BEING-WITH-FOOD-IN-THE-WORLD: THE INFLUENCES OF THE EXTERNAL FOOD WORLD IN CHINA

by

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Under the Direction of

Andrew Gitlin

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an interpretive phenomenological study of food choices among middle-class Chinese adults living in Beijing, China. The objective of this study was to understand eating behaviors in order to gain a broader perspective for future obesity research. Ten participants participated in multiple, unstructured interviews (in English and in Chinese) focused on their lived experiences in order to unravel food decisions made in everyday life. Bridling was used to ensure an open-ended approach throughout the study in addition to participant checks to verify understandings. Heidegger's concepts of Self and They-Self were used in the analysis. The findings suggest the people's food choices are heavily embedded in the They-Self world (They-food) as they interact constantly with the outside world. However, people still seek ways to project an individualized food identity (Self-food) as a way to maintain a sense of uniqueness. These findings demonstrate the intricacy of food choices that require health education measures to be collective and individualized in order to attain more effectiveness.

INDEX WORDS: Phenomenology, food choices, health promotion, obesity, health education

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Robert Jackson Patrick Junior, who taught me the value and joy of exercise and health.

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I would like to acknowledge my major professor, Dr. Andrew Gitlin, who helped me regain my belief in myself during some bleak periods. I also want to acknowledge all of my committee members whose valuable advice and support helped me make my dreams come true.

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CHAPTER 1: TO EAT OR NOT TO EAT?

THE SCOPE OF THE FOOD CHOICE DILEMMA AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO SOCIETY

This study was a phenomenological study of food choices among middle class adults living in Beijing, China. Food choices encompassed eating behaviors, eating frequencies, preferred cooking methods, food selections, food beliefs, preferred food portions, and the preferred settings in which food is consumed. Obesity was the underlying problem for this study; however, food choices are the premise for eating habits, including those that lead to obesity. I wanted to understand the intricacy of food choices to lay the foundation for understanding the growth of obesity. It helped me develop a more comprehensive perspective on obesity so that I can confront personal biases about the topic. Likewise, the phenomenological method permitted me to provoke my personal biases so that I was able to find new understandings. The potential role that schools play in the obesity epidemic is overlooked. Obesity is an important concern for educational systems because it significantly changes the dynamic of schools by affecting the physical, emotional, and psychological welfare of students and their families. Eating habits are developed at young ages; thus, schools cannot ignore obesity. However, approaches that ignore social, cultural, and economical factors do not address the entire scope of the problem. Consequently, they produce limited results in reducing obesity. This study serves as a foundation for future work for using schools as a platform for the fight to reduce obesity. This chapter discusses the scope of the obesity problem, the study rationale, the study objectives and research questions, the overview of the study framework, the study's contribution to existing academic

literature, preliminary research on the topic, the study's limitations, and the chapter organization of the dissertation.

Statement of the Problem

The research problem that this study concerned was the phenomenological relationships that people have with food that impacts food choices in middle class adults in Beijing, China. Eating patterns changed significantly in China due to urbanization and global trade that increased the abundance of food. I was interested in the social, economic, and cultural influences on food choices in a transitional society like China. Beijing was chosen as the research site because it contains a mixture of Western and Chinese culture that the literature suggested increased overweight/obesity in this population. The nutrition transition is the shift from a society of scarcity to a society where food is abundant, and diets are higher in fat and calories (Zhai et al., 2009). This environment produces cultural practices that are not conducive to physical activity (Popkin, 2008) and results in higher levels of chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer (Zhai et al., 2009). As China's economy expands, eating practices change. This study was aimed at exploring people's relationships with food during times of such a transition. Additionally, this study concerned the way that people's cultural and individual identities shaped their food choices. Food and personal identity are inseparable.

The Scope of Problem

Overweight and obese are differentiated. Body Mass Index or BMI uses a height to weight ratio to determine weight status. BMI is divided into three categories: BMI= 18.5-25 is normal weight, BMI = 25-30 is overweight, and BMI > 30 is obese (Ogden, Yanovski, Carroll, & Flegal, 2007; van Baal et al., 2008). The International Association for the Study of Obesity and the International Obesity Task Force posit that Asian obesity is defined as a BMI between

23-24 for overweight and a BMI greater than 25 for obese (Wen et al., 2008). The World Health Organization (WHO) indiates that 1 billion people worldwide are overweight, and 300 million are obese (Gill, 2006). Overweight/obesity are steadily increasing in China. Longitudinal studies from nine provinces indicate that 73% of Chinese adults gained weight from 1989-2000 (Kim & Popkin, 2005). The overweight/obesity rate in mainland China increased from 14.6% in 1992 to 21.8% in 2002 (Gill, 2006). Data from the Chinese Health and Nutrition Survey (1989-2000) designated that overweight/obesity in urban Chinese men increased from 10.1% in 1989 to 32% in 2000 while the rates of rural men increased from 4.7% to 15.5% (Lee et al., 2008). In 2004, 25% of Chinese adults were overweight (Popkin, 2008). Approximately 22 million Chinese suffer from diabetes (Gill, 2006).

The basic cause of obesity is excess calorie consumption in conjunction with minimal physical activity. Less energy use is related to sedentary leisure activities, inactivity at work/school, and diets that lower the metabolic rate (de Ferranti & Mozaffarian, 2008). These societal changes differ substantially from historical times when food was scarce and laborious to attain, (Ogden, Yanovski, Carroll, & Flegal, 2007) also known as the hunter-gatherer societies (Popkin, 2006). The Chinese diet is high in edible oil with lower intakes of dairy, cereal, and soy (Zhai et al., 2009). Soybean oil is one of China's largest imports, and prices are now low enough for low-income consumers (Hawkes, 2006; Popkin, 2008). From 1962-1979, China's economy started to recover from an economic depression. Major economic reforms resulted in new food trade legislation and mass urbanization (Popkin, 2008) that led to dietary changes as food increased. Supermarkets increased in China escalating the availability, the variety, and the accessibility of food (Popkin, 2006; Popkin, 2008). Processed food is attractive to consumers who feel that it is safer than fresh food (Popkin, 2006). In the cities, Chinese occupations

transitioned from agriculturally based positions to service sector jobs (Popkin, 2008). Hence, as food became abundant, physical activity diminished.

Food is multifunctional: "Types and amounts of food and beverages, flavors, textures, food combinations, and traditional uses and meanings of food mark differences among ethnic groups and societies, convey symbolic meanings, create social interactions, and define pleasure and punishment" (Kumanyika, 2008, p. 61). Additionally, food is the central mechanism in particular events, such as celebrations and everyday social gatherings (Schroeter, House, & Lorence, 2007) and is often linked to many cultural traditions (Guerrero et al., 2009). Food is institutionalized through invoking "a set of images, dreams, tastes, choices, and values" (Barthes, 1997, p. 20). In other words, food is a structural force in society that defines what it means to be a part that society and is used as a means to engage in that society.

Foods are consumed in context. For example, formal meals include particular food staples (such as rice) and are consumed in the company of family and close friends (Douglas, 1997; Ing, 2011). Furthermore, feasts indicate socioeconomic status through the quality and quantity of food served. People with higher socioeconomic status distinguish themselves through the consumption of particular foods (Ing, 2011) unattainable by others. In China, food abundance is associated with both financial success or as a method for people to differentiate themselves from others. For instance, in Hong Kong, people drink yumcha or tea to distinguish themselves as Hong Kongers. Likewise, the non-Han minorities consume buckwheat as their staple instead of rice (Ing, 2011). Food choices are also influenced by "identity politics and embody epochal transformations such as war and modernity, the birth of a nation, and globalization" (Chan, 2010). Therefore, as society evolves, food changes to reflect societal power and cultural structures. Society becomes "signified by food" (Barthes, 1997, p. 23).

Studies indicate that even though people identify some elements that influence their eating behaviors, people overlook many factors. For instance, people disregard many environmental factors that influence their food choices (Vartanian, Herman, & Wansink, 2008). On the other hand, people may limit their intake of certain unhealthy foods but find it challenging to resist these foods under particular circumstances, such as when the food served is a popular cultural dish. Nostalgia and habitual eating patterns play a significant role in food choices (Knight, 2011).

The Study Rationale

Social foundations of education is an interdisciplinary field in which aspects of sociology, history, anthropology, philosophy, and cultural studies are used to evaluate social issues in educational systems. This approach extends beyond traditional school systems into public outreach, nontraditional educational systems, and international education systems. Obesity is a significant global issue that affects both adults and children in developed and developing societies. Nutritional and physical education are typically not part of the core curricula; hence, educational measures aimed at reducing obesity are more likely to occur both inside and outside of the traditional school settings. Most essentially, schools are a powerful venue in public health initiatives because they serve more people than many public health programs, and they provide information that may be unavailable in the home context. They are one of the most influential resources in students' lives outside of the home. Furthermore, because social foundations incorporates an interdisciplinary analysis of education, this work aims at improving schools from a health conscious perspective.

Additionally, different cultures have different perceptions about obesity, health, and eating behaviors. This contextual approach is particularly relevant in social foundations studies.

In the case of obesity, nutritional programs in schools must be culturally relevant, which is why understanding people's experiences with food is essential. For instance, Kreuter et al. (2003) state, "…health educators must be able to identify and describe cultures and/or subcultures within a given population, understand how each relates to health behavior, and apply this knowledge in planning and development" (p. 134). Thus, in this case, programs fail if program developers ignore cultural contexts and promote generalized solutions that are cultural insensitive. Program developers must start with understanding the circumstances of this phenomenon in its specific cultural contexts before developing methods to promote healthy eating practices. This study is an initial step in developing the context of the problem. Likewise, educational systems and the local culture of education in particular societies must be understood before determining the right approach in integrating obesity interventions into schools.

Schools have a stake in childhood obesity because schools are one of the most influential entities in the first two decades of children's lives (Story, Kaphingst, & French, 2006). During this time, children establish dietary and physical habits, and studies indicate that overweight/obese children are at greater risk of becoming overweight/obese adults (Sharkey, Yetter, Felix, & Furlong, 2006). Overweight/obese children suffer from physical ailments, such as type 2 diabetes, asthma, depression, and anxiety and experience social problems like stigmatization, isolation, bullying, and low self-esteem (Story, Kaphingst, & French, 2006; Taras & Potts-Datema, 2005). Excess weight results in cardiovascular disease and cancer (Veugelers & Fitzgerald, 2005) later in life. Schools are responsible for the cognitive, emotional, and physical development of students; thus, they must take action to reduce childhood overweight/obesity. However, parents must be included in these efforts. Parents often lack health knowledge, so

programs benefit them, as well. Also, parents are the strongest influence in students' lives. If healthy practices are not reinforced at home, changes are not sustainable.

Weight significantly impacts students' physical and emotional well-being. Most people believe that obesity is caused by overconsumption, poor diet, and lack of exercise (Neumark-Sztainer, Story & Harris, 1999). Consequently, most people blame obesity on individuals while external factors, such as economics, culture, and societal influences, are often ignored. In Li et al. (2007), Chinese adolescents who were overweight/obese said that they suffered from more depression symptoms than their normal weight peers. Obese students also struggle emotionally to participate in health programs in schools because physical activity itself accentuates their body differences from their peers (Curtis, 2008). Certain tasks, such as eating during lunch, make obese students uncomfortable because they feel that they are judged on what or how they are eating (Curtis, 2008).

Weight is a particular issue for adolescents due to bodily changes during puberty and as they seek identity development (Robinson, 2006). Some studies suggest that weight status affects academic performance. In these studies, obese students performed lower academically than their normal weight peers, but these studies are inconclusive (Datar & Sturm, 2006; Sigfusdottir, Kristijansson, & Allegrante, 2007). Schools need to play a role in understanding the health behaviors of students and how these behaviors affect their academic and social development. Nonetheless, familial, cultural, and social factors in these health behaviors, such as food choices, need analysis. It is difficult for schools to compete with deeply constructed cultural values regarding food, especially if these factors are not understood.

Physical activity during the school day increases cognition, which can improve academic performance (Story, Kaphingst, & French, 2006). One physical activity program in China is the

Happy 10 program in which students engage in 10 minutes of exercise in the classroom, and activity cards, video demonstrations, and posters and stickers are used to track the students' progress (Yanping et al., 2010). The National Institute for Nutrition and Food Safety with the Chinese Center for Disease control (CDC) established Happy 10 based on their TAKE 10 program (Liu et al., 2007).

Behavior-focused programs are more successful in which lessons are integrated into all school subjects. These lessons focus on nutrition and physical activity; programs involving the family, not just the students, also show more promise (Story, Kaphingst, & French, 2006). Typically, schools with weight-related interventions show lower prevalence of obesity than schools without interventions (Veugelers & Fitzgerald, 2005), but programs are more effective among participants who are self-motivated to improve their health (Sharkey, Yetter, Felix, & Furlong, 2006). Most programs focus on nutrition education, physical activity, and healthy food choices. However, these programs lack emphases on cultural and societal factors. If these aspects are ignored, then these programs may prove futile for establishing any long-term benefits.

I had a personal interest in this study, as well. I was overweight in my early adult years, but I changed my lifestyle dramatically with exercise and diet. I want to help others do the same. I did not want to approach the issue in a naïve or biased manner. Even though I was overweight, I still lean toward a negative attitude toward obesity that blames the individual. This study was a building block in a line of continuous studies on obesity in schools that will hopefully lead to intervention work in schools. I wanted to understand obesity by first studying the reasons people eat. Otherwise, I worried that I might see only the individual responsibility perspective versus understanding that external factors contribute to the epidemic. Education on nutrition and physical activity has not appeared to make a significant impact on reducing the obesity epidemic

globally. Consequently, I wanted to explore those factors that are neglected. In the future, comparative studies between the United States and China will be conducted on food practices in addition to more studies specifically about obesity's impact on students and schools.

General Goals for Study

Understanding food choices is important for society because unhealthy eating practices lead to diseases, such as obesity, heart disease, and some cancers that diminish the quality and longevity of life. Obesity is increasing worldwide. Hence, the interactions between people and food choices are informative in understanding global food-related health problems. The main goal of this study was to develop a more comprehensive understanding of food choices in order to provide a foundation for future studies on obesity and the ways that schools can help in the efforts to reduce obesity. I prefer to conduct more phenomenological studies on obesity, such as studying the phenomenon of being an obese student in China. Thus, I will adopt a more socio-cultural approach to obesity studies in schools.

Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To develop an understanding of the phenomenon of making food choices through interpretive, phenomenological analysis.
2. To examine the perceived personal, social, and cultural influences on food choice.
3. To understand the various factors involved in food choices to develop a broader perspective on the issues of obesity and eating behaviors.

These are the objectives of this particular study. Because the data generated in this study will be used to design future studies, future objectives include these projections:

1. To use the data in this study to construct research questions about the relationship among the factors involved in food choice and overweight and obesity in China.
2. To design future phenomenological studies that will address issues that this study is unable to include.
3. To reevaluate nutrition education programs that lack social and cultural components.

Research Questions

Research Question	Rationale
What intentional relationships do people have with food in Beijing?	To deconstruct everyday (natural attitude) food choices to better understand the ways people eat.
How does food contribute to a person's identity/self in society?	To examine how people's sense of self and their relationship to others interacts with their food choices.
How do economics, culture, and sociability interact with food choices?	To determine the potential external factors that impact food choices.

Overview of Framework of Study

This study was an interpretive, phenomenological study of Chinese adults, ages twenty to thirty-five years old in Beijing, China. This theoretical approach was chosen because food embodies a plethora of cultural, social, emotional, and psychological meanings that required deep reflection to expose. Phenomenology is focused on understanding people's intentional relationships to objects. Sokolowski (2000) writes, "The core doctrine in phenomenology is the teaching that every act of consciousness we perform, every experience that we have, is intentional: it is essentially 'consciousness of' or an 'experience of' something or other. All our awareness is directed toward objects" (p. 8). Intentionality is the personal experiences that

people have with objects (in this case, food), and the way in which these experiences formulate their relationships with these objects. The specified phenomenon is always the focus of the study rather than the individual participants, but participants' accounts provide the possible manifestations of the phenomenon.

Additionally, phenomenology is open-ended. I did not predict any specific outcomes but solely sought to understand the phenomenon itself. Interpretive phenomenology uses the Heideggerian perspective in which the researcher analyzes themes in the data but also studies individual perspectives. Heidegger's approach to phenomenology is concerned with the concept of being or existence (Conroy, 2003). For example, Heidegger (2001) notes, "…*knowing is a kind of Being which belongs to Being-in-the-world…* (p. 88). According to Heidegger, people's interaction with others and objects is their way of making sense of the world, and this process defines their identity. Hence, data were analyzed through this concept by examining how food contributes to individual's social identities, which will be referred to as the Self-food. This framework was chosen because people interact with food constantly; therefore, food is a way to understand society and the Self. Food and person are inseparable.

This study used interview data through unstructured interviewing, which is the common method in phenomenology. These descriptive stories about food were used to explore the reasons people eat certain foods, food culture, and the emotional and psychological meanings of food to determine people's relationships with food. Individual experiences enhanced understanding of how and why people make food choices. I used bridling to control presumptions in order remain open during the interview process (Barnes, 2003). The interviews were unstructured to avoid leading questioning. These interviews established the basis for follow-up interviews and for creating probing questions that encouraged more reflective responses (Blackman, 2002).

Significance of Study to the Existing Literature

This study contributed to the existing literature on food and obesity by addressing its gaps. Although there are many studies regarding nutrition and physical activity programs aimed at reducing obesity, the outcomes of these studies do not show significant long-term decreases in overweight/obesity prevalence (Story, Kaphingst, & French, 2006). Overweight/obesity continue to increase worldwide. For example, Jiang et al. (2006) assert, "An improved knowledge is needed of factors influencing children's obesity and lifestyles in China in order to develop effective, culturally sensitive obesity prevention strategies" (p. 15). Most of the literature consists of programs that educate and promote healthy behaviors; however, they do not appear to address any social, cultural, or economic factors involved in obesity and food habits. In many ways, healthy diets clash with popular societal and cultural practices, making change difficult to maintain long-term. This study examined these potential social and cultural factors that previous studies do not include. Also, understanding food choices explained why these programs do little to change health practices overall.

Furthermore, although there are many studies in anthropology and psychology on food, there does not appear to be a significant amount of phenomenological studies on food. One of the most cited studies is Weingarten and Elston's (1990) study on food cravings. Their study focuses on appropriate definitions and measurements of food cravings and is mostly descriptive in nature. Another phenomenological study focused on people's experiences when they had food cravings, but this study emphasized the triggers of food cravings only (Tiggemann & Kemps, 2005). This study goes beyond these studies because not all foods consumed are connected to food cravings. Most foods are eaten daily in a habitual manner with minimal reflection. Food cravings suggest that people spend significant time thinking about the food with a strong

inclination to consume that food prior to eating it. However, many food experiences do not entail such cognizant cravings. Dibsdall, Lambert, and Frewer (2002) focused on food choices in which they examined how health information, personal beliefs, and personal habits affected women's food choices when purchasing/preparing food for their families, but this study did not use phenomenological analysis. Interviews were semistructured and did not reveal people's lived experiences that lead to these behaviors. Consequently, my study revealed more factors involved in food choices by examining the lived experience. There are limited studies on food that focus on decision-making processes and food choice (Sobal & Bisogni, 2009).

Moreover, unlike most approaches that focus on nutrition education, this study delved deeper into external factors that impact food choices, including factors that are beyond personal control. Societies are based on shared economics, social order, and belief systems that dictate normative behaviors, and as developing societies become more urbanized, diets "transition from self-prepared, homegrown produce to commercially prepared, processed convenience foods" (Hawks, 2001, p. 85). The 2002 China Health Nutrition Survey indicated a significant increase in fats and protein and decreases in fiber intake in the last twenty years (Li, Dibley, Sibbritt, & Yan, 2010). In developing countries, the ability to purchase such foods is seen as a prestige whereas food restriction is associated with the poorer classes who have little choice (Hawks, 2001). Dining out in restaurants and consuming snacks outside of the home is particularly trendy among Chinese adolescents (Li, Dibley, Sibbritt, & Yan, 2010). In addition to these societal changes, family strongly influences food choices. Parents influence the weight status of their children through genetics, food preferences, lifestyle models, and the food environment they provide for their children (Jiang et al., 2006). Parents also use food as a way to bond with their children (Wong, 2010). Culturally, food is a primary focus of Chinese life. Popular cultural adages

include, "'To people, food is all important'" and the cultural greeting, "Have you eaten today" (Wong, 2010, p. 363). Understanding how people make sense of their food choices is central to understanding other phenomena, such as the nutrition transition and obesity.

Preliminary Research

I conducted a pilot study entitled, "Understanding the relationship between food and culture." This pilot study was an interpretive, phenomenological study that focused on people's relationship and experiences with food. The participants were Chinese immigrants, and seven participants were interviewed. The purpose of this pilot study was for me to examine theoretical and methodological techniques of interpretive phenomenology and to analyze the kind of data such as study would generate. Interviews were a maximum of 60 minutes in duration, and participants were interviewed only once with informal follow-up interviews through email. Interviews were unstructured, phenomenological interviews in which participants described their favorite foods, their food traditions, and their reasoning for choosing certain foods. Analysis followed the interpretive, phenomenological framework based on Heidegger's theory (2008) and Gadamar's methodology (1989) in terms of bridling the data. However, since multiple interviews were not used, no solid interpretations were made.

The data suggested that people make food choices based on multiple factors. For example, one participant ate pizza when she was happy or sad. However, she insisted on eating mostly traditional Chinese food in order to preserve her sense of home. She consumed Western food when she was emotional whereas her sense of normalcy revolved around traditional Chinese cuisine. Another participant ate at Western restaurants in China because eating at these restaurants was a sign of prestige, and she mostly consumed Western food in China because it was popular in society. Hence, participants used food as a way to embody tradition, or they

chose food as a way to interact with modernism. Moreover, participants discussed how foods are connected to place. Spicy food was connected to southern China while Beijing was known for its sweet tastes. Chongqing was considered the place where the hotpot originated. These data raised questions about people's tendencies to connect foods to certain places, particularly places dear to them like their hometowns.

Limitations of Study

There were problems with unstructured interviewing. I needed to develop a rapport with participants while also being careful not to reveal any information that might have biased the participants during the interview process. I addressed this issue by documenting any interferences and/or presumptions in my research journal. I also conducted multiple interviews to explore the participants' experiences again to check for consistency. Unstructured interviews are often criticized for being biased due to their subjective basis (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). However, extensive follow-up reduced this subjective bias.

In the case of studying Chinese participants, language was a significant concern. Although the participants chosen were able to speak English, Mandarin did not always translate into English easily, which made it difficult for participants to communicate sometimes. The multiple interview process reduced this problem because participants became more familiar with using English in subsequent interviews, and they were able to reflect on the topics in between interviews so that it was easier for them to express themselves clearly.

Bridling required intensive reconceptualization of data and reinterviewing participants in order to uncover meanings (Ashworth, 1996). The process involved an initial review of a piece of data. Writing down my presumptions made them explicit. I was able to think about other possibilities aside from the presumptions in addition to questioning the presumptions themselves

in terms of how or why they emerged. Using this initial analysis, I formulated questions for the follow-up interviews that further explored the meaning behind the data to search for other possible meanings.

Generalizability was an issue in this study. Patterns of intentionality among different contexts were limited (Horgan & Tienson, 2002). In other words, the extent of experience is unlimited and may differ significantly from person to person; therefore, the goal of this study was to discover possibilities. To grasp the essence of intentionality, the meaning units were written in phenomenological terms and then fused with the other units into a meaningful, holistic structure (Devenish, 2002). There are an endless number of possible intentional relationships in phenomenology, but each relationship must be understood in context (LeVasseur, 2003). Regardless, patterns did materialize. Accordingly, intentionality is not about objective truths. Truth is interconnected with perception and, thus, true to the beholder of that perception but perhaps faulty to outsiders. However, Sokolowski (2000) remarks, "If we do not have a world in common, then we do not enter into a life of reason, evidence, and truth" (p. 10). People may have different perceptions of experience that constitute their truth, but since people live in the same world together and share similar cultures and ideologies, similarities in perception will emerge. Giorgi (2008) also asserts that as long as descriptions are rich in detail, essences or generalizations will emerge. Themes that are uncovered during analysis are broad enough so that they include all or most of the participants' experiences in the study (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). While individual differences were analyzed, they were identified within the umbrella of larger themes, which showed the different manifestations of each theme (Hycner, 1985). Universality is what makes it possible to study phenomena.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation includes the overview of the current academic literature, a detailed outline of my food study on myself, the audit trail, the results, and my conclusions. They are organized as follows.

Chapter 2 is the review of the current academic literature. It includes current studies on overweight and obesity, as well as studies on food. The food studies expand across different academic disciplines in anthropology, public health, and psychology. The review addresses topics on food choice, the social interactions around food, and dietary practices among populations.

Chapter 3 is the methodology section. In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework of phenomenology used in the study. This theory is explained in detail, and I provide justifications about the appropriateness of this theory to this study. Furthermore, I discuss the implementation strategies of this method in this study, including data collection and analysis techniques. I also describe the characteristics of the study, such as participant sample, location, and interview structure.

Chapter 4 presents the results of my personal self-study on my own relationships with food. These data were generated through a series of self-interviews I conducted on myself. The purpose of this chapter is present my intentionality with the topic of food choice so that my readers can understand the perspective in which this study was analyzed. My discoveries about my own food relationships are made transparent here.

Chapter 5 is the audit trail for this study. This chapter is a detailed account of my research journal, the bridling process, and challenges I faced during the process of this research. The research journal outlines the emergence of major themes in the data analysis process, as well as

potential biased interferences in the study. I also discuss in detail the process of analysis that includes code creation, thematic grouping, and meaning unit selection. I describe the synthesis of the data and how themes were finalized. The codes are defined and justified in detailed sections.

Chapter 6 is the results section. I discuss the overall meaning of each theme to the phenomenon of food choices and its philosophical connection to interpretive phenomenological theory. I present selected quotations from participant interviews here to demonstrate the manifestations of the themes. I also summarize some participant accounts, as well. Relationships between the different participant accounts are made clear.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion. I discuss the general meaning of the themes that emerged in the data and the essences of the phenomenon of food choices. I present current academic literature that supports similar essences in behaviors choices, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior. I offer my conclusions and my suggestions for future research and for future health education practice. The limitations of the study are also presented in more detail.

CHAPTER 2

BEING-WITH-FOOD: THE IMPLICATIONS OF FOOD IN THE HEALTH, SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY

This chapter is the review of the literature on the current studies in obesity and food choices. It sets the context of the study by illustrating the recent findings about obesity and food so that I could determine the gaps in the literature that my study addressed. An overview of obesity in China and Chinese food culture is presented followed by the changes in Chinese food habits over the past several decades. The connection between China's economic growth and food habits is illustrated in addition to the economic impacts of weight-related diseases linked to these food changes. The relationship between food and family demonstrates how people interact with food as ways to bond with family members. Last, I present the current research on food choices and identify the gaps in these studies.

Obesity in China

The increase of obesity in China has led to an increase in weight-related diseases, particularly among urban populations. The overweight and obesity rate in mainland China rose from 14.6% in 1992 to 21.8% in 2002 (Gill, 2006). Data from the Chinese Health and Nutrition Survey (1989-2000) designated that overweight and obesity in urban Chinese men increased from 10.1% in 1989 to 32% in 2000, and the rates of rural men increased from 4.7% to 15.5% (Lee et al., 2008). As a result, approximately 22 million Chinese suffer from diabetes. There was a 40% increase in diabetes between 1996 and 2002 (Gill, 2006). Diabetes is increasing in the

Chinese at higher rates than European populations. Managing diabetes is dependent on dietary practices; however, individuals struggle to make dietary changes within the context of the overall food environment.

Popkin's (2001) nutrition transition theory concerns the economic and societal factors involved in overweight and obesity growth. It refers to the transition from societies of food scarcity to societies of cheap, abundant food supplies (Zhai et al., 2009). These environments are urbanized, and sedentary lifestyles are commonplace (Popkin, 2008). This transition results in higher levels of chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer (Zhai et al., 2009). As Chinese consumers became wealthier, they desired variety in their food choices (Du, Lu, Zhai, & Popkin, 2002; Grunert et al., 2011; Zhang, Dagevos, He, van der Lans, & Zhai, 2008). The 1979 Open Door policy resulted in a new market for both food imports and exports (Zhang et al., 2008). The change invoked an attitudinal shift from an "eat-to-live" perspective to a "live-to-eat" perspective (Zhang et al., 2008, p. 39). Consumers are now attracted to brand novelty and brand name when selecting products (Zhang et al., 2008) rather than purchasing food solely for consumption purposes (Ma, Huang, Fuller, & Rozelle, 2006). Consequently, China now has the dichotomy of undernutrition and overnutrition (Zhang et al., 2008). Furthermore, changes in employment in urban cities negatively impacted the physical activity level of people. Unlike more laborious occupations in the past, urban development established sedentary occupations through service sector work (Hawks, et al., 2004; James, 2008; Popkin, 2001).

The Chinese have mixed views on weight status. Past Chinese perceptions about weight differ from current Western standards. Luo et al. (2005) state, "Some studies suggest that in places such as China, Korea, Japan and the Philippines, thinness was traditionally seen as a sign

of malnutrition, poverty and infectious disease, while increased weight signaled health, wealth and prosperity" (p. 333). A larger body mass was associated with fertility, as well (Xie et al., 2003; Xie et al., 2006). In classical Chinese art, most feminine images depicted plump women (Marsh et al., 2007). In China today, larger figures are still considered preferable in rural communities where these beliefs remain prevalent (Marsh et al., 2007). However, thinness is preferred in urban areas among women. In a study on Chinese adolescents, girls were more prone to body dissatisfaction, and they were more likely to engage in unhealthy dieting behaviors than boys (Fan et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, weight loss programs are popular in China. Many programs target students in schools and show positive results in both increased nutrition and physical activity levels; however, these interventions have not been implemented on a nationwide scale (Yanping et al., 2010). Three intervention practices are common in schools: nutrition education, physical activity intervention, and comprehensive intervention. Most nutrition interventions focus only on choosing healthy foods rather than reducing the consumption of unhealthy foods (McVittie, Hepworth, & Schilling, 2008). The Chinese Center for Disease Control or Chinese CDC created a nutrition handbook to use in nutritional programs in schools. The material is shared with parents, teachers, students, and health workers in the school (Yanping et al., 2010).

The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education in China in association with the World Health Organization (WHO) established Health Promoting Schools (HPS). In this program, health officials, teachers, students, parents, and community leaders collaborate to make the schools' environment, policies, and routine conducive to health (Shi-Chang et al., 2004). The goals of HPS entail emphasizing personal health habits, improving the school and social environment, and establishing relationships with community members (Lee, St Leger, & Cheng,

2007). Evaluations suggest that HPS improves nutritional knowledge (Shi-Chang et al., 2004). Nonetheless, results are limited to increases in health knowledge versus actual behavioral changes.

In Jiang et al. (2007), a three-year obesity intervention was implemented in six urban school districts in Beijing. This program focused on not only reducing the prevalence of obesity but also the incidence of new cases. Lectures were conducted on the following topics: the health effects of obesity, the food pyramid, physical activity recommendations, and the health effects of sedentary activity and poor dietary habits. A textbook on childhood obesity was used in the classrooms, and overweight/obese children and their parents received additional instruction and interventions. As a result, the prevalence of overweight was reduced by 26.3%, and the prevalence of obesity was reduced by 32.5% whereas rates increased in control schools. However, there is no evidence that these gains were maintained in the long-term. Additional follow-up studies are needed to determine if this intervention had long-lasting effects.

Diabetes management programs are rather intrusive on familial customs and cultural eating habits (Chesla, Chun, & Kwan, 2009). In many cases, cultural food staples are eliminated in dietary guidelines. Such dietary change is challenging for people, especially during family activities involving food. Enjoying experiences, such as dining out with family and friends, becomes taxing due to the need to exercise dietary precautions (Chesla, Chun, & Kwan, 2009). For the Chinese, this process usually necessitates limiting or even eliminating white rice consumption, the mainstay in the Chinese diet. This restriction is cumbersome for the Chinese because they believe that rice is essential for vitality and health. Therefore, many dietary guidelines often conflict with cultural beliefs and values.

The Role of Food in Chinese Culture

For a long time, anthropologists have studied the connections between food consumption patterns and culture (Ing, 2011). Food is imbedded in culture on local, national, and global levels. Food is a sign of prestige and socioeconomic status. The Chinese Malaysian saying, "We Chinese eat a lot," refers to the belief that overconsumption is a sign of wealth (Ing, 2011). Restaurants are prominent, and dining out is common, especially among higher income households (Ma, Huang, Fuller, & Rozelle, 2006). Both Western and Chinese fast-food is now a cultural mainstay with 280,000 fast-food restaurants in China, and fast-food patrons consume fast-food at least one to three times weekly (Wang, Shi, Gu, & Du, 2011).

Food differentiates people from others according to culture, gender, marital status, and religious affiliation (Linden & Nyberg, 2009; Wills, Backett-Milburn, Roberts, & Lawton, 2011). Using food to make a distinction from others is considered a kind of "othering" (Mkono, 2011, p. 254). Consuming certain foods is a way of being part of a group. Likewise, rejecting certain foods or behaviors as taboo is a way to mark other food practices as different from oneself. Through this process, people are able to create both a sense of belonging and difference among others in society. Furthermore, age is a factor in consumption. For example, fast-food consumption is highly popular among people ages 14-35 (Wang, Shi, Gu, & Du, 2011). Food is a form of cultural expression that defines a place and a people and attracts people to visit certain locations for certain cuisine (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010).

Older generations in China prefer traditional foods. As a result, the younger generation is the main consumers of fast food (Anderson & He, 1999). Fast food consumption has established a new social identity for the younger population as they have moved away from old traditions (Murcott, 1982). Nowadays, eating at a McDonald's in Beijing is standard when touring the city.

McDonald's are popular places for parents to take their children, and the Western fast food industry targets young consumers with working parents (Watson, 2000). Typically more concerned with convenience, younger workers report eating significant amounts of fast food or processed food at work (Devine, Connors, Sobal, & Bisogni, 2003). However, grandparents also frequent fast food restaurants for their grandchildren whom they wish to indulge (Wang, Shi, Gu, & Du, 2011).

Fast food induced many cultural changes in China. McDonald's introduced the concept of the birthday party for children, a practice that was previously uncommon. Clean restrooms were rare in most local restaurants, but McDonald's changed consumers' expectations for restaurant cleanliness causing many local restaurants to raise their hygiene standards (Watson, 2006). The United States trademark of the drive-through further revolutionized China. The automobile industry in China expanded, creating a larger market for fast food restaurants. Sinopec, China's largest gasoline company, now contains drive-through McDonald's restaurants at many of its locations. Other local fast food diners infiltrated the drive-through market with items such as Kung Pao chicken, dumplings, and noodles (Liu, 2007).

Despite these changes, most food decisions are based on cultural traditions rather than nutritional content (Mintz, & Du Bois, 2002; Murcott, 1982). For instance, some foods are believed to serve special functions. In Chinese culture, eating animal organs is popular because they are believed to improve the health of the corresponding human organ (Koo, 1984). Chinese food philosophy is abundant with symbolism that changes according to region (Grunert et al., 2011). Food tourism is popular (Grunert et al., 2011). Nevertheless, while local cuisines attract tourists, if the food differs too much from the tourists' personal cultural standards, the food can

discourage travel (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010). Thus, food choices are based on the intermingling of various food cultures on local and global levels.

Cultural and national identities project certain expectations for behavior among their members (Strachan & Brawley, 2009). Culture defines appropriate foods and appropriate ways of eating, which encompass flavors, cooking methods, and food staples (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010). In this sense, food is a way of assimilating into society. At the same time, individual identities emerge within these social structures, such as subcultures like health nuts (Strachan & Brawley, 2009). While people use food to assimilate, they also use food to project a sense of individualism.

Typically, Chinese food culture is centered on a staple, such as rice or noodles, served with various vegetables and meats, but the chosen starch is the foundation of the meal. Popular flavors include soy sauce, rice wine, and ginger (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010). The abundance of different ingredients makes preparation challenging, leaving less time for sanitation measures. Therefore, Chinese restaurant patrons focus more on taste versus cleanliness (Liu & Lin, 2009). Food purchases account for up to 40% of disposable income with little difference in this percentage among income levels (Cheong, Kim, & Zheng, 2010). Food advertising is also specific to culture. Cheong, Kim, and Zheng (2010) indicated that Chinese food commercials appeal to personal values of family and health.

There are about eight different cultural cuisines in China based on region (Liu & Lin, 2009). When experimenting with new foods, people from different cultures vary. Some studies imply that Westerners are more likely to try new foods when traveling than Asian populations (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010). Trying local foods is a way to interact with other cultures; likewise, traveling and consuming foreign foods are also a sign of prestige in many cultures

(Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010). Food neophobia refers to people who avoid consuming new foods whereas food neophilic people constantly seek new food experiences (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010). Familiarity is important to many consumers. Even if people try new foods while traveling, they are likely to choose familiar foods (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010). Furthermore, when people immigrate, maintaining food traditions is a form of "ethnic resilience" (Liu & Lin, 2009, p. 150). In my pilot study on the food choices among Chinese immigrants in Georgia, participants asserted that they purchased most of their foods from Chinese markets and rarely shopped at local supermarkets. They prepared most of their meals at home. Even though they lived in a new country, they maintained their traditional diet. Food habits are unlikely to change even as food environments change. To continue their food traditions, Chinese immigrants have established many traditional Chinese restaurants in various communities or Chinatowns around the United States (Liu & Lin, 2009). Chinese restaurants were one of the first kind of businesses established by Chinese immigrants (Liu & Lin, 2009).

The Relationship between Food and Economics

The expansion of the Chinese economy significantly affected both food practices and food-related illnesses, such as overweight and obesity. Similar to Western nations, the modern Chinese food market contributes to the obesogenic environment, an environment that promotes excess calorie and fat consumption. Convenience foods and Western-style products are prevalent forces in China today (Zhang et al., 2008). Consumption of traditional Chinese staples, such as cereals, maize, sorghum, vegetables, and millet, decreased in the past three decades whereas the consumption of meat, dairy, and eggs increased threefold (Du, Lu, Zhai, & Popkin, 2002; Zhang et al., 2008). Although dramatic changes occurred in urban areas, edible oil and fish consumption also increased in rural areas (Du, Lu, Zhai, & Popkin, 2002; Zhang et al., 2008). While not as

dramatic as dietary changes among the upper classes, diets among the lower classes similarly changed (Du, Lu, Zhai, & Popkin, 2002). The Chinese adopted Western-style cuisine because it is fashionable. Consuming new foods abroad is a status symbol because only people with a degree of wealth travel abroad (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010).

Traditionally, the Chinese preferred fresh food, such as purchasing fresh produce and choosing their own animals for slaughter (Ann Veeck & Burns, 2005; Grunert et al., 2011). Nevertheless, refrigerators have made presliced fruits and vegetables and packaged foods attractive for consumers with busy lifestyles (Ann Veeck & Burns, 2005; Grunert et al., 2011). Those consumers loyal to tradition still prefer fresh food (Grunert et al., 2011). Traditional values for fresh food are still stronger than the desire for convenience foods (Ann Veeck & Burns, 2005), but food values are changing. Snacking also increased in China. A snack includes any food consumed that is not a part of standard meals, and snacking increased significantly in children in higher income households (Wang, Zhai, Du, & Popkin, 2008). Fried food has always been popular in China; nonetheless, frying is now the main cooking method (Wang, Zhai, Du, & Popkin, 2008).

Western-style food markets infiltrated Asia, increasing food availability. Supermarkets increased substantially. Traditional staples are now used to make pastries, cakes, and bread, and potatoes are used to make French fries and potato chips. Potato consumption increased from 7.5% in 1961 to 28.2% in 1995-1997 among Chinese consumers (Pingali, 2004). Rice consumption changed. Consumers now have many varieties of rice whereas in the past, they purchased government, generic rice (Gale, 2003). Most importantly, many Chinese homes now have refrigerators. In 2007, there were 26.12 refrigerators per 100 rural households and 95.03 per 100 urban households. As a result, Chinese consumers purchase frozen food products (Stones,

2009). Global trade allows people to eat foods from countries all over the world. As societies become wealthier, food indulgence follows suit (Saint-Paul, 2010), and the success of society becomes "signified by food" (Barthes, 1997, p. 23).

The expansion of the economy caused changes in the workforce that impacted food behaviors. Adults with more sedentary occupations are more likely to be overweight or obese, for occupational activity and domestic activity decreased significantly. Work schedules usually designate eating times (Larson & Story, 2009). Consequently, many employees prefer quick, easy meals that can be consumed at their desks (Raulio, Roos, & Prattala, 2010). Policies and workplace culture also impact food intake (Larson & Story, 2009) with some work cultures averse to lunch breaks (Pridgeon, 2009). Work schedules determine whether or not employees eat at home with their families in addition to the types of meals they have time to prepare at home (Linden & Nyberg, 2009). Employees with little time are likely to prepare less nutritional meals at home to compensate for hectic schedules (Devine et al., 2006).

Obesity has significant economic impacts. Obesity is believed to induce many healthcare and societal costs. Obese patients visit doctors more frequently and often need referrals to specialists, drugs, and other treatments (Haslam, Sattar, & Lean, 2006). Other costs include obesity-related diseases, disability, and nursing home care (Kim & Popkin, 2005). However, some critics believe that these costs are offset when obese people's lifespan is decreased (van Baal et al., 2008), which prevents them from requiring health services in old age. Additional societal consequences include loss of quality of life and less productivity at work (Gill, 2006).

Socioeconomic status is "the structural, economic or cultural components which lead to the unequal or 'unnatural' divisions and dispositions that exist within society" (Wills, Backett-Milburn, Roberts, & Lawton, 2011, p. 726). Socioeconomic status affects food habits differently

among different socioeconomic groups. Obesity initially afflicts wealthier people, but as countries become wealthier, obesity spreads to lower income groups because food prices decrease (Wu, Huxley, Li, & Ma, 2009). Wages dictate food choices because of affordability, and time is also a factor when people lack adequate time for meals because of work obligations (Devine, Connors, Sobal, & Bisogni, 2003). Cheaper, quicker foods are more likely to be processed.

People with higher socioeconomic status use food to distinguish themselves from those with lower status (Ing, 2011). For example, expensive foods, such as caviar, are considered high class cuisine and are unaffordable for many consumers. Likewise, wealthier people have the luxury of engaging in more culturally diverse food experiences, which can "increase their position of otherness from those who cannot access foreign cultures through food, eating out or travel" (Wills, Backett-Milburn, Roberts, & Lawton, 2011). Similarly, Chinese consumers choose their wine based on its implication of social sophistication and status (Somogyi, 2011). Dining in restaurants frequently is a sign of luxury. Furthermore, wealthier families exert more control over their children's diets than lower income families because wealthier families believe that food variety is a form of cultural capital (Wills, Backett-Milburn, Roberts, & Lawton, 2011). Higher socioeconomic status in China is associated with an increase in high fat foods, Western style foods, and dairy consumption (Vlismas, Stavrinos, & Panagiotakos, 2009).

Food as Being-in-the-Family

Particular foods are eaten in different contexts. For example, formal meals are consumed in the company of family and close friends (Douglas, 1997; Ing, 2011). The Chinese emphasize food that is safe and nutritious; thus, food served in the home differs from food eaten at special events, in restaurants, or during social activities (Ann Veeck & Burns, 2005). Processed foods

are commonly used as treats for children in the home, in the school, and in social settings (Ann Veeck & Burns, 2005) rather than as the main course.

Parents govern the food practices of the family, and children adopt these same behaviors as adults (Wong, 2010). Having at least one overweight or obese parent is strongly associated with increased weight in children (Jiang et al., 2006; Wang, Zhai, Du, & Popkin, 2008). If one parent is overweight and the other is not, the overweight parent is more likely to dominate the eating behaviors of the whole family (Wong, 2010) than the other parent. Likewise, mothers usually are the primary caregivers in China, and they control children's eating behaviors more than the fathers (Wang, Zhai, Du, & Popkin, 2008). Furthermore, in-laws and grandparents (and parents in some cases) use food as a form of affection (Jiang et al., 2005; Wong, 2010). If the relationship between the overweight or obese parent and the child is intimate, the child is more likely to be overweight because they use food as a bonding mechanism (Wong, 2010). Other factors that increase obesity risk in children include the following: low maternal education, television use, and the mother's attempts to restrict snacking (Jiang et al., 2006) that increases overindulgence when the child attains snacks.

In one study of adolescents in Beijing, adolescents were more likely to engage in healthy behaviors when they witnessed family and friends practicing healthy behaviors (Turbin et al., 2006). Modeling healthy behaviors is effective in influencing change or simply promoting healthy behaviors. Many people believe that the One-Child Policy increased childhood obesity. With only one child, parents and grandparents overindulge children. Nevertheless, studies are inconclusive (Yang, 2007).

Moreover, parents do not always perceive their children as being overweight and, thus, continue to overfeed them (Jiang et al., 2007). Some grandparents who experienced the 1950s

famine overfeed their grandchildren because they do not want the children to experience deprivation (Jingxiong et al., 2007). Poor eating habits among children are evident when they begin school. A study of students in Hong Kong indicated that a majority of students do not eat five servings of fruits and vegetables daily or meet the physical activity requirements under the Hong Kong government's guidelines (Lee, St Leger, & Cheng, 2007).

Control theory posits that "stronger social bonds between parents and children increase the likelihood that children internalize values and norms about weight promoted by their parents" (Crossman, Sullivan, & Benin, 2006, p. 2258). The stronger the bond between children and parents, the more the parents influence the children about weight perceptions because stronger relationships often entail engaging in the same behaviors together. For instance, if parents endorse an obese lifestyle, children are more likely to accept this lifestyle. The parental modeling theory claims that parents influence their children's health behaviors through their own behavior. Parents who engage in healthy eating behaviors are more likely to have their children mimic these same practices (Anzman, Rollins, & Birch, 2010; Crossman, Sullivan, & Benin, 2006). More importantly, if parents are overweight or obese, they are more likely to purchase unhealthy foods, creating an obesogenic food environment for their children (Anzman, Rollins, & Birch, 2010; Crossman, Sullivan, & Birch, 2006). This theory highlights the essential link between people and their family in health behaviors, extending obesity beyond an individual responsibility perspective.

Familial decisions determine the degree in which new foods are incorporated into the family members' diets. This pattern is particularly strong among immigrant families adjusting to a foreign culture (Gruber & Haldeman, 2009). Repeated exposure to certain foods causes children to develop a taste for those flavors, and repeated exposure is imperative for children to

adopt these tastes permanently (Anzman, Rollins, & Birch, 2010). Exposure to a variety of foods early in childhood is ideal. Children develop food preferences as early as the prenatal period (Anzman, Rollins, & Birch, 2010). Nevertheless, if parents are too controlling over their children's diets, children may use food to rebel. Overprotective parents have more overweight children than less restrictive parents (Crossman, Sullivan, & Benin, 2006). Parents also significantly influence their children's physical activity patterns by exposing them to various forms of activity (Gruber & Haldeman, 2009). Many nutrition interventions in schools do not involve parents; therefore, changes may occur at school, but not within the home environment, making permanent changes unlikely (McVittie, Hepworth, & Schilling, 2008).

The prenatal period is essential to the development of food preferences. If mothers are undernourished during pregnancy, it increases their children's likelihood of becoming overweight or obese in adulthood because the fetus learns to store energy as much as possible for survival, resulting in a slower metabolism. If nutrition and food intake increase later, the metabolism remains slow, which increases the likelihood of overweight or obesity. Likewise, mothers who eat unhealthy foods during pregnancy increase their children's overweight or obesity risk because children develop taste preferences for these foods (Anzman, Rollins, & Birch, 2010). Moreover, parents who serve larger portion sizes to children encourage overeating (Anzman, Rollins, & Birch, 2010). Outside of the home environment, children and adolescents may modify food behaviors to a degree because they are free to make independent choices. They may consume different foods as a form of rebellion against the restrictions in their homes (Chitakunye & Maclaran, 2008) or simply indulge in foods they now have the power to purchase for themselves. Because of these strong parental influences, parental support in any health promotion efforts at schools is essential. In one study, when parents were unsupportive in their

children's weight loss efforts, children were significantly more likely not to complete the program (Braet et al., 2010). If at least one parent is involved in children's weight loss goals, children are more likely to change unhealthy behaviors (Gruber & Haldeman, 2009).

Similarly, spouses affect food choices in the family. Bove, Sobal, and Rauschenbach (2003) studied the interactions of diets among spouses and cohabitants. Participants reported bonding through shared food experiences. Couples reported sharing their food identities at different times. Some revealed their food preferences in the beginning of the relationship while others concealed them in order to appease the other. Some couples insisted on food compatibility in selecting a mate. Once couples started living together, they wanted to consume foods the other enjoyed. Food conflicts occurred if couples had significant differences in food preferences.

Married couples influence one another's weight and weight loss efforts. Many married couples gain weight after marriage, and spouses often have similar weights (Gorin et al., 2008). If one spouse becomes obese, the other spouse is 37% more likely to become obese (Christakis and Fowler, 2007). In some instances, women consumed more meat after marrying while men consumed less meat (Bove, Sobal, & Rauschenbach, 2003) as they adapted to the taste preferences of the other. If one spouse takes part in a weight loss program, the newly acquired behaviors may influence the other spouse (Bove, Sobal, & Rauschenbach, 2003; Golan Schwarzfuchs, Stampfer, & Shai, 2009). If one spouse begins exercising and eating healthier, the other spouse is likely to follow suit (Golan Schwarzfuchs, Stampfer, & Shai, 2009; Gorin et al., 2008). Having support from others is a factor in weight loss success (Golan, Schwarzfuchs, Stampfer, & Shai, 2009), but spousal support is more influential in weight loss success than other forms of social support (Canetti, Berry, & Elizur, 2009).

Therefore, health-related programs that focus solely on the individual and do not acknowledge family dynamics are more likely to fail (Gruber & Haldeman, 2009). Programs that focus on interventions for the entire family are more effective because of increased "emotional support, encouragement, reinforcement from other family members, and family member participation" (Gruber & Haldeman, 2009). Such programs create a reinforcing atmosphere for transitioning to healthier behaviors for each family member. Having support from family and friends affects the weight loss of people who participate in programs that require a great deal of self-discipline (Canetti, Berry, & Elizur, 2009) in order to change. Social support includes "emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support," and social support comes primarily from family members, friends, colleagues, and communities (Verheijden, Bakx, van Weel, Koelen, & van Staveren, 2005, p. S179). Health workers are not considered as effective in providing social support because their relationships with people are less personal (Verheijden, Bakx, van Weel, Koelen, & van Staveren, 2005).

Previous Food Choice Studies

There are many studies about food choice using different methodologies and theoretical approaches. French, Story, Neumark-Sztainer, Fulkerson, and Hannan (2001) examined adolescents' fast food consumption in the United States. Their study revealed that more males ate fast food than females, and males consumed more fast food weekly after entering high school than in middle school. Lower socioeconomic status females reported a higher frequency of dining out in fast food restaurants than their higher socioeconomic status counterparts, but socioeconomic status did not influence male consumption. Adolescents who worked up to ten hours weekly ate fast food more frequently than those who were unemployed. Similarly, Neumark-Sztainer and Perry (1999) report that adolescents conveyed the following reasons for

eating fast food: taste cravings and preferences, convenience in food preparation and accessibility, and external influences from parents, religion, health knowledge, and other situational factors. Fewer mentioned factors included body image, mood, habit, cost, and specific dietary requirements, such as a vegetarian diet. Parents were the primary influence in the development of food choice habits.

Most food is consumed at home. Home foods are foods bought at supermarkets, and then prepared at home, and food away from home consists of food purchased from restaurants, schools, and vending machines (French, 2003). Consuming food in restaurants is usually viewed as a fun, social experience (McVittie, Hepworth, & Schilling, 2008). In China, it is typical for other people to pay for meals, such as friends or employers, which increases the frequency of dining out (Bai, Wahl, Lohmar, & Huang, 2010) because it controls personal costs. All of these daily food choices are based on previous experiences with food, emotions connected with the foods, and "the changing temporal, social, and historical contexts" of people's lives (Devine, 2005, p. 121). In public situations, people adapt their food habits according to those people around them. McFerran, Dahl, FitzSimons, and Morales (2009) report that when participants witnessed an obese person consuming or purchasing large amounts of food, they ordered less food, but when they witnessed a normal weight person ordering large amounts of food, they ordered more food. Fears of weight gain affect food choice.

There are many studies on food cravings; however, most studies focus on disordered eating or specific populations (Weingarten & Elston, 1991). Food cravings refer to "an intense desire or urge to eat a specific food" (Kemps & Tiggeman, 2010, p. 86). However, consumed foods are not always craved, and cravings do not necessarily lead to consumption (Weingarten & Elston, 1991). Consequently, studying food cravings offers only a limited perspective on food

choices. One of the most cited studies is Weingarten and Elston's (1990) study on food cravings. Their study analyzes appropriate definitions and measurements of food cravings and is primarily descriptive in nature. A phenomenological study focused on people's experiences of food cravings, but this study emphasized the triggers of food cravings only (Tiggemann & Kemps, 2005). Hill, Weaver, and Blundell (1991) illustrated that food cravings are associated with mood, hunger, and the presence of the specific foods that invoke cravings. Some people believe that food cravings are associated with natural nutrient needs, but people crave foods regardless of their nutrient content (Weingarten & Elston, 1991). For instance, some people crave potato chips even though pretzels are similar in structure, which means cravings are rather food specific. Although cravings are induced through the presence of a food, mental images of craved foods produce a majority of cravings (Kemps & Tiggeman, 2010).

Additionally, food cravings affect cognitive function. Kemps and Tiggeman (2010) tested participants' cognitive performance on a computer in the presence of chocolate. Compared to the control group, these participants demonstrated slower reaction times, less ability to recall information, and slower mathematical computation skills. These differences were minor, but food may distract people from everyday tasks. Furthermore, packaging affects food choice. If foods are sold in large packages or restaurants serve large portions, then people are likely to consume more food (French, 2003). Food choices are made consciously but are also "automatic, habitual, and subconscious" (Furst et al., 1996) through the influences of food presence and appearance.

Additionally, personal values are expressed through food purchasing and food consumption (Grunert et al., 2011). Taste, purchase value, and nutrition are key factors (French, 2003; Furst, Connors, Bisogni, Sobal, & Falk, 1996). Self-efficacy concerns people's personal

judgments about their abilities to cope in particular situations (Clark, Abrams, & Niaura, 1991). The concept of self is pertinent in issues on behavioral choices: "The self is the 'psychological apparatus that allows organisms to think consciously about themselves'" (Strachan & Brawley, 2009). For example, the role of a mother conveys a responsibility toward ensuring the health of her children. A mother who is too busy to prepare healthy food for her children may feel inadequate as a mother. Working parents often complain about exhaustion and time constraints that interfere with cooking meals for their families (Devine et al., 2006). However, Williams, Thornton, and Crawford (2012) report that women who had high self-efficacy in making healthy food choices did not see time and money as barriers to food choices. More importantly, most people are not educated about food, which affects their self-efficacy and personal values in food choices. They accept popular information without evaluating the different views in the fields of food and nutrition (Rozin, 2005). The public understanding of healthy and unhealthy food is limited (Strachan & Brawley, 2009). Also, costs are a significant issue in food choice (Furst et al., 1996). French (2003) showed that, when the prices of low fat snacks decreased, sales of these products increased significantly. When the price was reduced by 50%, sales increased 93%. Nonetheless, value is important, as well. Consumers must think that the food is of good quality (Furst et al., 1996) if they purchase it.

Other researchers use a constructionist approach to study food choices. In this approach, food choices are analyzed "by incorporating the meanings and understandings that they [people] create in their food choice negotiations, including elicitation of the range and strength of the factors affecting food choice" (Furst et al., 1996, p. 248). In this approach, people formulate their own meaning in food situations; thus, influential factors may differ from person to person. Similarly, economic theory is used. According to this theory, the household is compared to a

factory that "produces basic goods (meals and entertainment) through a combination of market goods and services (food ingredients), resources (cooking equipment and skills), and time (shopping and food preparation)" (Jab & Devine, 2006, p. 1999). In this sense, the home produces eating structures based on the family's economic status that are maintained throughout adulthood. People, in this sense, are acculturated into food behaviors.

Health claims, especially when listed on product packages, influence choice to an extent. In Kozup, Creyer, and Burton (2003), participants did not rely solely on health claim labels but examined the nutritional information of the product label to ensure that the ingredients corresponded with the claims. Otherwise, they did not trust the product. On the other hand, if the products were unhealthy foods with health claim labels, then nutritional information did not matter. They were more likely to purchase the food. Hence, nutritional information was more influential when consumers were attempting to make a healthy choice, but the health claims were used to justify their unhealthy decisions. Many people are overwhelmed and confused with the plethora of health information, and the media limits food to being either good or bad (Frewer, Scholderer, & Lambert, 2003). This categorization conveys the idea that people must completely eliminate certain foods that are considered bad from their diets. It does not accentuate a balance in eating habits. Pressure to eliminate or even demonize certain foods discourages people who have strong affinities for these foods.

People are less likely to change food choices if consequences are not immediate. However, many diet-related health effects take years to manifest (Frewer, Scholderer, & Lambert, 2003). For instance, obesity, heart disease, and diabetes develop gradually, so the consequences are not immediate. As a result, people underestimate potential health effects if they are not an immediate threat. Another issue is optimistic bias in which people believe that they are

at less risk of ailments than other people (Frewer, Scholderer, & Lambert, 2003). Making healthy food choices depends on the following factors: "High self-efficacy for healthy eating, taste preferences for fruit and vegetables, family support for healthy eating and the absence of perceived barriers to healthy eating (time and cost)" (Williams, Thornton, & Crawford, 2012). To many people, healthy eating means deprivation of loved foods, making food experiences less enjoyable (McVittie, Hepworth, & Schilling, 2008). Altogether, some people believe that their health is beyond their control; thus, they refuse to worry about controlling their food habits (Frewer, Scholderer, & Lambert, 2003).

There are many studies on the impact of functional foods on food purchasing decisions. Functional foods are foods that are enhanced with nutrients to serve a particular function. For example, many foods have added fiber, calcium, or Omega 3 (Urala & Lahteenmaki, 2003), and these foods are usually consumed to prevent disease (Frewer, Scholderer, & Lambert, 2003). In one study, participants chose functional foods for digestive health purposes, but they were also drawn to aspects like price, package size, and familiarity with the product itself. Choosing functional foods made consumers believe that they were making healthy choices (Urala & Lahteenmaki, 2003), which was rated more positively when they liked the products' taste. In other words, they did not want to sacrifice taste for health benefits (Urala & Lahteenmaki, 2003).

Many researchers use the life course to study food choice because many food habits change in reaction to social, cultural, and physical changes in people's personal experience. This approach also includes historical and future influences because people alter their diets in response to past or future expectations (Furst et al., 1996). Life course study is concerned with contextual food choices (Devine, 2005). The life course model is an effective method for analyzing the relationship between societal changes and food choice and the ways that societal

change increases time constraints for healthy behaviors (Jab & Devine, 2006). For example, long working hours affect the time needed to cook homemade meals. Likewise, past experiences are highly influential. The past involves holidays, rituals, and everyday habits in addition to experiences with new foods, which establish the foundation for people's openness to foods (Furst et al., 1996). Experiences with fruits and vegetables in childhood significantly influence fruit and vegetable intake in adults (Devine, Connors, Bisogni, & Sobal, 1998). The life course consists of the following elements: "(1) food upbringing, (2) roles and role transitions, (3) health, (4) ethnic traditions, (5) resources, (6) location, and (7) the food system" (Devine, Connors, Bisogni, & Sobal, 1998, p. 363). Additionally, people's food choices change slightly with time (Devine, 2005). For example, food choices in adulthood may differ from childhood, or food choices may change based on major life events, such as divorce, health diagnoses, pregnancy, and so forth. Nevertheless, most events have minimal effects on overall diet patterns (Devine, 2005).

Furst et al. (1996) report participants' discussions of their food-related ideals. Ideals referred to their perceptions of good eating practices, such eating dinner with the family. Ideals also related to healthy food choices and personal standards for food behaviors. People set their standards based on taste preferences, emotions, and the importance food has in their lives. Aspects like job demands, entertaining friends and family, and other tasks clashed with their abilities to achieve these ideals and boundaries at times. Cultural standards influenced many food ideals. These standards determine the popularity of foods and food preparation methods (Devine, Connors, Bisogni, & Sobal, 1998).

Availability in terms of both physical presence and time is a major component in food choice. Environments determine which foods are available and their prices (Furst et al., 1996), and when people migrate or immigrate to new locations, exposure to these new environments

influence changes in food choices (Devine, 2005). Furthermore, location affects food choice if language barriers are involved. People do not know how to ask for certain foods, or merchants are unfamiliar with particular ethnic foods (Devine, Connors, Bisogni, & Sobal, 1998). Time constraints interfere with food behaviors, especially in homes with two parents working, and time constraints influence lower income households more profoundly because they have fewer time-saving resources (Jab & Devine, 2006). In some cases, people avoid certain foods because they do not know how to prepare them (Devine, Connors, Bisogni, & Sobal, 1998). Time is perceived as a barrier to healthy eating practices. Nutritional education may focus too much on nutritional knowledge and too little on methods to incorporate healthy eating into busy lifestyles (Jab & Devine, 2006).

Similar to the life course construct, food trajectories concern the development of food choices over long periods of time. Food choice trajectories refer to "a person's 'persistent thoughts, feelings, strategies, and actions with food and eating developed over the life course' in a social and historical context" (Devine, 2005, p. 122). There are three aspects of food choice trajectories. Foremost, food choice trajectories are mostly stable undergoing few drastic changes for most people. Also, food trajectories are based on feelings, strategies, and actions. Last, they are cumulative in nature because food choices develop over time through various food experiences (Devine, 2005).

Many people make food choices to appease others (Furst et al., 1996). For instance, people choose convenient meals to attend to other responsibilities, such as work or familial duties (Jab & Devine, 2006). The degree to which families value healthy eating habits affects food choice. If diagnosed with a disease, such as diabetes, people may follow doctors' advice to change their diets. In this case, people may feel pressured to change because it means eliminating

some of their endeared foods (Devine, Connors, Bisogni, & Sobal, 1998). The desire to follow the food guidelines of others produces an internal conflict within people's food attachments. For example, in James's (2004) study on the food choices of African Americans, participants expressed a strong connection to their food heritage, known as soul food. These foods helped them connect to their cultural roots; however, these diets were considered unhealthy. More importantly, body image was a focus in the study in which female participants did not want to be thin "'like white women'" (p. 356). Therefore, food is a way of both distinguishing oneself from the Other in terms of taste and weight while also maintaining social connections to specific groups of people.

Summary

There are several gaps in the literature that my study has addressed. Foremost, previous studies on food choices have not been phenomenological. They included semistructured interviews, and such methods are less open in exploring broader meanings. Phenomenology approaches the topic without any premade interview questions or theories. The main objective of phenomenology is to uncover new, unintended meanings and to allow these meanings to emerge naturally without influence from the researcher or theories. Additionally, the previous phenomenological studies focused on food cravings. Food choices extend well beyond the scope of food cravings because not all foods consumed are craved. Many people choose foods every day habitually in the natural attitude. More importantly, while many obesity-focused studies do involve nutritional interventions, they do not include cultural or societal components that guide personal behaviors. They prescribe more generalized interventions. Ignoring contextual differences limit results.

CHAPTER 3

FOOD AS A WAY OF BEING-IN-THE-WORLD:

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework, study design, and methods used in my study. The various theories and methods of different phenomenological approaches are explained in order to clarify my decisions in choosing interpretive phenomenology rather than other approaches. A detailed description of the study design is presented that addresses the location, participant selection, and data collection procedures. Last, I discuss my analysis procedures in terms of design, process, validity, and reliability.

The Phenomenological Framework

This research concerned the intentional relationships people have with food, affecting their food choices. Food choice in this study included eating behaviors, eating frequencies, cooking methods, food selections, food beliefs, food portions, and the settings in which food is consumed. This study applied the interpretive (Heideggerian), phenomenological framework to analyze food choices in middle class, Chinese adults in Beijing. Interpretive phenomenology was chosen because food embodies a plethora of cultural, social, emotional, economic, and psychological meanings that are contextual. Most of these meanings are hidden in the natural attitude of everyday life where people take them for granted, and intentionality is situated in these hidden meanings. Heideggerian phenomenology examines people's intentional relationships to objects and the ways this intentionality guides their interactions with others and their place in society (their sense of being).

Intentionality assumes that "consciousness is always consciousness of something" (Barnes, 2003). Analyzing intentionality reveals the underlying meanings of the phenomenon itself (De Castro, 2003) that are often overlooked in everyday living or in the natural attitude. People use their bodies and their minds to experience objects, and their thinking constitutes the uniformity of object and subject (Barnes, 2003; McNamara, 2005). In other words, people's experiences create the perspective that defines an object; therefore, objects are always relative, producing different meanings to different people. Idhe (1986) postulates, "Intentionality is the directional shape of experience" (p. 41). Accordingly, intentionality involves all lived experiences of an individual (Giorgi, 1997), for people are always beings-in-the-world in their own personal contexts (McNamara, 2005). For example, many people's experience with cake consists of celebrations, birthdays, and holidays. Contrastingly, most people do not have specific memories of fruit. Fruit may not invoke these same happy feelings since it is not a common celebration food in Western culture. This example illustrates an intentional relationship with cake. Even though intentionality is relative, intentional relationships construct truths: "…the cognition of reality and the cognition of causality are inseparably one…It is something *fundamentally relative,* which demands its corresponding members, and only in this connection of member and corresponding member is each a "*substance*" of real properties" (Husserl, 1980, p. 3). People's intentional relationships create concrete definitions of objects. This relative reality becomes true as other people concur on these definitions in society.

Gadamer proposes two aspects of intentionality: prejudgment and universality. All prejudgments make understanding possible (Dowling, 2007) because prior knowledge allows people to initiate engagement with an object. Even if the object is completely new to them, people's previous experiences cause them to produce judgments about the object. For instance, if

a food is new, people make judgments about that food based on its color, its origin, and its smell. Likewise, there is always a degree of commonality among human experience that aids in understanding, as well. People's thinking is ingrained in their cultural, economic, national, and individual contexts (Dowling, 2007) that produce universal meanings of objects across various spectra.

Intentionality is part of the natural attitude, and the everydayness of experience is often unanalyzed (LeVasseur, 2003). Intentional objects have a "horizon of meanings" that relate to other objects and lived experiences; therefore, intentionality must be understood in context (LeVasseur, 2003, p. 412). Gadamer (1989) defines horizons as the degree of possible perceptions. People with limited horizons perceive only meanings that are obvious to them whereas people with broader horizons think beyond everyday, superficial meanings to search for deeper explanations. Moreover, researchers are also engrossed in intentionality and cannot abandon their own intentional perspectives (Vagle, 2009) in analysis. To control subjectivity, researchers investigate the influences of their intentionality on their analysis of data in order to avoid limiting their analysis.

Heideggerian Perspective and They-food

Heidegger uses the concept of Dasein or existence to investigate the concept of being. People constantly interact with their own sense of being, and this interaction involves their pre-understanding of their sense of being and their search for new ways to understand their being. People also use their understanding of other people's identities in order to better understand their own. While people are aware of some aspects of their identity, they fail to fully understand their identities because many dimensions that construct identity are obscure. In the case of food, people consume food every day, but they are unlikely to decipher how their food choices reflect

their personal and social connections to the world. Societal customs exert much influence over food choices because food includes the physiological functionality of food but also cultural relevancy (Schroeter, House, & Lorence, 2007). Food serves multiple functions in societies: "Types and amounts of food and beverages, flavors, textures, food combinations, and traditional uses and meanings of food mark differences among ethnic groups and societies, convey symbolic meanings, create social interactions, and define pleasure and punishment" (Kumanyika, 2008, p. 61). Hence, food choice is a product of being-in-the-world. In many ways, food embodies Self. For example, the Japanese expression, "everyone eats rice," equates food with Self (Anderson, 2005). This perspective asserts that all Japanese people eat rice; therefore, rice is a way to define Japanese identity. As food choice influences identity, identity also influences food choice.

Because food is eaten several times throughout the day, food choices become virtually automatic, and thus, in many ways, are influenced easily. For instance, Heidegger (2008) asserts, "Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial 'sources'…Indeed it makes us forget that they have had such an origin, and makes us suppose that the necessity of going back to these sources is something which we need not even understand" (p. 43). Food choice inclinations emerge from familial, societal, or cultural traditions. For example, during Spring Festival in China, people devour dumplings as the holiday symbol. Nevertheless, people consume these foods without considering the meaning behind these customs. During my pilot study interviews on the food choices of Chinese immigrants in the United States, most participants were unsure about the origins of eating dumplings during Spring Festival. A few participants suggested that dumplings were a symbol of luck. Regardless, the participants followed tradition for tradition's sake. Heidegger

seeks to deconstruct traditional boundaries. Action should be analyzed rather than accepted for tradition's sake.

Similar to Heidegger, Bourdieu (1984) analyzes everyday choices in terms of taste in his concept of habitus. He notes, "The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification (*Principium divisionis*) of these practices…the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles, is constituted" (p. 170). There are underlying, external forces at play that define people's food preferences. For example, food is often popularized through advertising. McDonald's advertisements appeal to the values of the local culture. The more food companies advertise, the more authority they have in determining food tastes (that which permeates dictates). People eat foods that are popular and avoid foods with less prestige.

Moreover, Bourdieu asserts that choices are an illusion and are essentially products of social conditions. He claims, "It [habitus] is a virtue made of necessity which continuously transforms necessity into virtue by inducing 'choices' which correspond to the condition of which it is the product" (p. 175). People's food choices are limited by their income, their culture, their nationality, and even their gender. Lower income people choose foods that are affordable and satiating. Cultures and nationalities determine popular foods and appropriate foods. People with busy lifestyles also have limited choices and choose foods that are convenient and time saving. People rarely choose beyond these boundaries (Wills, Backett-Milburn, Roberts, & Lawton, 2011). Bourdieu emphasizes that eating habits are intertwined with lifestyle. The concept of habitus was used in this study to examine the cultural and societal constructs in food choices.

Heidegger's interpretive approach was adopted for this study rather than Husserl's descriptive phenomenology. From Husserl's perspective, culture dictates traditions that span over great lengths of time so that as time passes, their original meanings are lost. Husserl (1980) referred to phenomenology as the "science of 'origins'" (p. 69). Through historical reduction, such mundane experiences are analyzed according to their historical origins and according to the continuing development of their meaning in society (Caputo, 1987). Historical pieces are analyzed in conjunction with participant interviews to analyze food phenomena. This study was more focused on individual interpretations of experience rather than historical origins. Thus, this study extended beyond descriptions of the phenomena and included personal contextual data to examine food choices on both historical and personal levels.

Being-in-the-world is also being-with-food-in-the-world because certain food practices begin through experiences with others in the world and then become personal custom. Food is both a way to participate in society and a way to develop individual Self. Similarly, food "defines families, networks, friendship groups, religions, and virtually every other socially institutionalized group" (Anderson, 2005, p. 125). There are collective and individualized definitions of food that intermingle with one another as people interact with the world. External food factors support, form, and even conflict with the individual food identities. Heidegger's concept of facticity insinuates that people are aware that their being-in-the-world is constitutive with the being of others. For instance, eating dumplings during Spring Festival is a way of participating in Chinese society. People use food to personally assimilate with a chosen society and culture.

Additionally, Heidegger (2008) writes, "…Being-in-the-world—gets its ontological understanding of itself in the first instance from those entities which it itself is *not* but which it

encounters ‘within’ its world, and from the Being which they possess” (p. 85). Through social interaction with other people and objects, people learn the world, and the world shapes their being in juxtaposition with their own projection of Self. In other words, there is a desire for uniqueness but also conformity in construction of being. For example, parents assert significant control over their children’s diets, and the control itself is dependent on the parents’ culture, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, lifestyle preference, and education (Anzman, Rollins, & Birch, 2010). Therefore, people’s childhood experiences with food habituate them into the specific food context in which they live. Since food experiences begin in the prenatal period, food, essentially, is the first experience of being-in-the-world. These early food experiences pave the way for the Self to submit to everyday practice and limit the projection of the true Self (Caputo, 1987).

These contextual cultivations of food habits pertain to the Heidegger’s concept of They-self: “The Self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic Self*…As they-self, the particular Dasein has been dispersed into the ‘they,’ and must first find itself” (p. 167). Obesogenic environments provide favorable conditions for the consumption of high-fat, high-calorie foods and for overweight and obesity prevalence. In this context, conditions make it easier to succumb to poor eating and exercise habits. Similar to habitus, people are pressured to eat popular cultural foods as a way to interact with their chosen comrades. Hence, food becomes They-food rather than Self-food. Even if people choose food that is against societal and cultural norms, they are still making choices based on the interaction with the Others because they are consciously making opposite choices of a group of people; thus, it is they-food. There is a constant conflict between They-food and Self-food that makes the possibility of authentic food choice questionable.

Many food choices are simply habitual, and phenomenology focuses on studying the intricacy of the mundane. Heidegger (2008) posits, "Nor is interpretation the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities" (p. 189). Obesity is increasing everywhere. Using this phenomenological framework produces potential explanations for eating behaviors that lead to obesity. Husserl (1980) emphasizes that these possibilities must be analyzed thoroughly to distinguish the legitimate meanings from the unfounded ones. Moreover, food and culture are always changing; thus, there is no finality to this analysis, but simply an enhanced understanding of how people and food interact.

To examine meanings beyond traditions, Heidegger's phenomenology interrogates origins of phenomenological manifestations. Each manifestation is deconstructed rather than merely described. This process is typically referred to as "hermeneutic violence" (Caputo, 1987, 63) because deconstruction entails an interrogation of these traditions. People do not like to analyze their eating behaviors. For example, food diaries are used in weight loss because they require people to record their intake and their reasons for eating. This process causes them to reflect on their eating habits, which can cause discomfort or even shame. Food choices invoke personality judgments. In this study, some participants appeared uncomfortable when I repeatedly questioned their specific food choices.

According to Heidegger, phenomena manifest through appearances, but these manifestations are not indicative of all meanings. Appearances are merely a unit. For example, one pilot study participant associated a particular food with her home in Chongqing: the hot pot. She referred to it as "a taste of home." The phenomenon is appearing as food as home in this context. Food embodies people's sense of home, and when they eat these foods, they have a feeling of being home. The food becomes the place. Nevertheless, this appearance is just one

manifestation of the phenomenon. Likewise, Husserl (1980) suggests, "…the *essence* of what is signified is also something other than the signification" (p. 73). People reveal intentional relationships unconsciously, and the essence of the phenomenon emerges through these revelations. The people may very well project a different meaning than their true intentional meanings when they portray an experience. Therefore, their signification of the experience differs from the true intentionality of that experience, which is why continual reflection is needed in interview process. Furthermore, the researcher's pre-understanding of the phenomenon is used in this deconstruction in the interpretive framework, for these pre-understandings provide initial insight while also creating a reflective venue for considering new potential meanings. They are not bracketed or removed from analysis because they offer the platform for the research to begin interpreting the phenomenon. The researcher has no choice but to rely on prior knowledge initially.

All the suppositions of the researcher and the participants are valid because they are based on people's understanding of truth. This truth is based on experiences that create knowledge. Researchers depend on these presumptions to engage with the data. They must have a preliminary understanding of the phenomenon before investigating it. These presumptions create an initial analytical lens, but the researcher must continue to search for other possible meanings. Therefore, interpretation is grounded in foresight. Again, food is first experienced in the prenatal stages of life, and this exposure is the foundation for intentional relationships with food. Other factors in foresight include socioeconomic status, culture, nationality, religion, and even parental weight status.

Repetitive analysis results in new questioning and new understandings. This framework is concerned not with finalized, absolute claims, but only with revealing the multilayered depth

of phenomena (Caputo, 1987). Phenomenology is interested in possibilities. Food is both individually and culturally experienced, making it difficult to quantify with traditional scientific methods. Regardless, these experiences convey universality. The experiences of others affect individuals' experiences, accounting for some form of general truth. Husserl (1980) insists, "The Objectivity of this nature, *nature* in the first and fundamental sense, *is based on mutual understanding* of a plurality of experiencing Egos" (p. 2). Naturally, people concur on meanings, and these agreements establish a sense of reality that allows society to function. To examine dimensions of a phenomenon, the researcher accounts for the following: the judgment one makes about an object, the meaning of that judgment, and the relationship of that judgment to others' judgments about that object (Heidegger, 2008). Participants' judgments are always weighed against the judgments of others in general society.

Heidegger's theoretical framework was integrated into this study on food choices through the examination of being-in-the-world as being-with-food-in-the-world. I also examined the conflict between They-food and Self-food. The deconstruction of personal and social and cultural food traditions guided the analysis. I analyzed my own prejudgments about the phenomenon in order to avoid their potential limitations. Bridling was used in this process rather than bracketing. Every time an interpretation was formed, I re-interrogated the data again to search for new meanings and to avoid premature conclusions (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008). Since multiple interviews were used, I had the opportunity to discuss particular manifestations with the participants multiple times. This process gave the participants' time to reflect on behaviors deeply. I was also able to check whether my initial interpretations matched participants' reflections or if new meanings emerged.

Food is identity, and identity is food. Using Heideggerian concepts of being-in-the-world to explore food choices allowed me to examine food relationships on many different levels because people have both perceived personal and collective food identities. Food was a fundamental venue of interaction between Self and others (They-food), and theories drawn from the field of psychology were used to describe the implications of the phenomenon after data analysis was complete. Additionally, the theory of planned behavior (TPB) was also used at the end of the study since the emergent themes coincided with this theory. For the central framework and method, Heideggerian theory served as the theoretical foundation and methodological basis of this study.

Study Participants and Study Location

This study was conducted in Beijing, China. Research indicates that obesity rates are higher in Chinese cities than in the countryside, and many dietary changes over the past decades occurred in urban areas. For example, in 1993, 66.6% of urban residents consumed a high fat diet as compared to only 22.8% in 1989 (Popkin, 2001). Therefore, I was more interested in an urban population. Beijing was chosen because the city has Western influences while still maintaining a unique, Chinese food culture. It also has restaurants that are representative of all the various provincial cuisines around China. These locations posed a variety of potential influences on food choices. The ten participants were native Chinese adults who were born in China, but only one was born in Beijing. Four participants were from Southern provinces, three were from Northern provinces, and three were from central China. There was no specified weight status for participants because I was interested in food choice rather than obesity specifically for this study. Weight does not always coincide with healthy eating behaviors. People may eat unhealthy foods, but have lower weights and vice versa; thus, examining food choices allowed me to collect more

data about eating behaviors in general. Participants were between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five years old and were categorized as middle class. Chinese middle class was defined as people earning 80,000 to 400,000 RMB yearly and working in professional fields, such as management, engineering, education, and so forth (Li & Niu, 2003). They were also university educated and fluent in English (Zhang, 2005). Also, participants who self-identified as middle-class were accepted as middle class because self-perception of middle-class status suggests a perceived comfortable lifestyle (Li, 2006). University educated and English proficient were the two mandatory criteria.

Ten participants were interviewed in this study. Four to five interviews were conducted with each participant; thus, richer data were collected from each participant, making fewer participants optimal (Morse, 2000). The richness of the data was more essential than the amount (Tuckett, 2004) because participants reflected deeply on their everyday habits in a repeated, hermeneutical process instead of merely engaging in one interview. Interpretive phenomenological studies require such in depth analysis, making larger sample sizes unfeasible (Smith & Osborn, 2003) because larger studies produce overwhelmingly large amounts of data that make deep, reflective analysis difficult. A smaller sample size in this study was more reasonable because it abided by the phenomenological approach of providing in depth data through unstructured, open-ended interviews. Also, it kept the amount of data reasonable for me as a student researcher so that I could analyze the data thoroughly rather than becoming overwhelmed. A smaller sampling helped me, as a novice researcher, manage the data more easily in order to form interpretations, make connections between transcripts, and search for themes. The participants were offered sixty RMB per interview; however, most participants

refused pay. In exchange, I bought them dinner or coffee during the interviews. IRB approval was attained for this study, and interview consent forms were used.

Data Collection

Interviews were the data source in this study. Participants' descriptive stories and thoughts about food were used to explore people's reasons for eating certain foods, food culture and beliefs, and the emotional and psychological meanings behind food choices. As Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008) note, "The lifeworld theory is an epistemological and methodological tool with which the multifarious world of human being is revealed and understood. The overall aim of the lifeworld research is to describe and elucidate the lived world in a way that expands our understanding of human being and human experience" (p. 37). Individual experiences illustrated how and why people make food choices.

The participants were interviewed four or five times over a period of six months. Unstructured interviews were conducted individually and in person and were audio recorded using a digital recorder. The main goal of the phenomenological interview was for the participants to reflect on their experiences as deeply as possible while I served as a facilitator (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008). For the first interview, I asked participants to tell me a little bit about the food they eat. All of the questions afterward focused on their response to this initial question. During the interviews, I asked the participants to elaborate or to explain. Follow-up interviews helped participants become more familiar with the phenomenon so that they became more detailed in later interviews. After each interview, the recording was transcribed, and meaning units were selected in which more description was needed. For each meaning unit, I wrote down all initial interpretations and thoughts and then created a follow-up question to probe participants further about the specific concept shared. In this case, the questions were more

specific, relating directly to the data in the previous transcriptions. The phenomenological interview entails restraining presumptions during the interview process (Barnes, 2003). Hence, using the bridling process of recording all initial interpretations and thoughts and then re-approaching the topic again open-endedly allowed me to restrain these presumptions in subsequent interviews.

Since this study concerned participants whose second language was English, the second interview for each participant was conducted in Chinese. Interpreters were hired to ask the questions in these interviews, and translators were hired to transcribe these interviews into both Chinese and English transcripts. Interpreters and translators are different. Interpreters translate spoken language while translators translate written language. Professional, certified interpreters were used for six of the interviews (Gordon and Patty); however, a third interpreter, Shou, was used for some interviews since she was available and did not charge for her services because she was a friend of mine. The other two interpreters charged 300RMB (50 USD) for each interview, but they were more professional in their interviewing techniques because they did not lead the participants. They simply asked the questions and asked the participants to explain their responses. All translators were paid 600RMB (100 USD) for each transcript. I used different translators in order to divide the workload and receive transcriptions faster. Most transcripts took two to three weeks to complete for each translator. I could not continue my interviews with participants until those transcripts were complete and analyzed. Table 1 highlights the allocation of work among interpreters and translators. In most cases, the interpreter and translator were different in order to allocate work fairly and maintain a more objective transcription because an outsider was translating the interview. The Chinese interview process is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Table 1: Chinese Interview Task Assignment

Participant	Interpreter	Translator
Participant 1	Shou	Hou
Participant 2	Shou	Patty
Participant 3	Gordon	Alex
Participant 4	Patty	Hou
Participant 5	Yong	Hou
Participant 6	Gordon	Gordon
Participant 7	Gordon	Gordon
Participant 8	Gordon	Hou
Participant 9	Shou	Gordon
Participant 10	Shou	Hou

Unstructured interviewing was an essential method because it does not involve a list of predetermined questions based on suppositions. These interviews established the foundation for food experiences for follow-up interviews and probing questions that encouraged more reflective responses from the participants, and unstructured interviews instituted a more relaxed, informal environment than other interview approaches (Blackman, 2002). The interviews were conversational in nature. To avoid interfering with the flow of the interviews, I waited until the participants finished sharing experiences before asking any probing questions (Corbin & Morse, 2003). Also, I ensured that the data were protected and confidential to assuage any concerns of

the participants when sharing any sensitive information (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Audio recordings were erased after transcription, and files were kept on a password-protected computer.

To maintain openness, the participants did not prepare for the interviews (Blackman, 2002). I shared the topic of my study with participants prior to the interview, but the topic was broad, and most participants did not seem accustomed to discussing their food choices. Blackman (2002) found that unstructured interviews used in the job interview process caused applicants to talk more freely and honestly. Therefore, unstructured interviewing resembled a free-flowing conversation versus an interrogation (Collins, 1998), which was more suitable for invoking intentional relationships.

Participants' stories are an important part of perceiving intentionality. Collins (1998) posits, "Interviewees, in telling stories about themselves in relation to others, reconstitute themselves" (paragraph 3.10). In the process of telling stories, participants reflected on their food experiences, and follow-up interviews allowed for multiple opportunities for deeper reflection, especially if participants were unable to articulate their behaviors initially. The more times a story is told, the more meanings emerge (Collins, 1998), so repeated questioning was imperative (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006) to the study. Participants were free to engage deeply in their experience through "learning, listening, testing and a sense of bonding and sharing," (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 17). Constant reflection and clarification were needed (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000) to provide more opportunities for intentional relationships to emerge.

There were some potential problems using unstructured interviewing to ascertain intentionality. Foremost, to make participants comfortable, I had to share some information about myself (Corbin & Morse, 2003) because interviews can seem intrusive (Myers &

Newman, 2007) to participants. Sometimes, participants asked me questions during the interviews. These questions were either personal or related to the topic. For instance, one participant asked me to discuss my love for sweets to compare it with hers. These incidents pose the chance that my own intentional relationships may inhibit the openness of the interview. I documented any such incidences in the research journal, and I was careful in my responses to participants to avoid influencing them. I answered broadly, and I informed them that I did not want to influence them with my own thinking.

Additionally, brevity in participants' descriptions is another potential issue in phenomenological studies (Giorgi, 1997) and was an issue at times in this study. To uncover intentional relationships, detailed descriptions were essential. Again, I had to be careful in the way I probed because I did not want to lead the participants. Participants were less detailed in the first interview, but as the interviews continued, participants became more familiar with the topic and had time to reflect on responses more thoroughly. Multiple interviews offered several opportunities to gather rich data. Even if some participants were not detailed in each interview, examining the data from all of their interviews together provided a rich description of their experiences. After the first interview, I examined the data and developed more specific follow-up questions aimed promoting more reflection on the ideas and experiences revealed. These new questions guided the participants through reflecting on the experience again to produce more thorough responses. In a sense, the participants were co-researchers and had to be as reflective as the researcher by also examining their natural attitudes (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009).

Interviews can be problematic because people's accounts of experiences usually differ from the actual events discussed (Collins, 1998). Interpretive phenomenology is focused on the

ways people make meaning in their lived experiences, so these discrepancies are less troublesome than for other methods. Unstructured interviews are criticized for being biased because of their subjective nature (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). However, these interviews were not completely unstructured (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) because the study was about a specific phenomenon, and an opening question was used. The initial question was specific enough so that participants shared lived experiences around the same phenomenon (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Also, bridling reduced the influence of my biases because it induced repeated inquiry to diminish superficial understandings from both the participants and me.

Phenomenological interviews require active participation on the part of the researcher (Collins, 1998) because they are unstructured. During the interviews, I had to be attuned to opportunities that emerged about the phenomenon that needed more explanation. I had to create probing questions while simultaneously remaining engaged in the interview. For example, as noted previously, one participant in my pilot study said that eating hot pot was "a taste of home." This word choice was rather intriguing, so I asked the participant to explain the meaning of this word choice rather than assume its meaning. I had to be careful not to interject too often during the interview to avoid undue influence (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

Follow-up questions were a form of eliciting participant feedback because they allowed me to clarify meanings rather than making assumptions (Hamill, 2010), aiding in the bridling process. Nonetheless, the interviews were situated in presumptions at all times. Heideggerian philosophy accentuates that, even during the interview process, the researcher's suppositions and lived experiences influence what occurs (Lowes & Prowse, 2001) in both the probing questions and the questions in follow-up interviews. I had to remain cognizant of assumptions and had to mentally bridle them during the interview process. Questions during the interview were limited

because listening and reflecting were difficult to achieve simultaneously. I developed more questions for the later interviews after taking time to bridle between interviews. Furthermore, although follow-up questions were based on previous interviews, they were still open ended so that the previous interviews were not influencing the subsequent ones (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). For instance, a good follow-up question was the following: "Tell me a little bit more about the first time you ate chicken," or "Can you explain what you mean when you say that you hate carrots?" These questions prompted participants to retell their experiences again so that I could see if new meanings emerged.

Data Analysis Procedures

Bracketing is the identification and then isolation of presumptions associated with theories, previous research, natural attitude, and personal beliefs (intentional relationships) and is a continuous process conducted throughout the research study (Ashworth, 1996; Finlay, 2008; Hamill, 2010). It also includes any interests, cultural factors, and hypotheses that could influence analysis (Fischer, 2009). Theories formed in the beginning of the study are considered a hindrance (De Castro, 2003) because they establish a predetermined lens for analysis. Husserl (2012) declares, "And yet thesis undergoes a modification—whilst remaining in itself what it is, we set it as it were 'out of action,' we 'disconnect it,' 'bracket it.'" (p. 56). Theories were not used during analysis because they would have only provided presumptions. Husserl proposes that presumptions are detachable if they are acknowledged and separated from analysis.

Husserl's phenomenology is about grasping the essence of phenomena, and bracketing is one way to reduce bias to understand these essences (Ashworth, 1999). Husserl (1980) remarks, "The real itself, the subject term of the real relation, is also something indeterminate; the real object is given only one-sidedly; the real state, although perceived, will be able to show itself

ever more richly in the process of perceiving" (p. 4). Preconceived notions intrude on the process of emerging perception, resulting in a limited uncovering of essence because it offers a one-sided explanation. Different perceptions are needed to reveal phenomena. The bracketers are always reflecting inwardly and outwardly, not only on how they affect the study but how the study affects their analysis of it.

This study used bridling instead of bracketing because bridling was more appropriate. Bridling is a practice similar to bracketing. Researchers distinguish presumptions and restrain them to openly analyze the phenomenon, but these presumptions are never eliminated (Finlay, 2008) but rather aid in the analysis. Bridling has all the same components of bracketing (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008) without the attempt to eliminate presumptions. It treats all developed meanings as assumptions in the research process. Bridling demands "a disciplined kind of interaction and communication with their [researchers'] phenomena and informants, and 'bridle' the event of understanding so that they do not understand too quickly, too carelessly or slovenly, or in other words, that they do not make definite what is indefinite" (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008, p. 130). Bridling allowed me to slow down the analysis and question every interpretation I made. Nothing was taken for granted. Bridling supports more inclusion of presumptions back into the analysis versus keeping them separate from the rest of the data. Bridling was more appropriate for this study because it conveys the idea that the researcher always projects meaning into the analysis (Vagle, 2009). I was able to include my self-interviews and bridling notes in the study as valuable data for the phenomenon, as well as use these pieces to outline the perspective in which the study was analyzed. Presumptions are included as a venue for exploring meaning although they did not dominate the analysis (Finlay, 2008; LeVasseur, 2003).

Gadamer discusses the concepts of true prejudices and false prejudices in which true prejudices assist in understanding whereas false ones hinder it (Finlay, 2008). It corresponds with Husserl's idea of phenomenological reduction in which the researcher imposes no orientation toward the study but approaches it with an open attitude (Ashworth, 1999) that resembles a detached attitude (McNamara, 2005). Husserl (2012) posits, "A certain refraining from judgment which is compatible with the unshaken and unshakable because self-evidencing conviction of Truth" (p. 57). According to Husserl, detachment is avoiding judgments to uncover truth. It suggests a degree of objectivity. In Heideggerian theory, people cannot detach themselves from judgments because their thoughts are always emerging from limited perspectives based on their lived experiences. Detachment is impossible and thus, not expected, which is why this phenomenological method was more suitable for this study. I explored my own intentional relationships with food in order to learn how the phenomena manifested itself in my lived experiences, as well as to make my perspective transparent.

Bridling continues the interrogation of interpretations as these interpretations are developed throughout the study (Dahlberg, 2006). It is both a philosophy and a method (Dowling, 2007). When other possibilities are clear, then no meaning "can claim absoluteness or exhaustiveness for the possibilities of the thing" (Ihde, 1986, p. 72). Furthermore, bridling manages presumptions and interpretations only to the degree that the researcher remains open to new understandings (Dahlberg, 2006). This is crucial because both the researcher and the participants "'gives body to' the phenomenon" (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 16). Like the participants, I experience the food world and the study process. Inevitably, I project that experience into analysis (Finlay, 2008) because the internal framework in which I analyze my food experiences is the same framework in which I analyze those of my participants. However, I am responsible

for ensuring that the phenomenon is presented in a credible way so that other researchers and readers concur on the meanings presented (Fischer, 2009).

Nevertheless, "validity is situated in subjectivity" (Vagle, 2009, p. 589) as each experience is scrutinized contextually. The goal of this study was not to generalize the findings. Foremost, my goal was to explore food choices as way to enhance my understanding of the factors involved in obesity. This study produced potential hypotheses for future obesity studies (Krefting, 1991). I wanted to explore possibilities, making an open, unstructured approach appropriate. The phenomenological method proved suitable because it is aimed at uncovering possibilities and multiple realities rather than a generalized truth (Krefting, 1991). Guba's (1981) constructs of validity and reliability were applied in this study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is established through multiple interviews to provide detailed data and check for potential meanings, as well as through participant checks. The meaning units were rewritten in my own words and then sent to every participant for verification. Participants added clarity to my interpretations as needed, but no changes were made to my descriptions. Transferability was ensured through detailed descriptions of the phenomenon of food choices in order to make it recognizable to readers and other researchers. An audit trail was created (see Chapter 5) to address dependability and confirmability by presenting a detailed account of all research processes and my own predispositions and how these predispositions were controlled in the study. Chapter 4 addresses my intentionality statement toward the phenomenon of food choices through my self-interviews and personal experiences during the study.

Reflexivity was imperative in bridling. I questioned the ways each interpretation was developed to avoid making hasty judgments (Fischer, 2009), and this process continued before,

during, and after the study. Bridling was the most appropriate method for Heideggerian phenomenology because Heidegger emphasizes that all people are beings-in-the-world and, thus, share experiences, knowledge, culture, and so forth that situate them within particular experiences with a phenomenon (LeVasseur, 2003). Likewise, bridling was suitable for hermeneutic analysis because it endorses a constant reexamination of interpretations to search for other meanings until a deeper understanding of the phenomenon is achieved (Lowes & Prowse, 2001). As Husserl (1980) asserts, "There we must not stop so long as eidetic necessities hold sway; we must pursue all necessary connections, all ideal and therefore inseparable connections, until the circle is closed" (p. 61). Additionally, the descriptions written in my own words helped the bridling process: they helped me conceptualize the manifestations of the phenomenon and allowed the participants to determine if my understanding of their lived experiences was accurate (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009). The process of writing in my own words induced reflection.

In the bridling process, I selected meaning units depending on their degree of potential importance. Meaning units were selected if they revealed reasons for why participants ate certain foods and their past experiences with foods. For each meaning unit, I immediately wrote about my presumptions about the piece of data, including my own experiences with the same phenomenon. Writing down these presumptions made them explicit, and I assumed that these initial interpretations were wrong and wrote open-ended follow-up questions to search for additional meanings. Nonetheless, when new meanings were formulated after subsequent interviews, this same process was used again. As a result, the spectra of potential meanings increased (LeVasseur, 2003), which led to new data in later interviews. According to Vagle (2009), "Actively waiting for the phenomenon combines the ideas of seeking and remaining

open to receive" (p. 591). The bridling concept was more about revealing meaning rather than creating meaning. Participants simply needed more probing and reflecting to uncover their intentional relationships with food.

Moreover, bridling required a self-critical and inquisitive attitude and a quest for ownership over the final written product (Hamill, 2010). The focal parts of this study that were analyzed in segments were mainly main taste moments that emphasized the presence of Self-food and the influences of They-food. These parts were specific to each individual. They were labeled as main taste moments when they reoccurred in the transcripts and when participants revealed physical, emotional, and psychological struggles when changing these behaviors. Other parts were highlighted that outlined the participants' history with these main tastes in order to conceptualize Self-food development. When examining each interview, I looked for patterns in intentionality in hopes of grasping the essence of the phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2006). I analyzed each interview holistically before determining specific meaning units within it (Devenish, 2002).

These meaning units were re-written in my own words in order to further my interpretation of these manifestations. As a result, themes emerged as these units were brought together holistically (Barnes, 2003). To grasp the essence of intentionality, the meaning units were rewritten in phenomenological terms and then fused with the other units into a meaningful structure (Devenish, 2002). Following the individual historical development of main tastes revealed that Self-food is derived from They-food influences, which is a central theme among all the data. While participants had their specific tastes and food experiences, the broader theme of main tastes' authoritative power and They-food roots over food choices emerged. Thus, the individualized parts of main tastes led to the essence of main tastes relating to Self-food and They-food as a whole. While the main tastes of each participant were the parts, the whole of this

analysis revealed the overarching concepts of Self-food and They-food and their interdependent relationship with one another.

My own reflection and self-study began early in the process. I began my self-interviews prior to beginning participant interviews, and I began writing in my research journal about my food perspectives. This writing induced reflection on the topic, allowing me to acknowledge any existing suppositions. As a result, I had a fair understanding of my own intentional relationships with food; however, I learned more about these intentional relationships as my self-interview process continued. Furthermore, maintaining a bridling journal throughout the study forced me to continue to reflect on these premises in addition to producing the audit trail (Hamill, 2010; Lowes & Prowse, 2001).

Multiple interviews with the same participant lead to changes in the participants' perceptions of their eating behaviors. Some participants recounted opinions expressed in previous interviews. Similarly, my own thinking process changed during the study as new meanings emerged in both participant interviews and my own self-interviews. Consequently, I continued to approach the data with a new perspective (Gadamer, 1989).These changes provided a thorough examination of the phenomenon because the participants and I had to constantly re-conceptualizes the analysis. When no new meanings emerged, the saturation of data was complete. Furthermore, participant validation was used. After the Chinese interviews were transcribed and translated by a translator, the transcripts were sent to participants to check for accuracy. Participants made few changes, and these changes mostly concerned names of foods. After all of the interviews were completed, meaning units were rewritten in my own words, grouped by themes, and then emailed to participants to check for accuracy in descriptions.

Again, few changes were made to these descriptions. Most participants simply elaborated even more on their food experiences as they related to the themes expressed.

Summary

This chapter outlined the study design, theoretical framework, and methodology used in this study. Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology was chosen as more appropriate than descriptive phenomenology because my goal was to analyze food choices in order to pose new understandings of potential factors in obesity. I decided to use myself as a participant in the process, so I chose bridling as my main method in analysis because I wanted to incorporate myself into the study rather than resist my perspective. The discoveries I made in my own food choices not only illustrate the perspective in which this study was analyzed, but also convey additional descriptions of the phenomenon of food choices. The next chapter covers my own intentional relationships with food as they emerged in the study process.

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CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETING THE RESEARCHER'S INTENTIONALITY

This chapter describes my perspective toward the food world and my struggles in a foreign food environment. This chapter outlines the way my Self-food is situated in the context of this topic, as well as to present the realizations I made about my Self-food through my own phenomenological interview process during the course of the study. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate my past experiences with food and how these experiences have shaped my thinking about food. This study invokes the researcher-as-a-participant method in order to employ a reflexive approach in the analysis of data (Krefting, 1991). Through self-interviews and journal entries, I was forced to constantly analyze my own assumptions toward the topic, as well as my own personal relationships with the topic. My research journal and self-study interviews are essential in establishing the variability and credibility of this study because they indicate the development of my insight (Carcary, 2009; Krefting, 1991) during the study process as I learned new information from participants and myself.

My research journal contained data about the method process and reflective notes about my personal thoughts, attitudes, and preliminary analyses during the data collection and data analysis process (Krefting, 1991). This study was analyzed under the perspective that there are multiple realities, and I merely was presenting my interpretations of the participants' reality (Merriam, 1995). Thus, the interpretations of the study data are grounded in my own intentional relationships with the topic. Making my predispositions transparent is essential for the confirmability and credibility of my interpretations of the data (Carcary, 2009; Shenton, 2004) of

the study so that the reader may understand the process in which conclusions were drawn and determine if these conclusions are transferable to different contexts (Marrow, 2005).

The following section is the first installment of the audit trail. I adopted Guba's (1985) six categories of information for the audit trail process: interview data, data reduction and analysis notes, data reconstruction and synthesis, methodological process notes, materials related to intentions and dispositions, and preliminary development of themes. This chapter presents the intentions and dispositions related to this study while the following chapter addresses the other categories. In this chapter, I present both my self-interview data and notes from my research journal about my food experiences in China. Then I frame my Self-food and They-food influences within the same theoretical structure as my study: They-food influences through culture and context to Self-food manifestations in main tastes, implementation of main tastes in the They-food world, and reaction to challenges to Self-food in the They-food world. Last, I summarize the conclusions I made about my own Self-food and They-food influences and explain their relevance to the process and outcome of this study.

My Transition into the Chinese Food World

I participated in my first self-interview less than two weeks after I moved to China. I wanted to capture the essence of my food thinking before my new surroundings influenced me too much. My boyfriend served as my interviewer. Like my participants, these interviews were unstructured. This process posed a challenge for him because he is not an experienced interviewer, but I wanted to maintain the open structure of the interview as much as possible. My preliminary assumptions about myself were that I was a very unique eater who consumes the same foods weekly without ever tiring of these foods.

The concept of personalized tastes resonated with me early in the study. I do not like a variety in my diet. I eat the same foods every day, such as peanut butter sandwiches, chocolate milk, and watermelon. However, I made some changes in my new food environment because I could not find all of my normal foods in China. I replaced my breakfast in the United States with some wheat meal wafers that I have eaten every day since moving here. I passed street vendors before work in the mornings making pancakes with all kinds of fresh, delicious fillings, such as eggs and carrots. They looked tasty, and I toyed with the idea of buying one, but I knew I would never do it. Changing my routine makes me anxious. I was not anticipating to find that I was not alone but living within a world of habitual eaters.

In the beginning of my venture here, I was determined to broaden my food horizons, but I was scared. I need control over my food in order to feel healthy and to avoid gaining weight. I had spent nearly eight years perfecting my diet. To create an entire new one was a daunting task. Nevertheless, Chinese food was delicious. In the United States, I avoided the restaurants, but in China, they were intriguing. I falsely sensed that I had changed my diet. Some of my new found loves were spicy bean curd, rou chuan (meat on a stick), dumplings, and pumpkin porridge. I though acclimating to this new food world was going to be easy.

> I have become more open about eating in a restaurant. I still do not want to go to a restaurant too often because I will gain too much weight, but in terms of actually wanting to eat the food versus the food at home and looking forward to eating out again, my perspective on eating in restaurants has definitely changed. At home, by choice, I hardly ever wanted to go. I preferred to eat xigua [watermelon] or huashengjiang [peanut butter] instead. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, September 25, 2012)

Dining in a restaurant was now an exciting experience in which each week I pondered what new place we would try. Contrastingly, the food I was consuming at home during this time was not appealing to me. I had yet to develop a fondness for the peanut butter in China, and the hardness of the bread did not make my favorite dinner attractive anymore. I took my lunch to

work to avoid overeating in the company canteen. I found myself spreading sesame butter on wheat crackers, which was the only appealing option I found at the time. It was not nutritious for me, but it maintained my overall habit of eating self-made meals to avoid consuming too many calories. Nevertheless, I found myself easily led astray in the restaurants. To make matters worse, I typically dined in restaurants with my participants who insisted on sharing Chinese cuisine with me. Thus, they ordered an abundance of dishes encouraging me to "try, try." The Chinese dining experience involves a large round table with many dishes that a group of people share. It was a food wonderland. My only saving grace at this point was that the food at home left me disimpassioned, so during the week, my appetite was dull, and my weight decreased. My mentality at this time was to be a native eater.

As October came, my diet improved. I found skim milk and Nesquik, so I was able to enjoy chocolate milk again. I still ate some sesame butter, but I ate plain bean curd, as well. I felt it was a healthy choice, and it had the plain flavor that I loved. I was also able to find some instant oatmeal. The warm, dense, plain gruel is still my lunch of choice today. I found more fruit, and I started buying bread from a French bakery with seeds incrusted into soft bread. By this time, my tastes had adjusted to Skippy, the only peanut butter brand in China. I started to enjoy food again. My daily diet was transitioning into a pleasant homeostasis of simplicity and sweetness, the two tastes that I loved. The only aspects missing were sugar and coffee. Every time I ate, I had this feeling that something was missing. The only way to rid myself of this emptiness was to consume a little container of peanut M&Ms. The mere ingestion of these candied chocolates immediately sent a warmth of relaxation through me. I started to realize that sugar was a significant part of my everyday diet, and I was missing it. I knew I loved sweet

foods, but I did not know that I was so reliant on sugar. It was the first moment that my own main tastes began to make themselves known to me.

The situation turned in November. I found myself working and traveling more than I had anticipated. While I enjoyed the newfound responsibility of management, I found myself conflicted between two food worlds. I was dining in restaurants with participants to conduct my interviews and dining out with my work colleagues while on business trips. I was losing my structure, which left me feeling insecure.

> I do not have the same control over my diet that I had at home, and this feeling is infuriating really. I am learning how it feels to lose control over your food, which is what I think a lot of obese people may feel sometimes. I understand that things can get out of your hands or that societal pressure can be extreme. Thus, even my own personal experience is making me think about obesity in a new way. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, December 15, 2012)

I felt obliged to continue dining out for my participants because they enjoyed it, and it was my way of showing my appreciation to them for participating in my study since they refused any payment. Nevertheless, it was demolishing my health, my self-esteem, and my body. I perceived that I had little control because I was not confident enough to insist on my structured eating habits. I was afraid that I would offend people since I did not know the culture well. I felt that everything I had worked so hard for the past eight years was slipping away. The health cost of moving to China was too much.

I finally felt confident enough to convince my new friends to accept my refusal of Chinese food, but the office environment was challenging. I considered bringing my own food to the office lunches, but the idea of not eating in the presence of the company owner filled me with anxiety. The Chinese culture was to enjoy food and alcohol together in order to build strong work relationships. To refuse would be to isolate myself from the others. Frantically, I thought of solutions, such as eating slowly and only eating vegetables, but the pressure to eat was intense

once the toasting began and the alcohol quickly filled my senses with drunkenness. I ate more food to try to counteract the alcohol's effects.

By the end of December, I was depressed and angry. I knew that many social pressures cause obstacles to health, but I never fathomed that I would fall victim to it, too. When other people talked about social pressures, I blamed these people for making excuses about their lack of self-discipline even though I knew these pressures existed. Now, I truly understood the social pressure in the food world phenomenon.

> It [society] becomes this constant battle you have to deal with every day. You have to constantly fight against the schedules and people. I feel like I have to constantly explain myself to people about why I am making the food choices and exercise choices that I do. I feel like I owe them a justification, which I don't. I should just be able to do what I want and be accepted. I would not cringe if someone joined me for dinner and did not want to eat. It is okay, we can still talk. But it seems like, or at least, I feel this way, that they feel that I am judging them because I don't want to eat the food. That my rejection of the food is a rejection on them and their actions. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, December 30, 2012)

Nearly all the Chinese people I met were extremely proud of their food. While I did not have evidence that they would feel judged if I refused their food, this strong food pride made me wary. I was angry with myself for succumbing to the people rather than being firm in my needs. However, I later learned that people easily accepted me once I explained my reasoning to them. The desire to please others influenced my food choices, but ultimately, the decision was always mine.

Sugar was still engulfing my thoughts. I always thought about eliminating sugar from my diet, but I never dedicated myself to this goal. After I moved to China, I realized that I do not want to stop eating sugar. To give up sugar is horrifying to me. I started to realize my own bias here. I defended sugar even though I knew it was unhealthy, yet I scolded the excessive fried food consumption in China. For Chinese people to stop eating fried food is the same as giving up

sugar. There is some kind of cultivated instinct that ties people to certain tastes. Likewise, taste preferences influence unhealthy diets in many people, including myself.

In January, the data collection concluded, and I was able to avoid the restaurants more easily. My focus returned to my running and my weight lifting. It took another three months, but I was able to lose weight, and I felt happy again. The weight of the excess pounds flew off my shoulders. I equated my experience with the withdrawal of my main tastes. While my journey was difficult, I felt that I had a new connection with other people that may not have otherwise been discovered because I learned that I was also susceptible to external influences.

Initial Presumptions about Chinese Food Culture

Initially, I believed that the Chinese ate only freshly cooked food. In my first two weeks in China, I did not notice many packaged foods. There were many street vendors selling fast food, but even those foods appeared freshly prepared. However, after I visited many supermarkets, the aisles of packaged, processed foods amazed me. They had packaged foods that Americans would not consider packaging, such as packaged pickled vegetables and eggs. Thus, my first impression of a healthy, fresh diet proved false. Of course, my perspective that packaged, processed food is unhealthy is based on my health beliefs.

Health emerged quickly as a potential theme in the data. Overall, it was an interest of mine when I moved to China because I sought to maintain my own healthy diet and observe the habits of the Chinese around me. My health beliefs differ from most Chinese people; however, these differences made me scrutinize my own health beliefs. One difference in China is the attitude toward refined bread, noodles, and rice. I have not met anyone in China who eats wheat bread, wheat noodles, or brown rice. I believe that those are healthier options because the fiber and nutrients have not been removed. Most Chinese people claim the white rice they eat is very

healthy. Also, the rice is plain, which may be why they assume it is healthy. I also think there is some misconception about oil. Almost every Chinese dish is cooked in oil. They assume eating vegetables is healthy, but they do not consider the cooking method as having an impact on the dish. I always choose to bake foods rather than cook on the stovetop, and if I did cook on the stovetop, I used Pam Spray that had no fat or calories not oil. It was just to flavor the food a little and keep it from sticking. Oil is unhealthy, and frying cooks the nutrition out of food.

Many Chinese health perspectives conflict with my own. My perspective is derived from Western medicine, health books and magazines, and academic research. I know which foods keep me feeling well, keep my weight under control, and keep me nourished. I assumed that the Chinese are limited in health knowledge or take their food very personally; therefore, I suspected that to suggest that their food is unhealthy would insult them. However, after some reflection, I realized that there are parts of my own diet that are imperfect. For example, I drink chocolate milk every day, and I enjoy dessert. Therefore, perhaps I was being too harsh and hypocritical. Regardless, all of my health knowledge was based on the Western perspective. I had to adopt their perspective in order to understand their behaviors. If they believed that they eat healthy based on their health knowledge, then I had to conclude that they value healthy eating. I had to understand how the Chinese made sense of their food world.

I interviewed people from different regions in China even though they now lived in Beijing. Immediately, I made assumptions about their different food perspectives based on the regions in which they came.

> I think the Southern people are more passionate and particular about their food. They also have dishes that are unique to their hometowns. I think it is similar to the U.S. South. They [U.S. Southerners] also have a more distinct food culture and have a stronger relationship to their foods. South China seems to take food seriously and goes to lengths to avoid changing their habits. Northerners seem more open minded and less attached to food. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, September 20, 2012)

I made a personal connection and exposed a potential bias here. I am Southern American, and the cuisine I know is Southern American cuisine. I believed that Southern cuisine is more historical than food from the rest of the United States. When I heard a few Southern Chinese participants talk about their hometown food as being special, I immediately related to this perspective. All people are attached to foods. To say that Southern Chinese are more passionate about food is a problematic assumption.

Because I was not completely cognizant of the range of main tastes during a great deal of the data collection process, I assumed that the Chinese were traditional in their food habits and that these habits were difficult to change. I also believed that they refused to criticize their food.

> I think, and I am probably assuming this and being biased, but I think that due to the save-face culture here, they refuse to look at things, especially if they have a long tradition, as being bad or unhealthy and needing to change. It probably also has to do with the conformist culture, too, that they refuse to change traditions. Changing something small like substituting one kind for another is a crazy choice because it goes against common society of eating the white rice. You hear a lot of comments like that is the Chinese way or that is Chinese tradition. I do not usually hear Americans make these comments about their daily diet. They seem to really hold onto customs here. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, December 30, 2012)

The concept of main tastes was apparent early in the process, but I originally only saw the Chinese as being set in their food tastes because I assumed their society was less open to other cultures and outside influences than Western society. I believed their reluctance to stop unhealthy eating practices was higher than Westerners. It was not until I made the same realization for myself during my own self-interviews that I understood that this reluctance to change Self-food was not just specific to Chinese. It may hold true for all people.

Formulating My Self-food in the They-food World: The Self-Interviews

The research journal helped me record my thoughts and feelings during the study process. However, to enhance personal reflexivity even more, I decided to participate in my own self-

interviews. Initially, I planned on conducting only two interviews with myself. However, after the first interview, I decided that it would be impossible to attain the depth of my food experience with only two interviews. To truly guide myself into deep reflection on my food choices, I had to undergo multiple interviews. I completed a total of five self-interviews throughout the data collection process. Furthermore, being able to express my feelings verbally made my thinking more vivid than merely writing in my research journal.

I had many presumptions about my Self-food at the beginning of the interview process. I assumed that when I moved to China, my diet would change. I would eat Chinese food. I predicted that Chinese food would automatically be healthier than food in the United States; thus, I would eat an even healthier diet. In terms of my vices, such as my love of sweets, I assumed that my mother influenced those habits because she is a dessert lover, is a diabetic, and is overweight. My father was thin, active, and healthy in my opinion. Likewise, I knew health professionals had a major influence on my food choices. I read many articles and watched many T.V. programs on health, especially those focused on athletes. More importantly, I believed that people could change their diet. I had successfully changed my diet. I used to eat pizza, hamburgers, and lots of other carbohydrate-rich, high calorie foods. Now, I eat a lot of fruits, some vegetables, little meat, and whole grains and oats. My calorie intake is significantly lower than when I was younger. I had spent the past eight years of my life trying to convince other people that they can abandon their unhealthy eating habits and become healthy, as well. My study suggests that this perspective is faulty, but I think my own journey through my self-interviews made this error in judgment clearest to me.

I followed the same procedures with my interviews as with my participant interviews. I transcribed the interview, analyzed the transcripts, identified meaning units, bridled my

assumptions, and composed follow-up questions to explore those experiences again. I did not have the luxury of having someone else do this process for me; nevertheless, I did my best to approach the transcripts with an open mindset. I wrote follow-up questions even though I felt that I already knew the answer since I was writing them for myself. Luckily, I made many analytical breakthroughs that would never have happened without this process. In the following sections, I outline the connection between the codes and my interviews to illustrate my discovery of my own food relationships.

The Cultural Influences of They-food in My Self-food

This section focuses on the broader, cultural influences on my Self-food formation. Culture refers to the U.S. culture because I never analyzed my food choices under the identity of southern culture in the United States. While I specifically grew up in Georgia, my dietary habits are different than the traditional southern diet. I changed my food habits in adulthood and never consume southern food. Thus, I overlook this identity as a major influential factor in my food experience. Phenomenology is about presenting people's perceived experiences rather than imposing assumptions. I abided by the data in my self-interview transcripts and research journal. I outline the U.S. culture influences on my Self-food development that include foods and flavors but also food practices and any other cultural beliefs that impact food choices.

Staple foods are a mainstay in almost all diets. They serve as the primary carbohydrate source and are seen as necessary to provide adequate energy. Bread is the dominant staple food is most Western cultures, including the United States.

> That can—so I limit myself with bread, like two pieces of bread, but it's going to make me feel like I had something, and if I don't have bread at a meal, then it's probably like the Chinese people think about rice. They don't feel like….I feel like something's missing. It's like last night we ate, and I was full, but I still feel like there's something missing because I'm so used to having bread, you know? It's a big part of it. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, August 18, 2012)

Rice and noodles are popular in U.S. cuisine; however, many people consume bread more often than these staples. I always preferred bread. Since bread is not as popular in China, good bread (by Western standards) is difficult to find. Most decent breads are sold in bakeries even though bread may be purchased at the supermarket. I lost the most important part of my meals because I did not find bread that suited my main tastes. When staple foods are repeated at nearly every meal, they become strong forces within Self-food, making them difficult to change or substitute. To change the staple food basically changes the entire structure of the meal. A meal focused on bread as the staple differs from a meal focused on noodles as the staple. The loss of staple foods poses both physical and mental challenges because these foods are so culturally ingrained in people's Self-food.

One practice of the U.S. culture is food labeling. The U.S. culture includes food regulation practices that entitle people to know the contents of the foods they purchase. As a health conscious person, I always check food labels. However, food labels are not as common in China.

> I don't really know how because they [the Chinese] don't put nutrition labels on their food. [laughs] Some things they do, and some things they don't—like those sponge cakes. They didn't have nothing on there, and I don't know, so it's—I don't really have…you know, a structure, but you know, it took me years to build up a structure at home, so I'm like okay. I've got to do it here…maybe that means cooking bean curd or something. You know, maybe I have to broaden my horizons to make it happen. I don't know. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, August 18, 2012)

Knowing the contents of foods usually influenced my food choices because I avoid foods with too many ingredients and that are high in fat and calories. The security of food labels is abundant in the United States. To not have access to this knowledge made me insecure about my food choices. Labels may influence people's decisions to purchase certain foods, but to remove labels may cause people uncertainty in their food choices, which produces anxiety. People are no

longer able to guarantee that they are making the right choice. Dependence on food labeling is common in the U.S. food culture.

Cultures typically allocate different foods for different meals. Some foods are considered breakfast foods, some are considered lunch foods, and others are considered dinner foods. U.S. culture defines popular breakfast foods as breads, pastries, cereals, fruit, and eggs. However, the Chinese define breakfast foods differently.

> I think one of the interesting things in China is that they don't seem to differentiate different foods for breakfast, and that's just really weird to me. [laughs] It's just really weird to me. It's like when we went to that Best Western, I mean, they had some pastries and stuff there and eggs, but everything else was like stuff you could eat for lunch or dinner, and then I already had like 2 participants say that noodles were for breakfast. So it's just like really weird for me because I just think culturally, in America, we have foods, I don't know why we defined them as breakfast, but they have now been defined as breakfast. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, October 1, 2012)

Perspectives on breakfast are cultural, and people may view practices that differ from this perspective as strange. These habits are culturally ingrained, so to make people eat foods they consider appropriate for lunch or dinner for breakfast challenges their food perspective even when the foods are typical in their diet. The mere time of day affects food consumption. Changing the pattern is viewed as abnormal.

Another cultural cooking contrast is the method of baking. Most Chinese foods are fried. Even breads are steamed rather than baked. In the United States, I was accustomed to eating baked foods. I preferred baking my vegetables because I believed it was healthier than other cooking methods. Ovens are standard in most U.S. homes. However, in China, most homes do not have ovens because baking is not as popular.

> It's just a little harder to do in that scenario and even so, I don't want to eat that every day. I just don't. I don't like a lot of ingredients, and stuff that's been cooked like that. I just don't want to eat that every day. I don't—it's just taste preference. I don't, but you know, I'd love to be able to make some sweet potatoes if we had an oven. [laughs] I could make some sweet potatoes and eat those. Those are delicious, and um, that's

> another thing—stuff I was making. I was baking it in an oven. [laughs] (K. Singer, Self-Interview, August 18, 2012)

While small toaster ovens are available in China, they do not cook the food the same as larger, conventional ovens. I did not purchase a toaster oven until a few months after I moved to China. Thus, I stopped eating vegetables because I could not prepare them the way I preferred. Culture impacts food choices through the cooking methods that are popular in that culture. Self-food is developed based on the means available to prepare foods. I grew up around ovens; thus, baking is part of my Self-food.

One of the most influential cultural factors in my food choices is the Western view of health. Health beliefs are grounded in culture because culture dictates health behaviors and attitudes. People rely heavily on the health knowledge projected through popular culture. I learned most of my health beliefs from Western health professionals, such as sports nutritionists and doctors, and I always enjoyed watching popular health programs on television like *The Doctors* and *Dr. Oz*. I read many running magazines that have articles devoted to healthy eating to improve running performance. In elementary school, I learned about the food pyramid and the importance of eating fruits and vegetables. I had a long cultural history of exposure to health information.

> It's just medical information tells you that's [processed food] wrong. Um, so yeah, you know that if you eat something that is fresh like uh, a piece of fruit, then it hasn't been tampered with, and the nutrients and everything are kind of pure, but the more and more you do to a food, the more and more those nutrients are taken away, and it's just kind of like…the problem is you're not really getting the nutrition you need, and I would be worried that you know, to eat unhealthy food is, I'd be worried that it would do something to my body if I ate those every day. That there would end up being some kind of side effect to eating unhealthy foods every day. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, October 1, 2012)

While I never noticed a physical side effect from eating processed foods, Western medicine indicates that processed food is unhealthy. This concept is popular among the medical field and is repeated in many medical sources, giving it credibility in the culture. People often accept health information when it permeates the medical literature and media in their culture. For Chinese people, packaged foods are healthy because they are clean and unlikely to cause food poisoning. They judge them less on nutritional content. The cultural views and food values differ.

Additionally, my body-image perspective is also westernized. Western culture emphasizes ultra-thinness as a beauty ideal for women. Also, magazines often use computer software to alter bodies to depict images of physical perfection. Body insecurity is common among women, especially young girls. Consequently, this cultural need for physical perfection leads to feelings of body dissatisfaction and may even lead to eating and exercising disorders. To be overweight or obese carries a significant social stigma in U.S. culture even though it is the societal norm.

> Um, in American society, you know, being fat is not considered attractive. And uh, you know. You learn that about, you know, you think guys, and you learn that they don't expect you to look like this perfect, photo-shopped person in this magazine. You know, but yet, you know, and I'm just talking about growing up, I have different views now, but you know, growing up, it's just, you know, you got all these beauty magazines and you got all this television that somehow I'm supposed to match up to that…I'm supposed to be perfect. I'm not supposed to have any stretch marks or cellulite. And I'm supposed to have a perfect body…even as a little girl, I remember when I was in third grade, which I guess I was like 9. That was the first time I felt fat. I wasn't fat. I wasn't a fat little girl. But I felt fat. Because there were other little girls that were skinnier than me. Already at 9 years old, I'm feeling fat and unattractive, okay. That's how much this stuff is shoved in your head as a female. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, September 20, 2012)

These cultural ideals even affect children. I developed a negative self-image at a young age, and while I emphasize health over thinness as an adult, I still fear gaining weight. My first motivation for healthy eating is to prevent weight gain. Cultural expectations for beauty often

influence food choices because food consumption affects bodily appearance. If people value the cultural ideal of beauty, they are more likely to let these ideals guide their food choices.

Furthermore, when food intake is not controlled in order to achieve this physical ideal, people may criticize themselves as failures. For instance, a lot of popular Western health information accentuates the consumption of fruits and vegetables more than any other foods. Fruits and vegetables are supposed to be consumed in their natural state to maintain the nutritional quality, and these foods are low in calories to maintain healthy weights. However, avoiding unhealthy, high calorie foods is difficult, which diminishes some people's self-efficacy when it comes to food choices.

> I always have a sense that I'm failure. That I'm never successful at doing that. Basically, the only way I can think for me to feel successful is if I just ate raw vegetables and fruit all the time. Maybe some wheat bread's okay, you know. Eating peanut butter as much as I do. I don't consider that—it's probably not very healthy. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, November 12, 2012)

While cultural food beliefs, such as consuming fruits and vegetables, is meant to promote healthy eating habits, people can exaggerate these beliefs in order to aim for perfection. As stated, the culturally valued weight status in the United States is ultra-thinness. When people are unable to physically achieve this target, they may feel a sense a failure. For me, I cannot consume a perfect diet. I regularly eat foods that I feel may prevent me from achieving this cultural body ideal in addition to achieving perfect health. Perfectionist attitudes are common in the American culture since this culture is also a competitive culture. While people may not change their food choices to conform to the healthiest diet, they may experience feelings of inadequacy for not attaining dietary perfection.

The Chinese culture of work dinners contrasts with the U.S. culture. In U.S. culture, business dinners should limit alcohol because the culture deems that people should not get drunk

in front of their work colleagues. Nonetheless, in China, people show respect to their boss and their colleagues through toasts. The more people drink, the more respect they show other people. The practice of toasting this way is called gambei (bottoms up). The drinking and socializing make the meal last a long time, which makes over-eating enticing.

> Gambei. Well, I actually kind of touched on that. I feel that way because you have the group of people just eating, and you feel that food that tastes good, so let's just…I'm hoping I can, you know, learn to limit myself better, but it's just hard. You're talking. You stay there a long time. Maybe if we stayed there just a short time, I could stop eating and just leave it at that, but because we're there so long, then it's just hard not to oh, I could have just one more of these. And oh I can get just one more of these. And you also wonder how long it's going to be before you have that food again, and you enjoy it now, and it's just very tempting. More tempting to indulge, especially when they keep bringing out dishes. (Self-Interview, November 12, 2012)

When people join social gatherings, especially in a new culture, they have a strong desire to want to belong to the group. I do not want to offend people by refusing to engage in these food experiences even though they were not my Self-food. Furthermore, since these dinners involve so much food, the temptation for people to overeat is high. The food is never removed from the table. Thus, while people spend hours drinking and socializing, they continue to graze on the food even if they are satiated. This practice differs from Western restaurants in which people order their own dishes. Even if portion sizes are large, they are more in control of the amount of food they consume. Buffet-like atmosphere make monitoring intake challenging.

Contextual They-food Influences and Their Impact on Self-food

While my Self-food mimics a lot of U.S. culture practices, the development of my Self-food is situated in specific contexts. Culture is a broad influence while different contexts invoke more direct influences on eating behaviors. The people and society that people interact with daily establishes the food environment, and this food environment formulates Self-food. In other words, one culture may have many different Self-foods within it since individual contexts differ

across people. The following section highlights the major influences of family, friends, and society on my food choices.

Family

Health is a major component in my Self-food. While I gather a great deal of my health knowledge from health experts, my concerns for health are related to my family's health history.

> Because my family does have a lot of diabetes. Um, I don't want that. I don't ever want to have to shoot anything into my arm. Um, I don't want to like have to take pills. I don't want to worry about having to check blood sugar. I don't want to deal with that in my life, and I may still have to, you know? And I know that, but I just want to try to like prevent it, so I do look at foods that I think are not going to be high in sugar and all that stuff that causes diabetes. I'm also afraid of the colon cancer because that's also a huge, you know, a lot of people in my family have died—I don't know one person who has had colon cancer in my family who survived. They all died…But I saw daddy go through [it] and I don't want to go through that. (September 20, 2012)

Witnessing loved ones undergo disease significantly impacts people. By directly witnessing this suffering, people wish to prevent such suffering for themselves and may adopt healthier behaviors. Watching my family experience disease guides my food choices daily. If I eat too many unhealthy foods, I feel guilty because I know the side-effects of these foods. Other people may also feel this same guilt if they know the consequences. A history of witnessing other people with diseases may result in a more health conscious Self-food.

People often mimic the same food behaviors as their parents. Despite my fear of disease, sweet foods are my main taste, and I assumed that my mother had a lot of influence in my love for sweet foods because she also was a sweet food eater.

> To have that cake. I didn't care. I just kept doing it. Nothing could deter me. I guess the love was always there, but I don't know why. I guess I could say my mother loves sweets, and she does the same thing. She'll sit there and make like a cinnamon cake, and she'll eat on the whole thing all day, and at the end of the day, the whole thing is gone. She'll do that. You were there. (K. Singer, Self-interview, November 12, 2012)

My mother always ate too many sweet dessert foods. Naturally, I felt her habits impacted the development of Self-food love for sweets even though I did not feel a direct connection. I witnessed her consume a great deal of sweets, but we typically did not consume these foods together. My mother overeats sweets if they are available. I am the same way. If I do not buy any sweets, I easily avoid them. Once I have allowed myself to indulge, I figure I have already failed. Thus, I might as well savor the failure since I will face the consequences regardless. I see her undergo this same dilemma. At times, she makes a cake and encourages me to eat it with her as if she does not want to be alone in this behavior. I join her because maybe her failure makes me feel less guilty about my own.

However, I started to reflect more deeply on my father. I assumed that since he was thin and active, he was healthy. Nonetheless, when I recalled his behaviors, I realized he did not eat healthily, either.

> I mean, I hate to say anything bad about him, but he wasn't healthy. He ate lots of junk food. He would buy Chinese food and pour the entire contents onto a plate with the all of the rice and eat it and then eat a huge piece of ice-cream cake. I didn't think about it, but he showed me that it is okay to eat a lot if you can stay skinny. So, really, both my parents ate bad food, but I think my daddy had more influence over it than mom because I am more about how to stay skinny but I love to eat. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, January 2, 2012)

I always eat larger serving sizes than other people, and if I do not gain weight from it, I feel this behavior is acceptable. Being surrounded by both parents' eating too much food naturally made me reach for larger amounts of food when I ate. My exercise allows me to consume large amounts of food without gaining weight like my father; thus, I overlook this vice. Thus, both my parents contributed to my love for sweets and overindulgence. When people adopt food behaviors from their parents, these behaviors may entail specific foods, practices, or attitudes about eating.

My grandparents on my father's side were also major feeders in my life. In my grandfather's closet, he had stacks of candies and Little Debbie cakes. In the drawers of his refrigerator, there were packets of Reeces, Baby Ruth's, Butterfinger's, and Hershey bars. I spent a lot of time with my grandmother while my parents worked. She always offered me these sweets. If I refused, she offered again. My grandfather would pack up bags of candies and make me take them home with me. Therefore, my grandparent's house was another venue where sweets were abundant and even forced upon me. This constant exposure solidified this everyday habit of eating sweets as part of my diet. Coming from a family food world of sweet eaters resulted in my main tastes for sweets.

Parents often instill values about physique and beauty, which are influential in eating practices. My father played a major role in my fear of gaining weight. My mother was always overweight. She lost weight and regained it many times. My father would always criticize her weight and warn my sisters and me to avoid weight gain.

> So he would tell us that. You're going to get fat. You're going to get fat. And then he told me—he'd make comments to us directly. He'd come to me and say things like Kim's [my sister] getting fat. I hate to say that about my dad, you know, um, but maybe that's where I get it from…I don't think he should have said the things that he said because, you know, girls like that. It was not a problem with us, and I like that he was trying to encourage us to exercise, but he shouldn't have gone about it that way because you know, you're just very sensitive about it. (K. Singer, Self-interview, September, 20, 2012)

Exposed to weight criticism at young ages can make people self-conscious about their weight, which can affect their food choices. If people wish to maintain a normal weight, they may have to control their food intake. I feel that I cannot gain weight or else people will judge me based on my appearance. Even when I look at other people, I always notice their weight. I know that I should not do this, but I was socialized to see excess weight as unattractive. As a little girl, I wanted to please my father. I remember how happy he was when I started running marathons and

got physically fit. He emphasized to everyone how physically fit I was. Thus, my ultimate concern in my food choices is to maintain a healthy weight by controlling my caloric intake.

Friends and Society

Most people socialize with groups of people who share common interests with them. Often, they socialize with people who are similar in their food habits, as well. My friends do not have a significant impact on my food choices. My friends accept my food habits. When we go to restaurants, they will let me either order healthy food or not eat. On many occasions, I will join my friends to socialize at a restaurant, but I will not eat any food. However, if I am a guest in someone's home, I do not reject the food.

> If I go to somebody's house, and their mother or mom or somebody…I'll just eat whatever they have because I'm not going to hurt somebody's feelings. I'm not going to say make something different for me, you know. I'm just going to eat it because to me, it's rude to demand something different when you're a guest…It's just how I am, so I feel like I guess since I'm choosing, I'm choosing to be polite versus, you know, rejecting the food, so I guess there's still a choice, but in a sense, you know, when it comes down to disrespecting somebody, I don't feel like there is a choice with the food. I'm going to eat the food. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, November 12, 2012)

The social context determines the food behavior. Food behaviors that may be acceptable for close friends in public places are not acceptable in people's homes. The home is a more personal environment; thus, it invokes more polite behaviors. In this situation, the need to please others is more important than main tastes. Self-food succumbs to They-food to appease people whom they respect. The collective food approach provides an atmosphere of conformity that avoids social conflict.

The workforce is another influential factor. Jobs establish specific food environments based on their location and demands. My job requires me to travel frequently, which removes me from my Self-food environment into unfamiliar They-food societies.

> Um, most of the time, I don't know where the supermarket is or the convenience stores. So you don't really have a lot of healthy options there. So I end up eating what everybody

> else eats for lunch. Maybe I do go to the convenience store to grab something before bed or maybe they [work colleagues] beg me go out to dinner. They make me go out to dinner, then none of it…well, it's my choice in how much I'm going to eat and what I'm going to eat that's on the table. They order the food, and you know, it's just hard to not resist just wanting to try things, and then the stuff just stays on the table, so it's hard to resist like just continuing to eat it. It's just there. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, October 1, 2012)

A new environment removes people from their routine. They are more likely to engage in different eating behaviors than normally according to their main tastes. Since I travel frequently, these food behaviors during traveling become common in my diet. Since I do not know how to obtain the food I want, my work colleagues easily sway me to consume their foods. Environments often determine the impact They-food has on food choices. Unfamiliarity makes food choices more open to change.

Another societal impact on food choices is my reaction against popular foods in society. Societies dictate popular trends in food. For me, I avoid these social trends as a way to assert my individuality.

> I'm very unique with my tastes for things for sure. I really like the things I like, and most of the time, they're different from other people, but I do really like them. At the same time, it's a defiance, you know, that I will always like what's not popular. I think it goes that way. I will never like what's popular. Whether that's food or music. You know, whatever. Um, so, I guess when I was a kid, a teenage, I mean, I didn't always like what is popular. As I mentioned, I like cheese on my pizza and that was not the popular thing. I always wanted my steak rare even though nobody else did. Even if I was eating something like steak or like pizza that is popular, I still ate them in unpopular ways compared to the way everybody else. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, November 12, 2012)

While many follow the popular trend in food, I follow the opposite of these trends. Therefore, society still influences me because my choices are based on society's choices. I simply use this They-food as a way to assert a unique Self-food persona, but my choices are still

dependent on the trends of They-food in order to obtain this sense of individuality. Even when Self-food attempts to be unique, it is still reliant on They-food.

Because I enjoy watching television programs on health, the media impacts my food choices. The media is the most influential venue for food advertising, including the advertising of healthy food practices.

> Although another reason, it might be something l read or saw on T. V. about something that is really good for you, so I think, you know, is there a way for me to eat that? Is there a way for me to include that in my diet? And so I'll try it, you know, I mean something realistic. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, October 1, 2012)

Television programming about food invokes a curiosity towards incorporating different foods into my diet. Since I constantly try to improve my diet, I use the television and internet to learn more about healthy foods, and often, these sources are convincing. The media uses many health professionals to promote foods, and the media is able to reach a wide array of people. Television shows associated with health often have a strong rapport with viewers. I use the media to give me ideas for incorporating foods into my diet.

My Self-food Product of They-food

The previous sections outlined my cultural and contextual experiences with They-food both in past and present experiences. During exposure to these external influences, I developed my Self-food identity. Particular aspects of these They-food contexts were ingrained into my daily food choices until they became a natural part of my lived experiences with food. The following sections describe my Self-food through main tastes, the implementation of these main tastes, and reaction to challenges to these main tastes.

Main Tastes

My main tastes include several essential components: sweet, simple, and healthy, light food. My sweet preference refers to any food that tastes sweet, such as fruit, sweet potatoes, candy, chocolate, cake, breads, peanut butter, and chocolate milk. Simple food here refers to food with few ingredients and little preparation. My affinity for cake is overpowering. While I do not eat cake often, I love it so dearly that I have an obsessive, uncontrollable relationship with it. The feeling toward cake is almost like the lure of a drug.

> I mean, they're [cakes] all made with that really strong flavors that kind of come alive when you eat them, and as soon as like I taste it, I just want to keep experiencing that, so if I have a piece of cake, after that first bite, I've eaten all the cake, and it's just not enough. I'm not ready for this experience to be over. You know, I need more cake, and I know that if I eat more cake, it's going to be too much. I'm going to feel bloated. I'm going to feel full. I'm going to have too much sugar in my body. Um, I'm going to have eaten too many calories. So I know there's all these negative things to come with it, but yet I've got to have that experience. (K. Singer, Self-interview, October 1, 2012)

People often have strong desires for certain foods, and these desires become so physically, mentally, and emotionally poignant that they convey a sense of powerlessness. I know that I can choose to not eat the cake, but once I have tasted it, it consumes my thoughts. My body feels an adrenaline rush from the sugar, and I long to feel this sensation again. As demonstrated, my parents and grandparents exposed me to sweets as a child, which fueled my addiction to highly sweet foods like cake. I avoid cake by not purchasing it often.

However, I could never completely eliminate cake from my diet. I am more connected to sweet foods than I thought. I do not want to forgo this experience forever. Like a person, I would miss the food.

> Well, it's like a romantic relationship in the sense that I love sweets, and the idea of not having them in my life almost seems like losing a part of myself in my life, or losing something in my life. Kind of like the feeling you get, you wouldn't know, but kind of like the feeling you get when losing a person in a relationship, so you get this really like

> attachment and this routine, and then you break up with the person, and you're not the same… You feel like you can't be who you are anymore. You have to be someone—not someone else, but it's a different you. You'll never be that person you were with that person. So I guess in a sense, sweets are the same way. (K. Singer, Self-interview, November, 12, 2012)

Consuming sweets makes me excited. I have this event that I can enjoy and that brings me happiness. I feel guilty about eating these foods because I know they are unhealthy, but this health knowledge cannot change my habit. In this case, main taste takes priority over health. Like a person, the food fulfills me emotionally. To lose the food would be similar to losing a part of my identity. Essentially, many of my foods would change, making me a completely different eater. While I do try to control my intake of these foods, I feel that life would no longer be pleasurable if I did not have these foods. Almost all the food I eat is sweet. I did not realize this aspect prior to the study. I eat fruit several times a day, and fruit is sweet. I do not like vegetables as much, but the vegetables I eat are sweet, such as sweet potatoes, mushrooms, and sweet plantains. I eat breads that are sweet, and my favorite food is peanut butter. Even though the foods I choose are relatively healthy, they are still sweet. Hence, this taste permeates my diet and guides all my food choices.

Another important factor in my food choices is whether a food is healthy and light. I am a marathon runner, and I care about my weight status, so I try to choose foods that will keep me thin and nourished. Furthermore, I do not want to feel too full when I eat. I want to be satisfied but not full.

> It [a heavy food] is very dense. Like fish just crumbles apart. It's not dense. So I think that makes it heavy, and then also, it tends to fill me up very fast. I don't have to eat a lot of beef to fill like really full…Like you can eat a ton of shrimp, and you don't feel like stuffed. [laughs] You know, from just eating the shrimp, or if you just ate a piece of fish, you don't feel stuffed, so it's density of the material, but it's also how full it makes me feel. Is it going to kind of bloat me out or not, or is it something I can eat, and I can be satisfied, but um, I'm not going to have this bloated, stuffed feeling. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, September 20, 2012)

If I eat food that is too dense, I feel bloated. This bloated feeling is physically uncomfortable, but it also causes the stomach to protrude, which makes me feel overweight. Dense foods also affect my running performance because they make my body feel heavy and slow. The main reason I eat the same foods every week is because these foods keep me satisfied without making me full. Choosing sweet fruits and vegetables help me maintain my main tastes needs for sweet while also satisfying these other two factors for healthy and light. This part of my main tastes is related to my desire for health and my fear of gaining weight since these foods affect my body image.

Simplicity is a significant part of main tastes for me. Simple food, from my perspective, means food that has very few ingredients and does not need to be prepared and cooked; therefore, it allows me to savor one flavor at a time.

> [When I mix flavors] I'm not really experiencing or enjoying the taste to the magnitude that I could be. I just have it one at a time. It's like have you ever—if you've ever had pizza, um, maybe you put goat cheese on it. I don't know. If you ever have pizza, and you just pull off a little chunk of cheese, and you just eat the piece of cheese like that. And it tastes so good, but if you eat off—you know, just eat it with the pizza, then you really don't get that distinct taste of that cheese. You know what I'm talking about? If you just pull off that little corner and taste it. It just taste amazing, and you realize, this is what I'm missing. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, September 20, 2012)

I prefer to taste specific flavors without any distraction of other flavors. When I eat simple foods, I am able to taste one or maybe two flavors at a time. While this food was convenient, I choose this food more for its taste and lightness. Since most of the foods I eat are sweet, the sweet taste is satisfying by itself. Hence, I can savor the sweet taste of each food separately. This main tastes aspect is more about savoring the sweet flavor unadulterated by other factors. Simple food makes the sweet taste more intense.

The Implementation of My Self-food in the They-food World

My food choices are structured in order to both appease my main tastes for flavor and for health. The most important reason for control is health. I want to control my intake of dessert foods to remain healthy, but I have to find a balance between eating healthy and allowing myself some indulgent foods. Reflecting back on previous experiences, being overly restrictive does not work.

> I allow myself to eat some sweets. At that time, I did not allow myself to eat any sweets for like…it was probably like a year and a half. But, so it was just incredibly restrictive at that point because I really, I wish I didn't like sweets so much, but I really like sweets, and as much as my diet and health has improved because of the food I choose to eat, and I enjoy eating the healthy food, in a way, I think it has also been detrimental in the sense that because my body is not used to eating a lot of sugar because I do eat healthy food, then when it gets a taste of sugar, it's crazy about it, [laughs] you know? (K. Singer, Self-interview, September, 20, 2012)

Deprivation often leaves people unsatisfied and often leads to obsessive fascination with the foods they are being denied. When I do not eat dessert foods, I obsess over them. During the time period described here, I even purchased food magazines and would stare at the pictures of the desserts as if they were pornography for my taste buds. If opportunities emerged to eat sweets, I binged on them because I was unsure about when another opportunity for indulgence would emerge. I know that balance in my diet is essential for control. I allow myself to have sweets but a limited amount. It is control but not restriction. To restrict produces less control than balance.

Despite the balance in my diet, as stated previously, I suffer from feelings of failure for my inability to completely control my intake and to consume only healthy foods. Every meal makes me question my habits unlike other people who eat without discretion. I am always analyzing my food.

> **I** think that is the biggest thing about every meal I eat. No matter habitual or how I lay out the portion, and I know okay, that's all I'm going to eat, so I should just be able to eat and not think about it. I always have to struggle with wanting to eat more and having to analyze why I cannot. And then, if I'm in the situation socially, and we're just eating, and it seems that I'm just eating a lot without thinking, I'm still feeling guilty about eating the way that I'm eating. There's always a sense of guilt at every meal I eat no matter what. I always have this feeling of guilt after eating anything. So, no. I think I'm always analyzing. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, November 12, 2012)

While I have an established control system, I can never reach a sense of control. The urge to consume more food is always present. Even when I allow myself an opportunity of indulgence, a lingering guilt is present because I failed to maintain my controlled diet perfectly. Eating experiences are never completely relaxing for me. I enjoy eating, but the act also represents a flaw within me, reminding me that I cannot achieve perfection. Thus, even in habitual meals, my internal struggles with my instinctive urges to overeat mean that I am always making cognizant food choices.

Environmental changes pose challenges to my perceived control over this structure. Even though there are resources to maintain my diet when traveling, the internal struggle with overconsumption is more intense. Often, I fail to maintain my structure.

> The location, if I'm traveling…it feels temporary, and I guess I lie to myself and say well, I start off with great motives about what I'm going to do and behave myself and eat whatever, but then I go, it's temporary. I can go back to my old routine next week. So it just seems like okay, if things don't go the same for that one week. And I don't know. I just always crave to do things that I'm not supposed to be doing when traveling. It's like a compulsion. I just want to do things that I don't normally do. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, November 12, 2012)

The internal conflict of controlling my impulse with food is always present, but it is easier to overcome these urges in normal settings. When the setting changes, the situation feels temporary, which defeats my willpower. The sense of temporality lures me into believing that I can adopt different eating behaviors without suffering the consequences of weight gain or

physical discomfort. The experience will not last long enough to cause any damage. The temptation is higher.

My Reaction to They-food Challenges to My Self-food

I try to keep a positive attitude toward the changes I face in China. In the beginning, I felt that I needed some time to determine which foods were healthy. On the other hand, I did not want to eat cooked dishes. Thus, when I first arrived, I consumed a great deal of packaged food, which I knew was unhealthy. I also dined out in restaurants frequently. These practices diminished my food-esteem.

> You know, I just don't like it [eating]…I'm just not looking forward to it as much, so I'm just not eating that much now, and I don't care…You know, it doesn't taste very good to me [laughs]. So I just kind of eat it [food]. I don't know. I can't say that it makes me depressed, and I can't say that I feel like I lost this part of my life. I feel like I should feel that way, and I feel like maybe I kind of do. (K. Singer, Self-Interview, August 18, 2012)

Eating is a pleasurable experience, which is one reason why overindulgence is tempting. During the first few months in China, I did not enjoy eating anymore, and I felt unfulfilled. I lost weight initially because I did not eat as much food. The eating process was about satisfying my hunger and no longer about pleasure. My structure was gone, and I did not have a clue about how to develop another structure at the time. I felt discouraged and ultimately, like a failure.

I typically think of substitution in food choice as trading an unhealthy food for a healthier option, and I have always promoted this practice to other people as I encourage them to eat healthier. I now realize that substitutions are broader. Moving to China caused me to substitute my foods because I was unable to find my common foods initially.

> Maybe someday I can be happy with the brown rice eventually, but it would be very, very hard to not eat bread. Extremely hard to switch that staple food, so…you just…get so used to something. As much as you can substitute…it's hard to change it. I think that statement I just said is [inaudible] because I'm not…I think now the whole reason why I wanted to do this study is to be less naïve and…if you talk to obese people about substituting, oh no, you can eat this instead. It's healthier. Add this instead, and yes, it's

> healthier. Now I'm just realizing that it's very hard. Something as simple as me giving up my bread for brown rice, and how hard that would be for me is kind of making me think of when I talk to obese people about changing their diet and substitution…it's a lot more complicated. (K. Singer, Self-interview, November, 12, 2012)

Not having my main tastes foods in China left me feeling disconnected from the food experience. Food no longer made me happy. Since I prefer to control my intake, this experience should have made me happy, but it made me depressed because I lost my excitement for this activity. By switching to brown rice, I would not do any harm to my health. However, I am a bread eater, a flour connoisseur. The idea of eating rice like the Chinese is not an option for me. This realization is the most important realization in the study. Finally, I broke through my naivety because changing food habits is difficult, even for me.

Fortunately, the situation changed, and I was able to find my main tastes foods. However, I had to undergo a period of dining out with participants, friends, and work colleagues, which caused me to struggle to regain my dietary structure. Finally, after data collection ended, I devoted myself to regain my weight and health status. However, as I examine this diet now, I realize that my diet in China now is more or less the same as it was in the United States. Even though my environment changed and I struggled to find a way to structure it in this new context, in the end, I returned to my Self-food diet. I found that my participants follow this same pattern when they change environments. This phenomenon is illustrated in Chapter 6.

Summary

Through these self-interviews and research journal entries, I learned a great deal about the They-food factors that impact my food choice in addition to my own preliminary biases about my study. More importantly, I was able to make connections between the They-food factors that developed my Self-food and those that influenced my participants. I did not make these connections until the end of my data collection phase and into the analysis phase. These

connections are important to recognize in understanding the way the study was analyzed. By analyzing my own past experiences and biases, I was able to bridle them aside in order to remain open to my research. After exhausting possibilities, I was able to see the connections between my and my participants' experiences. The self-interviews also enhanced my openness because I realized that many assumptions I had about myself were not true, so I grasped the power of repeated reflection. Thus, I was thoughtful in my approach to my data since I knew that any initial interpretations had the potential of being wrong. In addition to my self-interviews, I documented all of my thoughts, concerns, and revisions to the research method in my research journal to create an audit trail. The audit trail is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONNECTING THE DOTS FROM ANALYSIS TO INTERPRETATION: THE AUDIT TRAIL

The chapter presents the other major components of the audit trail according to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework. Because this study is qualitative and phenomenological, reliability is achieved through consistency and dependability. Dependability is demonstrated through the extensive documentation about the methodological process and my personal reflections on analysis throughout the study (Marrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). The first section depicts the methodological process addressing data collection, interpreter and translator experience, and the bridling process to demonstrate that the final interpretations are consistent with the data generated (Krefting, 1991; Merriam, 1995). The preliminary code development section discusses my initial interpretations of the data, showing my self-monitoring of presumptions and continuous search for new meanings (Shenton, 2004). The data reduction and analysis section discusses the selection of meaning units in interview transcripts in my preliminary code development. The data reconstruction and synthesis section presents the reconstruction of themes based on new evidence that emerged during the study and as I analyzed the data holistically. The changes in analysis in this section are a good indication of dependability because it demonstrates that my assumptions did not bias the analysis (Marrow, 2005). The final section is the final code synthesis that defines the finalized themes in detail.

The Data Collection Process

There were ten participants in this study. All participants were currently living in Beijing, China, but only one participant was a native Beijinger. The other participants migrated from other provinces including Anhui, Guangxi, Jiangsu, Hebei, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Hunan. Most participants grew up in urban environments while only two participants grew up in rural areas. All participants were middle class Chinese. Middle class was defined as English speakers with a monthly income of 8,000 to 12, 000 RMB, or they were full-time university students supported by their parents who were middle class (Li & Niu, 2003). Likewise, participants were identified as middle class when they perceived themselves as middle class (Li, 2006). All participants were young adults between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-four years old. As a novice researcher in a foreign country, I felt it was best to avoid research with minors. I learned after arriving in China that this decision was best because many parents do not speak English at the schools I visit, which may have posed some communication issues. Young adults were chosen because their English abilities are better than older adults. Most young adults learn English in school; thus, their English knowledge is recent while the older generation is less likely to speak English. I was also interested in this age group because they are part of contemporary Chinese culture.

Participants had varying employment statuses. Four participants were full-time students with two earning their undergraduate degrees and the other two pursuing Ph.D. level graduate degrees. One of these participants was a graduate student, but also had a full-time job. Four participants worked full time in professional occupations, and one participant was currently unemployed. Of the professional, full-time workers, one participant was a mechanical engineer, one was a college advisor, one was an assistant manager at a real estate agency, one was a post-doc research assistant in agricultural science, and one was an editor for a Chinese publisher.

The characteristics of the participants as middle-class students and professionals situate the data in a specific context. Participants were accustomed to urbanized lifestyles with hectic work schedules and access to a variety of food sources as compared to people who live in rural areas. They had the financial means to purchase many foods, so food scarcity was not an issue for them. Most choices were not financially motivated. People with lower incomes likely face different motivations. Also, their age established a mindset among several participants that health was not an important issue to them because most health problems occur in old age. Older participants, especially those who have experienced health problems, may be more self-conscious about food choices.

Participants self-reported the economic status of their families when they were children. I never inquired into the specific income figures of their families during this time period. Participants simply stated whether their families were poor, average, or rich. Other factors on economic status in childhood related to the quantity and quality of food in childhood, the economy of their hometown, and their parents' occupations. Participants who identified themselves as being poor when they were children shared experiences of consuming only basic foods and eating little meat. Wealthier participants emphasized experiences with various foods, including foreign restaurants, such as McDonald's. The lack of food variety in childhood played an important role in the development of participants' main tastes. They tended to consume large amounts of foods and accentuated the new freedom in food choice they had since they now had more income. Likewise, wealthier participants emphasized the development of their exquisite tastes in childhood and how these higher food standards remained with them in adulthood. In other words, they were intolerable of cheap, plain foods. Socioeconomic status proved influential to Self-food development.

All participants had university degrees, and four were able to go abroad for graduate level study or shorter study abroad programs. One participant worked abroad in a position in which he would work one month abroad and then have one month leave. Countries visited by participants included Great Britain, France, and Indonesia. Six participants had never lived or studied abroad. Participants who lived abroad incorporated foreign foods in their diet or discussed these foreign experiences in their philosophy on food choices. Past experiences with living abroad were concluded as important to evaluating main tastes and outside influences among participants. Additionally, having a foreigner interview the participants may have impacted the study. I noticed early in the process that participants had a deep pride in Chinese food, especially their hometown food. Many of them emphasized that Chinese food is more delicious than Western food and that all Chinese food is intricate. I am unsure if they were trying to impress me with these attitudes because they knew Chinese food was new for me. When I learned that I did not like Chinese food, they were rather skeptical of my criticism about the food. Culturally, they were uncritical of most Chinese food for being unsavory or unhealthy.

Seven participants were interviewed five times, with each session ranging from forty-five minutes to an hour. One participant's interview lasted an hour and a half. The remaining three participants were interviewed four times due to the lack of new information revealed. However, follow-up emails were sent to all participants to clarify information as needed. The data collection process lasted six months. On average, each participant had two weeks in between interviews. This two week period worked well because participants had time to both reflect on the topic and to approach the topic again with a fresh mindset. There were times when the interviews were only a week apart, but they did not produce data as rich as the others.

The interview process was uncomfortable initially. I was an experienced qualitative interviewer; however, I was interviewing native Chinese in China with English as their second language. Unlike the participants in my pilot study who were living in an English-speaking environment, these participants had less opportunity to practice their English. While some participants spoke English well, others struggled at times. After multiple interviews, I noticed an improvement in their English skills. They adjusted to speaking English and to the topic itself. The interpreter clarified information as needed, and I asked questions using simple English. Luckily, I managed to learn some Chinese, especially food terms, which was useful during the interviews. I also repeated the participants' responses in order to make sure I understood their comments.

I usually met participants at coffee shops. Since most Chinese drink tea instead of coffee, coffee shops were quiet. The Charlie Brown Café was used most frequently because it was close to a subway station, but Starbucks was another good location. Most participants lived close to Wudaokou where I lived. If we met on weekends, the shops got noisy at times, but I spoke loudly and repeated the participants' responses so that I recorded good audio. Typically, the noisiness did not last long. I later got accustomed to the Chinese accents on the audio recording, but initially, I struggled with it. The repetition for clarity purposes helped. I repeated their words verbatim because I did not want to impose any meaning on their comments that may have influenced the interview. I usually bought the participants some tea or coffee to show my appreciation. Some interviews took place at restaurants. Participants were anxious to expose me to Chinese food, especially from their hometown, so we met at restaurants where I paid for dinner. The interviews always took place after the meal. We often met at restaurants during weekdays when they were less crowded. One participant invited me to her home two times to

conduct the interviews. She cooked dinner for me, and we did the interview afterward while drinking tea. One participant always met with me in his student office at his university. Thus, all interview locations were relaxed, fairly quiet places that ensured both the participants and I felt comfortable.

Sometimes my participants asked me questions during the interviews. For example, Hong asked me if food preferences were heritable. Her mother always loved sweet foods, and she felt that she inherited the same tastes as her mother. I hesitated to answer her question because I worried about imposing my ideas on her. Nevertheless, I did not want to be rude, so I responded based on the academic literature that suggests that the prenatal environment and the home environment play a significant role in the development of food preferences. I explained to her that these influences were not necessarily fixed, though. I did not want to interrupt the flow of the conversation by not responding. The interviews were more effective when they were conversational.

I talked about myself some, as well, when suitable. The first interviews with each participant were awkward because we did not know each other well, and the topic was new for them. To develop rapport, I shared some personal details about myself. For instance, one participant talked about how she loved pizza. I told her about the different kinds of pizza in the United States. The participants were interested in knowing about me as a foreigner. After I interviewed each participant once, I transcribed the interview, highlighted any potential meaning units, wrote down any initial meanings, bridled my original interpretations, and then composed follow-up questions to revisit those topics. I always had more follow-up questions than I asked in the subsequent interviews. I had to eliminate some of the questions to stay within the 60-minute interview time frame outlined in the consent form. More importantly, I noticed after 40 minutes

that the participants tired. Their faces looked tired, and their answers were less detailed. Using a second language may be one factor in this issue because speaking in a different language can be mentally exhausting. I did not eliminate complete topics. I chose questions that were more open and allowed participants to provide more details.

Working full time as a manager and conducting the interviews in the evenings was physically and mentally exhausting for me. Best practice is to write about the interview as soon as possible after the interview is over. However, I struggled to maintain this practice when I returned home because I was tired. If I was unable to write in my journal immediately after the interview, I tried to write about it as soon as possible the next day, but I did not always complete it immediately. Thus, the ideas faded in and out over time. One time I even forgot to write in the journal. I believe I still made good comments and notes, but I do not know if they were always optimal.

Some interviews did not go smoothly. In September, my first interview with Bingwen felt like a disaster. Foremost, I was an hour late. I underestimated how long it would take to arrive at the coffee shop and got lost. I worried that it would affect his participation in the study if he believed I was unreliable. Also, Bingwen did not fully understand my study even though I thought he did. It seemed sometimes that participants did not fully understand my study even though I explained it to them several times. They were happy to participate; they just did not understand what I was studying. The interview process began well; however, because I was late and I had scheduled an interpreter to come and conduct a second Chinese interview with another participant, my interviews overlapped unexpectedly, which created an awkward situation. I had to interrupt the interview process with Bingwen to set up the other interview, which broke the flow of conversation. I was able to revive the conversation, and the rest of the interview went

pretty well. I sent an email to Bingwen as soon as I arrived home a few hours later to apologize again for the lateness and interruptions. I managed to arrange the second interview with him easily, but he was unreliable after that time. I was unable to make further appointments with him until January. Luckily, he agreed to meet then. I helped him revise his own research proposal, so we worked out a way to help each other.

Originally, I had planned on meeting with the participants several times prior to beginning the interviews; however, time constraints due to my job interfered. I had too many appointments to arrange with people, and I needed to stay on schedule. I knew most people would be out of town the entire month of February for Spring Festival, causing us to lose contact. Hence, I wanted to complete the interview process before February. The participants and I did carry on conversations by email and Skype prior to first interview so that I could assess their English-speaking fluency and their ability to be reliable and informative participants. For example, if participants were laconic in email exchanges, I did not deem them suitable for the study. Also, if they made many English errors in communication, I assumed that their lack of English skills would pose barriers to the study. During these email exchanges, we discussed our family and educational backgrounds. I informed them about the nature of my study and why I had chosen to conduct a study on food choices in China. They knew that I am interested in obesity in China, but most participants did not think obesity was a Chinese problem, only an American issue.

I reflected on my interviewing technique constantly. During the interviews, I sensed that I prematurely interrupted participants' reflection because I was trying to ask all of my follow-up questions, making the interviews too semistructured rather than phenomenological in my opinion. The idea was to let the phenomenon emerge through reflection, any reflection. Thus, I

decided to rely less on the follow-up questions and probed more into specific experiences or comments. I narrowed my follow-up questions and practiced staying on the same topic to see it develop. Creating thought-provoking questions during the actual interviews was challenging because I was trying to both listen to the participants and think of good questions. I simply asked a lot of whys. For example, I described the process with Tong in a journal entry:

> I asked him about why he ate noodles for breakfast for the past 10 years. He gave a simple answer that it is his habit. He gave this answer for many things. I kept asking him why. He did not eat the same thing for lunch. Why noodles? Why no change? I think I got him to provide several responses to it. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, October 14, 2012)

Maybe I did not know how to ask the right questions or he did not know how to answer in English. Through repeated questioning, I got him to at least try to reflect more on the behavior. I tried to describe the ways food is judged like texture and taste, but I worried that I led him this way. Some people reflected easily with guidance while others struggled. One participant probed himself because he could not explain the reasons he loved meat. One day before our interview, he made himself lunch with no meat in order to try to understand why he needed it in every meal so that he could explain it better to me. In his follow-up interview, he was able to provide more specific reasons for why he was attached to meat. He chose to involve himself in the phenomenological process through self-study and reflection.

I shared some food experiences with my participants in order to understand their inclinations more. For instance, I took Lanfen to a restaurant to taste one of her favorite dishes, a spicy stewed fish. The fish was freshly killed, and I got to look at it before it met its demise. The dish looked fancy with the fish buried under a pile of fresh ingredients with bright red peppers. It was made for sharing. I wondered if the communal aspect of the dish enhanced the experience for her. The fish was too spicy for me and made my stomach ache afterward, which distracted

me from the interview process. I ate the fish to be polite. It was a significant They-food moment. She loved the fish, so I did not want to criticize it. I was making a food choice solely on a participant's influence. Nevertheless, the potent flavor clashed with my main tastes for sweet, and the stabbing forks in my belly all night long dissuaded me from trying the fish again. I understood why many participants did not often try new foods.

There were several limitations of the interview process. One of my challenges was scheduling. Some participants had unreliable schedules, so there was too much time between interviews. In this case, they forgot what they had said in previous interviews. On the other hand, it was good also because they approached the topic again with a fresh mindset. One of my participants worked abroad for weeks at a time, so for one of our interviews, I emailed him the questions. He was reflective and thorough in the first interview; therefore, I assumed that he would answer the questions in the email thoroughly, as well. This email was ineffective. His answers were too broad. I realized the importance of personal, in-person interviews. While I did use emails for short, follow-up questions, I never used them as interview sources again.

I struggled to maintain my motivation and enthusiasm toward the end of the study because of my hectic work schedule. The data collection process for this study was six months. It was a long period to maintain such momentum. I had to stay focused on my goals, my interviews, and my bridling. However, by December, the process was more tormenting than it was exciting. I was sacrificing too much for my research. The quality of my work may have decreased at times as I dealt with these struggles because I did not allow myself many breaks in the process. On the other hand, I did not know if my performance was waning or if it was a misperception on my part. I thought that my interviews were losing quality; however, I made some major breakthroughs in the interviewing during this time with three participants. Hence,

these feelings may have been more connected to mental fatigue than to actual performance. By December, I had become quite accustomed to phenomenological interviewing.

Interviewing the Second Language Speaker: The Interpreter and Translator Experience

I used interpreters and translators in my interviews because the participants were speaking in their second language. Most participants spoke English well and did not require much help from the interpreters. However, the interpreters were useful. Interpreters were the people who assisted during the actual interview. They translated for the participants when the participants needed to speak Chinese, and they clarified my questions in Chinese to the participants. The translators were used to transcribe the Chinese interviews and then to translate those interviews into English. For each transcription, I paid them $100. The interpreters were either paid with a free meal or 300-500 RMB. I had my participants review the translated transcripts from the Chinese interviews to ensure they had an appropriate level of accuracy. Participants made changes right on the document if they saw errors. Most errors concerned food items the translators did not know.

I used four interpreters, but I used only two of them most of the time. I had to use multiple interpreters to allow more flexibility in scheduling meetings. Also, I hired a few interpreters before I found two that I liked, who were professional interpreters. They asked participants to explain and provide details; thus, they probed. Other interpreters merely asked the questions, so I stopped employing them in my interviews. I explained the methodology and goal of my study to the interpreters so that they were prepared to conduct the interview appropriately. I used four translators. The process of transcribing the interviews and then translating them took a long time. To move the process forward quickly, I hired more translators. All but one translator

was a professional translator. The unprofessional translator was a friend. I based my choices of interpreters and translators on costs. Many companies charged expensive amounts that I could not afford. Thus, I used freelance services. Ideally, I would have gotten two different translators to translate the Chinese interviews to check for accuracy, but I could not afford more.

One of my professional interpreters knew one of my participants. I found this situation problematic sometimes because he suggested words that he believed she was trying to say. I did not see other translators do this. I was unaware of this issue until I read the translated transcript. The interpreter was not trying to lead the participant but only trying to help. I did not know how to avoid this issue, but I knew my subsequent interviews could revisit these areas to see if the participant's responses were consistent. His knowledge of her life could have definitely influenced the conversation. Alternatively, it may have made her feel more comfortable because he is someone she knows. Thus, maybe she shared more information.

The interpreters did not lead the participants for the most part; however, I was unable to know exactly what the interpreter asked during the interviews. I did not get to see the questions they asked until I reviewed the transcripts. Likewise, Chinese did not always directly translate into English easily. I asked some of the questions in English when the interpreters were unable to ask the question correctly in Chinese. Nevertheless, the participants understood the question after I explained it in English. Offering the Chinese interview did not produce any significant enhancements in the interview data, but it provided participants the opportunity to speak in their native language so that they could clarity the main ideas of the first interview. Regardless, giving participants this chance improved the dependability of the study by ensuring the participants' responses were consistent in both English and Chinese.

My main concern as a researcher during these interviews was that I was unable to ask any probing questions. The follow-up questions for the Chinese interviews were open-ended, but I could not probe further during the interview because I did not understand Chinese. The Chinese interviews were definitely more structured than unstructured. The interpreters who probed helped make them somewhat phenomenological since they knew the goal of my study. I still attained valuable data.

While the Chinese interviews did not produce new information, participants provided more detailed responses in some cases. When discussing foods, they said the Chinese names, and I researched these dishes on the internet. They also clarified some mistakes. For example, Lanfen said she preferred bread over rice, but in the Chinese interview, she emphasized that bread was a false translation because bing is different than Western style bread. Bing is a pizza-shaped bread with meat filling in it. It is different than the plain steamed bread in China. She shared more specific foods in her diet with me, which is important when studying everyday food choice.

I had one unfortunate incident with one of my Chinese interviews. After my Chinese interview with Bingwen, I somehow erased the interview. I made sure the interview recorded at the end, but somehow, after I put the recorder in my purse, it erased it. I managed to recover half the interview. To save time and money since I had paid an interpreter already for that day, I asked Bingwen to respond to the missing questions by email in Chinese. It was not optimal, but it prevented me from paying an interpreter again. Also, the interview was in Chinese, so I did not apply the phenomenological method during it. I still had additional interviews to collect the information I needed. At least I saved half the interview, so I had some natural context. However, responding to the questions by email did not produce detailed or reflective responses.

The Bridling Process

In the first interviews, I tried to keep my questions conversational. My only opening was to ask the participants about the food they liked to eat. All the subsequent questions were based on the response to that question. I did not like to make the first interviews too long because people needed to get used to the interview process and get to know me to feel more comfortable. I think the conversations in the first interviews progressed well. One interesting aspect is that a few of my participants began the interview. They took charge of the topic right away without my asking the introductory question. I gave them an explanation about the research topic prior to the interview, for we exchanged many emails prior to meeting. Some participants were eager to talk right away. Throughout the study, I wrote in my research journal to bridle any assumptions that I may have imposed on the data. I bridled directly in the interview transcripts using the comment function. I wrote any interpretations that came to mind for each meaning unit, including relating these units to my own experiences. I discuss the selection of these units later in the chapter. Afterward, I constructed a follow-up question that would broadly revisit that topic so that I could search for other possible meanings.

There were moments when I worried that I had led the participants. The following excerpt underlines this dilemma:

> I think I made some assumptions during the interviews. I thought that cooking food or serving food to others is a way to show love and/or respect, and I specifically asked the participants if this was true. I think this question may have been leading. I should have asked them what it means when a person serves you food, or how they feel when others prepare food for them. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, August 20, 2012).

In this journal entry, I identified a moment when I did not keep my questioning broad enough. On one note, these were my first interviews. Even though I conducted a pilot study prior to beginning this research, maintaining openness in an unstructured interview format was

difficult. I had to listen carefully to the participants while also constructing the right probing question. Furthermore, the conversational nature of these interviews made it challenging. Sometimes, I got so comfortable in the conversation mode that I digressed from researcher mode. In other words, I was not consciously focusing on my interviewer techniques. I was simply having a conversation. My saving grace was the multiple interviews that allowed me to revisit topics with again.

During the interviews, I repeated some remarks to ensure I understood what was said. I worried that it was possible to influence participants' ideas through this repetition if I did not repeat them correctly. However, I asked follow-up questions to re-explore concepts in case I did impose any unintended meanings. They had to retell an experience or idea many times. By September, I felt more confident in bridling and composing open-ended follow-up questions. I phrased the questions to approach the topic from a different angle. For example, instead of asking, why do you eat food to please others, I asked why do you eat pizza with your friends when you do not like pizza. It was specific but still open. As trends emerged among participants, I wondered if I was leading the participants during the interviews because my probing questions were becoming repetitive among participants. They were relevant questions based on the participants' responses, but at the same time, I felt they were leading because I had asked the same questions to other participants. I found this paranoia to be a common dilemma in the method.

When reviewing the transcripts, I found myself wanting to write more probing questions versus making initial interpretations, and then composing a question. As I forced myself to pose my own meanings first, it helped me write better follow-up questions. I originally wanted to focus more on developing specific experiences because I thought it would make sense to narrow

the interviews. I found this choice problematic. The follow-up questions were important to the bridling process. To choose specific incidences to develop limited my ability to remain open to all experiences. To me, the point of exhaustion from the phenomenological perspective was to keep revisiting multiple issues again and again. The process I was using was right. I decided that the important aspects would show themselves or among the various experiences, connections would emerge.

I knew how the phenomenological process worked in theory, but I was unsure about implementing it appropriately. As participants reflected on their experiences in the third interview, they began to provide more detailed explanations, to reveal new information, or to change their original perception. I assumed the interviews would get repetitive, but instead, they got deeper. A common expression from several participants was, "I never thought of this before," as they analyzed their own food choices. As I probed deeper into their stories, I learned how habits initially developed. Another challenge was to not bias later participants' initial interviews based on the first group of participant interviews. I made sure to focus on individual experiences and not to relate those experiences to other participants in probing. I did, however, make comparisons in my bridling notes in order to acknowledge these assumptions.

The phenomenological process of repetitive questioning was tiresome at the end of the data collection process. I felt a little disconnected from my study toward the end; however, I may have just thought I was, when I was actually just more comfortable in the method so that it felt easier. Furthermore, participants noticed that many of my questions were repetitive. They joked that they did not like it because the questions were hard for them to answer. Zhou had a difficult time describing what she meant by balance, and EnLai struggled to explain his love for meat. On

the other hand, sometimes they answered more deeply than before because they had had some time to reflect on the question since the last interview.

Sometimes when the participants offered a meaningful comment, I chose not to probe at that time. I needed some time to think and reflect on the response. It was hard to think deeply about a response like this and then ask the appropriate probing question in a short amount of time. Because I knew I had the luxury of doing more interviews, I knew I had time to stop, think, and write about this comment and then ask a follow-up question. Other times, I probed immediately after an important comment. One of my techniques was to cross my fingers. I never took notes during an interview because it was too difficult for me to listen to what the person was saying and take notes. I also found note taking distracting during an interview. Again, I knew I would have subsequent interviews. There were times when I asked the participants to define certain words or expressions. I discovered that my definition of dessert differed from that of Hong, so I was careful to seek clarification.

During the bridling process, I thought my presumptions were too obvious and that I should not write them, but time and time again, I found I was mistaken. When I wrote about my thoughts, it made me think. As I stated in my journal, "It makes me think about things that are NOT obvious even though I am writing what I think IS obvious" (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, December 15, 2012). This idea is the most important point in phenomenology. The purpose here was to make the familiar strange. My self interviews were another way that I bridled in my study. During this process, I thought about my own issues with food and how they compared or contrasted with my participants. It put my perspective on food and eating into view, allowing me to understand the lens with which I looked at food.

Preliminary Code Development

I began developing the codes during the interview process; however, they were not finalized until the analysis and drafting stage. Many initial codes were overlapping and inter-connected. However, the final codes were broad but distinct enough to justify their use. The following section outlines the early development of these codes during the data collection process. The notes and quotations used in this section are derived from the bridling journal.

Self-food

The concept of Self-food was present in the beginning of the study. Self-food is based on the Heideggerian concept of the authentic Self or at least, the perceived authentic Self. Self-food is people's personalized food identity. The food choices of the Self-food represent the finalized product of the fusion of all their past experiences with food. These food choices were consistent and so habitual that people suffered mental, physical, and emotional withdraw without their Self-food choices. As the literature in Chapter 2 illustrated, food identities are a well-known phenomenon. I was interested in the ways people made sense of their being through food. My participants identified aspects of this theme in the first interviews. They declared themselves as meat eaters, dessert lovers, Yunnanese eaters, and so forth. All participants had some ways to categorize themselves as eaters. The interviews were aimed at investigating the origins of these self-identified labels.

Main Tastes

The concept of main tastes emerged in many forms during the interview process and during the analysis. Main tastes are the specific flavors, behaviors, beliefs, and values of food that guide people's food choices. This concept and the They-food concept were broad and overlapping, making them difficult to define separately. I struggled to determine which of the

meaning units folded into which code. Before creating the umbrella of main tastes, there were many meaning units that related to individual preferences that were later coded under this concept rather than dividing them into separate parts, such as flavor preferences and behaviors. All participants had preferences in all of these smaller parts. By choosing to group them under the broader category of main taste, I was able to show how they all worked together holistically and were interrelated to guide people's food choices.

Cooking emerged as an important aspect early in the interview process. While I did not consider it as an important element in food choice initially, I later reconsidered as my participants continued to discuss it. The ability to cook determined the foods chosen. Some participants felt empowered through cooking because they made the dishes they wanted while others saw cooking as time consuming and chose to dine out instead. In this case, the ability to cook and the enjoyment of cooking determined if people cooked. I did not include cooking as a main taste concept, though. I first placed it under They-food because I thought that cooking was typically done for or with others. Later, I realized that self-interest guided a lot of cooking with particular participants even though cooking for others was present. In the end, it was folded into both main tastes and They-food depending on whether it was motivated by self-interest or external influences.

Most participants were attached to their hometown foods that were connected to both local culture and childhood memories. The following journal segment discusses this trend:

> Most are prone to the tastes of their hometown. The southerners are keener on sticking to their hometown tastes like participants 2, 4, 6, and 8, but 6 and 8 are open minded. They have found other foods from other places that they like, but they prefer the food style of their home. Most have developed habits early in childhood that are still with them now. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, December 18, 2012).

I originally believed that southern people were more attached to their foods than northerners, but in the end, I saw that everyone was attached to hometown foods. The southerners were more vocal in their attitude as seeing their food as more distinct than the North. I was presuming that southerners were more attached to their hometown culture foods. I had to probe more with the northerners to discover their attachments.

The topic of change emerged mostly when I met DaZhong. He talked in the first interview about how his tastes changed after he moved north to attend school. His interview contrasted a great deal with some of my other participants who were blatantly honest about not wanting to change their diet or try new food. He was very philosophical.

> He said today that he didn't really change his food and admitted that it is much different than what he revealed in the first interview. Thus, through reflection, he realized that he did not change. He was able to adapt, but he did not change his habits. He still eats the way he was raised to eat. He even said that people can't change. They are already rooted in their food habits" (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, January 2, 2012).

I have actually adopted his way of explaining main tastes as deeply rooted and cultivated. Likewise, DeMing revealed that he only adjusted to Chongqing food because he already liked spicy food. He just needed to adjust to the fiber and the heat. He would not have been able to adjust to it if it had tasted bad to him. Therefore, he really did not change his foods but only the frequency of his consumption. These interviews made me reflect on myself. By this time, I had been in China for three months, and I was reluctant to change my diet in China. I thought maybe my diet would change. I believed at that time that food preferences could change. I was open-minded. I simply assumed that some people were more open to change than others. I had a realization about substitutions during my self-interviews. I was wondering whether I would be able to switch my staple from bread to rice. I realized I did not think it was possible, or at least, I did not want to do it. This realization was later materialized further in January when DaZhong

had his own epiphany during our interviews. When I went back to analyze my other participants' transcripts, I realized that the same was true. Even though they had changed location, they still maintained their foods from childhood and their hometowns. Here, I knew that I had to include people's reaction to change in order to show the strength of main tastes. It became a rather important concept.

My initial analyses of the main tastes of my participants were rather weak. I had not holistically analyzed the entire picture of their food choices, especially as they related to each other. I first tried to define each participant's Self-food in order to compare them with one another. The following research journal entry demonstrates this process.

Authentic Self-food: December 6, 2012

> Participant 1: She eats the same foods for breakfast, lunch and dinner each day like me. She values health in eating, and she is always open to trying foods that are supposed to be healthy. She loves fish and bing. Bing is her main staple food from her hometown. She is attached to bing and congee from her childhood. Her emphasis on health reigns from her fear of getting sick.
> Participant 2: He does not care about food at all. He just eats whatever and hopes it tastes good and looks good. Also, he is focused on appearance and smell more than anything else.
> Participant 3: She has an obsession and almost addiction with sweets. She must eat something sweet after each meal, which is a form They-food since this habit began with her mother. She had dessert for main course. She will go to many dramatic lengths to satisfy a sweet craving. She also likes to cook to give her control and power over her food. She invokes her Self-food on others.
> Participant 4: He does not want to try new foods. He will not eat food he does not like. He is very stubborn with new tastes. I think he has less of a Self-food than other participants because he remains overly loyal to his food tastes of Yunnan and refuses to identify with anything else, making his Self-food completely They-food.
> Participant 5: He seems to have some health knowledge. He knows that greasy food and oily food is bad and tries to use less if he cooks. I need to inquire more into it, but he seems to move away from how most Chinese people eat. He is not interested in going to the restaurant, either. He seems nonchalant like participant 2. He cares more about convenience than flavor or health since he is a student.
> Participant 6: She wants to learn if foods are good for herself or not. She will not just believe people. She wants to understand why other people enjoy a food, and she is willing to keep eating a food until she learns to like it. She can also overindulge. She

likes spicy food the best since she is Hunanese. She also values simple foods in terms of health and flavor.
Participant 7: He is willing to go native with his diet when living abroad. He is really caught up in Chinese traditional medicine due to his mother, so he does follow They-food a lot in terms of health information. He will eat foods he does not like the taste of just because they are healthy. Health guides his food choices most.
Participant 8: He is very open-minded to food. He keeps eating food he does not like, and he will change his tastes. He does not approach food assuming he will hate it, but he keeps a positive attitude. This positive attitude helps him learn to enjoy different foods.
Participant 9: He eats the same foods again and again. He always orders the same dishes and goes to the same restaurants. But he kind of gets this through They food with his mother who always made him the same dishes when he was a child. He seems more influenced by They-food with his friends, too because he usually eats all his meals with groups of people who enjoy the same foods.
Participant 10: He makes it a hard effort to always try new food every week, and sometimes he is not successful. He is always looking for new food.

These notes about Self-food were rather undeveloped. However, this initial analysis was useful because I verbalized all of my preconceptions about the participants' Self-foods. For example, in this entry, I noted that participant 8 is open-minded and eats many different foods, but I found out later in further interviews with him that this notion was false. He copes well when he is in a situation in which he must eat food outside of his habit, but in his normal environment, he consumes the same foods from his hometown. Likewise, I assumed participant 10 ate different foods; however, his diet is rather consistent even though he enjoys trying new foods often. Like all participants, he is also attached to his hometown foods. Moreover, this journal entry demonstrates how the multiple interviews helped me develop a more complete description of the participants' main tastes. The participants for which I had already completed most interviews have more detailed descriptions versus the others whose are light. Multiple interviews helped the development of Self-food.

Convenience

Convenience was a code in my preliminary code development. Later in the final analysis, I decided to integrate this code into Self-food and They-food depending on the context because I discovered that it overlapped too much with these two codes. Convenience could be a part of Self-food if people value convenience in their diet, and convenience could influence food choices through external factors, such as work. The initial concept of convenience is outlined in this section.

Because most participants were full-time students or full-time workers, convenience was a factor they discussed frequently. Naturally, I figured convenience was a major component of food choices, but I was interested in the ways participants sacrificed their main tastes to attain convenience. I wanted to know how important convenience was in their Self-food fulfillment. All participants made convenience important sometimes. The students ate in the university canteen even though they did not like the food. Some participants did not cook because it was time consuming. Others ate what they referred to as junk food because they needed foods they could keep in their dorm rooms or to satisfy them after dinner.

> I think my study selection is specific in terms of convenience and food. Almost all my participants value convenience a lot. However, most are young adults who are attending school or are working and planning to return to school. They are all very busy. When I added participant 8, an older adult, he seems a lot less worried about convenience, but he has more time. He is settled. Plus, he has a family, so he has his father-in-law to cook for him. This makes a big difference. So, the characteristics of my people make a big difference in food choice. Another study on older adults or even kids could prove very different. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, November 14, 2012).

I noticed that younger people could sacrifice their main tastes for convenience while older adults were less likely to do this because they either had more stable schedules or had family members to cook for them. As mentioned, future studies on the differences in food

choices among younger and older adults may be informative in this case. For students, convenience was either about time or money. Some participants cared more about their studies, so they were willing to force themselves to eat foods they did not like to save time. Other students ate in the canteen to save money. Regardless, they usually dined out in restaurants on a weekly basis and were able to find restaurants that served their hometown style of food. Therefore, they had a way to escape the convenient routine and maintain their main tastes. Convenience was not always the overpowering factor. Those who were working usually sacrificed their main tastes when they traveled, worked late, or ate with their work colleagues. These participants had their own apartments, so they were able to cook or to purchase foods they loved. I saw the code of convenience as another way to emphasize main tastes attachments because people usually found ways to appease their main tastes despite convenience factors.

Health

Similar to convenience, I originally categorized health as its own code. Many participants made food choices based on health. However, after the final analysis, I decided to fold this code into Self-food and They-food because it overlapped significantly with these two concepts. A great deal of health information came from other people, making health a form of They-food. Also, participants had health beliefs that were not based on any health science that guided their food choices, or health was a main factor of their main taste, making it a Self-food. Even though some participants were unconcerned with healthy eating, their knowledge of unhealthy food and their desire to continue eating it was, again, another way to emphasize main tastes. Either healthy food was a main tastes, or main tastes took precedence over health. The development of this concept is outlined in this section.

There were some cultural differences in health beliefs. Participants talked about balance. They never provided an exact definition of it, but they basically explained that too much of one food or one kind of food is unhealthy. They ate a variety of foods. Zhou struggled a great deal to explain the concept of balance:

> She [Zhou] wanted to change her use of the term balanced because she could not explain it. Even though she even referred to balance again when she offered me tea after dinner. She said that after eating oily food, you should drink tea afterwards so that you can feel balanced. Yet, she struggled to explain this concept, and I will likely visit it again. Maybe I need to ask her about how she learned what balance is and why it is important to be balanced. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, November 22, 2012).

The repeated use of this concept of balance made me decide that health was an important code to use. Guiren also used the word balance a great deal to guide his food choices, but he defined it as eating a variety of foods to get different nutrients. Thus, he had a clearer understanding of the belief he was following. Balance is also part of the Chinese philosophy of Yin and Yang, and it resembles the concept of the Food Pyramid in Western culture.

Other participants ate unhealthy foods as part of their main tastes. Tong did not know why fried food was unhealthy, but he believed he was too young to worry about health problems since most illnesses happened to older people. DeMing knew why certain foods were unhealthy, but he did not want to change his diet because he cared more about flavor than health. However, he admited that a poor diet leads to health problems. I knew the degree of power of main tastes over health when participants continued to eat unhealthy food; thus, the health code enhanced the influence of main tastes.

They-Food

The other overarching concept of the study was They-food. This code was more distinguishable than Self-food and main tastes because external influences from other people

were obvious. Family and location were by far the most common They-food influences. Since Heidegger's philosophy of the Authentic Self and the They-self are the framework for this study, I was already in this mindset when I approached the interviews. People's food perspectives cannot be examined without the Other because people are all situated within the world of others.

Within my first two weeks in China, this code was present in my own experiences. This experience is outlined below:

> In terms of food choices, I also think that people eat due to the Other. For example, at my work dinners, people ate whatever was served. No one complained. I even ate when I did not want to eat. We arrived at Wei Tai very late, and I assumed that we [my work colleagues and I] would not eat dinner, so I bought something at a bus stop and ate it. However, we went to a restaurant to eat dinner at 11pm. I was not hungry, and it was late to eat for me. But, I ate the food because I did not want to be rude. I felt the need to eat the food to appease my boss and my colleagues. He bought us the meal, so I needed to eat to show appreciation. Plus, I felt that my impression to the other people there was based on my decision to eat. I would be thought about in a negative way if I refused to eat the food. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, August 20, 2012).

In this experience, I was in direct contact with the Other and food. I forced myself to act against my main tastes to partake in the eating practices of these other people to make a good impression on them and to become part of their group. This act was prevalent among my participants. One participant discussed eating vegetables because his boss liked vegetables. Others ate certain foods to appease their parents or friends. I normally did not allow Others to directly influence me, but here in China, I found myself in this situation. Consequently, Others became a central figure in the study.

Parents strongly influenced people's food choices in most cases. Hong's mother introduced her eating to consuming many sweets. Hai Wei's parents insisted he eat healthy, exposing him to many healthy foods. Participants all talked about their experiences with food and their parents' influences on it. Likewise, I noticed that friends often influenced choices. People copied the behavior of their friends. For example, Tong and Bingwen both said they

drank beer when their friends wanted to drink beer even though they did not like the taste. If people wanted to belong to a social sphere, they were inclined to eat the food that dominated that social sphere.

They-food overlapped a great deal with Self-food. I struggled trying to decide if these two identities were distinguishable, and if they were, I struggled to define their interdependence on each other.

> They-food seems like a big umbrella for many things. I really like this theme, but is it too big? Of course, I can always break it down into sections, but it seems to fuzz things with the Self-food, and it is hard to determine what is Self and what is They? Maybe that is the whole point, though. Maybe the argument is that even though there seems to be a Self, there is really ONLY They-food. It is definitely a turn on Heidegger. (K. Singer, Research Journal Entry, December, 6, 2012).

People ate food that they felt was part of their personality, but they started eating these foods based on the influence of Others, too. I wrote this journal entry above after interviewing Hong who said food was her friend. I did not know whether this connection was They-food or Self-food, or was if the food itself the "They" here. I followed the way participants made sense of food and accepted that the concepts often overlapped. If food gave participants a sense of Self, then I categorized it as Self-food. This study was about the participants' perceptions after all.

Data Reduction and Analysis Process

Construction of Meaning Units

The selection of meaning units began immediately after the first interviews with participants. Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed in order to prepare for the multiple follow-up interviews. Meaning units were highlighted, interpreted, and then bridled by making follow-up questions that would expose any new possible meanings other than my initial assumptions. A portion of the interview was selected as a meaning unit for many reasons. When the meaning units reflected an explanation for a behavior, when participants explained why they

loved a food, and when participants shared past experiences relating to food, these segments were highlighted as meaning units. These experiences often implied how their relationships with foods began and how they made sense out of these relationships, and oftentimes, participants were asked to share these experiences again in subsequent interviews.

Many portions were selected as potential meaning units in initial interviews. Since no follow-up interviews had been conducted, I interpreted and bridled all the remarks that I thought may be useful, which resulted in many meaning units. In the subsequent interviews, I only highlighted more specific parts that seemed to be developing more than others. I also highlighted any comments that implied a trend in the participants' food choices even if the participants were not cognizant of these patterns. These meaning units were used to provide guidelines for areas to probe.

Naturally, the meaning units in individual interviews synthesized themselves because each subsequent interview focused on the same experiences repeatedly. Thus, every meaning unit was able to build upon the other. When each participant's interviews were analyzed separately, the themes emerged naturally within that participants' transcripts. These individual syntheses were the parts of the parts-whole analysis. I wrote about these results in my bridling journal. Here, I both interpreted the meaning of these themes, as well as considered ways to remain open to new possibilities. This process was effective. For example, I initially thought that my participants ate a variety of foods and that most were open to trying new foods. I later learned that almost all participants ate the same foods in their everyday diet and were resistant to changing their diet, even temporarily. Thus, by bridling the assumption that they ate a variety of foods, I tracked the progression of my analysis, which was fascinating when realized I was wrong!

I did some interview checks with other readers. I sent the first three interviews from my first five participants to other readers. One reader was a professor, one a graduate student, one my boyfriend, and two were participants' boyfriends. I found it hard to find people to volunteer for this work because either the work was too time-consuming, or they merely did not feel qualified. They agreed with my comments and offered some suggestions for follow-up questions. After I completed the data collection, I attempted to find more readers, but no one agreed, and I did not have the money to pay a professional to analyze them for me. Unfortunately, I was unable to attain additional analyses.

I determined that I had exhausted the amount of possible meanings when the interviews turned repetitive, less reflective, and unproductive. They stopped producing deep, reflective moments of discovery. Typically, this incident occurred shortly after major conclusions they made during the interviews, such as when DaZhong realized he was not as open with food as he thought. Perhaps the participants also were tired of the topics, or maybe they believed they had reached the conclusion, so the study was done. Either way, the interviews ceased. Most participants finished in five interviews. Some finished in four. As needed, there were a few follow-up emails to clarify a few points. The level of exhaustion was corroborated when I sent the analysis notes to participants for participant checks. I took the meaning units and grouped them together based on their content under the codes. Then I rewrote the meaning units in my own words following the phenomenological method. Afterwards, I emailed these descriptions to each participants to be verified for accuracy. Half of the checks returned with no suggestions. The other half of the participants offered minor suggestions, such as Hong who wanted to share that she reduced her dessert intake since her interviews. Another participant clarified that he did

not believe brown rice is cultivated the same as white rice, which is why he does not substitute it in place of white rice. Hence, most suggestions were commentaries rather than corrections.

After the participant checks, I coded the transcripts. I uploaded every meaning unit into the qualitative software program, Dedoose. It was easier to code using this software. I originally coded with my initial list of codes. I had more codes when I first began that included the following: main tastes, habit and control, reaction to change, flavors and tastes, They-food (friends, family, society, location, Chinese culture, work colleagues, and boyfriends and girlfriends), past experiences, childhood, travel abroad, health knowledge, health beliefs, and weight status. I chose a particular code for a meaning unit if it described that code. For instance, Hong talked about eating soup after dinner in lieu of dessert. This practice was her way of controlling her diet with substitution, so I coded it under habit and control. When participants talked about the tastes they loved, such as meat, sweet, and spicy, these were coded as main tastes.

The software took the meaning units and grouped them under the codes. This way, I was able to go back and review the meaning units as a holistic group for each code. This analysis let me examine the parts as a whole. During this process, I realized that some codes were inappropriate. Also, I noticed that some codes did not contain a significant amount of meaning units to justify a separate code. Thus, I combined some codes together as appropriate, such as society and friends. I also noticed that some codes needed to fold into broader codes based on the way I had defined them. For instance, I defined main tastes as including food-related behaviors; thus, I folded habit and control into main tastes. I also folded flavors and tastes into main tastes. More information about code changes are found in the Date Reconstruction section of the audit trail.

After codes were finalized, I examined them holistically. I could see that there were trends among the data within the codes and grouped these meaning units together to demonstrate these trends. After writing the analysis of each code and its meaning units, I conducted another review of the literature based on some new aspects that emerged. I reviewed literature about how taste preferences are formed and why they are difficult to change. I also conducted another review of the concept of They-food by reading articles about the influence of Others on food intake. This second literature review helped me conceptualize my findings. I saw that my findings were corroborated in the literature, and I used this information to justify my conclusions.

Limitations

I did not have any additional readers. I asked many people, but no one agreed because the task was too time consuming. I was only going to assign one participant to each person to minimize the work, but I was still unsuccessful. Perhaps living in China exacerbated this obstacle because I was far away from most of the people who could help me. While some people said they would help, they never did. I tried to use Dedoose to provide some additional analysis, but this software was unsuitable for my type of study. The software was made for qualitative studies with more participants and semi-structured or structured interviews with descriptors. Since my study only had ten participants, it was impossible to make conclusions based on descriptors and structured interview questions. The comparisons it made were illogical for my data.

Another limitation was that this study is contextual. I only interviewed ten people. They were all middle-class, Chinese English speakers. The goal of this study was not to generalize findings to large groups of people. Instead, this study provided detailed descriptions of the phenomenon so that people who experience this phenomenon are able to recognize these descriptions (Krefting, 1991). The language difference posed some barriers. Participants mostly

spoke English, so they were not always able to convey themselves appropriately. Even with an interpreter, some meanings were likely lost in translation. When I used quotations from the transcripts, I was skeptical about their reliability at times. Perhaps they were not always the participants' true words. Nonetheless, this issue was minimized with the multiple interview process.

Data Reconstruction and Synthesis

Past experiences always play a significant part in phenomenological research; therefore, I assumed past experiences would be a code. However, deciphering the appropriate sub-codes was puzzling. Initially, I thought of different parts of past experiences that could be important in food choice development, such as childhood, education, and travel. After reviewing the transcripts and modifying the codes, I decided to eliminate education because the only education that people connected with food choice was health education, so I included the sub-code of health education under the code health, but then later these meaning units were grouped under They-food since health education came from culture. I decided that traveling included both travel for recreational purposes in addition to working and living abroad. These experiences, at times, had a lasting impact on the participants' everyday diets or their overall food perspective. However, these experiences were later seen as local culture influences because the local cultures of these places influenced participants' food choices. Childhood remained essential because participants shared many stories of their food experiences in childhood, and childhood is where food preferences are formulated. When I examined these meaning units, I could not disconnect them from their strong familial influences. Childhood was folded mainly into They-food but also was used to explain people's Self-food preferences. There were a few outlying units that did not relate to childhood or travel specifically but to past experiences in general. I determined that these units described

the development of main tastes; thus, I decided to merge those units under the code of Self-food to demonstrate how main tastes were formulated. This reorganization made the analysis more focused, which is that food choices are impacted mostly through family, culture, and location that lead to the formulation of internal tastes preferences, food beliefs, and food behaviors. There is no need to separate past experiences because essentially, all of the meaning units were embedded in past experiences.

The code of health underwent revisions, as well. Many participants talked about health in terms of food safety concerns or nutrition, so the need for this code was apparent. I created the following sub-codes for health: health knowledge, personal beliefs, and health education. I knew there was a difference between people's personal beliefs about health and formal health education; however, it was impossible for me to distinguish between health knowledge and personal beliefs. Personal beliefs were health beliefs that were not based on scientific evidence whereas health knowledge was based on evidence. My own biases regarding health intruded because my definition of evidence was different from my participants culturally. Consequently, I changed the sub-codes to health education and health beliefs. Health education included participants' experiences from formal schooling about health. Health beliefs included any final conclusions participants made about health based on their education (both school and self-education) and their own personal beliefs about health that were not based on evidence.

After further analysis, I eliminated health education and only included health beliefs. I rationalized that health education would likely come from educators, doctors, and various medical experts, which was a sub-code under They-food. Expert advice on health was more connected to an outside influence like They-food, but health beliefs were derived from the participants' own thinking, especially since some participants admitted that they believed in

certain health practices even though there was no evidence to support them. Thus, the broad sub-code of health beliefs was more appropriate. Additionally, I added the sub-code of personal appearance to health. Several participants expressed concerns about weight and acne and allowed these factors to influence their food choices, so I felt the inclusion was appropriate. Nevertheless, after determining that the code of health overlapped too much with Self-food and They-food, I integrated health beliefs and personal appearance under They-food under the sub-code of Chinese culture. Most health beliefs and personal appearance preferences are culturally constructed; thus, these meaning units were more effective under this code in order to demonstrate how culture contributes to the development of personalized Self-food.

At the beginning of the study, I was interested in food identity based on the Heideggerian perspective of Self and They-self. I was uncertain about how these concepts would manifest. I established the code of Self-food. The most significant sub-code main tastes was chosen to refer to participants' physical, emotional, and psychological food preferences for food flavors, beliefs, and behaviors. These main tastes were deeply imbedded in the participants' everyday lives, and they could not foresee abandoning them. Likewise, participants had various habits that involved either consumption of main tastes foods or control over these foods for health or physical purposes. The sub-code of the implementation of Self-food went further than merely describing main tastes because it reflected how participants asserted control over their food choices daily and how they maintained their main tastes within the world around them. Habit and control were major factors in this implementation. Also, this code referred to participants' food intuition. Food intuition was participants' feelings of pleasure when consuming certain foods that were not based on actual physical feelings but on natural inclinations towards foods. Reaction to challenges of They-food to Self-food was another important sub-code that emerged from the

concept of main tastes. Participants shared experiences when they were denied their main tastes and forced to acclimate to new foods. This sub-code was created to explore such dilemmas and examine the ways participants coped with these experiences.

Early in the interviews, I noticed that cooking was a common topic among several participants. Originally, I thought that I would interpret cooking as a way that other people influenced each other. However, after further analysis, I saw that many people used cooking to exercise control over their own food. Therefore, I decided to include the topic of cooking under both Self-food and They-food. Cooking was a part of the implementation of Self-food since it served as one venue for participants to have control in their food choice. Participants also discussed experiences of family members cooking for them. In these cases, I chose to include these experiences under the sub-code of family influences under They-food. Cooking manifested itself in different ways making it appropriate to apply it to more than one code.

They-food was another concept based on Heidegger's concept of They-self, but I changed it to They-food to fit my context. Through the interviews, I was able to gather the various aspects of They-food that ranged from family, friends, the media, culture (both Chinese culture and provincial cultures, medical experts, and so forth. Initially, I pondered if Self-food existed or if every food choice was in some form based on They-food. To remedy this dilemma, I decided to keep the concept of Self-food because this term described the way participants conceptualize their own sense of individualism through their food identity that is meant to set them apart from others. In other words, They-food is the dominant force behind food choices, but I decided to interpret the phenomenon through the participants' perspectives, and in their perspectives, they had a food identity that they tried to convey to others. Self-food is their way of identifying themselves as eaters. They-food entailed the broader influences of Chinese culture,

provincial or localized cultures, and dominant cultural influences. It also encompassed the contextualization of food choices that contributed to the development of Self-food that included: family, friends, and society. Self-food emerged out of all these aspects of the They-food world.

Final Code Synthesis

The thematic structure of this study moved from the broad influences of They-food in which Self-food is situated to the specific, personalized descriptions of Self-food. All Self-food is formed through the They-food experiences. By interpreting the They-food manifestations, the historical development of Self-food was made vivid. The overarching thematic codes were They-food and Self-food. The following sections define the final code labels, their sub-codes, and their relevance in the analysis of this study.

They-food

They-food was the food identity that is not the Self-food but is formed through the direct or indirect influences of outside forces, typically other people. They-food was based on the choices made that were not the participants' projection of their own personal identity. It was their projection of a collective identity. However, the They-food influences are what formulates the Self-food as people learn about food through the culture and people around them. The following sections define the sub-codes under this concept.

Chinese Culture. Chinese culture represented the generalized concept the collective culture among the Chinese society. It was used broadly here to define those cultural practices that appear universal throughout the country. It does not include provincial cultures or subcultures. Participants made many connections between Chinese culture and their food choices. Health professionals or cultural health beliefs were also included under this sub-code. Health professionals were doctors (mostly Chinese traditional doctors) and health educators.

Teachers were included if they taught subjects that contained health aspects, such as biology, and if these aspects impacted the participants' health beliefs. Health beliefs referred to participants' personal beliefs about health that are based on either their synthesis of health information over their lifetime, or on their intuitive beliefs unrelated to medical evidence or education.

Local Culture. Local culture refers to specific food cultures of certain locations. These locations included provinces, cities, regions, or foreign countries. Local culture was examined when the participants incorporated aspects of those cultures into their food choices. Local culture included the participants' hometowns, and foreign countries included the participants' experiences during vacations or study abroad programs that either left a long-lasting effect on their food choices or revealed their Self-food attachments more explicitly.

Dominant Culture Influences. Dominant culture refers to the most widely accepted food practices across the country that most people followed without question. These influences were dominant because there were exceptions to these cultural practices, but people viewed these other practices as abnormal. For example, consuming rice as the main staple food is part of the dominant food culture in China even though there are some people who consume buckwheat, noodles, or bread as they main staple foods.

Contextual Influences on Self-food Formation

They-food had contextual factors, as well. While people may belong to the same overall culture, they experience different contexts in terms of families, friends, and society. Thus, people within the same national culture may have their own sub-cultures that impact their individual development. These specific contexts are described in the following sections.

Family members. Parents were the main family members here; however, grandparents played a significant role in childhood experiences with food since they served as caretakers when

participants were young. Most families cooked meals at home rather than dining out; thus, parents made the primary food choices in the home. Families determined which foods to eat and instigated food behaviors in their children.

Friends and Society. Close friends were the largest influence in this code, but many participants reflected on influences from society. Society was a general term used to describe the influence of those people around them that they did not know personally but who enforced the social standards on them. The media and the workplace culture were also included under this sub-code. The media was comprised of television programs, movies, books and magazines, and news programs. While it contained educational material about food, most media influences were not embedded in academic research and were not part of formal education. These sources were for the general public. Society also included the workplace and economic situations of the participants. Workplace culture entails the working environments and work demands people experience. Economic factors include the financial means to purchase food and perceived quality of food that guide food choices. The income level of the participants determined what foods they could afford to purchase. Perceived value asserted whether or not they felt the food was worth the price.

Self-food: The Personalized Food Identity

Self-food is the food identity that participants portrayed of themselves. They identified themselves by either a particular food or taste or by the food habits of their hometown. They often related their experiences with an identity based on what they enjoyed and what food aspects were important to them. These food aspects were integrated into their daily food choices from the They-world around them, but they chose which parts of the They-food they wanted to

emphasize in their food lives. These personalized food identities gave them a sense of uniqueness as eaters. The sub-codes under this theme are described in the following sections.

Main Tastes. Most participants revealed particular food preferences that they felt they could not remove from their diet. For example, in terms of flavors, some participants were attached to meat while others were attached to sweet or spicy foods. The particular flavor, food, food belief, or food behavior was an everyday part of their diet and had been part of their diet for most of their lives. They had a long history with these main tastes.

Habit is also under the construct of main tastes. Habit refers to a food practice that the participants did every day without conscious decision making, and they struggled to explain why they made these choices. The choices were part of their lives from childhood and continued into adulthood. The participants identified these choices as their habit. Furthermore, this code refers to the participants' philosophy about food and eating habits. Some participants held certain attitudes toward food that guided their choices based on their individual values.

The Implementation of Self-food in the They-food World. This code refers to the perceived structure and control people exert over their food choices as a way to maintain their Self-food. Structure refers to participants' need to include certain foods in their diet, usually for health purposes. Control refers to the participants' desire to make their own food choices, or the participants' practice of structuring their food choices in particular ways. For example, some participants structured their diet for convenience purposes. I examined the degree in which participants felt they needed to control food in their daily life or the degree in which they felt they did not have control over their food choices and how that lack of control affected them both physically and emotionally.

Reaction of They-food Challenges to Self-food. Reaction to change referred to the participants' ability to change their food choices based on changes in their environment, in their health, and in their social food experiences. Many participants traveled or changed locations in which they encountered obstacles in maintaining their Self-food. For this code, I examined the participants' struggles, acceptance, and/or reluctance to change their food choices.

Summary

This chapter described the decision making process of this study. Not only were choices described but the intellectual challenges behind those choices were made explicit so that the readers can follow the analysis process of this study clearly. Most importantly, the development of themes were presented and defined to prove their appropriateness to the interpretation of the study results. Also, this chapter presented the methodological process, its limitations, and the way I resolved problems that arose during the study. The main purpose of this chapter was to provide transparency in the research process in order to enhance the credibility and dependability of the study. The next chapter will present the actual data evidence that supports these themes and that explains the conclusions made in this study.

CHAPTER 6

MAPPING OUT THE PHENOMENON OF FOOD CHOICE: ANALYSIS RESULTS

The following chapter presents the data results from this study. I used detailed descriptions of participants' experiences of food choices in order to make the phenomenon vivid and recognizable to those who share similar experiences. The goal here was to illustrate the range of experience, not necessarily the average experience (Krefting, 1991). Still, these experiences are not static, for they are "constructed, multidimensional, and ever-changing" (Merriam, 1995, 54). Furthermore, the participants asserted their own perceptions over their food choices rather than my interpretation. The goal here was to understand the phenomenon rather than treat it and to explore participants' meaning making in food choices (Merriam, 1995). Therefore, the results here are not intended for generalization. Dependability is a more suitable term for external validity here because the results present a range of manifestations of the phenomenon that are likely to resonate with people in other contexts; however, it does not present an exhausted list of possibilities because possibilities are limitless (Marrow, 2005; Merriam, 1995; Shenton, 2004).

First, the concept of They-food is presented because Self-food manifests out of They-food phenomena. Self-food main tastes are connected to contextual experiences that include national and local cultures in addition to family, friends, and society. This section demonstrates how Self-food identities are situated in specific contexts. The flow of the results illustrates that Self-food is born out of They-food, but Self-food still attempts to project itself as a unique entity. The Self-food section contains the descriptions of the individualized main tastes of the

participants, the implementation of these main tastes into their everyday lived experiences, and the ways they react with the loss of these main tastes in particular situations. The analysis of the need for Self-food in the concept of being-with-food is presented in the final section, and the implications of these data to obesity studies is discussed.

They-food: The Interaction with the Food "Others"

Adopting Heidegger's concept of They-self, food choices emerge out of interactions with other people in the world, developing the concept of They-food. They-food is the food identity that people adopt in order to belong to particular social and/or cultural groups. Culture refers to the broader food beliefs and behaviors practiced by all people under a specified but broad social umbrella. Culture refers to both Chinese culture and local hometown or provincial culture in this study in addition to dominant cultures that are present. Society refers to the everyday functions of people living in an area or within a particular social group. Whether through close relationships or societal structures, the influence of the Other on food choices is profound. In many instances, people follow societal and cultural food norms faithfully. Food is part of the socialization process for social acceptance. The following sections outline the various ways the Other influences the formation of Self-food in participants either directly or indirectly to demonstrate that premise of all main tastes are situated in the broader, They-food context.

Staple Foods. Chinese culture involves particular foods and food constructs; however, the Culture dictates particular food behaviors that people engage in when they eat in social situations. There are many Chinese customs that are taken for granted as normal and thus, not questioned. A mainstay in the Chinese diet is the consumption of rice or noodles and the use of sauces in a vast majority of dishes. Ingredients may vary, but these qualities are standard across

the entire country. Through these elements, They-food is standardized, and the participants justify their choices as defining what it means to be Chinese.

> **Hai Wei:** Uh, I think it's [rice] a custom. Like in America, we eat bread, bread as the staple food, right? And in China, we just can choose rice. In the South, in Zhuhai, we choose the rice as our staple food and in the North, we choose noodles with uh, another like dumplings as staple food north.
>
> **EnLai:** Yeah. A lot of sauce and uh, sauce is a part of food in China, I think. It make uh, food more delicious. If you don't add any sauce, I think it's too plain. [laughs] I didn't like the taste of the food.

EnLai equates the consumption of sauces as part of being Chinese because all Chinese food contains sauces. Similarly, Hai Wei is unable to accept the concept of bread as a staple food since he has always been socialized to see rice or noodles as staple foods according to Chinese culture. Hai Wei uses the term, "we," rather than "I" when he discusses his choice of rice as his staple. He automatically assumes a collective food identity here instead of acknowledging it as an individual choice. As EnLai insists, sauce is a part of food in China. Without sauce, the food loses its Chinese quality. Once foods are socialized as the norm, people struggle to alter this mindset, especially when these food habits permeate the food supply. To avoid sauces, rice, or noodles is challenging; thus, people are more likely to conform to these standards.

More importantly, there is always a dominant culture in any context. Typically in China, the dominant culture is the Han majority, and food habits associated with this majority group dominate China. Rice is one example of this food domination. While some groups consume buckwheat, steamed bread, or noodles, a vast majority of Chinese people consume rice as their staple food in most of their daily meals. Rice is perceived as necessary for satiety, and this perception is so imbedded that some people insist that they are unable to reach satiety without rice.

> **DeMing**: I tried to eat noodles two days in a row. At that time, my lunches and suppers are all noodles. But after dinner, I felt hungry in one hour, though I already ate a lot. That might explain why rice is my major food.

> **Zhou:** They are different things. To me, bread just, for me, it's not main food, for me. Um, I can, if I go to the restaurant, for me, the main food is quite like the main dish, but I don't think that bread is main food, but I will eat bread much with the dish, um...in my mind, uh, bread is a cooking, it's too cooked. The food is too cooking. For me, the rice is more natural. It's just boil with water.

In China, rice is often served towards the middle or end of a meal, and it is seen as the main food. People have become so accustomed to eating rice at every meal that other staple foods do not satisfy them even though these other staples are also carbohydrates and filler foods. The need for rice is ingrained so deeply in the Chinese psyche that they make themselves believe that other staples foods are not filling. As Zhou suggests, the Chinese food philosophy is concerned with natural foods rather than processed foods. Bread contains more ingredients and is more complicated to cook; thus, Chinese people perceive it as processed whereas rice is viewed as simple and natural. Hence, it abides by their standards for nature and simplicity, as well.

However, some provinces incorporate steamed bread and noodles into their diets as staple foods. Even though most people still enjoy rice, others adopt the same attitude about satiety about bread that others do with rice.

> **Lanfen**: My family…both my parents know about it. My mom will always ask if I will have rice, and my answer is always no. They know that I don't like rice, so my mom will have both Bing [pizza shaped fried bread] and rice as staple food. And occasionally if we have guests, my mom will also buy some other staple food like steamed breads. To me, Bing is more attractive than rice. When I found that if the staple food is rice, I did not want to eat. If it was Bing and when I was hungry, I would definitely have it even there were no delicious dishes to eat with. But even with very delicious dishes, I still don't have the interest to have rice.

Lanfen shares this food habit because she knows that her rejection of rice is an abnormality in China. As she states, her mother continues to offer her rice even though she always refuses it. Thus, her tastes are against those of the dominating, rice-eating culture. To

reject culturally dominant foods is almost a rejection of the culture. Most Chinese find it bizarre for a Chinese person not to consume rice because rice consumption is synonymous with China. This kind of behavior differentiates her and establishes her food tastes as strange.

Balance. A core belief in Chinese culture is the emphasis on balance. The concept of balance is associated with the yin and yang. Balance with food refers to the need to not only consume nutrients but the need to also eat a balance in different tastes and types of foods. Most Chinese people believe that Chinese dishes are designed with this balance.

> **Guiren:**因为所有的东西或多或少的.....中医的理论讲究的是平衡，天人合一，讲究人与自然的平和.....【笑】和外国的生态学理论差不多，或者医学的（差不多）。讲究的是稳态，内稳态。也就是平衡，人体自身的平衡。当你的平衡被打破了，你就生病了。中医其实只是用另一种话，那个我们的古语来解释。解释的不是很清楚很明白，没什么科学依据。其实说的就是一回事Because everything is more or less…..The essence of Chinese traditional medicine is about balance. A man is an integral part of nature. The relationship between people and nature should be balanced. [laughter] Sounds like ecology or modern medical science. It focuses on the internal steady state, which is the balance inside your body. If you are off-balance, then you are sick. Chinese traditional medical system is trying to explain this in an ancient Chinese language. It is not well interpreted. And it has no scientific evidence. But that's pretty much the same.

> **EnLai:** Uh, maybe it [Chinese food] is not very processed, but I think Asian intelligence contains a lot, um, some experience I think they uh, they accumulated a lot of experience to keep you health, and it's uh, it's um, contracted from one generation to another generation. I think the way they [Chinese] cook contains a lot of intelligence.

These participants insinuate that Chinese cuisine is designed to promote balance. Such beliefs are imbedded in ancient Chinese culture of health and medicine because Chinese medicine seeks natural ways to maintain health. In this case, nutrition promotes health. People want to maintain good health; therefore, they trust this food belief since it is grounded in ancient tradition and is the popular consensus. They trust They-food here because it conveys credibility. By trusting the Chinese cooks or recipes, they do not have to make any effort to balance their

own diet. The diet is balanced for them. Thus, this cultural belief influences their food choices indirectly since they assume a passive role in maintaining a balanced diet.

Similarly, foods are not served isolated from other foods in Chinese cuisine. Dishes usually contain both meat and vegetables rather than serving a fillet of meat and a side dish like in Western cuisine. For some people, this mixture is healthy since it encourages people to consume vegetables frequently.

> **EnLai:** Yeah, maybe in China, the meat and vegetables cannot be separated. Lots of dish have meat and vegetables, and I like to meat, and I have to eat some vegetables. That's my food.

EnLai does not prefer the taste of vegetables. Nevertheless, the design of the Chinese dishes forces him to consume some vegetables when he eats meat dishes. Even if people like certain food groups over others, they consume the standard Chinese dishes regardless of their composition. To enjoy the meat, they have to eat vegetables. In this way, the standard dish designs impose much influence over intake of different foods. Rather than consume dishes with only meat, EnLai finds it easier to eat the popular structure rather than to deviate. There is an inclination here to adhere to the norm.

On the other hand, the Chinese see traditional breakfast foods are simple and used mostly for energy. Breakfast is a small meal compared to lunch and dinner in China. People consume enough food to give them the energy they need for morning tasks. Purchasing breakfast from small street vendors or convenience stores is popular.

> **Guiren**: I think so. Because the diet was managed by the school, I couldn't decide it as a boarding student. Before, I ate at home. My parents cooked for me. One major change is breakfast. Chinese breakfast is simple. It's usually just deep-fried dough sticks, eggs or porridge. Sometimes, we have milk. And that's it. We often eat high caloric food, oily food or pickles for breakfast. Our breakfast seldom contains real dishes. I don't know how things go now. But now I still eat traditional non-dish breakfast.

Breakfast items are not considered real dishes; therefore, they are referred to as simple. Noodles are commonly consumed for breakfast in many southern regions. Most cultures determine which foods are suitable for different meals. They-food is extremely potent in this circumstance, for it strictly categorizes foods, and people follow these categories because they are imbedded in eating practices early in people's lives and remain consistent among different subgroups of culture. The culture controls the conceptualization of the use of these foods here.

Specialty Foods. Local culture foods exerted a deeper, personal connection with certain foods than the overall Chinese cultural influences. Local hometown provinces have their own ingredients and flavors that are unavailable in other parts of China. Thus, people develop a close attachment with their hometown foods and long for them when they are unable to obtain these foods.

> **DaZhong:** Uh, huh. Even now I'm here [Beijing]. The culture with me is still the culture back there [Guangxi], so it's sometimes food is to you is not only something put into your mouth and eat, just like some people eating the dumplings because the culture here, but now I still miss my bai qie ji [chicken dish] because it's my culture there. So like you when you have the Spring Festival here, but you think about your Christmas there, so it's the same. I think culture things. Still, food you can change. Like I said, it's a kind of technical things. One of them is the technical things. You still can adjust, adapt to some food. You can accept some food. It's technical to me. But when it's culture things, it's something beyond the technical things, so it's, maybe there's the cultural things. These things you won't be able to change.

The use of the words "technical" and "cultural" are intriguing. Technical refers to an automatic act that does not invoke emotional reactions. However, cultural signifies a deeper feeling. While technically, people consume new foods, they cannot form a cultural connection with those foods. This cultural aspect is what makes them connect that food with their identity; thus, new foods never soothe the feeling of loss of their hometown tastes. Substitution becomes impossible. The identity here extends beyond merely being Chinese, for he cannot recreate his

food identity with new foods in another part of China. The food that constitutes his being is Guangxi food.

DeMing expresses similar feelings toward Beijing food even though he has lived in other cities and learned to enjoy different cuisines.

> **DeMing**: It's [Beijing food] simpler. But I grew up in Beijing, so Beijing food is a reminder of my hometown. Though it's not as tasteful and colorful as Chongqing food, I still can't live without it.

While people can migrate to other cities and develop a fondness of different foods, these foods do not replace their desires for the food they grew up eating. DeMing lived in Chongqing, and he continues to eat Chongqing food every week now. Nevertheless, only when he consumes Beijing food does he feel at home. The feeling of home insinuates an innate, intuitive feeling of comfort, belonging, and acceptance. Essentially, only those foods that induce such feelings allow people to feel like their true selves (Self-food). Ironically, the They-food of this local culture invokes the truest sense of Self-food.

Local ingredients and livestock determine many culinary dishes in Chinese provinces. The food available significantly influences preferred foods among its residents.

> **EnLai:** Um, is there, I like to eat meat. It's very nature thing. Um, uh, it's uh, I will um, I will explain it from my gene. I was born in Qinghai Province. It's a cold place, and uh, there is a lot of [inaudible] there, and Tibet person live there. And uh, uh, there is a lot, a lot of uh, uh, lamb live there. Uh, lamb, I type it on internet, and it could provide a lot of calorie and uh in China, uh, lamb is a yang food. It means you will eat it, and you feel very hot. So…

> **Guiren:** Uh, I think it's just, uh, my family somehow…my mother's family is just traditional Northern Chinese family, and they live in China, serve food made from these powders [flour], and these flours because they, because northern Chinese can [inaudible] white rice than in the southern part of China, so uh, so I think maybe, maybe I think I don't like flour food because I've been fed up to it. I eat it maybe when I'm not remember. I eat some a lot, so when I have the ability to discriminate between flour food and rice food, I choose the—I prefer rice from.

> **Zhou:** Hmmm…maybe because acne, it's not a, it's not good looking. It's not good, but it's not a really serious disease like this, and uh, and I know the people in the province

> like Hunan in such area. They have the reason to have such food habit. And I think some, it have two sides of spicy food. I don't think spicy food is unhealthy food. And now you know, also people use the spicy food to keep fit. To burn the fat like this.

The climate impacts the livestock and foods grown in these provinces. The Chinese believe that yin foods cool people off whereas yang foods heat people up. If lamb is readily available in Qinghai and is a yang food in this cool climate, then logically, people consume more lamb according to their cultural beliefs. The animal is abundant, and it serves a physical purpose. Rice is grown more in the southern provinces even though it is still a mainstay in many northern diets. While common foods create an attachment for some people, it deters others who become averse to it due to its permeation in the local diet. Regardless, tastes are formed according to the foods available even if people become tired of eating these foods due to their abundance in the local diet. In Zhou's case, she believes that the spices in Hunan food cause acne, yet like EnLai, she feels that the local people must have a biological reason to consume this kind of food. Also, she believes spicy food burns fat, making it healthy even though it produces acne. Thus, she trusts her hometown people and follows their example despite the physical consequence because she believes in their logic. People follow the popular food culture because they trust the cultural health beliefs of their people.

People may emphasize the uniqueness of their hometown food culture over others in China, especially with particular dishes. These foods contain special ingredients or are ingredients other people do not use. These special qualities allow people to distinguish themselves even further from the rest of the Chinese.

> **DaZhong:** Okay, in the southern part of China, the famous saying for that kind of thing, describe in Chinese, is that Chinese people can eat anything. That's exactly, basically, it's from Guangdong and Guangxi and Hong Kong, even in Southeast Asia because those people there like to eat all the things, rabbit, the rat, I mean, the mouse, okay, and another one, what is that [inaudible] the fox?

> **Tong**: Um yeah. Let me put it in this way. Normally, when Chinese people, uh, mentioned Yunnan, uh, they will recall the Cross Bridge rice noodle pretty vividly. That's true. So that's why the, this kind of rice noodle has meaning, a symbol of this place because it is so famous, and then people will eat the Cross Bridge rice noodle will, uh, recall the memories of the, this place.

In one case, the local food is associated with a Chinese saying; however, the food is credited to the Chinese saying. When people claim that Chinese people eat anything, they are referring to this local food culture specifically, according to DaZhong's perspective. This local culture assumes more distinction than other provinces. Similarly, Tong emphasizes the fame the Crossbridge Rice Noodle in the Yunnan Province. This dish is not only famous due to its ingredients but it also has a myth behind its creation. People hear the myth of the dish, and this factor influences them to want to experience the dish for themselves. The food attracts people to the province. Food is almost like a celebrity or local hero of the culture. It becomes famous, and people want to "meet" it, or in this case, eat it. Local culture influences food choices by accentuating unique food items that will attract outsiders into the food culture. People use their food as a form of pride because it becomes a projection of themselves into the Chinese world. If people are attracted to their food, they are attracted to them as a people.

Popularity influences people to credit certain provinces with food labels. There are eight official types of mainstream Chinese cuisines (Shandong, Sichuan, Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Hunan, and Anhui), and these cuisines have attained cultural popularity. People seek to sample these foods in order to sample the entire Chinese food experience. The foods' reputation among popular Chinese culture draws people to them.

> **DeMing:** Because there is all kinds of snacks in the country and theirs [Guangdong] is the most famous snack in the country.

Guangdong has a reputation for snack foods. Like many people, DeMing follows the popular opinion. He feels that if many people like the food, then it must be good. Chinese provinces are famous for different food qualities. If foods already have the reputation of being delicious, this cultural consensus likely influences people's tastes prior to them sampling the food. The mere fact that he consumes Guangdong snacks shows that popular opinion ignited his curiosity in the food because he wanted to try the food based on its preconceived reputation. Word of mouth among They-food influences popular opinion about food.

Furthermore, the Chinese view their food as complex compared to other cultures. This complexity is associated with both nutrition and taste. They often speak about their food with a sense of pride because every dish is intricately designed, even fast food dishes.

> **Guiren:** **因**为比较快。因为在西餐厅可能……**真正西餐**厅也不是所有的菜都很快。**你去吃快餐的**时候就……**中国的快餐和**饭店往往是一体的。北京的盖浇饭，面条米线，或者成盘的菜，一些需要烹饪时间长的菜，都在一个菜单里有。根据不同的需**要，你会有不同的**选择。因为在日常生活里，你不会点三四个菜，叫一桌朋友，一**杯酒，喝上半天的。所以你就会**……**外国可能大部分**……**国外的餐**厅，快餐是快餐，**正**规的西餐厅是正规的西餐厅，会有分别。中国都混在一起。所以你点，就会点简单的东西。Because it's fast. Since the Western restaurants may, oh, not all of them serve food fast. When you go to eat fast food…..In China, there is no difference between fast food restaurants and other restaurants. You can see that our menu contains everything including rice served with dish on top (which is a fast food), noodles or rice noodles, or some time consuming dishes. They are all in one menu. You order different foods based on your need. Usually you don't order 3 or 4 dishes and some beer to kill time with friends. So you will……Usually in other countries…...snack bars and restaurants are not the same thing. So in China, when you want simple food, you order it in restaurants.
>
> **DeMing:** Uh, I don't think Chinese food is simple. Every dishes is complicated.
>
> **EnLai:** Uh, you can cook it in a very short time, but uh, the Chinese traditional fast food cannot cook in a short time. It prepared for a long time.
>
> **Zhou:** Because when we Chinese cook dishes, we do a lot of preparation, especially to the beef when we make steak. They use some sauce to make the steak soft and tasty, which often covers the original taste of the beef.

All participants convey the perceived complexity of Chinese dishes. According to participants, the preparation time is long because the Chinese spend so much time making the food delicious. In this way, they talk about Chinese food as if it is more sophisticated and more delicious than other cuisines, which makes it unique and gives them a sense of pride. Consequently, since they are Chinese food consumers, the food makes them unique as a culture because the food is not easily replicated. They use the intricacy of Chinese food to differentiate themselves from other food cultures and to invoke a sense of national pride. They establish the They-food here as a Self-food in terms of a sense of nationalized Self.

The same logic is applied to a broader societal scale. Word of mouth has a great deal of influence over food choices, especially in healthy eating practices.

> **HaiWei:**一般，第一很多人说这件事情，第二自己去亲自尝试过，然后一段时间确实对我身体是有好处的，Firstly, there should be many people talking about this [healthy food]. Secondly, I need to try by myself, and see if it's really good for my health after a while.

To incorporate a new healthy food into his diet, Hai Wei is only intrigued if many people believe in it. If they are talking about a food, it influences him to explore it for himself. If many people believe it, then it must have some credibility. In this example, the popularity inspires him to test the food. When society popularizes foods, it exercises great power in influencing people to try the foods. People naturally put trust in numbers.

Similarly, people are more likely to try new foods if their friends recommend the foods to them. If their friends accept it, then they trust that judgment, for they do not believe their friends would recommend any food that is not delicious or is unsafe.

> **DeMing**：呃，这可能是因为我不喜欢尝试新的食物吧。除非是很要好的朋友推荐的，坚持让我尝试，否则我不会点这东西，我会担心出现这种情况，会想这是什么

> 东西，能不能吃？Maybe it's because I don't want to try new things. I don't try new food unless my friends recommend. Or I will be worried whether it's a food at all.

Even if people are typically stubborn in changing their foods, peer pressure may influence them to experiment. This influence is even stronger when people share the same main tastes as their group of friends because they know that if their friends approve of it, they are likely to enjoy it, as well. As DeMing suggests, he is suspicious of food unless his friends recommend it. Hence, he needs social verification of food in order to accept it for himself. People seek to enjoy similar experiences with those close to them. The Self-food ventures into the They-food as a way to explore potential new aspects that could essentially become part of Self-food. Self-food is still searching for pleasure.

Even if the original Self-food rejects the common tastes of its society, it finds ways to force itself to conform to society in order to belong. The need for individuality is second in importance to social acceptance. When Zhou was younger, she did not eat spicy food, which is the signature style of food from the Hunan Province where she lived. However, her friends influenced her to become a spicy food eater.

> **Zhou:** She is the first person who told me straightforward that "hey, you are not Hunanese because you don't eat spicy [food]." At that time, I clearly realized that everyone in Hunan eats spicy, [food] and I'm a Hunanese, too. So her comment was like pouring cold water to me. Just because I didn't eat spicy food, all of a sudden, someone stepped up and judged me. [Laughter]

The Hunan province is defined by spicy food; thus, spicy food becomes equated with Hunanese people. To reject this food caused Zhou to stand out from her society. Hunan is part of her being, but she was told she had to reject this part of herself if she could not accept spicy food. Therefore, the prospect of losing this identity in front of her peers enticed her to start eating the spicy food. People seek labels as ways to identify themselves, and these labels sometimes require them to accept They-food into their Self-food.

Family. Since children are unable to provide food for themselves, family, especially parents, are the most profound enforcers of They-food dominance. Families define foods, guide food behaviors, and more importantly, establish long-lasting food impressions through the creation of childhood memories that are connected with food. These impressions set the foundation of Self-food in adulthood.

For some aspects, They-food embodies food attitudes, and these attitudes are often learned from parents. Parents who are passionate tasting food and cooking food enjoy sharing this passion with their children. Food gives them happiness in life; therefore, they want to share this happiness with others who are close to them. For instance, Zhou's father and DaZhong's father loved to cook, and they attribute their passion for food directly to their fathers.

> **Zhuo:** Uh, maybe it's [love for food] a passion passed to me by my father. I saw that he was so happy when I enjoyed his food. So I take this feeling is a special thing. If we have friend or my family, if they enjoy what I cook for them, it's a happy thing. It's a naturous thing. Yeah…Yeah. For that time for me was very poor, the time for my parents, but the passion of the food that my father want to pass me is not to eat a lot, but eat with good quality, yeah. [laughs]

> **DaZhong:** I grew up with good taste. I can taste food that if it's good or not. I taste a lot of food. That means, even from my childhood, I taste those things much better than my, than the other fellows could enjoy because I have a good cook father. So I think I have a good taste. That's why I know that each one is good.

Zhou's father loves to cook and taste food, and she feeds off of his passion. When people are passionate, that passion can spread to others around them. His excitement increases her excitement. She learned to love food because it makes her father happy to watch her enjoy the food, which instigated a bond between them. People's desire to please others and to share pleasure with others encourages them to partake in food experiences with these Others in the food world around them. Food is not only a way to bond here but a form of entertainment or a hobby that brings particular people together who share this same interest. DaZhong's father is a

professional chef. DaZhong asserts that he tastes food with a more critical perspective than other people. He uses the words “deeply rooted” and “cultivated” often when he talks about his main tastes as if these are seeds his father planted in his Self-food. They-food established here dominates all other food choices because not only was his father’s food tasty to him, but it also is perceived as superior to other foods because his father is a chef. This early conceptualization makes the They-food of his father his permanent Self-food. Both of these familial contexts leave the participants feeling that they are refined tasters because they grew up in environments with food connoisseurs.

The mere formation of food habits in childhood essentially leads to the development of Self-food in adulthood. When foods are repeatedly served, people learn to enjoy the taste, and the food consumption becomes second nature to them.

> **Hai Wei**: Since childhood, I started to eat it [soup]. So until now, I have eaten lots of it. Of course, I had no feeling towards it as a child, and I just ate it as long as my parents gave it to me. That’s how I grow up, and that’s the habit.

Hai Wei accepted the food he was served as a child, and now, he continues to make those same choices even though he can choose differently in adulthood. The soup is so routine to him. He admits that he has no special passion for it; he is simply accustomed to eating soup with his meals. Thus, sometimes Self-food is formed not by clinging to beloved tastes but merely clinging onto habits. The food routine his parents set he in turn sets as his Self-Food because it is what is familiar to him. Familiarity rather than passion instills a connection.

For Lanfen, congee is a special They-food that carries long memories of her grandmother making the family congee every morning for breakfast when she was a child.

> **Lanfen**: Um, uh, do you know, when I go home, uh, the next Monday, the holiday, my grandma is around 80 years old, and we get up very early, maybe 10:30 in the morning cooks big, a lot of congee for the whole family, and then my mother just take the basin, a

> big basin, and go there to take some for us, and then serve it in the morning. Um, actually, it's a habit, and also I feel it's very good. My stomach feel very good.

Similar to Hai Wei and soup, congee was served regularly in Lanfen's home, so drinking congee in the morning for breakfast became habitual for her because it is a habit that her family started very early in her life. Now, she consumes congee for breakfast every morning as part of her main tastes. Furthermore, consuming this food makes her recall memories of her grandmother who is passed away. The food induces the feelings about her grandmother and consuming congee is a way to continue that bond. She carries on a practice of her grandmother when she consumes the congee. They-food intertwines with Self-food because people maintain They-food practices as ways to maintain relationships with their loved ones. The They-food of their family is their Self-food.

Habitual behaviors established in childhood may not always entail a particular food but the variety of foods served. Parents cook meals for children; thus, they determine the dietary structures that children learn and later manifest for themselves.

> **DeMing**：**她会保**证每顿有肉。导致现在每顿不吃肉，我就觉得吃不饱。每顿都有肉，鱼啊，猪肉，牛肉，鸡肉。菜可能会有一两个菜。蔬菜会有白菜，菠菜，韭菜类的. When I was a child? My mother, [s]he was uh, very simple woman. She usually, um, make just most eight types of [food] my whole life. And [in Chinese]… She always cooked meat. Now I feel unsatisfied if I don't get meat in my meal. Every time she cooks, I have meat like fish, pork, beef, or chicken. She cooks vegetables too, like cabbage, spinach, and leek.

The repetition of the same eight dishes became commonplace. Eating the same foods with little change is the set structure here; thus, the inclination toward routine is set. DeMing rarely changes his diet in his adulthood. He eats the same foods and dines out in the same restaurants. The dishes he eats are not the same as these eight dishes in childhood, but his diet remains consistent. Habits involve foods and patterns. People adopt these practices from family

easily because they become a part of everyday being for them. They learn their Self-food through the They-food world of their familial context because they have limited access to other They-food worlds during childhood, which is what makes adoptions of these practices easy.

When parents make food choices, they are not always focused on the nutritional needs of their children. Parents have their own Self-food practices, and children witness or engage in these practices with their parents. This behavior begins with the parent. The parent enjoyed this practice and chose to share it with the child, and children usually follow their parents' habits.

> **Hong:** Because after eating food when I was young, I think after eating food finished, when the dinner finished, and when I grew up, I think that I have to eat something like fruit or soup or the dessert, yeah, when dinner finished. Or I maybe it's like a [collection] in mind.

Hong and her mother enjoyed eating fruits and desserts after dinner when she was a child. Her mother loves desserts, and now, she loves desserts. However, the situation did not only form her main tastes preferences but it also established her routine because she has the urge to consume sweet foods after the main course. Thus, she maintains a practice in her Self-food that is based on both taste preference and habit derived from engaging in her mother's Self-food habits as a child.

DeMing also consumes sweet desserts daily due to his parents' attractions for sweets, as well. Like Hong, he typically eats them after dinner, a practice he started in childhood.

> **DeMing**: They [parents] will eat, too and they just put them [desserts] in the house, and when it's night, I will study and go find the sweet food.

DeMing continues to consume sweets at night in his Self-food status. Even though he did not necessarily eat them with his parents, his parents made these foods available to him as a child, and they did not restrict his consumption. He simply ate these foods whenever he wanted. Parents may not order children to eat foods or invite them to eat foods, but they influence their children's food choices through the food environment they create. If they make sweets available,

children are inclined to consume. People are likely to establish similar food environments in their adulthood.

They-food is manifested in the desire to teach children about healthy eating practices. Parents' health beliefs are strongly exhibited through food as they attempt to instill healthy habits in their children based on their personal food beliefs.

> **Guiren**: Personally, from my fat—my parents, in fact, my daddy is a food engineer, and my mother is a doctor. I know it's not an expertise in this discipline, but they will share knowledge, some traditional Chinese medical knowledge, and uh, sometimes, they will tell me when they are cooking. They will also [inaudible] to their daily cooking, and when they cook some food, and they tell me this is food you should eat. This is maybe something you need to avoid because they are unhealthy, and so I think that's the indictment of my attention to the daily diet. And then at my own, uh, knowledge and realization of this.

Guiren's parents are professionals who are knowledgeable in food and made an effort to educate him about food based on their professional knowledge. His parents told him what foods were healthy and what foods were not and tried to explain some of the rationale for their cooking choices. His mother is a Chinese doctor who is knowledgeable in both Chinese medicine and Western medicine, so she advised his eating practices as a child according to her expertise. During all his interviews, he shared many aspects of Chinese medicine and scientific approaches to food, which suggests his parents' food beliefs strongly influence his daily choices. In other words, he trusts this source of They-food because they are experts in their fields.

While food is enjoyed, it can also be dreaded when people forcefully impose their food beliefs on others due to personal health beliefs. Zhou's mother made her overeat often when she was a child. In her family, size is related to health, and skinny is seen as less healthy. Consequently, she was over-nourished.

> **Zhou:** Yeah. She controls something, sometimes unreasonable, but she believed it is true. For example, each morning, I had to eat a big bowl of noodles, the Chinese noodles, with two eggs boiled inside. She believed that it's necessary nutrition for me when I, in my

> middle school, because the study is hard. It's no! I don't agree with her. Another thing every night before I went to sleep I had to drink a big uh, cup of milk, and a very thick milk she made for me. Maybe you put two spoon of milk powder, but she would put four! That's why! I'm overweight. I realize it later during that stage. I didn't realize it's wrong habit. It's wrong things to follow, but my mother, she prepared there. She ask me to eat and drink, so I eat and drink. My weight is not controlled by myself, not at all.
> In this case, the parent had full control over the child's intake and essentially, her health.

Children cannot make food choices for themselves because either they do not have the financial means to purchase their own food or they fear being disobedient to their parents. They-food emerges as a way for the Others to control food intake to suit their food beliefs, and this situation is most common among parents and children. While these influences are not based on malicious intent, they create an oppressive food environment. Oppressive food environments like this are likely to lead to food rebellion later when children attain the means to make their own choices.

Social Relationships. They-food comes into play significantly when people are in public due to societal expectations for behaviors. Behaviors that would be acceptable at home become taboo in public or around certain groups of people. Thus, food choices adapt to the specific social contexts people encounter as they interact with the world around them.

> **Bingwen**: It [foods] is related to culture. In Xinjiang Province, barbecue could be for the important guests. Nevertheless, generally, we don't bring guests to a barbecue…You can't eat it graciously.

Chinese barbecue is the grilling of meat on sticks, so the food is eaten with the hands and is messier than other foods. Barbecue is not a formal food, making it unsuitable around certain company. It is a casual food more suitable for casual encounters with Others like friends, making the situation itself relaxed and personal. He enjoys the food while enjoying a peaceful time with his close friends. The informality makes it more enjoyable. Foods with higher status are reserved

for important guests. Dinner invitations differ depending on the rank of the people who attend. Self-food adapts when people find it necessary to impress others.

Likewise, the way people eat changes when they are in the public sphere. They must adopt They-food mannerisms to be socially acceptable in public.

> **Tong**: Uh, maybe uh, when I'm at home, uh, I will uh, I will eat many, maybe I will eat three bowls of rice to make me full, and when I'm in restaurant, maybe I'll only eat one bowl.

In this example, overconsumption is seen as rude in front of other people, so despite his normal habits at home, Tong alters his behavior around others. He restrains his Self-food instincts. The concern of Others' judgments guides eating practices in public because people do not want to be seen as different but rather conform to what is socially acceptable. They choose not to exert their uniqueness at this time. Even if the actual food consumed does not change, how it is consumed is easily affected in public.

Furthermore, people are willing to temporarily change their main tastes in order to appease other people socially. When sharing meals with the Others, they care more about making the other people comfortable than satisfying their own needs.

> **DeMing**: Uh, sometimes we [he and his friends] uh, take something, take somebody new to the restaurant. We could order some new food, but if there is just one of our, my friends, never new food.

> **Guiren**: If you, you go out and eat with your friends to welcome some guests and uh, they don't care if the food is really healthy because it's not uh, um, a daily event. It is just one event in your life, so you can, you can just uh, order food that has the best flavors. You have different things for different times when you go to restaurant…Since we go out for entertainment, to eat healthy is then in the second place. These events are not a regular part in a year, so I don't need to mind it.

> **Tong**: Just like what I have said, I am an easy going people. If my friend suggested going to eat at a certain restaurant, I will just go with them. I don't know a lot of restaurants, and I don't have many ideas on choosing foods. So if my friends want to go have pizza, I just go with them.

If DeMing is with his usual friends, they always orders the same dishes, which is why they choose to dine out together frequently. Their food tendencies are the same. However, DeMing is willing to try a new dish to appease a person new to the dining experience in order to make this other person feel more comfortable. Likewise, Guiren dismisses his healthy eating practices when he dines out with his friends in order to allow his friends to eat the food they like. He prefers that they enjoy the most delicious food rather than the healthiest food. Tong simply lets his friends choose rather than imposing his food choices on them. They-food is a stronger influence when people want to make friends with other people. If people stubbornly project their Self-food into all social situations, then they limit the social connections they can make with people. When food is shared with others, it is meant to be an enjoyable experience. Conformity to food choices becomes important to make everyone satisfied. Self-food is more willing to conform to They-food for companionship purposes.

Food serves as a central venue for socializing in China whether people dine out in restaurants or dine out in others' homes. People use food to spend time with each other or to celebrate special occasions in their lives. Many restaurants have private rooms where dinner parties are private, and restaurants are abundant in cities, such as Beijing.

> **DeMing:** Because you don't have any excuse to call someone to get out to be with you, to have some seat to talk, but have some food, it's always easy to ask.
>
> **EnLai:** It is a culture in China. That is during the interaction with your friends, you need to try something new. If you always go to the same place, maybe your friends will not like to go, or you will feel boring yourself.

While DeMing uses food as an excuse to invite his friends to spend time with him, EnLai uses it as an excuse to have a new experience or to celebrate. Either way, they socialize through food. Food is the common trait among the people because all people must eat. Hence, food is a

tool to establish a commonality with people so that people are able to come together socially. Food decreases the social awkwardness involved in requesting people's companionship.

Likewise, food is a means to bring people together to celebrate events in their lives. Holidays and other celebrations are centered on feasts in which large amounts of food is served and consumed.

> **Tong**: Uh, but what else can we do? We always do that [go to a restaurant]. Especially with my parents. If we have to celebrate something, we go to the restaurant. Because we can't figure out anything else we can do to celebrate. Only eat a big meal means to celebrate something. It's a very big…it's a very good way to celebrate.

> **EnLai:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Uh, we ate a lot of meat. In Spring Festival, great day for Chinese, so we earned, a year, earned money a year, and prepare for this festival, and we spent a lot of money for buying food, especially meat, chicken, beef, I don't know how to…lamb. [laughs] All kind of food. Uh, this festival means a lot for children. They are waiting for this day for the delicious food.

> **Hai Wei**：**比如**说会搞个火锅之类的，就各种粉丝粉条，海带啊放进去一锅大家一**起吃**。**感**觉比较，中间放一个火锅，旁边放一些小菜，包括荤的素的都有。这个锅，这个火锅应该都差不多，然后自己再炖一**碗**汤。还有当然中国传统的食物是不可**少的**，**就**这个汤圆啊，饺子啊。这也是平常很少吃. For instance, we would have a hot pot with all kinds of noodles and sea-tent. The hot pot would be in the middle, with other meat and vegetable dishes surrounding, including meat and vegetable. The pot is similar with hot pot. Then we would brew a soup. Also include traditional Chinese food like dumplings and rice dumplings, which we don't eat in normal days.

These meals go beyond typical social food experiences. More food is served to emphasize the uniqueness of the occasion. As these participants imply, a big meal induces indulgence in food. The food is not only for satiety in this case. The increased enjoyment of the food accentuates the enjoyment of the life event. To celebrate any event or person is to also celebrate food. During these celebrations, people are expected to consume large amounts of food, creating an environment of intense cultural pressure on food choices.

Another Chinese food mannerism used to socialize with others involves the act of serving food to others. Serving food to others is a sign of respect and love to others. Thus, people who are served food are culturally obliged to eat the food served as a way to show gratitude and reciprocal respect.

> **Lanfen**: If somebody serves food for you, it may means that he [she] is your friend and he [she] cares about you. Um…maybe they think you work hard those days or maybe they think you are too thin. If they only serve one or two times, I will eat it. If they keep serving you food and you cannot finish it, it will be okay to have some left. Well, if it was your elders, for the reason of being polite, I feel it would be better to finish it.

Lanfen describes two different contexts that require differing behaviors. She tries to consume food served to appease her friends, but within the context of friends, she claims that people may refuse the food if they are satiated. However, she offers a different behavior when elders serve food. Elders require more respect; thus, there is more social obligation to finish all the food served. In this cultural practice, food becomes an act to demonstrate respect, love, and appreciation for others, and the rules are more rigid in particular social contexts depending on the people present.

Cooking is also seen as an essential part of family. Parents are expected to cook for their children. Most Chinese people eat dinner at home, which is convenient since most grandparents live with the family and are responsible for most of the cooking. Thus, as parents prepare for their future servitude as grandparents, they learn to cook for the family, as well.

> **DaZhong:** I really do. This question…you know, yesterday, I got a friend of mine back in high school. A friend, you know, we talk about things, and we talk about the cooking things. We just came across the cooking things because there's a time for cooking, and he was going to ask me are you going to cook today for the family? I said I do not cook. Oh, how can you do like this? You know why? Because your parents will get old, older and older, and your son or your daughter will get, will grow up. You don't want to cook for them? Yesterday, I tried to cook. And I wanted to cook. And I wanted to prepare, and then my parents-in-law said you just need to put it there. You don't need to. I don't…so I just let them because I cannot cook. Because I did not come up with any ideas to cook

> any good things. [laughs] If I really want to cook, I think of something real quick, but like if I cook, it took me a pretty long time. They don't want it. [laughs]

While DaZhong is not getting any familial pressure to cook, he still receives cultural pressure to cook because Chinese tradition involves grandparents cooking for their children and grandchildren. He must prepare for his future service as a cooker. However, since cooking is associated with love, DaZhong accepts this responsibility. He elaborates on this issue some more.

> **DaZhong:** Because I want to her [his daughter] to come back and probably from school—especially from school. Sometime, probably she'll start to go to school in the United States, but when she comes back, I want to cook for her. And even some time when I go to visit her in the university, I want to cook for her. I think it's the best way.

Cooking is a positive act of love for family. People accept this duty because they do not see it as a duty that their culture imposes on them but rather as a natural expression of love. This positive relation maintains the cultural practice even among working professionals like DaZhong. The traditional culture is maintained despite the change in family working dynamics.

Sometimes the need for social acceptance through food is between a person and a pet. Zhou changed her eating habits when she got a cat. The cat gives her an incentive to cook more at home since she shares the food with her pet.

> **Zhou**: Yeah, but sometimes I can enjoy the food myself. Maybe it's because Xiami. After she was with me, I cooked often at home, and I think I enjoy the food. [laughs] Yeah.

In this context, her cat influences her habits. Sharing her food with the cat and seeing the cat enjoy the food brings her the same happiness as she derives from enjoying food with another person, such as her father. The food is a way to show her care for others; hence, it serves as a bonding mechanism between her and her cat. Additionally, having companionship during food experiences encourages people to put forth more effort in their food choices. People may be more likely to cook or dine out when they have company. As Zhou suggests, eating becomes

more enjoyable with others. In this sense, perhaps They-food makes Self-food more enjoyable. To share Self-food with others is a way for people to share themselves, and to see Others accept Self-food, they feel their identities are accepted.

In some cases, the food is not the venue for fostering friendships but is the friendship itself. Food serves as a friend because the pleasure derived from food serves the same purposes as the pleasure from a friendship. Food induces pleasure and security in people's lives.

> **Hong**: Yeah, so, when I felt lonely, the food comfort me, make me good, and uh, yeah, it play a friend role.

Eating food is an event people look forward to enjoying similar to the way people look forward to spending time with others. Hong can sit down and enjoy dessert just as a person may visit a friend. Also, the dessert is an indulgence in her main tastes; thus, the experience is pleasurable. Friends often serve a role of comforting people by helping distract people from their problems. Likewise, food can also provide a temporary distraction from people's problems. It occupies their time and induces pleasure. This phenomenon blurs the relationship between Self-food and They-food. The food is the They-food because it has assumed a person-like identity to the consumers; however, the consumers create this "person" to serve their own emotional needs, which makes it a Self-food concept, as well. Regardless, the need for companionship is a societal construct, so this need emerges out of the They world, making the role of food as a friend essentially a They-food manifestation.

The use of They-food to socially connect with people is not always situated in the present. Sometimes people use They-food in the absence of Others in order to invoke past emotions and memories.

> **Zhou**: You know, before I thought it [French fries] is unhealthy food because it's fried, but uh, I eat, I see, for example, my professor. He just loves the French fries, and he told me it's good. He just like to eat it with the salt. Without any other sauce. He said the taste

> is so original. It's good, yeah. And also, other um, French colleague before, they told me that they like this food and it's good. Now I can accept it, and sometimes I can taste it. Before for me, it's unhealthy food. I never eat it seriously. But uh, now sometimes I eat it, and I, it will recall me the times when I have food in France. That means, it recall me the time in France like this with the people, for example, my professor like this.

Zhou lived in France for three years, and she still eats French fries because her professor enjoyed French fries. Her friend is represented in the food. Consuming French fries serves as a venue for maintaining a relationship with a person who is not present. Eating foods is a way to relive past experiences and to remember people. Food also embodies the friend role here. However, it assumes the role of an actual person.

However, since Self-food is still a strong innate force within people, selecting friends who share the same Self-food traits is preferable among people. Foremost, people trust the opinions of those people in which they share close relationships. If these people suggest foods to them, then people feel these foods are safe, healthy, and tasty because they trust their friends' opinions. Also, popularity plays a role in Self-food influence. People are more likely to engage in the same behaviors if they see their many other people in society doing so.

> **Lanfen**: I think this restaurant only, this feeling only start from the Wisdom Court restaurants. Um, there are many foreigners. I think in the compound Wisdom Court, 80% of the people from other countries, so it's seldom to see the Chinese people live inside, but many people, even Chinese, they just wait in the Wisdom Court restaurant, so I think it's really very, it's worth the wait. The food is really very delicious and very healthy.

If a restaurant has a lot of customers, she feels it is safe. According to her logic, if people got ill from the food there or if the food tasted bad, people would not go there. Interestingly, she emphasizes that many foreigners go to these restaurants. Many Chinese people believe that foreigners have higher sanitary standards than Chinese; therefore, if many foreigners frequent these restaurants, they are safe because their standards for taste and cleanliness are high.

Health. The overall Chinese culture dictates many medical practices due to cultural beliefs on health. Chinese traditional medicine is popular, and many doctors incorporate both Western and Chinese traditional philosophies into their practice. Like many cultures, however, many health beliefs are culturally based and are spread through the oral tradition. Nearly all people learn adages about ways to stay healthy, and food has historically been a part of these health beliefs as a natural preventative to illness.

> **Bingwen:** And with a, in China, there's an ancient saying before you have food, you eat soup. You can't eat every day soup, and you keep the doctor away. [inaudible] the doctor visit. In China, we say that like having soup before meal, you can stomach some food. Uh, I think it's true. It's very good for your stomach, and it will serve to warm your belly before a meal, and you, your appetite, like in China, different kind of food, you can have this. But more with generally because you warmed up your stomach. It's uh, healthy.
>
> **Lanfen:** Okay, all of them [people], the Chinese maybe old lady or middle age lady, they know. I ask so many people, they tell me the same, but I don't know why. And also the doctor, I told you. I go to see the doctor. He told me the same. Let me drink the congee every morning.
>
> **EnLai:** I didn't like the other fruits, but in our life, our culture, always have nutrient [plan]. You ask somebody to buy some fruit every day. Today, it is an apple, tomorrow it is orange, or some others. Uh, So I think I eat fruit every day.

All of these participants follow the general view of the public regarding healthy eating practices. They are not abiding by medical evidence but by cultural health beliefs. The culture has developed a belief that soup, congee, and fruit are essential for daily health. While they may have learned these practices from their family, they assert that all people culturally accept these practices. Therefore, they follow the majority opinion, and since it is the majority opinion, they are more likely to accept it as common sense. The more people who follow the practice, the more perceived credit it has.

A major cultural consensus about health is that Chinese food prepared in restaurants or by street vendors is unsanitary. The most emphasized health concern among all participants is food safety.

> **Bingwen:** Because there are so many reports, Chinese people care about the food safety. There were reports on drainage oil, poisoned steam breads and poisoned bean sprout. That is to say we don't have a supervise system on food safety. Especially when the restaurants want to make more money, they cannot guarantee the foods and oil they use. Although I will not feel so nervous about it, there still is a shadow aspect, so I feel I would go to eat the food with guarantee.
>
> **DeMing:** Yeah, so I think that the meat is not so healthful as in China, so I can't order the 50% [medium rare steak].

Bingwen uses the words, "shadow aspect," to describe his worries about the cleanliness of Chinese food. He knows the reports about food-borne illnesses and knows that China has no effective food regulations to ensure food safety in restaurants. These factors are sufficient to make him use caution in his choices to dine out. DeMing is referring to his experiences dining out in Western restaurants. While he feels that Western restaurants are cleaner than Chinese restaurants, he still does not trust the meat enough to order a medium rare steak. Fear of food safety issues may not prevent Chinese people from dining out in restaurants; however, it establishes a sense of distrust in the food supply and in food vendors. This distrust influences their food choices to differing degrees.

Other cultural beliefs are grounded in medical professionalism. People see doctors are medical experts and are likely to trust their advice about health. The extent in which people care about their physical health enough to change their food behaviors depends on the individual person. However, the medical expertise is based on culture.

> **Lanfen:** The doctor told me that although I am very thin, from my pulse, he can tell that I am very health. Later he told me that every day, we should eat some meat, some bean, and some vegetables. It is the basic for one to keep health to get nutrition from these three kinds of food every day. It is what the doctor told me.

Lanfen visits the doctor weekly basis, for this concern over her health is a significant part of her personality. She mostly visits Chinese traditional doctors, and she accepts all of their advice. The doctor here advised her to consume these specific foods every day. The foods are

broadly categorized; thus, they include many different specific foods. Regardless, this other person sets her food structure for her. Her choices are highly influenced here because she places so much faith in professional health care. If people value healthy eating habits, they usually follow the expert advice. The medical profession in different cultures dictates what healthy eating is because these medical beliefs and practices have been culturally accepted as true among the people. Healthy eating is typically standardized in cultures even though it may differ across different cultures.

Health education is often provided in schools. Since students are young, they are impressionable during this time and likely to believe this information, especially since they see their teachers are credible sources.

> **Guiren**:额，对，差不多、也是因为我们学校老师，我们生物老师，我们班主任，他也跟我们说过，我们学校的食物，不管怎么样，好不好吃，我们学校有专门的营养师专门做我们每周的食谱，然后，所以从那个时候开始注意我们学校的食谱，我们每天吃些什么，每周都吃些什么，然后我就发现我可以从中找出合理的一面。
> Oh, well. My teachers kept telling me about diet, especially biology teacher. My head teacher also told me that the school hired professional dieticians to manage dietary [guidelines] no matter it tastes good or not. From then on, I got curious in the school daily and weekly dietary. Later I found some reasonable elements in it.

As a student, Guiren had a natural interest in biology. Hence, when his biology teacher taught him about nutrition, he was easily swayed. Also, in China, head teachers form close relationships with students, giving them a great deal of influence over students. Therefore, he trusted his teachers who were in an authority position. Hong, on the other hand, also remembered learning about nutrition in her biology course. Her understanding of this health knowledge is that it justifies her consumption of sweet foods. Sweet foods are made with sugar, and her body needs sugar. She assumes she may consume sugar to suit her bodily needs. They-food exerts influence

in the school context because teachers are in authority positions that give them influential power, and people accept parts of health education that suit their personal interests.

Cultural Attitudes. The Chinese culture also projects certain attitudes or beliefs about other nationalities, and these attitudes factor into food choices at times. There is tension between China and Japan due to political conflicts both in the past and the present. This animosity towards Japan is strong even among some restaurant owners.

> **Lanfen:** I had another very interesting experience. One day my friends and I went to climb Mountain Tai. We drove there. After we had arrived, we looked for restaurant. We found a restaurant with a carpet in front of the gate. On the carpet, there were words saying "Japanese and dogs are not welcome." My friends said we would have dinner at this restaurant just because of the words. Of course, the food in the restaurant was very good. This is a very interesting experience, and it is a little funny.

Lanfen and her friends chose this restaurant because they empathized with the owner's attitudes toward Japan. The food is not the attraction here so much as the person serving the food, and the restaurant owner earned her respect through this shared political belief. In this situation, whether or not people share the same cultural attitudes influences their wiliness to purchase food from people. Chinese politics is a factor in food choices.

Similarly, people assume certain attitudes based on their perceptions of other countries. Many Chinese know about the obesity problem in the United States, and they believe that obesity is associated with the American diet.

> **EnLai:** I forgot why. It uh, people usually told us don't eat too much fried food. And uh I forget why. I think it's usually happen in America. A lot of fat because they eat a lot of fried food.

Frying food is the most common cooking method in China. Naturally, fried food is popular. However, EnLai is discussing deep-fried food, and he believes Americans gain weight from consuming too much deep fried food. While he makes the connection between fried food and weight, his understanding is limited because he only associates deep fried food with weight

rather than all fried food. Many Chinese do not perceive Chinese food as unhealthy. Thus, they project a negative view on the American diet but not on their own diet even though the unhealthy aspects of both diets are similar.

Additionally, when discussing individual food choices, the conversation moves away from an individualistic into a collective mindset as people refer to the food practices of their hometown cultures.

> **Hai Wei**: 因为一般我不喜欢馒头拌菜这种吃。而在南方的话，尽管米饭也没有什么味道。我们是作为主食、拌饭或拌菜可以吃。但馒头啊我们不作为主食。
> Because generally speaking, I don't like to eat steamed bread mixed with vegetables. Although rice has no flavor, in South, we regard it as staple food, or eat it mixed with vegetables. But as to steamed bread, we don't treat it as staple food.

> **Tong:** There are many differences. First, I feel that Beijing foods are much lighter, and Yunnan foods are much stronger and spicy. In Yunnan, people put more seasoning in food, and in Beijing people put much less. Second, Beijing is in north China. People have rice, steamed bread and so on as staple food, but in Yunnan, people always have rice as staple food, and normally, they will not have wheat made food. Third, people eat different [foods] at breakfast in Beijing. People will have rice porridge and steamed bread as breakfast, but in Yunnan, we will have a bowl of noodle or rice noodle as breakfast.

> **DeMing:** I don't know. Just uh, we [his hometown people] used to do that [eat Chaogan for breakfast], that way. Everybody do that that way.

Instead of discussing the personal attraction to these food choices, these participants choose to define their local hometown food cultures. They are not analyzing themselves as individual eaters but firmly as part of a broader food culture that dictates food behaviors for them. These cultural food rules directly influence their own food choices because they perceive these choices are being practical because everyone in the province eats this same way. The food practices are those that the people there accept and expect others to follow. Discussing their own choices in conjunction with the overall local cultures accentuates the way food is used as a way to assimilate into a culture or society because it establishes commonalities.

Furthermore, local provinces produce food differently. Agricultural practices differ in the South than in the North, particularly in livestock. These practices influence perceptions about food quality and taste.

> **DaZhong:** Because the meat won't be good. It seems like the same when you talk about the muscle, when you talk about the fat. Just now, you asked me that this question. The chicken there at the province, they are just running outside, play outside, they have a good kind of life there, and it's not like the chicken raised in the industrialized way. They're put into the cage and it's really not good. So they don't have a happy life. The people eating them won't be happy and so the meat, the meat will be much, much better and that's why it's more expensive. Much, much more expensive.

When livestock, chickens in this example, are raised naturally, people feel the animal is treated better and is allowed to grow naturally rather than artificially through the use of hormones. As DaZhong suggests, the chickens are happy because they live in a natural environment. All of these factors convey the sense of natural versus processed or artificial, and his hometown believes that natural makes the meat tastier. Even though the meat is more expensive using these natural methods, the quality is worth the price to people who are accustomed to eating this meat. Raising chickens this way is part of their food culture.

Societal weight perceptions often impact people and in turn, impact the way they eat. Eating behaviors are significant factors in weight gain and loss. People may alter behaviors to conform to societal weight standards.

> **Zhuo**: But um, um, with classmate, the girls, yeah, sometimes, they will say ah, you are too fat or like this. Oh, you always put sports clothes like this. It's not so nice, especially when you get up, you can feel it's not a good thing, and uh, in the university, I had a very good uh, um, roommate. She's my best friend. So she always um, tell the hard truth or whatever, always, she always say hard words. For example, she'll told me clearly you are too fat! [laughs] You need to lose some weight. So yeah, but I know my weight is not so high. I, but myself, I won't think I have a problem of weight. If I felt it, I will pay attention. I will control my food. I can do it. I did it.

Even if people are unconcerned with their weight, the Others are likely to accentuate their weight and pressure them to conform to societal weight standards. They face judgment and criticism regardless of their own weight perception. Zhou chose to monitor her portions so that she returned to a normal weight after people made comments about her weight to her. Because of the perceived weight standards of people around her, she changed her eating behaviors. People do not always have to conform their food choices to society, but they may be pressured in other ways that force them to change their food habits.

Other people are not focused on weight but on other physical factors, such as skin appearance. They feel that there is a link between food and acne and may alter their habits to prevent this side-effect.

> **Lanfen**: Yeah, the spicy because after I eat the spicy food, on my face, maybe you cannot see, the uh, spot [pimples]. So it's ugly. I do not want to eat the spicy food.

Society imposes standards of beauty, and in this case, acne is seen as unattractive according to these standards. People use food to fit into societal standards for beauty. The value placed on health and appearance determines if these aspects affect food choices. Therefore, people use their physical appearance as another venue for social acceptance. Self-food is easier to maintain when it does not interfere into other areas of social acceptance in the social world.

Alcohol. Drinking is a major part of the dominant food culture in China. Drinking alcohol is part of social dinners with friends, family, and work colleagues, and these dinners involve many toasts to show respect and love for people. Getting drunk is commonplace at such functions and is expected.

Interviewer: So why do you drink sometimes if you don't like it?

Bingwen: If you refuse to drink, in China, they [people] often think you don't take them as friends.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. So if you want to be friends with the people, you drink with them?

Bingwen: They feel you are hiding or protecting yourself from them.

Interviewer: So it's about relaxing and having a good time with them. Otherwise, you are not participating. They don't like it.

Bingwen: If they are those kind of guys, yes.

Interviewer: Do you ever refuse?

Bingwen: Sometimes, I don't care whether we could be friends. Or I think they would respect me or understand me.

Alcohol creates a situation where people are either accepted or rejected based on whether or not they drink. The social context determines the social outcome here. When people consume alcohol, they lose their social inhibitions, and this openness is seen as a way for people to get close to each other. Thus, others see refusal to drink as rude. As Bingwen suggests, only with close friends or those that he does not care to impress does he feel comfortable refusing to drink. Otherwise, the obligation to engage in drinking is present. Zhou and DaZhong shares similar feelings of pressure at dinners.

> **Zhou:** You are easy to drink more. Yes, with colleague, with colleague sometimes. It's like this but um, most, yeah, with colleagues or with friends, it is okay because I was student at that time, so it's not a drink for the business or for the work. But also I went with my parents to eat, to attend the dinner, for the…it's not really for business, but the people like the age of my parents, when they, when they eat, they like to toast. They feel they need it, but me, I really can't understand what's that, yeah. I saw the drink, and they were getting drunk. I don't understand why you do this. And I also, I feel I have the pressure in this kind of situation. They always ask me should I toast to somebody, an uncle or like this, yeah. I don't like. I don't feel so free.

> **DaZhong:** Especially in Guangdong and Guangxi, people will drink…we're all, yelling in the room, and then you feel that you have to drink, you have to drink that. This is the way that the tradition that passed from generation to generation to here. And when I'm back, the first time in my wife home, I had to take part in this kind of activity, as well, but I will try to protect me from parents-in-law. They try to protect me from all the others that were trying to get me drunk. [laughs] This is a tradition, so you have to know this is where you have to drink, and you have to have the way like that.
> Even in a familial context, people still feel pressure to engage in this drinking custom.

Social pressure emerges from both the feeling of the need to follow others' behaviors to be accepted and to follow the Chinese custom of demonstrating love and respect for others. The pressure extends further than mere peer pressure because it is imbedded in a deep cultural belief. Everyone present is having a good time drinking; thus, to not engage in the process may cause people to feel left out. People's individual personalities likely determine the degree in which they force themselves to engage in such practices.

Many food choices are based on being socially accepted. Part of bonding with other people is sharing the same food experiences with them. The food brings people together. In some cases, people enjoy foods they normally do not like simply because of the social context.

> **DaZhong**: You see, sometimes, if I am very happy, I drink with my friends, and when I would drink, we would talk a lot. Just like here, we talk a lot about things. It's difficult for me to get drunk. I cannot drink a lot, maybe 2 times, or 3 times. On my capacity, I can just retain drinking, okay, so even four times sometimes, so that means it depends on your feelings, your psychology, that controls your physical thing, especially when it comes to drinking the alcohol to me. I think most of the people are the same, yeah. Just they don't realize this thing, but we have a poem [in Chinese], that means when you are drinking with your soul mate, 1000 cups will not be enough! 1000 cups won't be enough! When you drink with your soul mate.

The social atmosphere affects the perceived tolerance of alcohol. People share close bonds with their friends, which makes them relaxed around them. There is no pressure to drink any certain amount of alcohol in this context nor is alcohol the focus as it is during formal dinners. The conversation and relaxed atmosphere distracts people from the amount of alcohol

consumed, and in the absence of toasts, they may drink gradually allowing their body to acclimate easier to the alcohol's effects. Even when people normally reject alcohol, they may accept it depending on the social atmosphere. The climate They-food creates determines the amount of ease Self-food can conform to different food experiences.

Gender Roles. Gender roles also play a significant role in food choices. Gender roles determine who cooks and which foods are appropriate to consume for each sex. Cooking is primarily viewed as a feminine practice in the North, but in the South, both men and women cook. Regardless, cooking is seen as a familial duty after marriage or parenthood.

> **Lanfen:** Uh, I think if a man is trying, uh, work very hard every day and go home, no one can cook for him. And he has to worry about the food, or maybe he has to worry to take me out, to choose a restaurant I like, and then he will release a lot of energy. So I think it is better that I can cook for him to let him feel comfortable in our home. So I think it is very important for family.
>
> **DaZhong:** Through his stomach, yeah okay, so he will, in Chinese traditional culture, the ladies are supposed to serve their husbands good food, and uh, yeah, sometimes they will serve their—their children will get food. It's a kind of a very traditional expression of love. It's very deep rooted things. It's not only, it's also, it's like you will be yourself when you are doing playing games, just like that. You will be yourself. You will be truly close when you cook something and then for someone.

In these examples, females are valued as the cookers in the family. To cook food for a husband is the proper behavior for a woman to show her love for him. This act of cooking is not seen as a duty here. Instead it is interpreted as an expression of love. While the dominant culture imposes this role onto women, the role is accepted because it has a positive meaning. As DaZhong implies, the desire to cook for others is a natural feeling when people love each other. This interpretation is why the feminization of cooking is widely accepted even though men do often cook in the southern provinces in China.

A gender stereotype in China is that meat is a masculine food. Most males see their love for meat as a typical trait among their gender and use their gender as an excuse for this inclination toward meat.

> **EnLai:** I just like them. I think most Chinese boys like meat like me, I think. I don't know why it's so important to me. I just want to eat it. If I have only vegetables, it's very boring, I think.

The love for meat is seen as a personal food trait but also as a genderized food trait. Loving meat is part of being male. The food choice is associated with masculinity, making it part of a dominant, collective identity. This perspective allows him to use his main tastes as a way to identify himself as a man and as a habit that is beyond his control. His love for meat is simply masculine nature. Likewise, weight and nutrition concerns are not seen as masculine, either.

> **EnLai:** Most boys…we, um, we didn't consider [weight], because we feel better. We feel great! Whatever we eat, we feel great, so we, we choose um, we choose the taste over the nutrients, I think, because it cannot affect my life, my daily life, so we don't consider it. If we really want it, I, umm, maybe one day, I feel my tooth was bloody, and maybe I feel I know I need some fruit, so I eat some fruit, but most of the time in daily life, they didn't need to consider that. The food cannot affect our daily life.

Again, EnLai excuses his own health behaviors as beyond his control because his food attitudes are part of being a man. Men do not worry about gaining weight or nutrition. Their bodies are not affected in their young adult years. In this scenario, men may avoid being health conscious because it is seen as a feminine behavior in this cultural environment. To establish their gender identity, Chinese men disregard health factors in food choices. This way, they claim their manhood in the food world.

Travel. When people move from one location to another, they encounter new environments that typically bring new food experiences. They adapt their main tastes to this new environment to a degree, but they often discover some foods they like.

> **Guiren**: 也不能说果冻不健康，因为果冻什么都不是，不算是一种食物。它吃进去多少，你完全消化不了。你只是吃它的味道。就像是甘蔗。你吃甘蔗会吐出来，你

> 吃果冻，使用另外一种方式由你自己吐出来【笑】。吃进去的果冻，你其实.....其实你吃的时候.....我有时候还会自己也会偶尔去买点吃。但是吃的时候你知道这东西什么营养都没有，什么都消化不了，但是有时候你会追求一种新鲜感 I didn't mean it's [jelly] unhealthy. It's nothing. It's not even a real food. You can't absorb it at all. All you get is its taste. Like sugarcane, when you eat sugarcane, you chew it, drink its juice and spit residue out like a gum. So jelly is the same thing. The only difference is you spit the chewed sugarcane out through your mouth. You discharge the jelly in another way. [laughter] But sometimes I still buy jelly. I know it has no nutritional value. But I want its fresh tastes.

Jelly does not abide by the principles of Guiren's typical diet that is focused on nutrition and balance. Nevertheless, he ate jelly in England, and he enjoys the taste. Thus, the They-food of England influenced him. People are more likely to test their food boundaries in new foreign environments, causing them to develop an altered Self-food during this period that helps them acclimate to the food world that still abides by its main tastes but is more adaptable. When they return to their original environment, they may return to their old Self-food, but the new Self-food desires are still present. Hence, the They-food of the new societies people encounter leaves a lasting impression on their Self-food tendencies.

Local food cultures asserts influence when people travel for work or leisure, as well because they are unfamiliar with the local food. Therefore, they trust the local people to guide their food choices.

> **DeMing**: There are common for a reason so maybe it's [food] really good, so why is it common? Because most of the people will think that is good, taste good, so I will try it.

> **DaZhong**: You see, I still trust the good things [foods] are the popular and will be popular, and you see, if you go anywhere local and you will always try those popular food and also, special, I mean, compared with my experience, should be special, but popular food, and also, in the popular restaurant locally one, that's my point because they all—usually if you try to take something genuine, then you should take the local people think is genuine, so that's the point. So just like you're here, and you go to roast duck, Beijing roast duck, where you take, probably not necessarily to be [inaudible] but some place that local people think it's the genuine or original one, you should take.

When people eat food in an unfamiliar place, they choose the popular food of the local people. If the local people like the food, then it must be good because the local people have more knowledge of the local food than they do. People follow the They-food of this unfamiliar food culture rather than their own instincts. They adapt their main tastes in these new environments rather than trying to find local foods that resemble their preferences. Likewise, people typically enjoy experimenting with local food when they travel, so they are already more open-minded. This practice is easy since these changes are temporary. They can always return to their old habits when they return home. Therefore, Self-food gives way to They-food dominance when people are naïve to the local food. This They-food dominance is stronger than in familiar contexts.

The Media. The media influences food choices. The media here refers to television, newspapers, the internet, and any form of public media. It is the direct advertising of They-food. People may consult the media about food, or the media may project food attitudes or practices to them. With the advent of the internet, food attitudes, practices, and beliefs are projected on a mass scale.

> **Hong**: When I have doubts over an ingredient I get the urge to successfully figure out how to cook it, so I go to the Internet for references.

The internet is used here as a source to find recipes. In this example, the opinions of Others is needed to determine the ingredients used in a dish rather than experimenting herself. Many people follow recipes, and the internet is a rich resource for recipes. However, to follow a recipe is directly following They-food because people are making dishes that someone else defined. The finished product is unoriginal.

Television also exerts influence over food choices. In China, television programming is government controlled. While people may not trust government regulation in some cases, they

are more trusting of less controversial topics, such as healthy eating. For some people, programs on television are directly related to the Government.

> **DeMing**: Because uh, the government will not lie to people about what make you healthy.

> **Bingwen**: I do pay attention to the information about healthy eating. If I watch relevant T.V. program or listen to some radio program, I will normally follow it. The information change my habits bit by bit.

Any health program on television about food is creditable because the Government controls the programming, and the Government has no reason to project false ideas about food. This political connection makes the source credible. The media is a strong force when several media sources convey the same information as in Bingwen's case. The more people hear an idea, the more likely they are to believe it. The influences may not be immediate; however, the media is able to project They-food influences by planting ideas into people's psyche. These ideas may emerge in food choice situations.

The media often portrays stories about food safety issues. Food safety is a significant concern in China because food regulation is difficult to enforce. When cases of food poisoning are reported, people are easily impacted.

> **Lanfen**: Um…maybe there is an example which can explain it. A certain girl would eat Ma La Tang every day. Sometimes she just ate on the street, and the oil people there used to cook Ma La Tang was not very clean. Finally, she got her stomach full of parasite, and at that time, it was hard for doctor to give any treatment to get her recovered. I believe it is a real story for I hear it from news. Some food is not healthy, but some people still will have it. I feel it is may be because they know little about it. If I feel…I heard that some food is not good, I will not to have it.

The news reports on food poisonings may not dissuade everyone from consuming the foods implicated, but they are influential enough to create doubt in people's minds. For people like Lanfen, one report is enough to make her avoid the food. She does not want to take a risk. If the media induces physical fear, it exercises great influence over people's food choices. It plays

on societal fears. The media entices people both to eat certain foods or discourages them from eating particular foods.

Socioeconomic Factors. Socioeconomic factors involve the amount of money people can spend on food, the value they place on the food, and past experiences with poverty. All of these factors impact the way people think about food. When people experience poverty in childhood, it affects their food tendencies later in life.

> **EnLai**: It's [his childhood] very different. Uh, uh, I, uh, yeah, there was no choice. You, you cannot pick the food in your childhood and uh, when you go to college, you can pick all kind of food, and uh, you can uh, you uh, you can afford it and maybe you can eat more than from your childhood.
>
> **Hong**: Uh, I told you that when I was young, my family was poor, and I experienced lots of cheap food. It was terrible. And I could not find someone or somewhere where it's more and the food is cheap also, the taste is good. I cannot find that. When I, when I grow up now, I have my money, and I can afford me to go to the fancy restaurant. The food is really different from the, from the little restaurant.

If people experience deprivation and then enter a period of food abundance, they are likely to over-indulge. They have never experienced such freedom in their food choice; therefore, the amount of choice is overwhelming. Overconsumption is now affordable and convenient. While many university students complain about the food in the canteen in the study, EnLai loved it when he first became a student because it contrasted with his childhood food. Likewise, Hong rejects cheap food now that she has the financial means to purchase more expensive food. Cheap food is now associated with poverty, making it low-class food. The economic forces in the food environment that dictate affordability, availability, and social status of foods are highly influential in food consumption.

Self-Food: The Personalized Food Identity

Self-food is the concept of the Self in people's sense of being that gives them a sense of uniqueness and individuality; it is people's sense of being. In this study, the Self is projected

through food choices. People establish personalized food inclinations that are referred as main tastes as a way to gain a personal identity. Self-food decisions are made under the perception of personal autonomy in which the people project their own food preferences. However, as previously illustrated, Self-food emerges out of They-food influences, and at times, it merges back into They-food. It is not a static concept, for it is in constant interaction with They-food. The following sections outline the personal history of these main tastes and the ways people implement their main tastes (project their Self-food in the They-food world) needs in the world around them. This section presents the personalized context of food choices.

Main Tastes: The Personalized Food Preferences

Main tastes manifest through particular foods and flavors in addition to food behaviors and beliefs. These tendencies result in perceived innate yearning for foods. Forgoing these foods produces feelings of imbalance and dissatisfaction. It is not an addictive response, but the habits are so ingrained that people physically feel abnormal.

Main tastes are strong forces in Self-food because they have become so habitual to people that people feel they are instinctive. They have become a solidified part of people's lives.

> **Dazhong**: What I mean is when you think of something, when you ask me something, it remind me back to those things, the first things that comes up to your mind is something deeper, and it will never be kind of blurry or kind of ambiguous in the future. It will still be very clear there, very clear there. When you mention some items or something like this, it will show up there. You don't have to think about it. It's there.

DaZhong's main tastes are instinctive within him so that they emerge naturally whenever he thinks about food. Once the attachment is there and it is reinforced with daily food habits, it is permanent within people's being and psyche so that it invokes a great deal of certainty as compared to other aspects of identity. Food is easy to embrace, and food relationships are easy to maintain. This certainty may provide a strong sense of security to the Self, which makes the need

for a Self-food necessary for people. To know themselves through food is one way to assert that they know themselves. As DaZhong suggests, there is no ambiguity.

As main tastes solidify, they become the norm. This strong attachment to normalcy deters people from eating foods that differ from their main tastes, even if the new food situations are temporary.

> **DeMing:** Uh, because I know what we order is good for the restaurant, is good at the restaurant and uh, we don't want to try something new. Because I don't know if they are a good cook or…
>
> **Tong:** Well, I'm afraid the food I try is not good. I'm afraid—uh, I don't know. I want to try new things, but I don't want to try new foods.
>
> **Lanfen:** Uh, I think maybe it's also my habit. Um, if I'm really very hungry, I'm sure I will order something I tried before. I never try the new food if I'm very hungry, but if not very hungry, uh, I can try a little but if it is very tasty, it's very um, not very oily, it's just like the fruit or vegetables, I will try it, but it's not my main meal.

To order a new food would create an unpredictable experience, and people fear the unknown. By ordering familiar foods, they know that the food experience will be good. While they do have some interest in tasting new foods, this situation only occurs if they have a guaranteed back-up plan. As Lanfen indicates, she can taste new food, but she makes sure that this new food is not her main course. Thus, new foods are typically avoided. Main tastes are the norm and are so deep within people that they discourage them from exploring different tastes. Because of this fear of experimentation, main tastes become stronger within people because they provide security. Self-food may be less influenced by They-food that differs significantly from itself in adulthood. People may eat with those they know share their same main tastes rather than different eaters. Self-food creates little coteries of main tastes groups.

One way main tastes manifest is through staple foods. Staple foods are a common main tastes indicator because staple foods are consumed at nearly every meal. Staple foods include foods, such as rice, bread, and noodles.

> **Zhou:** It's [her feeling] just like I'm out of my way. Yeah, I really—I feel something missed. Um, even the taste, I can, it is so clear in my head if two days or three days, I didn't eat rice. And also for me, the taste of rice, for me, it's a taste very balanced. If I eat always the French food, uh, they eat a lot of meat. Otherwise, we also eat fried. But this food if I just eat this food, it will make me feel uh, my diet is not balanced. I really need uh, rice.
>
> **I: But how would that make you feel? To not have rice? Like feel?**
>
> **Tong:** I will feel unsatisfied, yeah. I will feel unhappy when eating. Yeah, that's true.

People become so attached to their main tastes that to be in situations where they no longer have access to these habits affects them in a perceived physical and emotional way. These participants feel physically unsatisfied without rice because rice is their chosen carbohydrate. Mentally, they are unable to view other foods as fulfilling this need. Food does not invoke as much joy for them. Since rice is a staple food, Chinese people are accustomed to having it at nearly every meal. To remove it, removes a large piece of their daily food habit. The adjustment is harder. Carbohydrate staples are the most solid form of main tastes because they are so ingrained in people's lives.

Main tastes are also invoked through particular dishes. These dishes are often habits that begin in childhood and then become so instinctive that they inspire similar feelings of deprivation and loss when they are not consumed.

> **DeMing:** It's just my mouth wants to taste some chaogan, but my head tell me that you don't need to, but then my mouth and my stomach want.

Chaogan is a thick, soup-like dish made from animal organs. DeMing formulated the habit of eating chaogan several times a week as a child. Either his parents made it for him, or they took him out to buy some. Now, he has an innate craving for the dish. In subsequent

interviews, he describes his body as feeling abnormal without chaogan. The need for this taste extends beyond mere cravings into a form of physical (and likely mental) withdraw. He knows he does not need chaogan, but his cravings overtake his mental rationale.

For Hong, chicken is a special food for her. Many of her dishes are made with chicken, and one of the first dishes she ever cooked was a version of her mother's chicken dish. According to her, her mother's chicken is better than any restaurant version. However, her attachment is deeper than mere taste.

I: What is it about chicken?

Trans: [in Chinese]

I: That makes is special.

Hong: Um, my mother cook chicken, and the dish made is great. It's really great.

When she decided to start cooking, the first dish she made was her mother's chicken dish. She follows the same recipes as her mother. Many people have favorite childhood dishes, and consuming these dishes in adulthood brings back sweet memories from childhood. Hong moved away from her parents, but she has found a way to maintain her taste needs for this beloved dish by learning to create it herself. Many cooking recipes are passed down through generations; thus, main tastes are transmitted from family member to family member, making them a permanent part of the identity of being part of this family. The They-food of the family is a significant part of the creation of the Self-food. While it is a collective identity, it is still a unique identity because families are unique from each other. Therefore, the projection of Self-food through the lens of the They-food of the family gives people a sense of individuality.

Flavors are another important part of main tastes. People are exposed to certain flavors in cooking in childhood, and they continue these patterns of flavoring in adulthood. These

preferences are specific even though they may manifest themselves in different foods. Participants describe their experiences with these main tastes passionately. These flavors/styles ignited many feelings within them.

> **DaZhong:** It's [the flavor] a sour one and one of them is my father put those things together, and he put them into some very special kind of things that even it's very good now. Those are the things I remember. Those kind of thing is just, this kind of beginning of your taste with the food. Even up to now before those bai qie ji [chicken dish], those things. It's all because—I think the root, the seed is there because my father, yeah.

> **Hong:** I see myself as a disciplined person. For example when I am shopping for clothes, I would never purchase everything that I like, I would only decide on one with the same range of style. But when it comes to desserts it is a different matter. I cannot get enough with one portion of dessert, and my appetitive for sugar has increased; nowadays I need to consume much more sugar than other people in order to satisfy myself. My taste bud became less sensitive to sweetness. Nowadays I need to consume a huge portion of sugar in order to taste sweetness. So comparing to my other interests, my crave for dessert is best described as "greedy."

As DaZhong indicates, these early exposures to certain flavors are people's first experiences with food. The more they are exposed to these flavors, the more these tastes become integrated into their main tastes habits. These are the flavors they are accustomed to tasting, and they are more likely to become averse to different tastes as time progresses, especially if they limit their flavor variety. For some people, these tastes are an attachment while for others, like Hong, they are an obsession. Her desire for the sweet flavor is so intense that it clouds her judgment. While DaZhong's desire appears more controlled, he still uses the analogy of these tastes being rooted within him, which implies that they can never be removed from his being. In both instances, main tastes are powerful innate forces that started in childhood and were nurtured over a long period of time within the context of the family and culture in which they live.

Other participants, while also passionate, are more scientific in their desire for particular specific flavors. Meat is a favorite food for several male participants. These inclinations seemed so natural to them that they struggled to explain these tendencies.

> **EnLai:** Yeah. So, uh, it's it's uh, it's one of the reasons I like to eat meat from my gene. And, uh, second thing I think its texture. I like the texture. I feel very good when I eat it, and uh, the third thing it could be cooked in many ways. It can be boiled, boiled or fried or something else. Different, I can taste the…uh, I can taste the meat from different way. I feel very uh, I can feel the differences, but it's very, some vegetables cooked by some different ways, uh, I didn't, I cannot feel the difference. I just feel it's vegetables. But meat, boiled meat, fried meat, it's very different. It's very delicious. Um, I think maybe that's all.

Since the inclination toward meat is perceived as intuitive, EnLai suggests that it may be associated with genetics. Genetics means that it is part of his physical structure and beyond his control, but he acknowledges the specific qualities about meat that attract him. Taste preferences have some genetic connections that are explained in the next chapter; thus, people may have predispositions to certain flavors or foods. People may relate their tastes more to their nature rather than their environment or culture because to them, they always enjoyed this food. However, their specific contexts exposed them to these foods and nurtured these taste preferences. While main tastes seem intuitive, they are still imbedded in context.

In some cases, particular foods or dishes are not the centralized focus of people's main tastes, but their main tastes are based on structures. For health conscious people, nutrition is the basis of their main tastes rather than the actual taste of the foods.

> **Guiren**: Yeah, I eat some food that does not taste good for me like carrot because it has a lot of vitamin in it, but I naturally just dislike that, but I will still eat them. I just don't like the flavor of carrot.

Nutrition is the focus of Guiren's food choices. Healthier foods are not always the best tasting foods to people. Also, even if people consume healthy foods, they usually do not like the taste of all healthy foods. If nutrition is important to them, they abide by these nutritional needs. Thus, people allow health to overcome taste preferences if they value health, making health a dominating part of main tastes in these people's lives. They see food as not only enjoyable but essential to a quality life.

Similarly, when health consciousness is part of main tastes, new health information can stop people from consuming foods they enjoy if they discover that these foods are unhealthy.

> **Zhou**: After…I don't know where my idea came from, my thinking of quality is more nature. It's less processed. And the [inaudible] food can taste very good. But I will decision by which ingredient make. For example, even after I came back from France, I will pay more attention on what I eat. Before I drink the drink that from the [juice] but now I will see the ingredients to see what it is. A lot of drink before I like. I drink, I don't think. I didn't think, but now when I see it, I don't drink. Some fruit juice. Before I thought yeah, it's fruit juice. It is some fruit. It's good. But no, it's not pure. They add a lot of things, yeah.

Zhou's main tastes are focused on pure and unprocessed food. If she sees that a food is processed, she avoids it. Her health knowledge redirects her food choices. Again, flavor preferences become secondary in importance when people are health conscious. Changing dietary habits is easier when health is a central role in people's main tastes.

Likewise, some people believe that food is directly related to health, so all of their food choices are health focused. Experiences with previous illness or witnessing others getting ill has a profound impact on people's health consciousness sometimes.

> **Lanfen:** Food poisoning, okay. Only one time, I told you my experience. I throw up five times the whole afternoon. That scared me. I fear I don't dare leave the hospital. I just want to stay together with the doctor. I'm afraid I will die. It's really very terrible. I never had this feeling. Yeah, it scared me, so I have a fear of all the food I eat.
>
> **Tong**: Um, actually, I've never been drunk, but I think many who drunk did crazy things. They, even, they get dead. They get drunk. Yeah, that's true…Yeah, one of my father's colleagues was dead of drinking too much. That's true.

Lanfen fears illness. She visits the doctor frequently and seems constantly worried about becoming ill. Her behavior is based on past experiences with food poisoning. This situation caused her to become skeptical about food in terms of nutrition and safety. Likewise, Tong knew someone who died from drinking too much alcohol. In terms of health, food is one aspect they can control that may prevent them from getting sick, so they emphasize this control in life. Food

is an aspect of fear as it is essential to life but can threaten life, as well. Making healthy food choices is a way to invoke a sense of safety in life by avoiding risk.

Among Chinese, the fear of sickness typically involves food poisoning from food sanitation issues or unhealthy food consumption that leads to physical deterioration. Restaurants, especially street food, instigate concern in many people causing them to forgo dining out frequently.

> **Hai Wei**: 见证？第一，它那个小摊上的摆在外面，首先那**种**环境就不好，比方说有苍蝇啊之类的。它那个工具都是反复用的。那个烧烤之类的，它一直都用，也不知道什么时候换。碗筷这些都不干净。然后用的油也不是很放心。Evidence? First, it is shown in the air. The circumstance is not good. For instance there are flies in the northern area. The tools are used repetitively. Like the barbecue, the tools are used repetitively and we don't know when they will be changed. Bowls and chopsticks are not clean. And the oil is not safe.
>
> **DaZhong**: Yes, I'll try new things because you don't really usually go to the restaurant, and I'll, because the hygiene things like you said, even the oil thing like you mentioned something news on it, because the oil, they recycle it and use it again and we don't go pretty often.. It's rare we will do.

Visual impressions influence people a great deal when they examine restaurants. The Government does not regulate restaurants; thus, the situation is risky. Likewise, news reports about food poisoning cases in restaurants instills uncertainty among people. Hai Wei prefers to eat at his university while DaZhong prefers to eat at home to ensure safety. People are likely to avoid restaurants when there are negative reports on food safety or sanitary practices. News reports are highly effective in swaying public opinion about food choices.

In some cases, health avoids its place in main tastes because people assume that their age or weight determine their health. If they are young and thin, then they believe they are healthy.

> **I: Um, why does the physical always win the war? Why can't you control that? [laughs]**

DeMing: [laughs] Because there is uh, no problems, there's still the problems, no troubles of physical in me.

Tong: Because I like it. And, I like it, and I have good, I am in good health. So they have only a little impact on my health

Consequently, people do not restrict or control their food choices even if they believe those choices are unhealthy as long as their health seems good. Prevention does not override their main tastes. Therefore, they feel diet does not matter because the onset of any disease happens in later life. When disease takes a long time to develop, people find it easier to ignore unhealthy behaviors because consequences are uncertain and not immediate; thus, people can believe that they will not become ill. Also, unlike Lanfen, DeMing and Tong have not experienced illness from food. People are more likely to change eating habits after they personally become ill.

Similar to health, convenience can also play a significant role in main tastes to the extent that it also takes precedence over actual taste preferences. Availability is a major factor in convenience. People are more likely to consume what is readily available rather than seek out harder to find foods that are tastier to them. This practice is especially true for students.

Hai Wei: 第一，从学校里面到学校外面它需要一段时间。第二，它那个，在外面，因为我喜欢吃干净的东西，所以就到餐馆、餐馆那种点菜之类的，花的时间很长，也等吗.所以一般要到外面吃的话，就吃个面食这样的。这样也比较快。Firstly, it [going to a restaurant] takes some time when I walk outside from my school. Secondly, I like eating clean food, so I am always choosing dining places like restaurant. Ordering dishes will take some time and I also need to wait for the dishes ready. So I will choose eating noodle if I eat outside because it will be quick.

Bingwen: It is because of my living condition. I am now living in dormitory and cannot cook by myself. And also it is because I go to bed late. So I have got such a habit. If I was at home, things would be different.

Tong: The convenience I talked about means saving time and energy. Now we are studying in university, and we are under heavy stress because of lots of lectures and homework. If we eat at school, first, we don't need to cook by ourselves, and second the

> restaurant in school is much closer to the classroom. So it will save us lots of time and energy, and therefore, we will have more time to study.

The Chinese universities have canteens where students can buy cheap meals. While the food is not the best quality, students can eat all their meals on campus, which saves time. During busy periods in people's lives, they may alter their main tastes habits in order to prioritize their lives. As Bingwen suggests, the situation is temporary. If he was not a student, he would have different eating habits. Because the situations are temporary, people may acclimate easier to situations when their foods choices are based on convenience, causing them to sacrifice main tastes needs. The Self determines people's values; here, the Self values studies over food; thus, convenience becomes a part of Self-food that is created out of the external responsibilities of the They-Self world.

Main tastes extend beyond mere flavor and foods to additional qualities, such as appearance and familiarity. Visual attractiveness is essential, but some people, it is even more important than actual taste. Food has to look fresh and attractive to be appetizing. Some participants go as far as to refuse to eat foods whose appearance was unattractive to them.

> **Bingwen**: Because Chinese people pay particular attention on the color, taste and smell of food, and they put the color first. That is to say your visual response is important to your appetite. I think people have many natural reactions. For example, if you went to buy vegetables, or fruits, or meat, you will find that even you have not been taught or trained, you will choose to buy those you feel comfortable when you look at and make you want to eat. It is the same to the food you cook. If they look good, you will have the appetite. It is the first step to make the food look delicious. I think it is very important.

Appearance is a reaction that occurs prior to tasting a food, for it is what entices people to want to taste the food. People are drawn to certain qualities that give them a sense of comfort when they see foods with these qualities. The food aesthetics they deem appropriate guide their choices here. Appearance also is connected to familiarity. Even though people may not be

familiar with a particular food, they are likely to eat those foods with familiar qualities, such as colors, textures, and smells.

Main tastes encompass particular eating behaviors in some participants. These behaviors are necessary for the enjoyment of the eating experience because they provide comfort through routine, social bonding, and/or control over food intake.

> **Hong:** Because after eating food when I was young, I think after eating food finished, when the dinner finished, and when I grew up, I think that I have to eat something like fruit or soup or the dessert, yeah, when dinner finished. Or I maybe it's like a [collection] in mind.

As a child, Hong consumed dessert or fruit after the main course with her mother, and she continues this practice into adulthood; thus, to alter this routine results in a sense of incompletion that leaves her wanting. This main tastes practice is part of her conceptualization of the food process. She acknowledges that it is a psychological fixation, yet she struggles to change this way of thinking about food. Her mother instigated this Self-food since consuming sweet foods is uncommon in her province. While the practice emerged from her mother, she assumes this practice as part of her Self-food that she continues to practice without her mother's direct influence.

DaZhong enjoys sharing his love for food with those around him. For him to enjoy the food, he needs others to enjoy it, also.

> **DaZhong:** I taste [a food] good, eating good and describe it good, and people will think it will be delicious. And I like kind of uh, affecting or influencing my family in this way, especially my daughter. When I try something that didn't turn out really good, but I will pretend it's really good, so she'll like it. [laughs] So that's the way—actually, now when I talk about this, it seems I do it intentionally, but actually I just do it most of the time. I don't do it intentionally. I just do it myself. I just want to, it's a kind of happiness will be infectious to other people. You're eating it in happy way, you will get other people eating in a happy way.

Food serves as a bonding mechanism for him. Being able to spread his enjoyment of food to other people, especially his family, means that he is able to share an activity he loves with the people he loves. In this sense, his Self-food is the They-food for those around him because he poses a direct influence on their food choices and their eating experiences. At the same time, the people around him influence him to want to make the food experience enjoyable. His Self-food is constantly interacting with the They-food around him.

Implementation of Self-food in the They-Food World

To maintain main tastes, structure and control are needed in daily food choices. Structure and control are people's way of inducing a sense of choice over their food choices and the ways they organize their food consumption based on their Self-food. These behaviors consistently impact food choices because people seek to maintain environments where they can exercise their main tastes easily. Thus, they project their Self-food in contexts where they know the environment and the people will support these choices.

Structure and control are demonstrated through the amount of food consumed or the amount of specific foods consumed. Many people are cognizant that excessive food intake leads to weight gain and other health issues; thus, some consciously pay attention to their food intake while others feel the process of controlling consumption as natural. They simply stop eating when they feel satiated.

> **Zhuo:** Control my, my diet. For example, before I eat, I did not think if I am full or not. Now I know, maybe I am not any more hungry, so I stop. I can do this. It's easy. But just some days, I really need to eat. I miss some special things, uh, I will have the food, and I eat a lot. And after that, I stop. [laughs]

Zhou used to be overweight when she was an adolescent, but she does not see weight loss as difficult because she simply pays more attention to her bodily cues for satiety. The manifestation here also requires balance. She still indulges in eating a large amount of food

sometimes, but she typically stays within her structure of avoiding overconsumption. Managing her weight is part of her main tastes, and she exercises this need through self-restraint over indulgence. This situation differs from her past experiences of being overfed by her parents. She now feels in control over her food choices. Hence, her Self-food shifted away from her parental influence here. She now asserts her own personality through the assertion of control over her food.

Other participants like Guiren choose to eat certain high-fiber foods in order to control food intake.

> **Guiren:** Because fibers are from the vegetables, it will help me to digest the meat. So I try to, I eat, and because my stomach [laughs], it's, because my stomach, it's limited, so if I, it will always keep me into a balance if I keep the balance, just keep them well portioned, keep a good portion between meat and vegetables and other food because I can eat that much. I can't eat anymore. It's in another uh, in another meal. It just stopped me from overeating too much meat.

Guiren emphasizes the need for a balanced diet that avoids excessive meat consumption. By eating vegetables that are high in fiber and thus, satiating, he is able to control his meat intake because he feels too full to consume too much meat. Health is more important here than tastes, but food is used to help him overcome the desire to overindulge in tastes. The structure of the meal is the important aspect here. When people establish a structure in their meals, they feel in control over their intake.

While the need to control food intake is common, the need to indulge is also needed. Main tastes are associated with food desires. People have preferred flavors and foods as described previously, and main tastes are what make the food experience pleasurable. Nonetheless, sometimes main tastes are a strong, dominating force in which people feel they cannot control.

> **Hong:** When I grew up, suddenly, I was just interested in the dessert. And I cannot control it. I know it's not healthy, but I just want it, want it. A strong desire. I don't know why. So, I feel it is from the [inaudible]. Really interesting.
> Hong asserts a lack of control over her main tastes for sweet foods. This desire

overpowers her logic causing her to indulge. She feels this impulse emerged suddenly as a force within her. While she consumed fruit often with her mother as a child, fruit is not the focus of her sweet food desire. Desserts are the focus. Hong also grew up poor and did not consume many desserts other than fruit. However, as an adult, she now has the financial means to purchase desserts. Thus, all of a sudden, she could afford her main tastes. Consequently, the temptation to consume desserts became overwhelming. While she tries to exercise control over her intake, she struggles with this inner urge regularly. When the They-food influence from her mother became her Self-food, it manifested as a perceived uncontrollable force. Perhaps her struggle with this desire is what differentiates her Self-food as unique for her.

Adhering to a nutritional structure is a pattern among main tastes phenomena. Nutritional structures sometimes entail specific nutrient requirements while at other times, they are based on an intuitive sense about the body's nutrient needs. People trust their physical feelings to determine the nutrients they need.

> **Lanfen:** For energy. For energy. It is automatic. If you, I find a very uh, a very funny, very good regular, regulation for my body if I have the breakfast in the morning. I'm sure I would be very hungry in the noon. If I don't drink the breakfast in the morning, I don't feel I'm hungry, so it's automatic if you take the breakfast in the morning. And then maybe after three hours, I will be very hungry. You will find the food yourself.

Lanfen eats her meals at a consistent time in order to maintain constant nutritional needs for her body throughout the day. She is able to keep her appetite constant and an efficient supply of energy. This structure forms her main tastes habit; thus, to forgo the structure would affect her physical appetite for food. This regulation is her norm, and her body has adapted to it. The structure gives her a routine, which provides a sense of control over her food intake.

Bingwen allows his university to structure his food for him. He cares about food safety and nutrition and knows that the university canteen ensures these two qualities because the Government regulates the food. Therefore, he does not have to worry about attaining these qualities for himself.

> **Bingwen:** I feel most restaurant cannot provide more delicious foods than the schools, and they lack of the system to guarantee clean foods, so I prefer not to eat outside.

Bingwen is satisfied with the quality of food at his university's canteen. He does not see the value in dining out in a restaurant when he can get nutritious food at school. Maintaining the structure is convenient for him because he allows others to make the choices for him, and he chooses to eat in an environment that matches his main tastes needs. When Self-food coincides with the Self-food of others, then people maintain their Self-food easily. Similar to the way people join social clubs based on common interests, people choose food environments based on common food interests.

For many people, flavor is more important than health. However, health is concern; thus, they find ways to balance their need for main tastes while exercising some limitation on these main tastes for health purposes.

> **EnLai:** Yeah. It's very important the way to cook the food. Uh, I know fried food is not healthy. I know if you eat boiled food, it's very healthy. Its nutrients, but um, I think you should find the balance between delicious and healthy. So, I um, maybe I can, if it's there, I eat too much more fried food. And the next day, I wouldn't eat too much fried food. So I can adjust it myself.

EnLai controls his desire for fried food by not over-consuming it. If he indulges, he will restrain himself to balance his diet. He feels denying himself fried food is impractical because healthier food is not as delicious. Many people's Self-food may contrast with healthy eating guidelines. However, Self-food is their identity. They may allow the They-food perspectives on health to influence their food choices to an extent, but to forgo their main tastes would remove

their Self-food identity. Thus, upholding their Self-food is their way of maintaining their food identity and continuing to enjoy food experiences based on their individual preferences.

Cooking serves as a main venue for implementing main tastes. Through cooking, people assume power over their food choices because they are able to choose the food, choose the flavors, and choose the preparation methods. They practice ultimate authority here over food choices.

> **Tong:** I think I will enjoy it [cooking] because…uh, because I think it will be a very good experience to cook something myself, you know, to do something myself. You know, uh, to I, because I like, uh, how to explain, uh, you know, maybe the restaurant cannot satisfy my tastes, so I can cook myself and satisfy myself. It is a good way to satisfy myself.
>
> **Hong:** I don't have much preference on that because I have lived on my own for almost eight years now, and no one really cooks for me. Sometimes my boyfriend cooks for me, but what I really enjoy is that sense of freedom I derive when I cook for myself. For example, I can add as much sugar as I want in a dish.
>
> **Zhou:** I pay attention and I think, it should be the better food you cook yourself. Maybe at home. Maybe safer.

Cooking allows people to satisfy their main tastes at any time. Likewise, it provides a way for people to maintain their main tastes even if their environments change. For example, Tong is planning on moving abroad. To maintain his main tastes, he plans to study cooking before he leaves so that he is prepared to cook when he gets there. Furthermore, cooking gives people a sense of freedom. They can choose the food however they prefer, so their tastes are not confined. As Zhou indicates, food cooked at home is safer. People know the quality of the food and how it is prepared; thus, the food is safe. They avoid any food poisoning risks this way. Cooking is a way to indulge Self-food regardless of context.

Contrastingly, cooking is not always convenient for people. Cooking takes a great deal of time to execute. If people are able to attain food from other places that resemble their main tastes, then they prefer these venues over cooking.

Guiren: 然后.....另外就是.....有时候你自己做饭的时候，你会把它.....如果你有充分的时间，而且没有其他事情的话，就是充分的空闲时间，这样定义。有时候你会觉得做菜是一种乐趣，你可以享受切菜，把它们切成一片片，然后烹饪，把它们做成可口的好看的食物的过程。你会享受这一过程。但是如果你在想别的事情，你心不在焉，你根本不会去想，这顿饭要做成什么样子。因为你想的是别的东西。这顿饭仅仅是计划的一个环节: 你知道你必须吃饭，才能去做接下来的事情，保持良好身体应付接下来的事情。所以你不会去花太多时间去做菜。你就不是抱着享受的感觉去吃，而只是完成任务的感觉去吃。你会忽略一些事. Sometimes when you cook for yourself, you will….. I mean when you have enough time and have nothing to do, then you can really enjoy the cooking. You can enjoy the process of cutting, braising and making the food good to look. But if you have other things in your mind, then you can't focus on the cooking. The dish means nothing to you. It's just a prerequisite of your plan. You can't do your business when you are hungry. So when you eat your dish, you are not enjoying it but filling your stomach.

DeMing: Because I think, I cook for myself, it's a waste because I have to cook for 20 minutes, and uh, I eat them in 10 minutes and then I have to wash the dishes, wash the this [motions to plate]. All this for just 10 minutes to eat. It's a waste of time I think. So if I cook food for one hour for the whole family to eat, then I think it's worth.

According to Guiren, even if people make the time to cook, they are unlikely to enjoy it if they are busy. DeMing avoids cooking because it is too time consuming to prepare. Even though they know how to cook and can use cooking as a venue for satisfying their main tastes, they do not see cooking as valuable. They can attain their food from restaurants that will adhere to their main tastes and consume less time. Restaurants or other people make the primary food decisions in preparing dishes; therefore, choosing to consume their food makes the Self-food choice more of a They-food choice. People may be willing to sacrifice some of their main tastes for convenience.

Reaction to the They-food challenges to Self-food

The main tastes of Self-food become most obvious when they are confronted with challenges in the They-food world. Challenges often involve changes in environment, such as

people moving from one location to another. When people are placed in situations where they must adapt to new tastes, many face inner turmoil that often leads to a sense of loss and apathy towards eating. Some people have established coping mechanisms that help them adapt to new tastes rather than battling them. The following sections outline how participants react to main tastes' challenges.

Most people either change locations for work, or they travel for leisure. People's predisposition towards encountering new foods often impacts their ability to cope with food changes. If people approach new foods with openness and curiosity, they typically have positive experiences with new foods.

> **Zhou**: You always find some food you never tried when you are in a new place. The first time you try, it must tastes strange to you. If it tastes strong, then it probably would be hard for you to accept it. Like the French cheese and olives, they have very special tastes. So in the beginning, I felt it's so strange and even a little repulsive. Because it's so different from the foods I used to eating. But as a Chinese saying goes, each place has its own way of supporting its own inhabitants. I believe this. Since people here eat some kind of food, there must be some reasons. So I am willing to try new food again and again when I move to a new place. I won't stop trying only because it tastes odd in my first try. Usually, I can know more about the food in my second try.

> **Guiren**: I can only explain briefly. In my opinion, you have to feel it [the culture] if you want to learn a culture. You need to learn how they live. You need to try to speak in the way they speak, do what they do, eat what they eat, and dress what they dress. You have to make yourself a local. Of course your heart is different. But that's the only way for you to have a real local experience. You can't learn it in parties, or culture exchange programs, such as English Year or Russian Year. What you can learn in such activities is only a tip of the iceberg. If you want to understand a culture, you have to let you in.

> **DaZhong:** I feel it is the same to treat food and people. If you have already had a bad perception of a certain guy even before you try to learn more about him, you may dislike him more and more. If you have an open mind and see the good side of him, maybe you will be attracted by him and finally accept him. I am glad that you ask me such a question, and it helps me to realize this. Actually, we don't have to do it forced by someone or something, we make voluntary choice to "enjoy" it.

People may not like new tastes; however, taste develops over time. If they expose themselves to these foods several times, they may learn to enjoy the taste even if it does not

become a mainstay in their diet. Zhou accepts beforehand that she may initially reject a food, but she continues to eat it in order to acclimate her tastes to it. Guiren also seeks out new foods in different locations. He approaches such situations with the agreement that he will accept new foods rather than entering new experiences with a negative mindset. By learning the qualities of these new foods, they gain an understanding of the culture in addition to experiencing new pleasures in food. Their natural curiosity make them adaptable to these They-food experiences. Self-food is allowed to bend to the They-food influence in order to bond with the people in this new environment. When DaZhong cannot choose his own preference, it is this sense of not having a choice that makes it easier for him to adapt to the changes because in his mind, he has no other options. He has to eat this food, so, he can eat it and learn to like to make the situation a positive experience. It is a mental strategy that he uses to help him adapt.

People may also embrace new food experiences as ways to provide excitement in Self-food. As EnLai describes below, these new challenges are more like vacations to the daily routine of food choices.

> **EnLai**: I like to try all kind of food. Like Yunnan food, and we try to try our tastes, we like to try to our tastes. Ummm, uh, uh, um, the time when we are eating out, um, it's just like a small festival for our ordinary diet.

People can experiment with their tastes in order to explore the horizons of tastes. They may discover new foods they like through this process. Even if they do not adopt the food into their daily diet, they can still challenge themselves beyond the ordinary and have an enjoyable experience. Investigating the possibilities of taste is almost like an adventure. Food is like a form of entertainment for people. Therefore, trying new food is a positive experience rather than a threat to their Self-food.

Other people find consuming foods outside of their Self-food difficult. They feel confident that they will adjust and learn to like the food, but this adjustment period is a long process.

> **Tong:** I feel that American foods are very different from Chinese foods, so I need some time to get used to them. In my mind, I think American people often eat bread or pizza, but I got used to eating rice every meal. So if I went to America and stopped eating rice immediately, I would not be willing to eat if there is only bread or pizza every meal. My choice is to get used to it slowly, for instance, maybe at lunch I will cook for myself and have some rice, while at dinner I will eat some pizza. I have to do it slowly, and I don't want push myself, or it will make things worse. I need some time.

> **DeMing:** Uh, the first week I went to Chongqing, I feel awful because every food is spicy. Even the noodles, yeah. Not the rice, but except for rice everything is spicy and uh, I don't want to go starving, so I have to eat, so it's after the week, I feel it's okay, but I don't like it, but it's okay. Um, half a year later, I have to eat every day spicy food.

Adjustment is a process that begins in despair but leads to acceptance. Tong prefers the luxury of incorporating new foods slowly; however, DeMing did not have that option when he was in college in Chongqing. Once DeMing adjusted to the local food, he enjoyed the food. However, his situation was easier because he already liked the taste of spicy food before he moved there. It was not a genuine change of flavor but rather in the frequency in which the food was consumed. This factor made the adjustment easier for him. People may encounter negative experience when they undergo dietary change, but they know they can overcome the physical and mental struggle with time. They believe that their Self-food can change if needed even though they prefer to avoid change.

Despite the development of coping techniques and mental attitudes, challenges to main tastes often affect people's temperament. Participants have feelings of loss and despair when thrown into new eating environments. This lack of adjustment results in negative changes to their mental and physical statuses when consuming food.

> **Tong:** Physically, I will be uh, I will lose my weight because I eat less. I don't, I don't like those…I don't like those eating habits, so if, I eat less, and as a result, I lose my weight. But emotionally, uh, you know, eating is, eating's very important in our daily life. If I don't eat well, it can affect other factors in my life, yeah. The, you know, the process of eating may extend to my study, my emotion…Uh, I'll be not so happy, you know. I will be not so happy, so my study efficiency is low.

> **DeMing:** Food? It's uh…uh, for example, I'm going to go to Canada for prison. Just prison food. And so, I have to enjoy every day right now.

If people have to eat food they do not prefer, they may become disinterested in the eating process, which causes them to lose weight or become indifferent to food. Eating is a process that must be undertaken rather than enjoyed. Most people enjoy the eating process, so to lose this pleasure creates a sense of loss, especially since people consume food several times a day. These negative feelings may extend to other areas since people's overall demeanor may change. They have lost their Self-food, so they have a feeling of losing their personalized identity. Their Self-food has to change, so their identity has to change.

Some people do integrate new foods into their main tastes. Integration refers to the addition of certain foods or food styles while still adhering to Self-food.

> **Zhuo:** Yeah. In France, the Western food I had cooked it spaghetti, but I will add some sauce or make some sauce Chinese way, but such Chinese way should match the Western taste. For example, the tomato, buy the bacon, like this.

Zhou incorporates a Western dish into her diet, but she maintains her main tastes by using Chinese style sauces. This way, the food is new but still familiar to her. This familiarity aides in her adjustment to these changes because she alters the Western food to suit her needs. Self-food does not drastically change, but it integrates a new aspect of They-food into it. The two forces merge together to form foods that morphs into a new food that incorporates aspects of both food worlds.

Summary

The essences of the phenomenon of making food choices are the main tastes that make up the Self-food identity but are derived from They-food influences. Without these main tastes, food experiences are void of pleasure in addition to psychological and emotional satiety. Temporary deviation from main tastes is possible, but Self-food seeks ways to return to its routine to reestablish itself again. Since Self-food is composed from the They-food influences of people's particular lifeworlds, Self-food is highly dependent on contextual factors, such as environment and culture. In this sense, Self-food is difficult to change (as shown in this study) because food perspectives have been solidified and constantly reinforced over time through interactions with the food world. People are likely to surround themselves with people who are similar eaters to them, making Self-food an integrated part of people's lifestyles. These factors make changing Self-food difficult.

Essentially, separating Self-food and They-food is impossible. As Heidegger (2008) asserts, "There entities [Others] are neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand; on the contrary, they are *like* the very Dasein which frees them, in that *they are there too, and there with it.* So if one should want to identify the world in general with entities within-the-world, one would have to say that Dasein too is 'world' (p. 154). Both Self and Other are in the food world and thus, are interacting within the same food perspectives in the world. The Self is born into a world of Others who immediately are thrown into a world of food that may vary according to culture, nationality, income, and so forth. Parents indoctrinate children into their own dietary habits, and since the children do not know the food world for themselves, this context becomes their food world. As they gain more experience, they form a Self-food identity through integrating foods into their diet and/or creating some food behaviors that differ somewhat from the Others around

them in terms of the combination of food behaviors they choose to adapt. Nevertheless, the Self merely selects the Self-food from a buffet of They-food options that the Other imposes. The only distinguishing factors of the Self-food is that the combinations of They-food elements differ from person to person. These differences give people a sense of personalized food identity.

Furthermore, Heidegger (2008) notes, "The Self of the everyday Dasein is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic Self*—that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way…As they-self, the particular Dasein has been *dispersed* into the "they," and must first find itself" (p. 167). By collecting different main taste habits as they merged into adulthood, people are able to search for their authentic Self-food. The development is similar to the psychological development of identity. As people transition into adulthood, they separate themselves from their parents into their own personality. In this case, it is a food personality, yet since the deviation from the parents is still based on external influences, it is an adaptation of They-food. As Heidegger (2008) continues, "*Existentially, a state-of-mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us*" (p. 177). People seek to create a Self-food because they seek a unique identity or purpose in the world. Self-food allows the food world to become personally meaningful to their lives.

There are two major implications for obesity research based on these results. Foremost, main tastes are difficult to change. If people have main tastes that are unhealthy, then they are likely to struggle emotionally, physically, and psychologically to change these main tastes to fit a healthier lifestyle, which explains why people are unlikely to maintain long-term dietary change. Therefore, people main tastes must be considered in nutritional and obesity programs. Most important, Self-food must be a central focus in obesity programs, and in order to focus on Self-food, They-food must become a prime target because Self-food is derived from They-food. In

other words, the contextual factors of culture, society, and social interactions need to be improved so that they promote healthier food practices. Programs that only focus on the individual or individual families will not treat the entire Self-food of people, limiting their results. These implications are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

THE INDICATIONS OF BEING WITH FOOD TO IDENTITY AND OBESITY

The results of this study show that people create a food identity for themselves that I refer to as Self-food as one way to project their personal identity in the world. However, identity is formulated through the influences of others in society through culture, family, and other contextual factors, and food identities are formed the same way. People are exposed to food experiences that are dependent on the food environment and culture in which they are born. While people take these collective experiences and personalize them to establish a sense of individual Self, all of the components of this Self-food are derived from external entities (They-food). However, the degree in which external food influences are personalized varies; in other words, people choose their Self-food among a wide array of They-food practices based on personal preferences. These differing combinations are what make people feel like individualized eaters.

The following chapter develops the process of developing food identities from external forces and discusses the implications of these Self-food formations for obesity research. First, existing theories from psychology that focus on identity and behavior are used to analyze the relationship between They-food and Self-food in this study. The next section discusses how this information contributes to obesity research. Finally, future research goals and the overall limitations of this study are outlined.

Connections to Current Theories on Identity and Behavior

The field of psychology has many theories about the way people formulate their sense of self. People naturally suffer an internal conflict between the desire to be accepted by others and the desire to be unique from others (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004). Personal differences, even if they are moderate, give people a sense of unique self (Lynn & Snyder, 2002). Although the Chinese culture is a more collective culture than the United States, individuality is still valued. For collectivist cultures, people experience positive feelings towards Self when they are able to comply with the social norms in their social groups because this compliance is how they maintain relationships and status (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In Chinese Buddhist belief, life is a personal experience that is connected to ancestors and descendants but still unique in which a core self is discovered after removing all attachments to external desires and influences (Elvin, 1985). The millennial generation, also referred to as the Ku generation, embraces an individualist culture of uniqueness and autonomy (Moore, 2005) as compared to the previous Maoist culture. The Chinese in this study still showed signs of distinguishing themselves as individuals in their food choices rather than minimalizing all of their choices to cultural expectations, even though many behaviors were culturally embedded.

In identity theory, people assume an identity role and then act according to societal expectations for that identity role (Stets & Burke, 2000). People identify themselves as "an interchangeable exemplar" of various social groups rather than as a completely individualized entity (Brewer, 1991, p. 476). Levels of social identity range from broader social identities (Chinese culture) to more specific identities (individual families). These identity aspects are present in food relationships. Participants discussed their food habits as being Chinese or as being normal for their home province. Provincial identities had strong relationships with Self-

food. For instance, Tong emphasized that he liked Yunnan food and did not care for many other foods. DaZhong admitted that he still mostly eats Guangxi food even though he now lives in Beijing, and EnLai's favorite meat was lamb, which was the most common meat served in his home province. Participants often stated that Chinese food was more flavorful than Western food and proudly insisted that Chinese dishes were more complicated than Western dishes. Thus, they strongly associated their Self-food with national and provincial social groups.

According to identity theory, if people feel that they are too ordinary, they naturally seek to differentiate themselves from others as a way to establish a personal identity (Brewer, 1991; Hornsey & Jetten, 2004). All participants projected a Self-food that made them perceive themselves as unique eaters. For example, Lanfen ate Chinese food, but she did not like rice, and she discussed her dislike for rice during many interviews because she felt that this behavior made her different from other Chinese people. DaZhong accentuated that he enjoyed eating different foods and changed his diet as he was exposed to new foods. He later revealed that his diet had not changed since childhood, but the projection of himself as open-minded made him feel like a personalized eater. Therefore, he kept emphasizing this perceived attitude about himself. People may not eat unusual foods, but they perceive themselves as having food behaviors that make them different from other people. This uniqueness feeling gives them a sense of Self that in turn, makes them feel in control of their food choices. They have autonomy over their food lives.

Self-categorization theory depicts another way people conform to the norms of social groups while also maintaining a sense of uniqueness. People classify themselves according to social groups or categories, which allows people to define themselves according to their given social context (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). People choose categories as a match (or fit) when the norms of those categories are consistent and coincide with their own norms. Certain identities are

activated when particular social contexts promote the expression of these identity roles. When identities are activated, people achieve a sense of self-verification (Stets & Burke, 2000) because they feel that their identities are validated by others. People may identify so intensely with group goals that they internalize these goals as personal goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Personal identity is comprised of self-categories that make a person individualized whereas social identity are the self-categories used to define identity by those traits shared with other people (Brewer, 1991; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). However, the two overlap when people internalize group norms as their own. In some cases, people may merely adopt a general view of Self in which they look at themselves as a sum of all their social categories rather than as a member to each category (Stets & Burke, 2000).

People often determine their self-categories through relative accessibility. According to Turner, Oakes, Haslam, and McGarty (1994), "Relative accessibility reflects a person's past experiences, present expectations, and current motives, values, goals, and needs. It reflects the active selectivity of the perceiver in being able to use categories that are central, relevant, useful, or likely to be confirmed by the evidence of reality" (p. 455). People perceive their chosen categories as self-evident since these categories reflect their personal identity traits (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Choosing certain social groups over others to self-categorize themselves gives people a personalized conception of Self and a sense of choice, especially since they choose groups they perceive as similar to themselves (Brewer, 1996). This practice was prevalent among participants in this study because participants selected main tastes from their available food environments as their own that gave them a sense of Self-food and personal choice. Thus, identities are not inherent but constantly shaped by social influence as people continually try to

establish their sense of self (Brewer, 1991; Hogg & Reid, 2006; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994).

In this study, participants categorized themselves as particular eaters as they attempted to describe their Self-food. As mentioned, the most common categories pertained to Chinese and provincial food cultures. Some participants classified themselves as having refined taste in food because of the influence of their parents who were cooks. DaZhong's father was a chef, and he believed that he had exquisite tastes in food because he was exposed to fine food as a child. While he ate the same dishes as other people, he belonged to a different category because he experienced professionally made food as a child. Conforming to the behaviors and attitudes of elite or unique social groups produces a sense of distinctiveness because these groups are unattainable to all people (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004). For DaZhong, he was part of a rare group that made him special. Similarly, Hong believed that she was a natural cook, and her cooking intuitions provided her with refined tastes in food and the ability to make any dish she wanted, which gave her a sense of empowerment. She sensed she had full control over her food choices while others do not because they lack these skills. Furthermore, some categories were based on other social roles in society. All of the male participants categorized themselves as meat lovers and felt that eating meat was a masculine inclination. Hence, eating meat was part of being in the category of being male.

Another theory about identity development is optimal distinctiveness. Optimal distinctiveness is when there is an equal balance between the need for individualization and the need for social conformity. When people seek to identify with large groups or highly inclusive groups, then people's needs for uniqueness are high; however, if people are too different from others, the need to conform to others is stronger in order to attain a sense of belonging (Brewer,

1991). Smaller social groups are more exclusive; thus, they provide people with a higher sense of individuality while still embracing a collective identity. People naturally seek this equilibrium, which is why large groups naturally segment themselves into smaller, more specialized groups (Brewer, 1991). Therefore, people seek a moderate sense of uniqueness because to be too similar or too dissimilar to other people makes them uncomfortable (Lynn & Snyder, 2002). While some people may engage in rebellious behavior against social norms, they are more likely to assert their uniqueness through socially acceptable distinctions (Lynn & Snyder, 2002). For instance, owning an expensive car is a form of socially acceptable uniqueness.

This preference for moderate uniqueness was apparent in this study. While all participants discussed their perceived Self-foods, they typically discussed these traits as being shared with other people on smaller, more exclusive levels. The provincial cuisines differ due to different crops that are available in each region in China. Many participants spoke more proudly when distinguishing their food tastes according to their provincial cuisines rather than to their Chinese heritage. Chinese culture is too inclusive; thus, they felt more individualized through their provincially influenced food choices. While participants asserted personalized food habits that they felt made them unique, they still shared these habits with other smaller groups. For instance, DeMing consumed the same dishes every week, but he dined out with his friends who shared this same habit. Likewise, Hong shared her love for sweets with her mother, and Guiren abided by the scientific food guidelines derived from his parents and his education. Thus, these Self-food behaviors were not shared on a provincial scale but on a more localized scale among friends and family. Nevertheless, these habits were still shared with others, which coincides with the tendency for people to choose self-categories that match their internalized identities.

Ashworth (2003) discussed the fractions of the lifeword: selfhood, sociality, embodiment, spatiality, project, and discourse. Selfhood, sociality, and embodiment relate to this study specifically. Selfhood was a predominant factor in Self-food since food is used as an expression of Self. People equated their food habits to their hometown identities, such as being a Yunnan eater or Hunan eater. The male participants emphasized their identities as meat eaters, and other participants embraced themselves as healthy eaters. Thus, personal values were very much projected in food choice. Likewise, sociality plays a significant role here because food is used as a venue for socializing and maintaining relationships with other people. In this study, participants drank alcohol on social occasions even though they did not like the taste of alcohol because they desired to share social food experiences with others. Also, participants consumed foods they did not enjoy, such as pizza, in order to join a group of friends. Thus, food choice is guided by social needs to fit in with peer groups. Furthermore, embodiment was illustrated in this study through gender roles and physical attractiveness. Men emphasized themselves as meat eaters to the extent in which they had to consume meat at every meal. The women in this study did not reflect this same attitude towards meat. Most women accentuated eating more vegetables or fruit than the men did, but they did not equate these preferences to being feminine. The men connected their meat preferences to being male. Some participants like EnLai, Bowen, and Zhou discussed concerns over weight and sought to control their weight by limiting their intake of food. Thus, they did not give up their main tastes but merely controlled the amount of food they ate. Other participants did not perceive themselves as overweight or unhealthy and therefore, did not see the need to control their diet. When physical appearances were visually affected, participants altered their food choices, but when they were not, participants did not care as much about intake or health.

After reexamining the existing literature on behaviors, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) offers some further insight into the phenomenon of food choices. The TPB suggests that intention is predicated on attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Fila & Smith, 2006). In this model, both personal attitudes and perceived external social pressures (subjective norms) motivate behaviors (Shepherd, Sparks, & Guthrie, 1995). Despite external influences, personal beliefs and values are more influential in choices than subjective norms (White, Smith, Terry, Greenslade, & Blake, 2009). However, in the context of this study, subjective norms, those often related to childhood, were internalized as personal norms and thus, formulated individuals' main tastes.

Subjective norms are the perception of how other people who the individual cares for will evaluate a behavior (Carrus, Nenci, & Caddeo, 2008). It only concerns the alleged perceptions of those people close to the individual rather than society. This factor makes it quite plausible that people would then alter behaviors based on these perceptions and subsequently internalize these behaviors as part of their natural behaviors in the natural attitude. For example, Hong ate fruit after dinner with her mother as a child. Her mother encouraged this behavior. Now as an adult, Hong's main taste is for sweet food. The perceived acceptability of indulging in sweet foods is now internalized as her own personal food choice. Likewise, Zhou personalized the love for food and cooking from her father. They bonded over food in her childhood. Her father's main tastes behaviors became her main tastes behaviors. In this way, the line between Self-food and They-food (personal norms and subjective norms) is blurred. Essentially, all food choices begin as They-food, and then certain aspects of this They-food are personalized until a Self-food emerges. In a sense, people establish some degree of food identity by selecting others' choices to accept as their own.

Implications for Obesity Research

Main tastes that compose Self-food are difficult to resist. In Nederkoorn, Houben, Hofmann, Roefs, and Jansen (2010), participants with a preference for sweet foods and a weak response control gained more weight than those participants who had a weak response control but no preference for sweet foods. Obese people have demonstrated stronger impulses for sugary and fatty foods (Drewnowski, Kurth, & Rahaim, 1991), suggesting that sugar may be a part of their Self-food; however, this sugar focused Self-food had to emerge out of a sugar focused They-food. Such findings invoke the need to compare the Self-foods of obese individuals to those of non-obese individuals. If Self-foods differ among obese and non-obese people, then the They-food worlds may differ, as well. This information supports the importance of environment in food choices rather than individual control. Furthermore, many studies suggest that taste preferences are connected to genetics. Some people have more sensitive taste reactions and prefer sweet tastes rather than the bitter tastes found in foods, such as cruciferous vegetables (Drewnowski, Henderson, & Barratt-Fornell, 2001). Typically, infants are inherently attracted to sweet foods and averse to bitter foods (Drewnowski & Rock, 1995). In this study, EnLai despised vegetables. He tried to consume a meal of only vegetables, and he could not finish it. The taste repulsed him. Tong insisted that when he cannot eat his main tastes, his mood changes. There are both potential physical and emotional responses in consuming non-main tastes foods. If people are born with such natural inclinations towards food flavors, then changing main tastes is cumbersome, particularly in dietary regimens. When many people try to lose weight, they usually are encouraged to drastically change their food habits. Such drastic changes invoke negative responses making them difficult to maintain in the long-term.

As people get older, main tastes solidify creating a neophobic food attitude toward new foods (Birch, 1999). Eating familiar foods is comforting because the foods are guaranteed to be enjoyable. For example, DeMing rarely ordered any new food or even dined in a new restaurant because he feared that new foods tasted badly. The fear of food tasting badly is the number one reason for not trying new foods (Birch, 1999). This aspect suggests that food choices are psychological in nature. Changing food habits is opposed because people feel secure in maintaining their normal food choices. To forgo normalcy means to put themselves in unpredictable situations that may not be enjoyable. Moreover, socioeconomic status is connected to main tastes. Lower socio-economic classes demonstrate stronger preferences for sweet, fatty foods because these foods provide the highest degree of satiety (Wright, Nancarrow, & Kwok, 2001). Hong used to eat fruit as her dessert as a child because it was the only sweet food that her family could afford. However, when she became able to purchase her own food, she consumed desserts, such as cakes and even consumed these desserts as her main course meals. EnLai did not have a great deal of meat as a child. Now, he mostly eats meat and very little vegetables. These main tastes are based on foods that are satisfying but also were unattainable in the past. Food was not enjoyable for Hong and EnLai in the past due to their economic status. The desire for satiation is still strong even though their financial situation has changed. The inclination for indulgence may be impacted not only by the food available during childhood but also by the food denied in childhood. Food becomes a commodity that resembles status. If people experienced food deprivation or low food quality, they may overcompensate for it when they have the financial means.

Convenience is a major component in food choices. Convenience is involves the difficulty or ease in attaining a food, and these factors are a major predicator in behavioral

intentions (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003; Shepherd, Sparks, & Guthrie, 1995). Behavior intentions refers to the amount of effort that people are willing to exert in order to engage in particular behaviors in addition to their attitudes regarding these behaviors as either good or bad (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). Food choices are based on convenience principles, such as satiety, ease in food attainment, and economics more often than for pleasure purposes (Park, 2004). For example, Tong ate most of his meals at the school canteen; however, he believed the food was unhealthy and unsavory. Similarly, Hai Wei believed that dining in a restaurant was inconvenient due to time constraints, so he ate most of his meals at the school canteen. Both of these participants were unwilling to inconvenience themselves for food because they perceived their studies are more important than food. Thus, while main tastes are strong, the maintenance of main tastes may change depending on the convenience in maintaining them. When convenience is present, these main tastes will take control again. The convenience factor posed mostly negative effects in this study. Many students admitted to eating what they referred to as junk food because they did not have a kitchen in their dorms. Convenience can increase the consumption of unhealthy, fast food. However, Zhou and Guiren ate simple, easy food that they perceived was healthy. While some people may make healthy choices that are convenient, convenience may influence people to make poor eating choices, as well.

Meta-analysis research fails to show a strong connection between subjective norms and intentions, which implies that personal norms guide behaviors (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). People make choices based on personal responsibility (White, Smith, Smith, Terry, Greenslade, & Blake, 2009), but this sense of personal responsibility is derived from external interactions with the world around them (the They world). People personalize their attitudes, but they often conform to societal attitude norms in order to identify with those in their social sphere. For

instance, several participants admitted that they believed that fried food was unhealthy. Nevertheless, they claimed that all Chinese people eat fried food. Hence, they identified themselves as Chinese and used this social identify to justify their unhealthy food choices. Past behaviors that continue indefinitely are believed to be connected to identity (Carrus, Nenci, & Caddeo, 2008). As these participants grew up in a Chinese society, they made food choices based on the food choices of that society. This connection emphasizes the impact of culture on food choices. People may consume unhealthy foods due to cultural pressure or cultural conformity if those foods are part of the food culture in which they want to belong. In this case, health education is not effective enough to change food habits if the culture itself is unwilling to change.

Societal customs often determine normal behavior. Attitudes are the products of beliefs about good or bad outcomes for behaviors based on personal experiences in the world (Shepherd, Sparks, & Guthrie, 1995). If there is a perceived societal positive attitude about a behavior, people are more likely to engage in that behavior (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). More importantly, behaviors (including food behaviors) are developed in childhood and continue into adulthood (Brug, Tak, te Velde, Bere, & de Bourdeaudhuiji, 2008). Childhood experiences involve parents and other family members controlling most food choices for the child. Main tastes are cultivated in childhood through familial relationships and socialization (Wright, Nancarrow, & Kwok, 2001). People are taught what foods to eat based on what foods are considered delicious and acceptable in the family. While some studies indicate innate food preferences, most people learn main tastes from their environment (Birch, 1999). During childhood, food is They-food, but as people become adults, they take certain parts of this They-food and personalize them as their own Self-food. The main tastes that comprise Self-food are learned through conditioning and

positive reinforcement in the home (Brug, Tak, te Velde, Bere, & de Bourdeaudhuij, 2008), as well as in culture and society. Self-food is the product of the family, culture, and society rather than an individualized entity.

Furthermore, injunctive norms are what others feel a person should do, and descriptive norms are what others actually do (Rivis and Sheeran, 2003). In other words, what people say and what people actually do differ. Parents may tell children to eat healthy, but children observe parents eating unhealthy food. People, especially children, are more likely to mimic what they see others do (Brug, Tak, te Velde, Bere, & de Bourdeaudhuij, 2008). This influence is more significant with unhealthy habits because unhealthy habits are typically more enjoyable (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). Thus, people justify unhealthy behaviors when they observe others partaking in the same behaviors because the behavior seems socially acceptable. Likewise, the temptation to engage in unhealthy behaviors is higher when people are surrounded by others doing these behaviors. Several participants acknowledged that fried food is unhealthy, yet they excused their consumption of fried food based on the observance that all Chinese people eat fried food. Associating themselves with society minimalizes the severity of their choices.

Location determined many food choices in this study. Behaviors are dependent on "social, organizational, and physical environments" (Glanz & Bishop, 2010, p. 410). Guiren stated that location limited his foods. He was unable to find certain ingredients in Beijing, so his main diet was fixed. Most participants had an affinity for foods from their hometowns. Tong was devoted to Yunnan food, and Zhou was loyal to Hunan food. The flavors of these regions differ; therefore, they were conditioned to eating these certain flavors, making adopting new tastes into their everyday diet difficult. While people adopt particular aspects from other cultures as they encounter new foods (Wright, Nancarrow, & Kwok, 2001), main tastes never deviate

substantially. In fact, it is this cultural norm that blurs the line between They-food and Self-food. People base their choices on common sense when they are really derived from external influences that dictate the norm. Thus, the issue of obesity cannot be examined only through individuals. Obesity programs must be aimed toward changes in culture, family, and society that advocate for socially acceptable changes among various populations. Each culture, family, and society must be treated as both holistically and individually since these factors change from context to context.

Other studies confirm that They-food factors, such as culture and family, have a significant impact on Self-food behaviors. African American women often feel pressured to have larger weights since these weights are considered more attractive in their culture; also, African American cultural foods tend to be greasy and high in fat (Blixen, Singh, & Thacker, 2006). Society often portrays ideal body images through the media. In U.S. society, the thin ideal is portrayed on television, magazines, and toys, and it often is equated with the value of personal control and restraint (Brownell, 1991). Also, gender standards influence eating behaviors. Women are expected to eat less food than men in many cultures (Mori, Pliner, & Chaiken, 1987). Serving large amounts of food, especially at family dinners, is common among some cultures (Blixen, Singh, & Thacker, 2006). They-food factors determine affordability, child feeding practices, ingredients, taste preferences, familiarity, and health beliefs towards food (Caprio, 2008).

Health promotion programs focused on healthy eating are more effective when they incorporate They-food factors, such as culture (Cousins et al., 1992), agriculture, food industries, educators, governments, and researchers into Self-food counseling (Hill & Peters, 1998). Childhood is a primary target time for people since Self-food development begins in childhood

(Hill & Peters, 1998), but these programs need to focus on the entire family rather than only the child. Regardless, They-food factors are contextual: "Culture, unlike instinct, is learned; is distributed within a group in that not everyone possesses the same knowledge, attitudes, or practices; enables us to communicate with one another and behave in ways that are mutually interpretable; and exists in a social setting" (Caprio, 2008, p. 2214). People interact with cultural factors differently to form their Self-food identities. Thus, while a holistic approach is necessary, an individualized approach is still imperative.

Implications for Future Study

This study indicates that the main tastes of Self-food are conditioned through They-food contexts and thus, difficult to change. It also demonstrates that food choices are embedded in cultural, familial, and societal contexts are not just within the scope of individual choice. Even though participants made changes at times when needed, they always reverted back to their main tastes for their everyday diet. The notion of main tastes is important for obesity research. Many obesity interventions focus on changing diets to induce weight loss; however, if main tastes are difficult to change, then this factor may explain why new diets that health experts recommend are unlikely to be maintained in the long-term. Taste is a short-term consequence (Brug, Tak, te Velde, Bere, & de Bourdeaudhuij, 2008), and many people are short-term orientated; thus, they prefer the reward of their familiar tastes rather than spend the time adjusting to new tastes. Thus, main tastes should be maintained. Based on this evidence, I posit that changing people's diets to those that do not complement their Self-food and They-food contexts should be avoided. Instead, we must find a way to incorporate people's main tastes in healthier ways.

Invoking behavioral change is more successful when behavior is changed in self-interested ways that allow people to maintain a sense of choice (Downs, Loewenstein, &

Wisdom, 2009). This method requires a more in-depth, individualized approach that considers personal experiences combined with a comprehensive approach that targets cultural and societal change. Behavioral change is a process that requires many adaptions over a period of time (Glanz & Bishop, 2010). This process-orientated approach would help people to find new ways to acquire their main tastes that are healthier and easier to adapt. Since convenience is a major issue in food choices, adaptions need to be implemented slowly because if these adaptions are inconvenient, people are unlikely to adopt them. For instance, children are more likely to accept new foods that a taste like foods they already prefer (Brug, Tak, te Velde, Bere, & de Bourdeaudhuij, 2008). Main tastes embody a broad range of food preferences that can be found in many different foods and dishes, making them more adaptable than forcing people to consume completely different foods they dislike (Birch, 1999). Behavioral theories indicate that self-interest, such as personal values, guide behavior, but social norms restrict these behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). People follow social norms as a venue for fitting in with a society or group. Even though individualized health intervention approaches are contextual, people are part of a larger societal framework. Healthier food choices need to be instituted on a cultural and societal level, as well. For instance, the practice of making existing dishes healthier needs to be enforced in cultural, familial, and societal environments, or individual change is unlikely.

Health professionals need to reveal Self-food and They-food influences by engaging people in an almost phenomenological process of counseling in order to reveal food tendencies and food histories. This process requires a more thorough and intricate process on an individual level. This process could go further than psychological counseling because counseling may address addiction to food for obese people by examining specific psychological triggers. It does not necessarily focus on people's history with food, their main tastes, or their everyday habits

and may ignore They-food factors. Also, most counseling methods focus on those who are obese or who overeat rather than ordinary people; thus, they only reach a limited number of people.

Main tastes need further study. This study indicates that main tastes are solidified and resistant to change. However, the question still remains about whether or not these main tastes are changeable. More studies about the ability to change main tastes are needed. Also, more studies are needed that examine people's rates of success in preserving a healthy diet when their main tastes are maintained. Although unhealthy eating does not only apply to overweight or obese people, I would like to study the Self-food and They-food of obese people compared to non-obese people and compare how Self-foods were cultivated and how main tastes differ among They-food contexts. What food experiences do obese people share with one another? Is the obese-Self another manifestation of They-self that differs from the They-self of normal weight people? Is unhealthy eating the natural attitude of the modern condition in the developing world?

Self-food develops out of past experiences with family, location, culture, socio-economic class and so forth. Therefore, health promotion programs that only target the individual and do little to target the overall context of the person have limited results. This aspect suggests that programs must examine individual (main tastes) and They-food environments. The entire context surrounding food choices needs to be addressed in a holistic approach. Combined approaches that target the main tastes of people, the food industry, economics, social and societal environments, and culture are necessary.

Limitations of this Study

There are several limitations to this study that justifies further exploration of this topic. Foremost, the language barriers caused obstacles at times. The participants used their second-

language for most interviews. Most participants spoke English well, but at times, they did not accurately convey their thoughts in English. Luckily, follow-up interviews and participant checks helped minimize this issue. Participants had multiple opportunities to clarify their meaning. Also, the interpreters sometimes caused problems. One interpreter did not keep the questions open-ended during the Chinese interviews and was rather leading in her questioning. Again, follow-up interviews allowed me to revisit the topics with these participants to ensure consistency. I also stopped using this particular interpreter after discovering this pattern.

Qualitative software was unsuitable for this study. I attempted to use a software program; however, this program did not provide accurate results. My participant sample was too small to compare the results in a meaningful way. I could not see any significant comparisons with only ten participants. Likewise, the software was more appropriate for structured interviewing that is focused on a set of specific questions. Since this study is based on unstructured interviewing to allow a more grounded theoretical approach, comparing meaning units according to codes was unreliable. Also, the codes used were broad and were present in all transcripts. The participant number is also limiting even though it is suitable for this kind of study. The ten participants here are not representative of the entire urban, middle-class Chinese population. However, the codes that emerged are broad because they relate to the phenomenon of food choice. The participant number was minimized because phenomenological study requires in-depth, multiple interviews with each participant in order to produce detailed descriptions of phenomenological manifestations that should be recognizable to readers. Because food choices are cultivated in specific contexts, subjectivity cannot be completely removed.

A follow-up study is needed on the phenomenon of food choices among people attempting or who have attempted dietary changes. This study could follow-up on the concepts

of They-food and its influences on Self-food in the context of attempting dietary change, which could further illustrate the potential difficulties in changing Self-food in the They-food world. The time frame of this study posed limitations. This study was a dissertation study. If I had a longer period of time to conduct the study, I may have included at least fifteen to twenty participants. While ten participants is suitable for a phenomenological study as explained in Chapter 3, adding some more participants may have produced more potential manifestations of the phenomenon. Additional studies on the phenomenon of food choices may prove insightful in this regard. Also, this study was conducted in Beijing. Studies conducted in different Chinese cities or in Chinese rural areas may be useful in continuing the exploration of food choices.

This study used self-reported data, which is potentially bias; however, phenomenological studies are concerned with people's perceptions of experiences rather than the actual events. Thus, this form of bias did not limit this kind of study. All but one participant in this study were in their twenties. Most participants were young adults who were unmarried and did not have children yet probably because these people had more time to engage in this kind of study. This factor limited the variability among participants to an extent. Future studies are needed that may include a larger range of adults or that target adults who are married with children to explore any potential influences children have on parents' food choices. Furthermore, the review of the literature on current studies was limited due to my lack of fluency in Chinese. I was unable to attain previous research studies on food choices and Chinese obesity published in China or published in Chinese. I was able to obtain literature from English-speaking researchers including some Chinese researchers who published their work in the United States.

Summary

The food people take in is the food within. The food we eat is a part of us, and we use this food for pleasure, for social acceptance, for companionship, and for identity. Food is the sustenance of life, making food and body one. To lose a food is like losing oneself. We should discover the elements in these foods that we love as a way to know ourselves. What is it about these foods that makes meaning for us? Our goal should be to find this same meaning (main tastes) in other healthier forms because the goal should always be to improve ourselves rather than change ourselves. In this case, we improve our food; we do not change it. Learning about our food will help us learn ourselves, and as long as we can maintain our food identity, the journey to healthy eating may prove possible.

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