

Having children seemed to have the most impact upon the informants. Once they had children, they seemed to want to provide them with healthy, balanced meals and the knowledge on how to make them. Often times, the parents hoped to provide their children with the meals and experiences they never had growing up. They did this by having more balance in the meal by including both healthy foods and indulgences. They also did this by involving their children in food preparation which they hoped would teach the kids good habits. Jamie, who remembers being involved in the kitchen while her mother was cooking, says she wants her son to learn how to cook because “eventually he will have to learn to be independent and cook for himself.” This desire for future independency and the ability to make good choices has led many of the younger mothers to include their children in food preparation.

Younger informants expressed the importance of family meals at least once a day. While not many ate breakfast and lunch together, they tried to eat dinner together every night. In today’s society, after school activities and other events often pull families in different directions in the evening. Almost every participant agreed that it was important to share a meal in the evening so that the family could spend time together after a busy day. While it is difficult to say if informants actually had evening meals as often as they said, they agreed that dinnertime was “family time.” Melanie, an expectant mother of one, says that “My daughter is only two and a half but she still has swimming lessons and we’ve done things on weeknights. You still have to sit down and eat something.” She explains further that the entire family doesn’t have to be present. Sometimes it is just Melanie and her daughter sitting down to dinner together while her husband works.
Kelsey, a mother of two young children, expressed her appall at how other people let after school activities such as sports become a priority over family time.

As a teacher, I am amazed at the stories I hear about sports activities, dinners on the run and a lack of understanding of the importance of a good meal on a body. Even though my kids are still so young, I love sitting down in the evening and talking about our day. We always pray before we eat dinner and I love that my kids already see this as an important time of day.

Many of the young mothers expressed that they felt their child ate better when they sat down with them. Several of the informants also mentioned that their child had food sensitivities that they have to watch out for. Melanie is very conscious of what her daughter needs in order to be healthy. Since her daughter was a baby, Melanie says she has had to watch what her daughter eats due to her “failure to thrive” status at birth. Ultimately, this leads her daughter to be picky about texture and taste. Melanie is exasperated that she cannot get her daughter to eat “real green beans” or that she will only eat seven of the ten raspberries on her daughter’s plate.

Cooking from a young age seemed to be an important goal for the young mothers in this study. Some of the young mothers reported having positive experiences in the kitchen growing up, while others said they hoped to provide their children with the knowledge they never learned as a child. In contrast, cooking was a necessity for the older generation that they learned at an older age. There was a lot of variation in the responses of the older cohort. Some reported teaching their children to cook; others spoke of not having the time to do so. Regardless, all older informants hoped their children would learn to appreciate home cooked meals and reported being disappointed when their children chose convenience foods.
Home Cooked vs. Convenience

For many in the older cohort, food is about convenience and ease. Many informants in this cohort live alone or only with their husband. They do not have kids to care for anymore, and many older informants said they are tired of cooking after doing it for so many years. Others say they struggle to cook meals for one person after the death of a spouse. Often times, the older informants chose to eat at restaurants rather than cook due to convenience.

Throughout this study, family dynamics often seemed to affect the type of food that was eaten. Older informants often ate out more than those in the younger group. One participant in particular, Jeannie, goes out to lunch almost every day with her husband. She explains that, “When I was young I loved [cooking]. I collected recipes, I tried new things. I had a family to cook for. Now it’s just the two of us.” Other older informants expressed the same sentiment when asked how often they cook or if they like to cook. Julie, 74, has been widowed for about a year and remembers that after her husband passed away she did not cook as much because it was just her. Instead, she enjoys a big breakfast at a local restaurant every morning which she says is “enough to get [her] through the day”. She often goes to one of her eight children’s homes for dinner.

Gina, 65, says that when she had children she was more conscious of what foods she bought and prepared. She recalls that when her children were young she was also was eating healthier because “it was my responsibility to give them healthy foods and I benefited from that when I didn’t have to.” Emily agrees with Gina that she thinks her children caused her to eat healthier. Unfortunately now that she has lived alone for many years, Emily says that some of her healthy food habits have gone downhill because “when you’re by yourself, you think, ‘Oh, I’ll just maybe let that go’” because it is easier.

Some of the other informants let themselves eat more foods that tasted good, while also keeping health in mind. They preferred not to feel guilty for eating tasty foods and instead would try to balance their food intake later in the day with healthier meals. Anna’s family ate pretty healthy when
she was a girl. So when she moved out, Anna says that loosened her diet and allowed herself to eat whatever she wanted. Now, she speaks of that time as a “negative change.” As she got older, Anna says she reverted back to how her family used to eat. She now describes herself as a healthy eater who may not eat balanced portions at one meal, but tries to eat healthier later in the day.

Fran, 74, recalls that her mother always made sure the family had balanced meals and Fran would eat them, but she does not remember particularly liking them. However, Fran does remember liking sugar a lot; “any kind of sweet; pastries, cookies, candy.” As a result, she felt “out of control” with sugar from a very young age. She says that her “first memory of being out of control with sugar was when I was probably 12 or 13. I was out of control with sugar. I kept my weight normal until about 15 years ago but sugar—once I would eat it I couldn’t stop and it started when I was young.” To this day, Fran is conscious of how much sugar she eats. This recognition of when it started is often when people want to change. Once they pinpoint why they eat the way they do, they often want to change those habits for the better.

Then there were some informants who were okay eating whatever they wanted to eat. Julie recalls feeling tired of cooking after doing it for so many years. After her eight children moved out, she began grabbing “what I want” instead of “what was healthy.” At 74, Julie feels entitled to eating what she wants since she has lived a long life. While others hope to extend their lives by eating healthy, Julie says “...if I die eating what I like, then so be it. I’ve lived my life.”

Wendy agrees with Julie in that she should be able to eat what she wants. Doctors and other people “say I can’t eat certain stuff. But you can do anything you have to. It doesn’t bother me. I drink diet pop and some people say I can’t do that.” At the same time, Wendy knows what her limits with food are. She simply states, “I don't need dessert, I like dessert.” She is entirely conscious of her food decisions and doesn’t let her palette decide what she eats.
For many of the older informants, holidays were an exception from their regular cooking habits. Around Thanksgiving and Christmas people cooked and baked for their children and grandchildren who were traveling to visit. While many informants expressed that they had tried to teach their children how to cook favorite dishes, few children continued making them despite enjoying them. The holidays provided an opportunity for parents to cook beloved childhood dishes for their kids while also sharing them with new members of the family. Anna, 71, typically uses crock pots to make large batches of soup or chili and then freezes the rest to have meals ready at any time. She chooses to cook only a few times per week and to eat leftovers than to cook new meals. However, she expresses that she “doesn’t mind cooking if I have company.” Elsa used to love making apple pie and would get compliments on it, but now she says that she does not make it anymore because no one else is around to eat it and she does not want to eat a whole pie by herself. Elsa fondly remembers cooking and baking for her family. While she lives alone now, she longs to cook for people again and sometimes does for her friends at the senior center.

Jeannie used to cook for special occasions, such as Christmas, but her kids have moved out of the area so the tradition has faded to a near non-existence. Jeannie also enjoys how foods have become easier to buy premade. She favors making easy meals rather than homemade ones that others may prefer. She recalls that in high school, she took a home economics class where she learned to cook, bake and sew. Now, she says that “…I don’t think I ever started with flour [while baking]. Well maybe I did at first but then cake mixes came out. Who wants to start from scratch? Even cookies now, you can get the frozen ones. Just slice them up.”

Yet, there were a few older informants who recalled eating healthier despite not having people to cook for. Elsa eats healthier food that she cooks at home because “that is the way I was raised.” Elsa grew up in another country and was in charge of cooking for her family while her parents ran the family business. She likes to make a lot of soups because it is easy to throw everything in the pot and let it
cook. When asked how she cooks her meals, she simply says, “I cook from the bottom,” meaning homemade. Elsa also has a taste for sweet desserts but she does not make them for herself because she lives alone and she would be the only one to eat them. She lets herself indulge every now and then but she knows when to stop.

*Well, I just know what I can eat and what I can’t eat. Let’s put it that way. I try not to go to the wayside because I pay for it afterwards. I get a stomach ache and I should know better than to eat that.*

Gina also says that her youth influenced the way she eats. Even though other foods taste good, she says "...what I eat is not determined by what I like because I didn't grow up that way. I want to keep my health as I'm getting older." Health is also a big factor in a person’s food decisions. Gina eats health consciously because she wants to live a long life. She admits, "I don't particularly love the foods I cook so I don't eat a lot." While Jeannie and her husband eat out nearly every day, she is still conscious of what kind of foods she eats. At restaurants, she asks for less sauce or for them to take off some meat from a sandwich because she knows it is not healthy. Jeannie also does not like to overeat so she learned how to order her favorite dishes at restaurants so that they are perfectly portioned. Both Jeannie and her husband have switched to 1% milk at the recommendation of their neighbor who had heart problems. At first, she says, “we thought, ‘Ugh! This is terrible.’ But we got used to it.”

Losing a member of a family, whether to moving out, divorce or death, can also have a serious impact on a person’s eating habits. The older cohort spoke of eating out more after such events because they did not know how to cook for one or did not want to carry on their current habits alone. For many people, eating good tasting food and eating food that is good for you is a common dilemma that people make decisions about every day. The younger informants in this study showed an inclination towards wanting to balance healthy and non-healthy foods for both themselves and their children.

When she first went to college, Melissa says she would eat at the cafeteria for meals because it was on campus and convenient. As she became more involved in school activities, such as her sorority
and the swim team, she began to eat more on her own. Melissa was not a big meat and cheese eater and she said that the cafeteria would often serve meals based around these foods. In addition to that, Melissa remembers that her swim schedule did not leave her much time to get to the cafeteria before it closed. Instead of going out to eat somewhere else, she would keep ingredients for salad in her room. She easily could have eaten out but she chose not to. She goes on to say, “It’s much easier to order out or throw something in the microwave, but I want to eat good food, food that tastes good and is also good for you.”

Serena credits her parents for the way she eats as an adult. She says that she does not crave some of the foods that some people do “just because it was never the way I ate.” She says her husband grew up with food that was very unhealthy, “and he struggles to make good choices and often craves those kinds of meals.” Terri, 32, also thinks that unhealthy foods are becoming addicting to children. She does not let her kids eat a lot of sugar because she fears they will become addicted to it like she did. Terri remembers that her mom used to let her eat ice cream if she finished her dinner at night. While she enjoyed it at the time, she thinks that it set her up for “a lifetime of struggle with sugar.”

Kelsey also strives for a balance of healthy and unhealthy foods in her household. While she thinks that it would be better for her children to eat healthy all the time, she does let them enjoy sweet treats on special occasions. Kelsey recollects that her children “love sweets, but we really limit the amount they eat and really don’t allow any ‘junk’ food.” Speaking about herself, Kelsey says:

I try to eat a variety of foods and eat a fairly healthy diet. I’d say I eat much more organic food now because it’s readily available. We did not have things like sugar cereal or pop growing up, and I will have those things every now and then as a guilty pleasure.

This idea of convenience foods as “guilty pleasures” was common among the younger generation. After eating an unhealthy food or meal, informants reported feeling guilty and that they needed to balance
out the transgression by eating healthy in a future meal. Convenience meals such as foods eaten at a fast food restaurant were also cause for feeling guilty.

Balance was a topic often brought up by the informants, especially the younger ones. While some of the older informants felt they had earned the right to eat whatever they wanted due to old age, others wanted to preserve their health in hopes of living longer. It is interesting that some of the older informants report eating out regularly but then are disappointed when their children opt to eat out with their families. This dissonance in food values is critical in order to better understand how people think about and evaluate their food choices.

Organic Food

Many of the younger informants say it is easy to eat healthy due to the availability of organic foods in grocery stores. While many of the informants say they shop at their local Kroger, many mentioned Trader Joe’s or Whole Food Market who are known for their selection of organic and natural foods. Serena, 32 and a mother of two, does not recall eating organically grown food as a child but is sure that “neither one of my parents buys organic food presently.”

Serena, even though she grew up in an area with limited access to organic foods, chooses to purchase organic foods for her family because she thinks they are healthier. Although she prefers fresh organic foods, she often has to eat a mixture of fresh and frozen foods. Serena says she sometimes chooses frozen foods when the organic ones are too expensive. After reading several times that “frozen fruits and veggies tend to have less additives to keep them fresh since they are frozen so quickly,” she decided to substitute frozen foods for fresh, organic ones in order to stretch her finances. When she was growing up, Serena remembers eating pretty healthy. Her mom was always on “some diet” like Weight Watchers. Serena says that her parents emphasized low-fat alternatives instead of looking at the ingredients and additives to the food. Today, Serena does not think low-fat options are the best for
herself and her family. While she aims to eat mostly organic, Serena avoids food items marked low-fat while her husband aims to eat them because he is diabetic. To Serena, low-fat options are to be avoided. Serena also associates some foods with her migraines. She thinks that foods with “a long list of ingredients and additives,” she gives margarine vs real butter as an example, aggravate her migraines. Instead, she chooses foods with simple ingredients that she knows in order to better control the quality of her food.

Melanie buys organic produce due to the food sensitivities of her young daughter. Melanie buys fresh, often organic produce because her daughter prefers it over conventional produce. Melanie explains that the use of organic food in her house became more of a concern since her daughter was born; “Since I had my daughter there's some things that we always get organic. She drinks rice milk and some of the other vegetables we get are organic because she has a very sensitive stomach.” While not all of the food in her house is organic, Melanie avoids highly processed foods and mostly cooks from “scratch.” When asked if she follows any diet or food rules for her family she responded,

> Everything is bad for you because you read one thing about food and they say it's bad for you and then six months later they say it's good for you. And then a year later they'll go back and say it's bad for you. So I don't really pay attention. I think that more natural things are better.

In contrast to how she grew up, Melanie eats very differently. When she was young, her dad would make a lot of the family’s meals because her mother worked. Melanie describes her father’s cooking as “your basic meat and potatoes cooking.” He prepared a lot of hot dogs, bologna and ravioli and she remembers that “none of it was from a recipe.” She recalls that she has never been a big meat eater, even when she was a child. Her father’s “basic cooking” did not sit well with her and she makes up for that today by cooking the way she would have preferred to eat. Melanie says that she cooks a lot of fresh foods that include a wide variety of vegetables.
Kelsey, another young mom, also looks out for her family’s health by avoiding processed foods. In particular, she avoids foods with high fructose corn syrup or artificial sweeteners. While her husband drinks diet soda, she tries to eat foods that are “real or whole.” She says that she knows “too much sugar is not good, but I would rather eat ‘real sugar’ than ingest some chemically created sweetener.” Melanie also tells her husband that Coke Zero is not any better than drinking a regular Coke with real sugar in it. She read that it is better to ingest “real sugar” than it is to drink the “chemical stuff they put in it to make it zero calories. It's not any different. You're better off just drinking a regular Coke.”

Kelsey remembers her childhood food habits as being fairly similar to how she eats now. She eats organic food as much as possible. When she was in college, Kelsey read Fast Food Nation and was grossed out by meat. She was vegetarian for a while but now enjoys meat especially when it is fresh from one of her husband’s hunting trips. When she buys meat from the grocery, she either buys organic meat or nitrate or nitrite free meat.

Jamie, 29 and a mother of one infant, makes her own baby food out of fresh ingredients. While not always organic, she makes it with fresh fruits and vegetables that are chopped or pureed and then frozen into cubes. Jamie, like many of the other informants from both age groups, thinks that fresh foods are not only better for you, but “they taste better.” Frozen foods are often utilized when fresh ones are not available or it is a food that is not used quickly. Canned food, although it lasts longer, was not commonly used among the informants due to their easy access to grocery stores. When ingredients were needed, informants said they would rather go to the store to buy fresh foods than use canned ones. Only one participant said she wished she kept more canned foods but this was primarily out of concern for inclement weather. Jamie tries to avoid foods with lots of sugar and unnatural ingredients, but she says this is very hard to do and she does not always succeed.

For the older group, organic food was often not a factor in grocery shopping or meal planning. One participant, named Fran, eats organic, non-GMO frozen meals because they are “easy to prepare.”
Aside from Fran, no one else within this group mentioned the word “organic.” Several informants from this group mentioned fresh gardens at their childhood homes where their parents grew a variety of foods including chickens, tomatoes, and corn. Brianna, a participant in her 70’s, recalls that her parents had a garden when she was younger where they grew fresh green beans, okra, corn, and raised chickens. Canning was a process that was familiar to her family. The family also utilized the chickens for eggs and as a meat source. Even though her mom liked to cook and often had a home cooked meal for her family at night, Brianna discloses that she ate a lot of fast food such as McDonald’s when she first moved out. She says that she was working a couple of jobs and did not have time to come home and eat a meal. She says it was purely out of convenience that she ate that much fast food. Presently, she is more conscious of what she is eating because of her cholesterol levels. Brianna’s memories of fresh foods from her family garden lead her to evaluate her fast food choices as bad.

Another participant, Jeannie, reminisced how life must have been much harder for her mother, as resources were more limited when Jeannie was growing up.

*We’d go to the grocery store on Saturday mornings. I realize now that it wasn’t easy for my mother. You couldn’t just run down to Kroger’s if you needed something, it was a trip. She didn’t drive. My father worked in town as well as the farm—it was a small farm. So we never had a car at home during the day. We had a lot of stuff from the garden in the summer though. We had sweet corn and tomatoes, and green beans we raised. [We] canned the beans and the tomatoes in the summer. We’d go pick blackberries where we had permission but they knew a place—it was wild. My brother and I hated that job.*

In her adult life, Jeannie realizes that she has more access to a wider variety of foods than her mom had. While she does not specifically mention “organic food,” clearly homegrown food was utilized more than Jeannie uses now. For Jeannie, her mom’s life was harder than her own because she had to do more to
have access to fresh foods. Jeannie seems to feel grateful that grocery stores give her access to fresh produce even if she doesn’t always utilize it.

With the younger generation, there is a shift to buying “organically” labeled foods. With the older generation, more foods were grown by the families themselves. While organic food was mostly mentioned by the younger informants, there is no assumption that it does not play a role for the older ones. Younger generations might have been more heavily influenced and conscious of their consumption of organic food. Also, there are difficulties in talking about organic food mainly because it can mean something different depending on who you are talking to.

These three themes, socialization of food habits, balancing good and bad foods and organic food, all played a role in the lives of the informants. While there are few clear cut differences between the generations, it is clear that the memories the informants have about their food choices impact the choices they make now and for their kids. It is also important to emphasize how people evaluate their past decisions as good or bad and how they act on these judgements. Some of the informants did not have positive memories with food as a child and are trying to make up for it now with their own children. Others were too busy to participate in food preparation as a kid, but now see the value of it. Still, some think that food is just food and others see it as a bonding experience for the family. The memories and reactions to past food habits are variable and do not seem to strongly correlate with generational variation. However, some generational themes do arise and these are particularly interesting when viewed through a historical framework. To better understand the role of society on food choices, I evaluated some popular food trends in order to better describe how participant agency is situated within the structure of society.
Discussion, Study Limitations and Conclusions

The two generations in this study remember, express and evaluate their past and present food preferences in a number of ways. However they do so, they express them as “choices.” This individual agency is actually quite limited when compared to the larger structural processes such as the economy or cultural influences that impact what is available or acceptable to eat. For example, people in the US do not eat dog or horse because there are other meat sources and because they are seen as pets. This is just one example of how larger structures dictate what foods are available and are accepted as nourishment. Recounting their personal histories with food, the informants made decisions about what foods they bought, prepared and served themselves and their family members. However, their “choices” were structured by what is made available to them. The economy and technology have always had an influence on food production, preservation and distribution (Goody 2012). Shifts in agricultural technology, the marketing and branding of food, and what grocers choose to make available on their shelves all influence what options people have (Goody 2012). The resources made available are also structured around gender. In the mid 1900’s in particular, women were the primary homemakers and were preparing most of the family’s meals. Thus, food marketing was heavily geared towards women, and cooking today is still considered to be “gendered work” (Swenson 2009).

Social movements, technology and the economy both influence food production and distribution and are the larger structures that impact the consumer and the choices they make. Both generations seem to be affected by different trends throughout their lives. In this section, I first discuss how the older cohort in this study preferred convenient and low-cost foods that were made more available when they reached purchasing age. Following this, I discuss the younger cohort and how the slow food movement and the rise of organic food has impacted how they reflect and evaluate their food choices. These trends that are often structured by larger entities are represented in the informant’s reflections of their own food choices.
This study suggests that both generations are enabled by transformations in the production and transportation of food. For the older generation, the postwar era was characterized by a boom in consumerism and more packaged foods. Consumers seemed to favor packaged foods that were mass-produced in factories because they were readily available in the grocery stores. Packaged and canned foods gained popularity among food producers because they were incentivized by profits. During World War I, there was a need for food that could easily be shipped to soldiers overseas. Packaged food was a cheap way for food producers to profit. The cost to produce packaged and canned foods was low, they were easily portable, and they had a longer shelf life. After the war, factories already had the means to keep producing these convenience foods, so they began offering them to the domestic market for public consumption.

Despite Albritton (2012) who once questioned, “What could be more foolhardy than placing food, the basis of all human flourishing, in the hands of giant corporations, which are obliged to pursue profits in order to further enrich an elite of wealthy stockholders?” there was widespread acceptance of industrialized food production. In particular, the invention of microwave meals, canned soup, and boxed baking mixes were influential to the purchasing generation of the 1950’s and 1960’s. Furthermore, the opening of the first McDonald’s in 1953 reflected the preferences of people at the time. After people became used to buying convenience foods in the grocery store, they wanted the same from food they purchased from restaurants. McDonald’s saw a demand for quick, cheap food that was the same regardless of what time you bought it. This “sameness of food” is a strong similarity among the older cohort in this study. Ubiquity and sameness seem to be important for this generation because it allowed them to easily obtain the same taste and quality wherever they went. There was little individualism in food items because they were produced with Fordism-like accuracy.

The technological and economic environment of America during the mid-1900’s also impacted the way the older generation thinks about food in relation to time. The older generation articulate their
food needs using adjectives such as “fast, easy, and accessible,” as Fran said. The market appeal of mass-produced, packaged food was that it could be made quickly to fit the lives of the women providing for families in the 1960’s. Barb, 75, remembers working two jobs and having to pack food that would last while she worked both jobs. She also supplemented with quick stops to fast food restaurants for a hot sandwich. Packaged foods required minimal time in the kitchen, allowing a meal to get on the table with simplicity and ease or even to be eaten outside of the home. The older generation in this study seem to value convenience and ease in food preparation. If a product can streamline dinner preparation, the older informants in this study seem more likely to take advantage of it.

Finally, these post-war changes in agricultural technologies appear to impart a philosophy of personal responsibility to be financially frugal. This comes from their parents living through the Great Depression. Jeannie expressed disdain when she was talking about how certain brands of frozen dinners do not yield high quantities of food; “Stouffer’s has the most in the bag. Bird’s Eye Voila is pretty good but there’s not as much of it. So we just go to Stouffers and stock up.” This shows how quantity, rather than quality, is the indicator of a “great deal” for Jeannie and many others. Women in this cohort have a tendency to utilize their resources to the best of their ability. Convenience foods, such as frozen fruits and vegetables, offer a cheap alternative to fresh ones that are often more expensive.

The older generation in this study demonstrated values and food preferences that strongly correlated to the historical-economic environment they grew up in. Their penchant for cheap, accessible foods that are easy to prepare are often associated with their taste preferences and a desire to save time. In contrast, the younger cohort expressed a partiality for organic food and home cooked meals that may take more time than the older generation is willing to invest.

The younger cohort, who are late Generation X, also have a different idea of what good, healthy food is compared to the older generation of Baby Boomers. The younger generation in this study appear to distrust processed food because they do not think that food should include, as Kelsey mentioned,
“high fructose corn syrup, artificial sugar or [too much] salt.” While the older generation likes that they can buy frozen vegetables and fruits whenever they need them, the younger generation gave the impression that they value fresh, organic foods because they are “less processed.” Serena restricts food items that have a long list of ingredients because they are often more processed and have a “long list of ingredients and unneeded additives.” Fresh foods tend to have no added ingredients, so she prefers to eat whole foods as much as possible.

The young, health-conscious mothers in this study also seem to distrust genetically modified crops, pesticides, and animals that are given growth hormones. All three of these agricultural technologies allow food to be more accessible. Now more than ever there are higher quantities of food available from a variety of different sources. However, the younger mothers in this study prefer locally grown foods over ones that were grown on the opposite side of the country. However, imported foods and convenience foods are still consumed by the younger generation but there is a certain level of guilt associated with consuming these foods. The younger generation expressed feeling guilty after eating processed foods, particularly ones containing added sugar. Food as a “guilty pleasure” is a fairly new phenomenon that the younger generation expressed. In contrast, the older informants did not express feeling guilty about the foods they were eating and often rationalized the lack of nutrition in certain food items by saying they would eat healthier later. Anna, an older informant, said “I would say if you count what I eat during the day it’s balanced. It might not be balanced at one meal but another meal might balance it.”

The younger generation can be characterized by their desire for high quality foods that take more time to prepare. This generation, who were born in the 1980’s and became purchasing consumers beginning around 2000, strive to eat local and prefer organic food. The slow food movement, characterized by traditional and regional cuisine, is popular among the younger generation because the food was made for them and hasn’t been “sitting under a heat lamp in the back,” as Terri phrased it.
Similar to the “endangered foods campaign” in Italy that pushed to save regional tastes in Italy, the younger cohort in this study expressed that local foods and dishes should be prioritized and saved from, as Terri said, “fast food chains [who] are taking over” (Leitch 2012). Rather than a focus on high quantity and low-cost food, this study suggests that late Generation X consumers prefer high quality foods, are willing to pay more for them and are prepared to wait longer to eat them. There has also been a shift to slow-cooked meals made from scratch.

While convenience foods in the form of prepared and packaged goods are still popular, “home cooked” meals are taking over, both in the home and in the commercial industry. The first genetically modified crop was produced in 1982 and since then, there has been a call from younger consumers to get away from these agricultural approaches in favor of older, more traditional methods of farming. The younger generation has this notion that food from “mom and pop” farms is better than commercial farms. The younger generation’s imagined past of what good food is does not include genetically modified crops, pesticides, or meat containing hormones. One informant, Kelsey, was vegetarian for a while because she learned what is in traditionally raised meat. Then, Kelsey married her husband who “hunts and who loves to eat meat” so she went back to eating meat. When she can’t rely on meat from her husband’s hunting trips, Kelsey says she tries “to buy organic meat, or meat that has no nitrates or nitrites.”

Finally, the younger generation feels a collective responsibility to be environmentally friendly for the good of themselves and future generations. Out of the younger informants, 71% showed a preference for organic food not only because they think it is of higher quality, but because they think it is a more environmentally friendly alternative to conventional farming with pesticides. This is an interesting imagined backstory to organic food since organic farming has been argued to be equally or more harmful to the environment (Rigby and Cáceres 2001). There is also the controversy of the sustainability of organic farming that many of the younger generation fail to acknowledge. Aside from
organic farming practices, the younger generation also cite the ethical treatment of animals as reason for consuming organic meat. With this decision to purchase organic foods instead of conventional ones, the younger informants in this study are expressing a common identity that may not be entirely representative of their generation as a whole.

Informants often compare organic and conventional farming practices but Guthman (2003) tells us that organic food is actually less of an opposition to fast food than initially thought. While many of the younger informants cite health and environmental reasons for choosing organic and slow food options, Guthman (2003) argues that there is less of a binary between slow and fast food. She argues that “…slow food is often made tasty by slavish uses of salt and butter” and there is a disregard for the fact that “… organic production depends on the same systems of marginalized labour as does fast food.”

In conclusion, both generations express themselves in their food choices and demonstrate their priorities when purchasing foods. For the older generation, cheap, fast and mass-produced foods that came about after World War I were heavily relied on growing up and continue to have high priority in their lives today. In contrast, the younger generation craves pesticide-free crops and hand crafted restaurant meals that reflect the time that went into growing and preparing the food. Each of these generations remember and reflect on their food choices according to these standards and it is essential to recognize participant motivations behind food choice in order to better understand how they are assessing their food choices over a lifetime.

Study Limitations

A major limitation in this study was the use of snowball sampling among younger informants. I found one young participant who recommended someone they thought would be interested in helping with the study. Then, that informant recommended someone else. While there were many different branches of this recruitment method so that not all of the informants were from the same social group,
many still knew each other. The danger of recruiting from the same social group is that often friends have similar ideals and come from the same economic class. This turned out to be the case. While there was still a fair amount of diversity in childhood experiences, many of the young informants made similar choices about food and how they feed their family. Ideally, I would have had a more diverse participant group, but my sample proved to be an opportunity to see how different childhood experiences led people to comparable adult lives.

Another limitation is the lack of men in this study. Men would have offered important insights into how food habits change over time. However, since the study included all women, I was able to see differences among life trajectories that I might not have been able to see had men been involved. For example, I was able to focus on how motherhood affected women’s eating habits throughout their life. Not only did having children change how women ate, but it also affected their habits when their children grew up and moved out.

A final limitation of my study can be found in the way that information was reported to me. My only method of data collection was through interviews at the location of the participant’s choosing. Only a few of these interviews occurred in the participant’s home. Thus, all information given to me was self-reported by the participant themselves. I did not verify their eating habits by checking their kitchens or by observing eating practices in restaurants. The problem with self-reported data is that the participant can choose what to reveal to the interviewer. While it is just as significant to report what informants think of their habits, it is also important to understand the limitations of this method. As the interviewer, I had to be aware that the participant might not have been conscious of all of their decisions or how their habits were shaped over time. For many of the informants, this was the first time they had consciously thought about why they eat the foods they do. Ideally, I would have included a shopping trip with the participant and observed them in their homes. Future studies of food habits and how they change over time should consider these limitations during protocol development.
Future Research

To better understand how people remember and evaluate their past and present food choices, supplementary research should be conducted. Several opportunities for research presented themselves as I was doing this research project. Additional research should aim to uncover how men remember, evaluate, and express their food choices in order to see if they differ from the women in this study. Furthermore, the inclusion of millennials in future studies would provide interesting perspectives and would aim to describe how reflections on food choices are constantly changing with each generation.

Food choice decisions are complex, multifaceted, situated and always changing. Decisions about food are influenced by emotion, location, values, tastes and ideals. Eating habits, as shown by this study and many previous ones, are also hugely affected by events that occur throughout a person’s life. While other studies have taken a longitudinal approach and have interviewed informants over many years, my study took snapshots of eating habits from people at different points in their lives. Both types of studies suggest that women of two generations remember, evaluate and express their food choices differently than one another.

Eating habits cannot be understood from just one framework or field of study due to the number of aspects that influence how a person chooses food. Instead, studies from the physical sciences, life sciences, behavioral sciences, social sciences, and humanities should be compiled to offer a unique insight into how and why people choose the food they do. Ultimately, this could lead to a better understanding of how to improve the health of our children and public health in general.
References


Recruitment Flyer:

Volunteers Needed for a Research Study: “Generational Differences in Food Habits”

This study is open to adults ages 50 and over and their adult children living in the Cincinnati area. The purpose of this research study is to describe generational differences in food habits. Participation involves interview where subjects will be asked about their:

- Food preferences as adults
- Childhood food preferences
- Children’s food habits

Time Commitment: One 45-60 minute interview

The research will be conducted at the location of the participant’s choosing.

For additional information, please call Kristen at 513-409-3772 or email tomkokm@mail.uc.edu

Kristen Tomko Master’s Candidate
Department of Anthropology University of Cincinnati
Title of Study: Generational Variation in Food Habits among Cincinnati Residents

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study?

The person in charge of this research study is Kristen Tomko of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Anthropology. She is being guided in this research by Jeff Jacobson.

What is the purpose of this research study?

The purpose of this research study is to describe and better understand change in food habits and preferences over time.

Who will be in this research study?
There will be approximately 12 to 20 informants who will take part in this study. You may be in this study if you:

- Are over 50 years old
- Have adult children living in Cincinnati

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?

You will be asked to be a part of a one-on-one interview. It will take about one hour. The interview will take place wherever you are most comfortable. The interview will ask questions about your current food habits and your food habits from when you were younger. Also, you will be asked about the food you cook for your own children.

Are there any risks to being in this research study?

It is not expected that you will be exposed to any risk by being in this research study.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?

You will probably not get any benefit because of being in this study. However, being in this study may help parents understand how to improve their child’s health.

What will you get because of being in this research study?

You will not be paid (or given anything) to take part in this study.

Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?

If you do not want to take part in this research study you will receive the same services you already get and will not be treated any differently.

How will your research information be kept confidential?

Information about you will be kept private by only using your first name and removing all personal
characteristics after all of the interviews have been completed. Additionally, all research data will be kept on a password-protected computer. Signed consent documents and master lists of participant names and ID numbers will be kept in the faculty adviser’s locked office while the identifiable data will be kept in the graduate student’s locked office. After the audio recordings have been transcribed, they will be permanently deleted.

The data from this research study may be published; but you will not be identified by name.

Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes.

Your identity and information will be kept confidential unless the authorities have to be notified about abuse or immediate harm that may come to you or others.

**What are your legal rights in this research study?**

Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

**What if you have questions about this research study?**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Kristen Tomko at 513-409-3772 or tomkokm@mail.uc.edu

Or, you may contact Jeff Jacobson at jacobsjt@ucmail.uc.edu

The UC Institutional Review Board reviews all research projects that involve human informants to be sure the rights and welfare of informants are protected.
If you have questions about your rights as a participant, complaints and/or suggestions about the study, you may contact the UC IRB at (513) 558-5259. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu

**Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?**

No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. You may skip any questions that you don't want to answer.

You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell Kristen Tomko at 513-409-3772 or tomkokm@mail.uc.edu

**Agreement:**

I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Participant Name (please print) ____________________________________________

Participant Signature ____________________________________________ Date ______

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent ___________________________ Date ______
Interview Questions:

Outline

1. Current Diet/Grocery Shopping/Kitchen:
2. What foods they ate as kids
3. Change Over Time
4. What they cook for their own children

Participant Information:

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Race:
4. Religion:
5. Income:
6. Where they grew up:
7. # of Years in Cincinnati:
8. Number of Kids and their ages:
9. How would you rate your health?
   Excellent—Very Good—Good—Fair—Poor
10. Why do you rate your health this way?

Current Diet/Grocery Shopping/Kitchen:
1. Are you in charge of food shopping?

2. If so, where do you shop?

3. Tell me about the kinds of food you buy at the grocery store.

4. Do you like to cook?

5. (IF YES) What do you like to cook?

6. (BP) When did you first start to cook for yourself?

7. What’s the last meal you made at home?

8. What kind of foods would I find in your kitchen right now?

9. What foods do you avoid? Why?

Childhood Eating:

1. What did you like to eat as a child?

2. What foods did you avoid as a child?

3. Tell me about a favorite memory from your childhood involving food.

4. Who prepared your family’s meals? How did you help?

5. (BP) Tell me about how your family’s kitchen was different from your kitchen now.

6. Why do you choose these differences?

7. If you could go back in time and have one food from your childhood that you don’t eat now, what would it be?

Breaking Point:
1. Do you eat differently now than when you lived at home?

2. (IF YES) When did you first notice a change in how you ate?

3. (PROBE IF UNSURE) Were there any events or media stories that changed how you felt about food?

4. Which changes do you think have been good?

5. Which have been bad?

Cooking for Own Children:

1. What do/did your kids like to eat?

2. Do/Did they enjoy the same kinds of foods that you liked as a child?

3. Have you/Do you plan on teaching your kids how to cook family dishes?

4. Do you think it is important to teach children family recipes? Why/Why not?

5. (If kids are adult) Do you know of any family recipes that your child/children make for themselves and their family?