Everyday food practices among three low-income groups: Rural, homeless, and refugee

Amy L. Redman

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EVERYDAY FOOD PRACTICES AMONG THREE LOW-INCOME GROUPS: RURAL, HOMELESS, AND REFUGEE

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
In Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In
Sociology

September, 2013
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For Lawton and Lilly
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

After writing a dissertation, one would think that writing a ‘thank you’ to those who made it possible would be easy in comparison. It is not that simple, however, to express my overwhelming gratitude to all those who helped bring this work to fruition. As with most endeavors, the culmination of my graduate student experiences, which ends with this dissertation, has been a deeply social experience.

To my advisor and chair of my committee, Dr. Michele Dillon, thank you for your consistent, thoughtful, and patient guidance during my time at UNH. You have spent countless hours listening, brainstorming, and reading my work, in addition to providing me support through the many life events I faced as your advisee. You have embodied what it means to be a mentor- thank you.

To the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Semra Aytur, Dr. Joanne Burke, Dr. Sharyn Potter, and Dr. Sally Ward- you each encourage me to think about my work in a different way. You asked thoughtful, probing questions, and helped me organize my thoughts, which is a difficult task sometimes. You have provided me with a powerful example of what it means to be great scholars, teachers, and people...

To my editors: Megan Lenard, Dutch Redman, and Heidi Makoutz. Thank you all for your careful eye, ‘wordsmithing’, and time. I owe particular thanks to my 11th hour editors, Dutch and Heidi. Thank you both for reading and editing my work. It can feel like a vulnerable place to have your close friends and family read your work, but you both offered support and excitement that I am truly grateful for.
I also owe special thanks to the men and women of this research who let me into their 'food lives'. The people in this study shared their stories with me, opening up their lives to me in a way that I could not have expected. Without all of you, there would be no story. I would also be remised if I did not acknowledge the 2010 UNH Dietetic Interns. You all worked tirelessly on the “Voices From the Field” project, and without your thoughts, research, and positive attitudes this dissertation would not have had the launching pad it needed.

Lastly, to my family and friends- thank you for your love, support, and continuous inquires about this research. I owe a special thanks to my husband, Lawton Redman. You have not only encourage me to pursue my academic endeavors, you have also initiated numerous conversations about food and my work, challenging me to think about my work in new ways. I am beyond grateful that while you are not a sociologist by training, you love to think and talk like one.
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ABSTRACT

EVERYDAY FOOD PRACTICES AMONG THREE LOW-INCOME GROUPS: RURAL, HOMELESS, AND REFUGEE

By

Amy L. Redman

University of New Hampshire, September 2013

Lower-income groups are more susceptible to diet-related diseases like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease (CDC 2010). They are also more likely to need food and nutritional assistance (USDA 2011). Yet very little is known about the day-to-day food practices of these individuals and families. Many times those who are relatively adjacent in terms of income are assumed to have similarities in food consumption (Hupkens, Knibbe, & Drop 2000); however, this has not been empirically examined. The main objectives of this research are to 1) gain an exploratory in-depth understanding of the everyday food practices of individuals in three low-income groups: rural, homeless, and refugee, 2) to examine the cultural variations in food practices among the groups, and 3) to investigate the everyday strategies used to obtain food. An ethnographic design was used, including 60 hours of observations in group venues and individual/family homes, and 22 semi-structured interviews, conducted in urban and rural settings in the northeastern United States. The main findings suggest that each group has distinct patterns of everyday food practices, and vary in cultural competence around food. The refugee group demonstrated more cultural competence around food, i.e., knowledge of how to grow, prepare, cook, and celebrate food, in comparison to the rural and homeless
groups. Additionally, each group employs the various capital resources they have, in a reasonable way, to feed themselves and their families. This research calls for a greater appreciation of the role of culture in everyday food practices and to increase scholarly recognition of the differences that exists within groups who share a similar economic situation. Additionally, with escalating obesity and food insecurity rates in the US, understanding food culture can alert policy makers that no one intervention is necessarily effective for all low-income groups. Economic strain is undoubtedly linked to food hardships. The findings from this study, however, suggest that cultural capital may be as relevant as income in increasing food security.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"The story of three low-income groups, food, and how culture matters when it comes to getting fed…"

- Author, August 2012

Lower-income groups are more susceptible to diet-related diseases including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease (Allen & Sachs 2007; CDC 2010). They are also more likely to need food and nutritional assistance (USDA 2011). Yet very little is known about the day-to-day food practices of these individuals and families, or the various food practices among low-income groups. Many times those who are relatively adjacent in terms of income are assumed to have cultural similarities in food consumption (Hupkens, Knibbe, & Drop 2000); however, this assumption needs to be empirically examined. To address this gap, the following study examines the everyday food practices of individuals in three different low-income food spaces, including a rural cooking class, a homeless shelter kitchen, and a refugee community garden.

For the purposes of this research the term ‘food practices’ means practices that are linked to everyday experiences with food. Everyday food practices explain how and why people select, think about, handle, prepare, and eat food on a day-to-day basis. These practices focus on the tacit aspects of food consumption that are primarily subconscious
or taken-for-granted: how we relate to food, the ways we prepare and think about food, and the strategies we use to procure food. Ultimately, in this research, culture is defined by the observable everyday food practices of the people in this study.

Research Objectives

In essence, this research uses a phenomenological approach in describing the "here and now" realities (Schutz 1970) of food practices among lower-income groups. Using ethnographic methods, I focus on three main research objectives. The first objective is to gain an in-depth understanding of the everyday food practices, or ‘food cultures’, of low-income individuals purposefully chosen across three distinct sites: rural cooking class participants, homeless shelter residents, and refugee community gardeners. The second objective is to examine the variations in everyday food practices of individuals and families within these different low-income groups. The third objective is to investigate the strategies used by these differently situated individuals to obtain food in the face of economic strain.

The importance for exploring such research questions is multifaceted. On one level, detailing everyday food practices and how food decisions are made in low-income groups will add depth to the existing literature. While there is an extensive body of literature about social class differences in eating and food practices (e.g. Hupkens, Knibbe & Drop 2000; Roos, Lahelma, Virtanen, Prattala, & Pietinen 1998), there is very little research examining lower-income group differences. Furthermore, my study directly contributes to the growing literature on the sociology of culture (e.g. Bourdieu 1984; Swidler 1986). For example, sociologist Ann Swidler (1986) writes about culture as a ‘tool kit’ of rituals and world-views, which people use in various ways to approach and
solve problems (ibid: 273). Food obtaining strategies, for example, could be thought of as cultural tool used by the low-income groups in this study. My research also has implications for future research and public policy. For example, if the groups in my study are not equally 'food poor' from a cultural perspective, understanding food culture can alert policy makers that no one intervention is necessarily effective for all low-income groups. Given the escalating trends in diet-related illnesses and the rising number of low-income households in need of food and nutritional assistance (USDA 2011), understanding the day-to-day reality of food on the ground is increasingly necessary. Perhaps what I have learned from the families and individuals in my study, who are directly experiencing such trends, can provide a piece of research that public policy makers can respond to.

A Note on Rural, Homeless, & Refugee Group Labels. Throughout this dissertation, I often refer to the individuals I observed and interviewed at each field site by a group name ('rural', 'homeless', and 'refugee'). As I will address in the next chapter, I am not using these names to suggest meaningful conceptual or statistically representative groups. For example, the food practices that I found at the rural cooking class are not necessarily related to 'being rural', in the same way that the everyday food practices among the refugees I write about, are not completely linked to being 'a refugee.' Furthermore, there are many types of 'rural', defined not only by geographic location but also by their distinct economic and cultural characteristics (Hamilton, Hamilton, Duncan & Colocousis 2008). Therefore, when I use the term 'rural', it is in a very general sense, simply to differentiate one of the three low-income groups in my study. My observations are place based, meaning that the food cultures I write about are
dynamic and structured by the specific field sites (rural cooking class, homeless shelter, refugee community garden) in which I observed them. And while I do not want to make claims that the sites or the people in them are representative of more generalized processes, at the same time they add sociological richness to my study because the variation across site practices allow me to point to the differentiation in the food habits and dispositions among low-income individuals.

**Literature Overview**

The research literature on the relationship between social class and food tends to focus either on public policy issues of health and obesity, or on sociological questions pertaining to social class, gender, and culture. My research engages both of these literatures and, in particular, I use the theories of Pierre Bourdieu on class and culture to frame my study. To help organize what research has been done and to highlight the gaps that my study contributes to addressing, I have divided my discussion of the literature into four main thematic categories: 1) Social Class, Health and Nutrition, 2) Gender and Food Work, 3) Food, Class, and Culture, and, 4) The Theoretical Structure: the Bourdieusian Framework. The first set of literature on social class and health articulates the problems of obesity and food insecurity in the US. The second is about gender and social class, and the third section focuses on the research, and gaps in the literature pertaining specifically to the cultural aspect of food. Lastly, as stated, I discuss how my study engages with the research and theorizing of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002).
Social Class, Health, & Nutrition

Social class differences in nutrition seem to be an ever-existing concern for many developed countries (Crotty & Germov 2004). Historically, more attention has been paid to nutritional concerns during times of war or natural disasters, when food is in limited supply. Today, however, there has been a shift to valuing nutrition because of adverse health problems including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, all disproportionately experienced by lower-income populations (Crotty & Germov 2004).

Common topics regarding social class and nutrition often fall into two seemingly separate but related arenas: food (in)security and obesity. The USDA defines food security as “consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living.” Food insecurity on the other hand means, “access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources” (USDA 2011). Each year the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) publishes a household food security report. This report is based on an 18-item questionnaire with questions like “In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in the household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?” and “In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry, but didn’t eat, because there wasn’t enough money for food?” (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, & Carlson 2012: 3). While the term food insecurity can be used in different ways, for the purposes of my study I am referring to a broader conceptual meaning based on my observations of the everyday food practices and characteristics of the groups in my study. In other words, in my study, food insecurity includes limited resources, food knowledge, and meaning, which impede a healthy lifestyle.
Food security fluctuates with the economy, and, given the ongoing economic downturn in the United States, there has been an increase in households that reported not having enough to eat. For example, in 2011, approximately 15% of American households were struggling to consistently feed themselves; this estimation is up from 11% of households in 2007 (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, & Carlson 2012; Nord, Margaret, & Carlson 2009). Other reports suggest that as of 2010, as many as 18% of US households have experienced 'food hardships,' or have not had enough money to feed themselves or their families in the past 12-months (FRAC 2011). Along with looking at the number of food insecure households in the United States, researchers have also begun to look at access issues related to the distance some consumers live from food retailers (USDA, 2011; Esala 2011; Stracuzzi & Ward 2010).

Areas in the United States that have limited access to full-service retail food stores (i.e. with fresh fruits and vegetables) are called 'food deserts', located in predominantly lower-income neighborhoods and communities (USDA 2011). Food deserts exist in both suburban and rural settings and have also been defined as locations without full-service grocery stores within a 1 to 5 mile radius (Stracuzzi & Ward 2010). Limited access to grocery stores leads to an inability to reliably obtain healthy foods based on geographical constraints (Esala 2011). In examining grocery store locations in New Hampshire, Stracuzzi and Ward (2010) find that grocery stores are not evenly distributed, and are often concentrated in areas with greater population density. This makes obtaining good food a difficult task for individuals and families without transportation and who are living beyond walking distance to a grocery store (Stracuzzi
While economic and geographic issues affect good nutrition and health, food insecurity has also been linked to diet-related problems like obesity.

Unsurprisingly, with national statistics showing that nearly 36% of the adult population in the United States is categorized as obese (CDC 2012), researchers and practitioners alike are interested in understanding social class, diets, and health. The American diet as a whole is under scrutiny, but diet-related diseases like obesity have been correlated with class, race, gender, and ethnicity (Allen & Sachs 2007). Obesity is most prevalent in non-Hispanic black women and those who are economically disadvantaged (Allen & Sachs 2007). It is important to note however, recent studies suggest that obesity prevalence is increasing for all income and educational levels, and is not limited to lower SES groups (Ogden, Lamb, Carroll & Flegal 2010).

The link between obesity, nutrition, and social class is a complicated one with many theories about its pervasiveness. While some might argue that obesity is the result of an individual’s agency and poor dietary choices, others suggest obesity is a phenomenon caused by food insecurity (Glassner 2007). This theory suggests that individuals may have enough to eat in a caloric sense, but most of the accessible food consists of inexpensive, nutrient-deficient calories, instead of nutrient-rich foods that are thought to be more expensive (Glassner 2007). Sociologist Barry Glassner (2007) suggests obesity is related to food insecurity because of binge eating (Glassner 2007). This theory proposes that due to a lack of consistent access to fulfilling foods, those who face the prospect of not eating tend to overeat in times when they do have access to food (Glassner 2007).
It seems, however, that the least contested explanation comes from a medical model perspective. In this biological medical view, the cause of obesity is understood as a result of more calories consumed than burned via basic metabolism and muscular exertion (Paarlberg 2010). Political scientist Robert Paarlberg (2010) suggests that an increase in caloric intake coupled with a more sedentary lifestyle is one of the leading causes of obesity in America and Europe. He explains that the average diet has increased to 2,757 calories, which is 20 percent more than the World Health Organization recommendation (Paarlberg 2010). Paarlberg (2010) denies some of the popular explanations for obesity such as farm subsidies policies on corn and cheap food. Citing a United States Department of Agriculture report, he points out that during the past 25 years the price of fruits and vegetables has fallen at the same rate as commodity items like chocolate chip cookies, cola, ice cream and potato chips (Paarlberg 2010). Furthermore, Paarlberg notes that the price of in-season fruits and vegetables has decreased.

Paarlberg (2010) states that obesity in America is in large part caused by what he explains as the 'four new sources of calorie intake.' From the 1980s until today, Americans have experienced an increase in: "supersized fast foods, energy-dense snack food, ready-made prepared foods, and sweetened juice beverages" (Paarlberg 2010). The largest increase in obesity being caused by sweetened beverages with the average American consuming 450 calories a day from items including juices, milk drinks, sweetened soft drinks, and alcohol (Paarlberg 2010). Interestingly, Glassner (2007) is critical of the 'fast-food hypothesis', stating that there has actually been very little research testing whether fast-food is a contributing factor to obesity (Glassner 2007).
Therefore, contrary to Paarlberg, Glassner does not believe that obesity is exclusively caused by excessive calories but rather by food insecurity.

The interplay between food and health within lower-income groups is complicated. For example, research suggests that lower-income groups are at higher risk of not having enough food, while simultaneously the same groups have a higher prevalence of diet-related illness like obesity. The literature on food and poor health seems to be a web of explanations, with little consensus on the causes. Clearly, the research suggests that the obesity trend is gaining strength, which makes my exploration of lower-income food practices a needed and timely topic, one that will add depth and clarity to why these patterns persist.

**Gender & Food Work**

Scholars have long been interested in determining the role of social class and food work, and how it is influenced by different gender patterns and roles (i.e. Allen & Sachs 2007; Calnan & Cant 1990). There is reasonably conclusive evidence about the relationship between the division of food labor and gender roles both within the household and in the larger agricultural food system. This evidence shows that women hold the majority of the responsibility in tasks like growing food, food preparation, and purchasing food, but have little power and representation in the actual decision making processes involved with food (Allen & Sachs 2007; Calnan & Cant 1990).

In a critical look at the role women have in the larger food system, Allen and Sachs (2007) scrutinize the contradictions in the gendered aspects of food. They explain that, globally, women are responsible for the “mental and manual labor of food provision - the most basic labor of care” (Allen & Sachs 2007: 1). However, while women are
responsible for most food-related work, they control very little power when it comes to
the management of resources and decision-making within the food industry (Allen &
Sachs, 2007). Globally speaking, women are subordinate to the very food industry
structure they maintain, and the microcosm of this relation is also present in the
household.

Beagan and colleagues (2008) conducted a study examining the relationship
between social class and food consumption, and found that women are responsible for the
majority of household food labor (Beagan, Chapman, D'Sylva, & Bassett 2008; Calnan &
Cant 1990). Even though the management, purchase of, and overall responsibility for
food is primarily that of the woman, it is the family’s likes and dislikes that determine
what is bought, eaten, and prepared (Calnan & Cant 1990). Furthermore, “irrespective of
social class, women still took the major responsibility for shopping, food preparation and
cooking” (Calnan & Cant, 1990: 73). It may seem like these findings are no longer valid
because the study was conducted 30 years ago, but more recent studies suggest that while
men have become more present in food practices, gender inequalities still pervade food
work (e.g. Cairns, Johnson, & Bauman 2010).

For example, Cairns et al. (2010) investigated whether food identities were
gendered in ‘foodie’ cultures. Defining ‘foodies’ as people “with a long standing passion
for eating and learning about food but are not food professionals” (Cairns, Johnson, &
Bauman, 2010: 592). They find that those who are ‘foodies’ are primarily elite
professionals, and therefore the study consisted of interviews with 30 upper-class subjects
(Cairns, Johnson, & Bauman 2010). Their study found that even though men are
presently more involved with food than in the past (e.g. in making food choices, helping
in the kitchen, and being visible in popular T.V. cooking shows), their narratives expressed more freedom and pleasure with food than the narratives of women (Cairns, Johnson, & Bauman 2010). Women, on the other hand, have competing discourses between the pleasure of food and caring for their families (Cairns, Johnson, & Bauman 2010). Women talked more consistently about being concerned about the health, well-being, and diets of their families, which makes purchasing, preparing, and thinking about food more laborious; conversely, men described food work as a fun hobby. Therefore, while gender identities are perhaps different today than in the past, it is still women who bear the majority of the food burden, primarily because they feel it is their responsibility to maintain their families' health (Beagan, Chapman, D'Sylva, & Bassett 2008; Cairns, Johnson, & Bauman 2010). My study’s examination of how low-income women manage their family’s food needs will contribute to the growing body of research about women and food by exploring the various everyday food practices present among the rural, homeless, and refugee women.

*Food, Class, & Culture*

While researching low-income food practices, I found a number of studies with a focus on social class differences in food and eating practices (i.e. Crotty & Germov 2004; Prattala, Berg, & Puska 1992; Smith & Baghurst 1992), but limited evidence on the variations of practice by different groups within the same social class. Some of these studies have investigated the differences in selection/consumption and nutrition between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ income groups. Other studies focus on why lower-income groups eat differently (i.e. accessibility, affordability), and more specifically what role culture might play in this explanation.
One way that scholars have tried to understand social class differences in food consumption is by examining how in line a particular group is with dietary guidelines. For example, Roos et al. (1998) used food records to compare social class and food behavior, looking at how closely various socioeconomic classes, and educational levels, complied with the dietary guidelines in Finland. They found that women, employed people, and those with higher levels of education were more likely to follow dietary guidelines. Other studies, by contrast, have shown that the differences between the social classes are not great (Smith & Baghurst, 1992). For example, Smith and Baghurst (1992) suggested that in developing countries food consumption differences between classes has drastically declined without disappearing (Smith & Baghurst 1992; Prattala 1992; Crotty & Germov 2004). They found that, in Australia, diets of the upper class were healthier and closer to the recommended guidelines but that there were small differences when looking at nutrient intake, and that in fact, there was a great deal of overlap between the diets of 'high' and 'low' socioeconomic groups (Smith & Baghurst 1992; Crotty & Germov 2004).

Therefore, while studies show that middle-class groups are generally more aware of dietary guidelines, and have healthier diets than lower-class families (Hupkens, Knibbe, & Drop, 2000; Roos, Lahelma, Virtanen, Prattala, & Pietinen, 1998), the reason lower-income groups eat differently than other social classes is still imperfectly understood. To my knowledge, there are very few studies about the variations that exist within lower-income group’s eating practices.

The role of economic indicators such as accessibility and affordability of food consumption patterns is another dimension of research designed to understand the food
choices made by low-income groups. For example, one case study evaluated 21 Rhode
Island retail stores in a predominately low-income Hispanic community (Sheldon et al.,
2010). Sheldon et al., (2010) found that only two of the stores carried enough variety of
food at affordable prices to fulfill the USDA’s Thrifty Food Plan (TFP). The TFP is a
plan specifying types and quantities of food that can provide adequate nutrition. This
study found that limited access and affordability play a significant role in low-income
groups’ food choices and food security (Sheldon et al. 2010). Similarly, in examining
food landscapes in rural New Hampshire, Esala (2011) found that availability, cost, and
quality of healthy foods greatly impacted the lower-income families living there. Esala
(2011) interviewed 18 single mothers in two rural towns, finding that they often struggled
to afford the amount and kinds of foods they preferred due to accessibility and
affordability issues.

Freedman and Bell (2009) also looked at food access in low-income
neighborhoods. They measured perceptions of how accessible healthful foods are in a
low-income, minority, urban setting. Using self-reported perceptions of how easy or
difficult it was to get healthy food in their neighborhood, the researchers found that
individuals accurately described the reality of the food environment they lived in
(Freedman & Bell 2009). People living in places with limited access to fresh, healthy
foods feel this reality. Therefore, these studies suggest that there is a causal relationship
between structural issues (accessibility and affordability) and the food choices made by
low-income groups. Fewer studied however, have sought to examine factors such as
accessibility and affordability while questioning the role of culture in food behavior
among low-income groups.
One of only a few studies to suggest that low-income food behavior is not explained exclusively by economic and geographic constraints was conducted by Gavin Turrell (1996). He studied the effects of food availability, accessibility, and affordability on food behavior among a group of low-income Australians. Turrell (1996) used two samples, one from a randomly selected electoral list (n=500), and the other a self-selected group from three different Salvation Army centers (n=70). Respondents completed a structured questionnaire about food purchasing behavior, SES, and the availability, accessibility, and affordability of food recommended in dietary guidelines (Turrell 1996:613). The data collected found that respondents in both socioeconomic groups shopped at large supermarkets and reported little difficulty in accessing food (Turrell, 1996). Thus, this study suggests that the two groups did indeed choose different foods despite relatively equal access.

Like other previous studies, Turrell (1996) found that low-income groups are less likely to eat according to dietary guidelines than other socioeconomic groups. His study suggests that food prices influence what foods low-income households are purchasing, as food is a discretionary item in the families budget (Turrell 1996). Different than previous studies, however, Turrell (1996) writes that it is reasonable to suggest that if the “low-income consumer is selective and discerning about his or her purchasing of food”, the cost of the diet can still be in-line with dietary guidelines (ibid: 617). Ultimately, Turrell (1996) concludes that food behavior is not exclusively explained by accessibility and affordably but also by cultural factors (i.e. beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge). After reading the literature on social class and food choices, it is Turrell’s study that offers a
direct call for a more detailed analysis of the cultural aspects of food practices in/between lower-income groups.

**Theoretical Structure: A Bourdieusian Framework**

In an attempt to better ground the study of social class and food culture practices in a solid theoretical framework, my study engages with the research and theorizing of the influential French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), a prolific theorist primarily interested in class inequality and its reproduction. The interrelated concepts from Bourdieu’s work that create the foundation for examining the everyday food practices of low-income groups include: 1) his identification and analysis of multiple sources of capital, i.e., economic, social, and cultural capital; 2) his acknowledgment of the ways in which gender mediates class practices and competences with respect to food and the body; 3) his attentiveness to within-class fractions, and the economy of practices (or everyday food obtaining strategies); and 4) his conceptualization of cultural habitus.

**The Multidimensional Aspects of Capital**

Bourdieu was influenced by sociological theorist like Karl Marx and Max Weber, in that like Marx, Bourdieu was interested in inequality, but understood that capital is not limited to only economic capital, like Weber (Dillon 2010). Bourdieu explains that in addition to economic capital, individuals and groups also have various amounts of social and cultural capital as well (Bourdieu 1979/1984). Specifically, he wrote that an individual’s place in social space is defined by ‘a three-dimensional space’ including “the volume of capital, composition of capital, and change in these properties over time...” (Bourdieu 1979/1984). Each form of capital is analytically separate from the others, thus, for example, a person can have low economic capital but have a moderate amount of
cultural capital. Similarly, one can have low economic or cultural capital but have high social capital. Social capital consists of an individual’s networks and connections that can be used to increase and enhance their other forms of capital (Dillon 2010). For example, in my study, friends exchanged their SNAP/food stamps1 with each other in times of need, thus highlighting how social capital can be used to obtain something for which one typically needs money, or economic capital.

Cultural capital is the ease and familiarity individuals have (or lack) in everyday life situations. This is how capital, like formal education and family origin (the social class we grow up in), translates into cultural competences that are often taken for granted and go unnoticed. While the concept of cultural capital may seem rather obscure, most of us have felt cultural capital in situations where we were lacking it - when we were in a situation without the ‘know-how’ or knowledge of how to navigate a particular social setting, eliciting an uncomfortable feeling ‘of how to be’, ‘what to do’ or ‘how to act’. Imagine how a person might feel if they are unfamiliar with dining out, yet trying to order from a strange menu, unsure of what the food items are, or how to pronounce them. On the other hand, the acquisition of cultural capital might be the competence an individual has in appreciating an art museum, or how to navigate a farmers’ market. The idea, following Bourdieu, that individuals and groups possess different forms of capital is paramount for understanding the everyday food practices of lower-income groups, as individuals in these groups may not have much economic capital, but this does not necessarily exclude them from using what other types of capital they have. More

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1 In 2008, the ‘Food Stamp’ program was renamed the ‘Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program’ or SNAP. I use both names throughout the dissertation, as this is the common nomenclature in the literature (i.e. see FRAC), and the program is still referred to as ‘Food Stamps’ by the people in my study.
specifically, I extend Bourdieu’s notion of cultural competence around food to suggest a hierarchy among the three groups in my study, a hierarchy that derives from their differentiated cultural experience with and connectivity to food in everyday life.

*Gender & The Body*

Bourdieu wrote that tastes “depend on the idea each class has of the body and of the effects of the food on the body, that is, on its strength, health, and beauty…” (Bourdieu 1979/1984). He explained that gender and the body govern eating practices - not only what is eaten but also how it is eaten. Additionally, Bourdieu wrote that tastes in food depend on how each class views the body. Being a woman or man in a particular social class determines what foods we eat and how. For example, Bourdieu observed the working class man opted for cheap, nutritious foods, which were not cumbersome or delicate to eat (Bourdieu 1984: 190). Furthermore, Bourdieu found that the professionals in his study were interested in presentation and food aesthetics, while the working class had a ‘taste of necessity’ and a desire for functional foods to keep the body working. My study does not look at differences in eating between social classes, but I use Bourdieu’s notion that gender and the body mediate tastes to examine the differences in how the three groups in my study eat (i.e. how long mealtimes are, food presentation and preparation, and socializing during meals). Additionally, I explore the various body types, loosely defined based on common every day typifications (Schutz 1962: 29-30) (rather than on scientific categories or bio-physical indices), and what this might suggest about the class fractions in my study and question if the taste distinctions he found *between* the classes can also be seen *within* the same social class groups.
Class Fractions & The Economy of Practice

Two of Bourdieu’s concepts core to my work are that of class fractions and the economy of practice. Simply put, Bourdieu explains that while we may think of the ‘wealthy’ as high class and the ‘poor’ as low class, the use of economic, social, and cultural capital varies greatly in every society, and every society consists of many various sub-groups, which he terms ‘class fractions’ (Bourdieu 1979/1984). In my study, the rural, homeless, and refugee groups are separate class fractions. Furthermore, Bourdieu writes about how, across all social classes, individuals and groups make strategic choices to use what resources they have to enhance their various forms of capital, and thus to develop and use an “economy of practices” (Bourdieu 1984: 97) that, in essence, allows individuals to make the most of what they have.

The economy of practices concept is used in my research to look specifically at the strategies the groups in my study use to obtain food (e.g. using coupons, going to food pantries, exchanging SNAP/food stamps). The concepts of class fractions and economy of practices not only provide the theoretical framework for looking at everyday food practices within three lower-income groups, but these concepts also begin to fill a gap in the literature that often neglects to tease apart very important differences in food culture within social class groups.

Culture, Habitus, & Tastes

Central to my research on everyday food practices is Bourdieu’s concept of culture. Prior to embarking on this study, I understood culture as a term other scholars researched, and in fact, felt as if the concept ‘was everywhere and nowhere’ at the same time. Though I had studied Bourdieu throughout my graduate work, the term still felt
elusive to me, and certainly not something that was observable. After reexamining Bourdieu, coupled with my systematic observations of the three groups in my study, I now feel, and more importantly view culture as the everyday, observable entity Bourdieu wrote about.

For Bourdieu, culture is an embodied concept observable in our daily life, in acts like food shopping, cooking, and eating. He used the terms cultural habitus, or a set of internalized dispositions (Dillon 2010), to explain how class distinctions are continually expressed in our everyday tastes and preferences (Dillon 2010). For most, food preferences are taken-for-granted, and while we may think that our tastes are a personal, and an individual choice, Bourdieu argues that these tastes are socially constructed, and constrained by our social class (Dillon 2010).

Tastes in food are actively practiced in our everyday lives by our food selections and how we eat (Dillon 2010). Bourdieu explains that our family background is the origin of where we learn class practices, which constructs our tastes preferences. This meaning we “embody cultural expectations” of what “people like us eat and do” (Dillon 2010: 415). Therefore, our food choices and tastes are both constructed and constrained by education, cultural habitus, and family backgrounds (Dillon 2010). From Bourdieu’s concept of cultural habitus, I use the term food habitus, referring to the day-to-day food happenings, practices, and experiences (i.e. growing, selecting, cooking and being around food), of the groups in this study; a food habitus that has been constructed by their particular class fraction background.

The Social Reproduction of Inequality. This would hardly be a dissertation grounded in the ideas of Bourdieu if I did not directly address one of his main theses
about the social reproduction of inequality. Briefly, for Bourdieu, the reproduction of inequality stems from our family backgrounds and family experiences. Family habits create the cultural habitus of one's social class, and the accumulation of capital can be passed from generation to the next. He writes that formal education, like college, can offer upward social mobilization; children of parents with more economic and cultural capital are more likely to attend college than those children with parents with less capital (Dillon 2010). Children who grow-up in families of higher socioeconomic-status are exposed to everyday cultural experiences like language skills, reading, and education appreciation, for example, that then function as cultural capital for these children and allow them to acquire more cultural (and economic, and social) capital (Dillon 2010: 412). Similarly, children who grow up close to the land and to agriculture will likely feel more at home with raw food and what to do with it than will those who grow up in urban families heavily reliant on processed or frozen food. Simply put, class reproduction is linked to our everyday cultural habitus, the everyday things that we are familiar and comfortable with (whether visiting art museums or weeding gardens) and which, in turn, provide us with competences and strategies that we can translate into, or exchange for, additional capital. Family habits, tastes, and choices are actively passed on inter-generationally, thereby perpetuating the objective class structures of society. My study is not about the social reproduction of inequality per se, but what my study does demonstrate is that among low-income individuals, the reproduction of inequality is complicated by variations in cultural strategies involving food (and likely too, among other domains of social life as well). As I will discuss in a later chapter, the high food cultural competence of the refugees in my study suggests that this group may have a
better chance of upward mobility in comparison to the other two groups, a point I will return to, and develop in the conclusion.

Bourdieu writes, "The distribution of the different classes (and class fractions) thus runs from those who are best provided with both economic and cultural capital to those who are more deprived in both respects" (Bourdieu 1979/1984: 114). While Bourdieu does offer a blueprint to understand the reproduction of inequality, he does not discount an individual's autonomy. This means that while social class is the ownership of capital, it is also about how individuals and groups use and exchange their capital (Dillon 2010), which is clearly demonstrated in the varying everyday food practices of the rural, homeless, and refugee groups in my study.

**Research Overview**

There is little research on the everyday practices of low-income groups and what similarities and differences might exist between class fractions. In this chapter, I have presented the need for further investigation into the eating practices of low-income groups with literature to support this endeavor. I have also articulated the theoretical components of my study, as well as the important concepts put forth by Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). This dissertation investigates and describes the everyday food practices of three low-come groups: rural, homeless, and refugee. In comparing these three class-fractions, my study reveals marked differences in the food cultures and competencies around food.

Chapter 2 is a detailed description of the data gathering methods used in my research. The chapter begins with the appropriateness of using an ethnographic approach in looking at food practices among low-income groups. I then go on to explain the three-phase design of the study: the pilot phase, public food observations, and finally, home
observations and interviews. Because this research includes data gathered from observations and interviews, I explain my data gathering and analytical techniques for both. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the delicate balance between scientific rigor and reflexivity in ethnographic work and, more specifically, my reflections on the project.

The subsequent five chapters are the empirical findings from my observations with the three low-income groups. Chapter 3, the first of the findings chapters begins with a rural cooking class. The chapter describes in detail the unfamiliarity and uneasiness expressed by the class participants, both being in the kitchen and preparing food. The chapter also explores the significant role of SNAP/food stamps in obtaining food for the rural individuals in my study. The need for SNAP/food stamps in the rural group is drastically different than for the homeless and refugee groups. The chapter is the beginning of a story that describes the differences in food practices and cultures among the three class fractions. The rural individuals are the first of the three groups to bring Bourdieu's notion of class fractions to life. The subsequent chapters in this study reveal that while the homeless shelter residents and refugee community gardeners are similar in their economic status to the rural cooking class participants, they show marked differences in their cultural food patterns.

Chapter 4 is about the lives and food practices among a homeless group living in a shelter. In the chapter, I describe the setting and events in the shelter kitchen. I also explore the tastes and opinions of the shelter food by the shelter residents, before concluding with a section on the barriers to eating and cooking that exist in the kitchen spaces for the individuals and families staying there. Chapter 5 describes a refugee
community garden. In chapter 5, I write about the role of women in food culture and how ‘food sentiments’ create meaning for the resettled Americans in my study.

Chapters 6 and 7 compare the three groups. In chapter 6, I extend Bourdieu’s concepts of the body and habitus to the groups in my study. I explore how the body is a physical manifestation of habitus, and the different ways the body is used to eat. The chapter also includes a section explaining how a few of the individuals in my study describe their overweight bodies. Based on my observations, many of the individuals in the rural and homeless groups could be loosely categorized as overweight; additionally, there were a few people who had been overweight but, as they recounted in their conversations with me, they changed their everyday eating patterns and lost weight. These people experienced what I term a ‘phenomenological rupture in health’ (PRH), a catalyst for changed eating habits, a theme that constitutes the last section of chapter 6.

The last findings chapter, Chapter 7, is an examination of the cultural competence among the three low-income groups. I begin it with an explanation of the economy of practices used by the groups in getting food (i.e. using coupons, going to food pantries, and exchanging SNAP/food stamps). The latter part of the chapter compares the cultural “food competence” among the three groups. I present a hierarchy of cultural food competence showing the refugee group with the most food competence, the homeless group with somewhat less, and the rural group with the least. In chapter 7, I suggest that cultural food competence (i.e. an everyday easiness and familiarity with how to grow, prepare and eat food) is potentially as significant as income when examining food security. Finally, my dissertation concludes with Chapter 8 wherein I provide an
overview of the main findings from my research, theoretical implications, and a direction for future research.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

“"I learned then that the day-to-day routine activities of these [people] constituted the basic data of my study."”

-William Foote Whyte (1943: 320)

To examine the everyday food practices of lower-income individuals in my study, I used an ethnographic approach with observations and in-depth interviews. A systematic, in-depth design was needed to fully examine, compare, and contrast the food practices among the different populations and cultures in my study. Anne Murcott (2002), a prolific writer on food and inequality, encourages using such an approach. She explains that there is a great deal of potential value in using sociological approaches, like qualitative research, in examining nutrition and inequality (Murcott 2002). She argues that the best-known sociological approach in public health has been ‘political arithmetic’ which explores socio-economic patterning of food purchases and disadvantaged access; however, this approach does not reveal other important food decision-making pathways (Murcott 2002). Therefore, she states that qualitative approaches are used much less often than quantitative methods, but that such approaches can illuminate the “everyday reality of class-based food use” (Crotty & Germov, 2004: 250: Murcott, 2002).
The observation dimension of ethnographic research offers an additional advantage when studying food. While a great deal of information can be gleaned from in-depth interviews and personal narratives (e.g. Devine, Connors, Sobal, & Bisogni, 2003; Cairns, Johnson, & Bauman, 2010), such techniques can be limiting when trying to collect information about food practices. For example, there have been studies that show individuals often misreport what they eat (Glassner 2007). In part, this is caused less by issues of social desirability and more because people simply do not remember what they have eaten on a day-to-day basis (Glassner 2007). Therefore, in order to truly understand everyday food practices, it is important to actually observe this behavior.

In determining how to best access the everyday food lives of low-income families, I looked to Annette Lareau’s (2003) research methodology from her hallmark work in *Unequal childhoods: class, race and family life*. While Lareau’s (2003) ethnographic design sought to contextualize how middle class and working/poor families transmit advantages to their children, my study is about low-income food practices. By using a multiple-phase design, Lareau moved from observing public spaces (third grade classrooms) to more in-depth observations (with 12 families) (Lareau 2003). As a standardized design, my research follows a similar multi-phase succession, moving from public food observations to more in-depth interviews and observations. The three-phase design is:

**Phase I:** Pilot project (including a short documentary) exploring lower-income food practices (including a rural, homeless, and refugee family).
Phase II: Observations in three public domain food sites (i.e. cooking class, homeless shelter, and refugee community garden).

Phase III: Observations and interviews with a sample of families/individuals drawn from each group in phase II

In this chapter, the various elements of the research design are examined and explained. First, I explain the setting and participants in my study. With an understanding of this context, I then provide a detailed explanation of the data collection process, followed by data analysis. Finally, I address the issues of scientific rigor and its balance and interrelation with the reflexive nature of this study.

**Settings & Participants**

In an attempt to understand and compare food practices within low-income class fractions, it was logically necessary to select sites that were rich in food behaviors, practices, and everyday talk in general. Based on the pilot project, which served as phase I of my study, I learned that cooking classes and community gardens function as rich and accessible social settings in which to observe the processes involved in how individuals and families behave around food. These settings are naturally ‘food centered,’ with a host of opportunities to observe and talk about food. Therefore, to make observations in public food domains, I observed low-income cooking classes, a homeless shelter kitchen, and a refugee community garden for phase II. From these public food domains, I drew a small sample (n= 22) of subjects for home observations and interviews, to examine the everyday food practices among the rural cooking class participants, homeless residents, and refugee community gardeners in my study.
The first step in gaining access to my research field sites was to complete an IRB (Institutional Review Board) application. For this project, two IRB applications were submitted and approved for the pilot phase of my research and the continuing data collection for the dissertation. The following details my field sites and how I gained access to them.

A Three Phase Design & Gaining Access

Phase one of my dissertation was a pilot project that began in the fall of 2010. I was involved with a separate but related project about food insecurity, which culminated in a short film called "Voices from the Field" (Redman, Burke, & Ripley 2010). The main objective of the project was to learn about the experiences of lower-income families who are, or who have been, food insecure.

For the film, three families were observed and interviewed, including a rural working-poor couple, a homeless and refugee family. These groups were selected based on a series of meetings with the New Hampshire Food Bank, the University of New Hampshire's Food Solutions New England (FSNE), and a research team working on the project. I met and observed two of these families at a cooking class organized by the New Hampshire Food Bank called Cooking Matters™, which is a nationally-funded program by Share our Strength, an anti-hunger group. I met the refugee family via a New Hampshire Food Bank contact and made home cooking observations with this family. In total, I attended two, three-hour long cooking classes and made home and grocery store observations as well.
Phase two of my dissertation involved participant observation at the three public food domains listed above: a rural cooking class, a homeless shelter kitchen, and a refugee community garden. All three sites are located in the Northeastern United States.

To gain access to the low-income cooking class, I contacted the local food bank, with whom I had worked with for the pilot phase just described. I indicated that I was interested in observing a cooking class in a rural setting based on my desire to compare and contrast potentially food insecure populations. It is worth noting that the classes are offered at a variety of sites throughout the United States. These sites, based on their locations (i.e. rural, urban), tend to draw participants who represent various populations within the lower class. When I expressed interest in observing a cooking class, the Food Bank employees who organize volunteers asked if I would be willing to participate in the class as a volunteer. As a mutually beneficial relationship, and as a means to gain an insider status, I agreed to the six-week commitment.

To observe the refugee population, I conducted my fieldwork at a community garden. The Garden is approximately one acre in size, located next to a small urban college, and is comprised of small plots primarily maintained by refugees. The refugees are from a variety of different countries such as Bhutan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Iraq. Again, to gain access to the community garden, I contacted the garden manager I had worked with during the pilot phase of this project and asked if I could observe the garden on a weekly basis, for six weeks, and she agreed to my request.

As with the cooking class, I contacted a local homeless shelter, located in an urban setting, to see if I could volunteer in the kitchen. Originally, this field site was going to be at a different low-income cooking class held at a homeless shelter. However,
the class fell through, and I chose another site where I could observe the everyday food practices of a homeless group. The shelter became this site, with an industrial kitchen and a need for a volunteer, I spent one night a week for six weeks prepping, cleaning, and serving food.

Gaining access to the garden itself was relatively easy; however, gaining an insider status was more difficult than in the rural cooking class and at the shelter. This was in part due to language barriers, but also because I was not a gardener or a refugee. Initially, I was viewed with polite skepticism as I walked around the garden trying to meet and observe people. I was not able to hide my observations in 'the volunteer role' as I had at the other two sites. Initially, it was uncomfortable. With no set times or structured activities to observe, I remained a true outsider for the first two weeks of my observations at the garden. A shift occurred on an evening when I began weeding the garden manager's plot, which she had given me permission to do. Once seen working and weeding, I was viewed as a gardener and was visited by other gardeners and had a basis for conversation (i.e. asking questions about what a given plant was, how much to water etc.).

Phase three of the study involved recruiting a small sample of people from each of the field sites described above. Based on the fact that I was able to observe individuals cooking and eating in the rural and homeless shelter settings but not at the refugee community garden, I decided to make additional home cooking observations with members of the refugee group. Additionally, I attended two social events, which also allowed me to observe cooking and eating among the refugees. I did not however, make home observations for the rural and homeless populations because I was able to observe
cooking and eating practices at the cooking class and shelter sites. From the public food domains I recruited 22 low-income individuals to interview. The total number of people I observed is roughly between 65-85 people. This is a difficult approximation because at the shelter and the garden, each observation was a mix of people I had observed before, along with new individuals and families.

Participants & Disclosure

The interview participants in this study were all volunteers recruited using two different methods: indirectly, and directly. Those who were recruited indirectly were given an informed consent letter, on which they provided their information and sent it back to me. With this information I then contacted the individual to schedule an interview. However, the majority of the participants interviewed were directly recruited during the observational phase of my research, when I asked for volunteers.

As stated, the interview portion of this study consisted of 22 low-income individuals: six rural, seven homeless, and nine refugee individuals. The individuals interviewed, 12 women and 10 men, ranged in age from 21 to 62 years old. One of the rural interviewees was the friend of a cooking class participant who agreed to partake in the project. All of the interviewees, with the exception of one homeless man, had been on, or were currently participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formally known as the ‘Food Stamp Program’. The one man who was not currently on food assistance informed me that he was not eligible because he was not a United States citizen. At the time of the interviews, 19 of the 22 individuals were currently receiving SNAP assistance. The amount of assistance received ranged from as little at $23 to $600 a month. Of the 22 interviewees, 11 were employed and 11 were
unemployed. Thus, half of my sample was employed and working, five of whom were employed part-time. Please see Appendix A for a detailed table of the characteristics of my interviewees and note that the names of the individuals have been changed to protect their identity.

Participants who agreed to be interviewed were informed that I was interested in food, and the challenges of getting food, living on a limited income. This full disclosure was given both in the consent letter they signed and during informational meetings I held explaining my project. Being a participant-observer, however, meant that I observed many people, some of whom knew I was a student interested in food. When I was in the public settings of my research I cloaked my identity as ‘volunteer’ and/or ‘student.’ Therefore, some of the people I observed, but did not interview, were aware that I was a student interested in food and doing a study, while others did not know the purpose of my project.

**Data Collection & Analysis**

For the purposes of this dissertation, I used two data gathering techniques: participant observations and in-depth interviews. Data gathering for this project began in September 2010 and was completed in November 2011, resulting in a total of 14 months of data gathering. The following section describes how data was collected through observations and interviews along with my data analysis process.
Table 1. Summary of Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Homeless</th>
<th>Refugee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>2 interviews</td>
<td>1 interview</td>
<td>1 interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 hrs observation</td>
<td>2 hrs observation</td>
<td>2 hrs observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation</td>
<td>4 interviews</td>
<td>6 interviews</td>
<td>8 interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 hrs observation</td>
<td>18 hrs observation</td>
<td>16 hrs observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6 interviews</td>
<td>7 interviews</td>
<td>9 interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 hrs observation</td>
<td>20 hrs observation</td>
<td>18 hrs observation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 interviews  
60 hrs observation

*Observations*

The observational aspect of ethnographic work, often referred to as participant observation, allows for a unique study of people in their own lives, in the time and space of their everyday lives (Burawoy et al. 1991). It is simultaneously about human relationships and reciprocity, yet contact with participants that is too close can lead to a loss of objectivity (Burawoy et al. 1991; Bender 2003). It is a time consuming process both in training and in data gathering.

As a participant-observer, I acknowledged my role as a researcher and many times as a student of the setting and people I observed. Given the richness of the context of all three of my field sites, I was able to garner an understanding and appreciation of the everyday food practices of each of the groups I studied, along with the similarities and contrasts among the three cultures.

Observing the rural cooking class was perhaps the most structured setting. Class was held for six weeks from 4-6 p.m. on Wednesday evenings. Although this class was scheduled for six weeks, one week many of the participants did not show up; however, I was still able to gather data on those who did attend. This meant that my observations
began at 3:00, when I helped set up for class, and often ended between 6:30-7:00 p.m., for a total of seven weeks.

As the class volunteer, I was responsible for grocery shopping for the class. I was given a master list of food items to buy both for the demo dinner that was cooked each class and the items the participants would receive to cook the recipe at home. During class, I took notes when possible, then spent between 3-5 hours writing field notes the following morning. I spent 20 hours observing the rural cooking class participants, along with 2 hours observing a different cooking class in another rural town during the pilot phase, for a total of 22 hours of rural cooking class food observations. These observations resulted in 46 single-spaced pages of field notes, which include the interview transcripts.

Like the rural cooking class, my observations at the homeless shelter were in a structured setting where I played the role of volunteer. My duties at the homeless shelter included food preparation, serving, and some cleaning up. Volunteer scheduling at the kitchen was disorganized; therefore there were times when I was the only volunteer and other times when I was one of four or five volunteers. Observations at the homeless shelter were usually from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. This was because we were preparing larger meals for two separate meal times. During these observations, I was able to observe activity in the kitchen and how the homeless residents ate. Like the rural site, I jotted notes when possible on-site but spent 3-5 hours the following day typing my field notes. I spent a total of 20 hours as a participant-observer at the homeless shelter kitchen, which resulted in 48 pages of single-spaced text (again, this includes interview transcriptions).

My observations at the refugee community garden were less structured and more free flowing than the other two sites. I was not a volunteer, there were no set times or
activities, and gaining access as an insider proved to be a little more difficult. However, once I established relationships with the other gardeners I was invited to other events that extended beyond the garden but that always involved food. I spent six weeks going to the garden one evening each week during the summer of 2011. I spent my time there weeding, assisting the gardeners as they hauled water, and talking, of course. Once I became less of a stranger, I routinely spent time admiring the growing garden plots with the refugee gardeners. I spent a total of 18 hours observing the refugee populations. This included observations I made at a potluck dinner, a baptism I was invited to, and home cooking observations. My observations and interview transcriptions took the form of 42 single-spaced pages of field notes.

In all, I spent a total of 60 hours observing the everyday food practices of these three low-income groups, resulting in a total of 136 pages of field notes. All together, the three field sites offered enough data to write a dissertation. The time spent with these populations allowed me to explore their everyday food practices and the class fraction differences between them. Still, as with any other scientific exploration, the themes and findings from this research have inspired new questions.

**Interviewing**

Along with participant observation, I conducted interviews, as is common in ethnographic work. As noted earlier, observations allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the everyday food practices of the site-specific groups in my study in a way that interviews and narratives simply do not allow. Food and eating is an ingrained, often taken-for-granted aspect of our lives, so routine that individuals often misreport aspects of their food and eating practices, such as what they ate the week before. For this
reason, observations were an essential data gathering technique. In addition to my observations, I also wanted to gain a greater understanding of the perspectives and experiences of those in my study, perspectives I could not directly observe; hence the role of the interview.

Unlike observations, interviews allow the social actor to share their experiences and perspectives on events and processes that are not directly observable at the time (Lindlof & Taylor 2011). Open-ended, semi-structured interviews are also adaptive to the situation, circumstance, and topic, allowing the researcher to discover unanticipated themes and patterns (Lindlof & Taylor 2011). In my interviews, I spent a short amount of time ascertaining some general background demographic information (i.e. age, household size, education, employment, income) and then I moved to questions more directly related to my study’s theoretical interests. I asked the interviewees whether they had ever experienced food shortage or hunger, how they dealt with those experiences, and probed them about any strategies they used for obtaining food, and how they felt about being on food assistance. I also asked them about their food experiences while they were growing up and about their current everyday food practices. All the interviewees spoke freely in response to these questions and essentially provided a life narrative of their current and past situation and the place of food in their lives.

The interview schedule and protocol were slightly different for each of my field sites in order to take account of the specific setting and dynamics of each context. For the rural cooking class, during one of the last classes I asked participants if they would be willing to volunteer to be interviewed for my study. Individuals interested gave me their contact information, and I called at a later time to schedule a time and place to meet. I
conducted interviews in public places such as a park, and private places such as the participant's home, depending on where participants felt more comfortable. A dietetic intern involved in the project recruited the rural couple interviewed during the pilot phase.

I recruited individuals at the homeless shelter based on suggestions from volunteers who worked in the kitchen; I also approached people who indicated interest in my study. At the homeless shelter I conducted interviews in small private rooms located near the front of the building. These rooms included a playroom, medical examination room, and a computer room. Additionally, I recruited one homeless participant during the pilot phase by attending a cooking class at a different homeless shelter. At that shelter, I also explained the project to the class and asked for volunteers.

Lastly, the refugees I interviewed were recruited at the garden and through an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. Due to communication barriers, I did not have great success in recruiting individuals directly from the garden. While there were several individuals who expressed interest in being interviewed, when it came time to schedule the interviews my earlier protocols did not work. For example, while communication was effective in person, communication failed when it came to speaking on the phone to set up an interview time and location. Additionally, while many of the refugees had email addresses, this too did not serve as an effective means of setting up interview times. Therefore, I met a contact person who worked with many of the gardeners in her ESL class, and she recruited interviewees for me. I then went to the ESL evening class and those who had signed up to be interviewed met with me in an unused classroom. It is also worth noting that I conducted two interviews with two people in each interview, as the
refugee participants were more comfortable in groups. In each case one individual had better English speaking skills than the other and served as a translator. For the pilot project, the garden manager recruited one participant. For all groups, interviews lasted between 30-90 minutes. Please see guiding questions in Appendix B.

**Data Analysis**

In exploring the everyday 'food lives' of the lower-income individuals in this study, I systematically wrote down my observations and what I learned as a participant-observer. This included detailed accounts and descriptions of the settings, groups, and individuals' behaviors, as well as face-to-face encounters with the participants. In writing about ethnographic research, Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) explain that “relationships between the researcher and the people in the setting do not so much disrupt or alter the ongoing patterns of the social interaction as reveal the terms and bases on which people form social ties in the first place” (1995: 3). Therefore, it was important for me to write my field notes with as much detail as possible about the multiple dimensions of the space (physical setting, behaviors, interactions). The field notes from my immersion in the three field sites serve as the data for my research. The constant and continued process of writing the field notes led to understanding the patterns of food practices. In an ongoing process of building understandings upon prior insights, I began to discover the food practices, behaviors, and the meaning of food to each of the groups in my study (Emerson et al. 1995). Additionally, I audio-recorded the interviews and conversations during the third phase of the study, which were transcribed and analyzed as well.

I began to analyze the data after spending several months in the field, when I shifted to taking a more systematic look at the compilation of my observations. In an
attempt to produce a coherent and focused analysis of the processes involved with food
decisions among the groups in my study, I read through my notes and analytically coded
for ideas and themes (Emerson et al., 1995). As is typical in ethnographic research (e.g.,
Bender 2003), when coding, I found unanticipated themes (i.e. the role of SNAP/Food
Stamps), along with themes that began to emerge during the data-gathering process (i.e.
the multiple food obtaining strategies among the three groups I write about in Chapter 7).
Coding continued throughout the writing process of this research. To facilitate the
analytical process of transforming field notes into themes, Emerson et al. (1995) suggest
the use of memos. Once I had completed writing my field notes and transcribed all
interviews for a particular site, I printed a hard copy and coded by hand. While coding I
wrote short notes/memos, which included possible themes, concepts and conceptual
definitions. After coding and analyzing each field site for themes and characteristics of
the everyday food practices that describe each groups’ food culture, I then coded for
themes that compared and contrasted the three sub-populations. Analyzing the three field
sites was an ongoing process that happened well into drafting the chapters of my
dissertation.

A Note on Social Class

To measure social class, I again followed the logic of Annette Lareau (2003). She
explains that measuring social class, particularly in small samples, can be quite
cumbersome. There are contentions within the social sciences on how to conceptualize
social class (Lareau 2003). For example, social scientists debate whether it is best
measure social class in purely economic terms, in the Marxian sense, or to follow the
Weberian tradition that states economic resources are only one dimension of social class
Lareau (2003) explains that the social class categories she constructed "conceal important internal variations" (Lareau 2003: 261). These variations did not change the 'cultural logic' in the focal relationship being examined in Lareau's study; however, as I found when examining food within the lower-income groups, there are great cultural differences among those who may be categorized in the same economic and social class.

Many researchers use elements like occupational prestige, education, and income to measure stratification in society. My study classifies the sub-groups of low-income in the following two ways: the working poor class are those individuals and households in which no individual is employed in a middle class position and at least one person is or has been "employed in a position with little or no managerial authority and does not draw on highly complex, educationally certified skills" (Lareau 2003: 279). The working poor individuals and families are those whose lives have been punctuated by times of need, and/or whose income is just enough to make them ineligible for assistance. The poor class includes those individuals and households where the head of the household is "receiving public assistance and does not participate in the labor force on a regular, consistent basis" (Lareau 2003: 279). Using this class classification, I found both working poor, and poor individuals, in each sub-group of my study (See Appendix A for summary of interviewee characteristics). Additionally, it is important to note that the homeless group includes individuals who are or have been without a place to live in the last six months. Also, the refugee individuals in my study have moved to the United States within the last 10 years from Bhutan, Somalia, and Burundi.
Limitations

There are several limitations involved with this research. One limitation is that my observations are based on purposeful samples. This means that the people that I interviewed and observed are not statistically representative of ‘rural’, ‘homeless’ and ‘refugee’ individuals in the United States. Their selection was purposeful because given my theoretical interest in exploring whether there is variation in food practices among low income individuals, the groups and sites chosen were each sufficiently distinct to ensure that there would likely be across-group variation in my study’s findings. Like all data, including quantitative survey data, the food observations in this study are tied to the time and space in which I observed them. In this study, as in social research in general, readers also need to be aware of the likelihood of selection bias; the practices and experiences of the people who consented to be interviewed and observed are not necessarily similar to others who, for example, also live in a rural area, or who are refugees, or homeless.

Another limitation in this study is the possible exclusion of other lower-income subgroups, such as seniors, single mothers, or those living in economically disadvantaged southern states. While the entry points I used - the cooking classes, the shelter, and the community garden - elicit information about three different subgroups of lower-income individuals and families, my findings are about their everyday food practices, which may, or may not be found in other low-income groups. The value of ethnographic site research is to highlight the complexity of the social processes in play in human-social life in a specific time and space and culturally bound context. While site-specific case studies invariably point to and illuminate larger social processes (e.g., the utilization of food
pantries in times of food shortage regardless of locale), they at the same time alert scholars and policy makers alike to the need for additional focused studies that can illuminate the variation in human experience (e.g., what it means for diabetic seniors to be food insecure).

Lastly, while being a participant-observer has great advantages, it also creates a limitation: my observations may introduce a “watcher effect,” or a social desirability bias, meaning that the very behavior I want to observe may have been altered by my observation. However, given the natural behaviors I observed in each site, coupled with the reoccurring themes I write about in this dissertation, I feel that there was limited ‘watcher-effect’, if any. Despite the limitations of this study, its major strength lies in its unique in-depth examination and comparison, of the everyday food practices of individuals in low-income groups in distinct settings, practices that until now have not been investigated.

**Scientific Rigor & Reflexivity**

Throughout the course of this research, I began to observe that the study was not only happening around me but also affecting me as a person. A critique of ethnographic work is the role and strength of objectivity, and I want to acknowledge the interplay between scientific rigor and the reflexivity that occurred throughout the course of this study.

As a qualitative researcher, I have the job of participating in the social context that I wish to study, building relationships, watching relationships, and recording the spoken and unspoken dynamics of the social space in a systematic and reliable manner. As mentioned, throughout the course of this study, I did my due diligence in observing
and writing field notes, and through amalgamation of my field notes in their entirety, tried to see the story of food cultures within and between three low-income groups. This process however, was not devoid of self-consciousness and complete separation was not possible; in part, I became a subject in my own study.

The impetus for this project came from a research grant for a food initiative I was working on at the time. Therefore, it did not dawn on me that I would start analyzing my own food culture along side the subjects in my study. My low-income childhood spent on food assistance was not in the forefront of my mind until one evening in the rural cooking class. I sat next to a five-year-old girl who was trying raw kale for the first time; when I witnessed a grimace on her face, a reaction to the unfamiliarity of such a bitter green. In that moment I saw myself. I recognized a younger version of me, unfamiliar with foods, and a taste defined by my social-cultural upbringing. I realized I had personal attachment to my subject matter. My own background came into mind several times throughout this study. I identified with my subjects in many respects, which ironically lent itself to the scientific endeavor. I was non-threatening. I was raised in a rural area by a single mother on food stamps. My own cultural incompetence around food acted as a doorway into the lives of the people in my study.

I felt the most out of place at the refugee garden, less for cultural barriers like language, race, and ethnicity and more because of my ‘un-stocked knowledge’ of how to be in a garden. The most poignant example was on an evening at the garden when I picked a plant that I thought was squash from the garden manager’s plot, thinking I was doing her a favor, when in fact what I had picked was a lot of un-ripened pie pumpkins.
It was a simple mistake in the eyes of the garden manager but a direct result of food culture.

Is it possible to be scientifically rigorous while simultaneously feeling the reflexive nature of your research? After this project and personally experiencing the very phenomenon I was studying, I, along with other scholars, would say yes. Although I have spent a great deal of time throughout this study feeling self-conscious about the relationship of this study, my past, and my personal process, I now feel that it made the study richer. It required me to work harder to find out what the story of food culture really is.
CHAPTER III

EVERYDAY FOOD PRACTICES OF FOOD AMONG RURAL RESIDENTS:
KITCHEN CULTURE AND THE FOOD STAMP EXPERIENCE

"We usually only have fresh, fresh fruits and vegetables in my house...one to two times a month."

-Laura, Rural Resident

Food and eating practices are among the most rudimentary elements of social life, and are simultaneously mundane and complicated. For many people eating is simply a common, taken for granted, part of daily life. However, everyday eating patterns are imbued with social meaning, which became evident during the time I spent at a low-income rural cooking class. While there are inherent complexities in looking at the food practices of lower-income populations, a cooking class called Cooking Matters™ became a fertile setting for me to observe food practices among a small group of rural residents. Throughout the class and the time I spent with the rural cooking class participants, I began to see a distinct way of being around food, a kitchen culture that characterized how these particular rural residents experience food.

In *Kitchen Culture in America*, Sherrie Inness (2000) explains that people relate to food based on race, ethnicity, social class, and regional location (Inness 2000: 4), meaning social indicators (i.e. how much money a family has to spend on food, what
food are available in the region, cultural traditions) shape our relationship with food and eating. For example, a family on welfare living in a rural location in the United States will have a very different experience with food than if they were wealthy and living in an urban setting (Inness 2000). Furthermore, a poor rural group in the Northeast will have a different relationship with food than a poor rural group living in Appalachia. Over the last decade there has been increased attention given to those living in rural areas with food desert research (e.g. Stracuzzi & Ward 2010) and food insecurity prevalence (e.g. Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, and Carlson 2011) yet, there has been little to document what is actually happening in the kitchens of these populations. My observations from the rural cooking class cannot explain what is happening in other rural kitchens throughout the country, but they do begin to uncover, and explore, a few of the patterns that may be present in some of them.

The term kitchen culture is meant to describe the various ordinary everyday ways of being around food and cooking for those in my study. This is the discourse, cooking practices, and gender roles I observed in the cooking class, and during the time I spent with the rural individuals outside of the class (in interviews and home visits). I found that the term kitchen culture is related to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus. This is that everyday food happenings are connected, constructed and embedded in our social and family experiences- our habitus. In a way, kitchen culture gives insight into a specific kind of habitus, a ‘food habitus’ of sorts. This meaning for example, having an everyday easiness, or lack thereof, with getting, preparing and cooking food, which is linked to our family experiences.
In addition to describing the kitchen culture of this rural group, this chapter will first describe the Cooking Matters™ context, setting, and participants. The latter part of this chapter includes a section explaining the ‘Food Stamp Experience,’ a salient part of life for the rural individuals and families in my study. Although most of the individuals in my study are on SNAP/Food Stamps, the rural individuals have a unique, more direct relationship, and need for food aid in comparison to the homeless and refugee groups. Unlike the homeless group, with food at the shelter and the refugees group with their gardens, this rural group did not have similar sources of food, making them the most dependent on SNAP/Food Stamps.

**Cooking Matters™ & The Rural Participants**

Cooking Matters™ is a cooking class for lower-income individuals and families, and is the context in which I was able to observe the rural group in my study. More specifically, Cooking Matters™ has a series of classes, some designed for adults, others for families, but all participants have limited resources. The goals of the classes are for the participants to gain the “skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to prepare healthy and affordable meals” (Cooking Matters™ 2011). The class is a program of Share Our Strength, a national nonprofit organization whose goal is to end childhood hunger. The class I volunteered in was a Cooking Matters™ for Families, which is one of six curriculum-based courses offered in several locations across the nation. As a community nutrition education program, classes are offered in urban, suburban, and rural settings (Swindle, Susan & Auld 2007). Each class is typically ‘staffed’ or facilitated by one paid nutritional educator and two volunteers: a chef, and another person who does the grocery shopping, and fills in on whatever role is needed to be filled (i.e. plays games...
with the children, cuts vegetables, washes dishes etc.). I was the grocery shopping volunteer. Each week before class, I went to the grocery store and bought the ingredients for the ‘demo meal,’ the meal we would prepare in class together, as well as enough ingredients so each participant had a take-home bag of groceries to prepare the evenings meal at home. The class facilitators use an instructor’s guide, which serves as an educational tool, containing helpful hints on teaching and engaging participants, and has recipes to pick from for the 6-week curriculum (See Appendix C for Sample of Instructor’s Guide).

The core philosophy of the program is that by teaching individuals and families how “to shop and prepare healthy, low-cost meals”, the negative health and economic consequences of hunger can be minimized (Share Our Strength 2011). The class operates under the assumption that by giving individuals and families knowledge on how to shop, read food labels, understand basic nutrition information, and improve cooking skills, it is possible to eat healthy meals on a budget. Therefore, each class is divided into two sections, one portion on how to shop, read food labels, basic nutrition etc., and a cooking portion.

The curriculum is careful to provide chefs, class instructors and volunteers with education on the participants’ context and background. Thus, instructors and volunteers learn that while it is possible to eat well with a limited income, to do so means one must have certain cooking and food planning skills. For example, the recipes taught at each class have ingredients that are common, accessible, and easily found in most grocery stores (i.e. canned beans, rice, tomatoes) and that avoid the need for any special equipment. This acknowledges that many individuals and families, especially those
attending Cooking Matters™ classes, will not have food processors, blenders or even ovens.

The class I observed took place in a quaint rural town surrounded by open countryside, and a meandering river along the road. Its aesthetic beauty is contradicted by tired looking buildings and houses that fill the downtown, whose structures give hints that the town holds little economic vibrancy, and has undeniably lost the thriving character it once had. Like many other rural areas in our country, the loss of farming and farmland was also evident by the very first house you see entering the town, with a sign that reads “46 acre farm FOR SALE.” The town is defined as rural based on its small population of less than 2,000 residents and its location approximately one hour from any metropolitan area (Economic Resource Services 2007).

This Cooking Matters™ class was held in a regional high school. In contrast to the tired look of the town, the high school sits on a hill and looks newly constructed. The modern brick building is of modest size but with a welcoming feeling. On the first evening of class, I made my way up to the home economics room, which is the cleanest and largest space I’ve seen for a Cooking Matters™ class. This is in comparison to the other class sites I observed during the pilot phase of this project. Many features separate this space from the other places I have seen these classes held: there is large and bright industrial kitchen, which has a clean open-floor plan design. The other classes were often held in accommodating and functional, yet, worn-out spaces, spaces that gave the feeling that everything had been used, and used again, with second hand and donated supplies or supplies that had been there for a long time.
The tables in the classroom portion of the room were covered with the evening's teaching and cooking equipment. It looked as though someone has just come home from a day of shopping. Tupperware containers and boxes full of cooking equipment including knives, measuring cups, cutting boards, and mixing bowls covered the tables, along with grocery bags, and a large flipchart poster board, and papers for the evening's class.

**The Cooking Class Participants**

Four mothers and five children attend the rural cooking class. Susan is a single, unemployed mother who appeared to be in her early 50's with a teenage daughter who is taking the class with her. Susan and her daughter are friends with Tracy, also a single mother. Tracy and her five-year-old daughter are also taking the class. Tracy is 28 years old and when I met her she was working part-time and going to college part-time. Susan and Tracy came to class together because Tracy does not own a car. Shelly and Betsy are the other two mothers. When I met the two women they said they were sisters. Shelly and Betsy came to class together with one teenage boy, and two children, a boy and a girl. While the women said they were sisters, I subsequently found out that they are actually not related. Shelly is 41 and is the single mother of the teenage boy and is currently unemployed. Betsy is 23 years old and is the mother of the two younger, 5 year old children, who are about 10 months apart in age. Betsy is pregnant with her third child. She is married and both she and her husband are unemployed. Betsy explains, “We collect disability... [my husband] is permanently, cause of his back and I'm disabled cause I have that uh, lupus.” She explains that including the disability, and the other forms of assistance she receives about $2,600 a month. The two women live together and their link is that Betsy’s husband is Shelly’s teenage son’s father. Initially they hid the
confusing dynamic, as it’s easier to say they are sisters. However, as I got to know them they explain that Shelly and her son moved in with Betsy and the children’s father because Shelly was going through a very challenging time in her life, economically and emotionally. When she moved in with Betsy, Shelly was considering suicide. Interestingly, their dynamic does seem to resemble more of a sisterly relationship than that of two women who have had a relationship with the same man. I also learned that Shelly’s boyfriend lives in the same household with Shelly, Betsy, her husband, and the children.

**Kitchen Culture & Food Practices**

What does kitchen culture mean? Kitchen culture means the rudimentary, observable activities, and talk that happens in the kitchen (Inness 2001). This is the food preparation, cooking, cleaning, and eating that happens in the space of the kitchen. Beyond the surface however, the kitchen and food act as a nucleus of culture, a center where traditions and knowledge are actively passed from one generation to another. There are many kinds and types of kitchen cultures, as Inness (2000) notes, being defined by things like age, race, region, and income. However, there is a common denominator in the kitchen and the role of women as cultural carriers of food traditions and knowledge. Bourdieu (1984) observed this, in that women are primarily responsible for the socialization of taste, and while he meant it in a larger sense to include things like fashion and art, the following section explores the rural women and the kitchen culture I observed during the rural cooking class. My focus on women, is not to say that men do not matter when it comes to food and culture, but historically speaking, women have played a larger
role in domestic and food labor, thus being the ones to pass on food traditions and knowledge and it was women that I observed in the cooking class.

**In the Kitchen & Food Practices**

When I first began observing the rural residents in the cooking class, I was blind to the actual kitchen culture that was happening in front of me. It was not until spending months away from my field notes, and in comparing how the rural cooking class women were in the kitchen to the refugee community garden women (in Chapter 5) that the rural kitchen culture, and the discomfort around preparing food became more apparent. I learned that many of the women were unfamiliar with the kitchen and felt lost in the cooking space. One evening in class, Betsy clearly illustrated this sense of being out of place.

During most classes Betsy would sit on the outside of the kitchen looking in, stating that she was not feeling well or the smells from the kitchen were making her nauseous. At 7 months pregnant I took her at her word. She was a quite woman, with a stern but not unwelcoming face. On the nights when she sat outside of the kitchen I would make it a point to go and sit with her, and before long she began to open up. She had already told me that she does not do much cooking in her household and has done even less since becoming pregnant. From the first class she was very direct with her disinterest in participating in class and that she was there for her children. Then finally, one class she agreed to come into the kitchen and make a dessert with her kids.

When I first observed her in the kitchen, it was obvious that she was unsure of where to stand, what to do first and where the cooking utensils, bowls and ingredients were kept. We were making pineapple carrot muffins on a square table that sat in the
middle of the kitchen. Betsy stood on one side, I stood on the other, and the three children pulled up chairs to stand tall next to the table. They were eager, and for a minute I didn’t realize everyone was waiting for me to get things started. There were large, flip chart sized pieces of paper with the recipes on them – one for the turkey tacos, another group was working on and another for the dessert – taped to the cabinet for everyone to see. I began to read the recipe that said to grate two medium sized carrots. I asked Betsy if she wanted to do that and she hesitantly agreed. First she peeled the carrots while I tried to juggle reading more of the recipe and avoiding a kitchen catastrophe while the three children touched, picked up, shook, smelled and almost dropped, everything on the table. We found a large bowl and started mixing the wet ingredients. When Betsy was ready to grate the carrots I handed her the grater. When I handed it to her she looked at me with a serious and sincere look. She quietly asked, “Which side do I use?” as she held the grater in front of her like a foreign object, unsure of where and how to position it.

In an instant, she had subtly revealed her ‘food habitus’ and by extension her cultural habitus. In what appeared to be her first time using a grater, I finally understood that her display of disinterest in the kitchen was actually a genuine discomfort and unfamiliarity of what to do in the kitchen. It was a moment that would have been easily missed: her uneasiness in handling the grater, one of a large number of different types of utensils in the kitchen. In that small incident I was able to see her level of kitchen utensil knowledge. I stopped what I was doing and explained where to hold the grater and which side to use.

Like Betsy, Tracy felt uncomfortable in the kitchen. She was a large, overweight woman with a flamboyant and confident presence who is not afraid to say what she
thinks. For example, during one class we were checking in with the class participants to see if they had made anything with the groceries we sent them home with the week before, and Tracy admitted that she had put the bag of groceries in the refrigerator and forgotten about them. The instructor then inquired about what she had done with the chicken that had been sent home with her last week. The instructor simply asked if the chicken made it into the freezer. Tracy openly admitted that she was totally unaware that the chicken was no longer good because it had been sitting in her refrigerator instead of the freezer for the week, and jokingly said, “I have CRS,” which she then translated for us as “can’t remember shit syndrome.” This made everyone laugh. And while she deflects her unawareness of food and the kitchen, she revealed her own kitchen culture.

It was not hard to get to know Tracy and she was very open about how little time she spent in the kitchen. She often joked about not wanting us to know what she feeds her daughter. During one of the first weeks of class Tracy was in charge of making a chocolate cake from scratch (which she later said she did not like because it was not sweet enough). As we walked to the kitchen to get started she told me that she felt “stressed and anxious” about making the cake. As I watched her, I felt uncomfortable for her as she tried to gather the ingredients and utensils she would need to make the cake. She was unsure of how to measure the flour. A few weeks earlier, when Betsy was measuring the flour for a different dessert, the instructor stopped her as she was using a ‘wet measuring cup’ and explained that dry ingredients should be measured with the flat, little cup with a handle. Getting the class’s attention, she explained that in baking it is all a chemical reaction and that measuring flour with the wet cup would actually measure a different amount than the dry measuring cup. The instructor demonstrated how using the
different types of measuring cups measures different amounts. She stated that flour should not be packed, and then used the back of a knife to level off the top of the cup, pouring the flour into the bowl. When it came time for Tracy to measure the flour for her chocolate cake, she knew there was a special way to do it but could not remember exactly what that was. For those who are proficient in the kitchen and with baking, knowing which measuring cup to use for flour is probably an unconscious knowing. However, for Betsy and Tracy the measuring cup was a symbol of their unfamiliarity with kitchen utensils and moreover their uneasiness in using them, and being in the kitchen.

Their discomfort with being in the kitchen, and how to use kitchen utensils, largely characterizes the class atmosphere. Thus, for the most part there was a lower level of kitchen abilities for the class participants in comparison to individuals in the shelter and refugee groups. However, there were a few occasions when participants seemed comfortable in the kitchen. One evening Shelly was making granola for yogurt parfaits. She loudly and confidently read out the recipe to her son as to what she needed and what she wanted him to gather. “I need cinnamon, oats, almonds, raisins, honey, oil, a mixing bowl...” As she rattled off the recipe on the large flipchart paper taped to the refrigerator, her son worked his way around the kitchen gathering what she called for. However, even Sally had her moments of uncertainly. For example, one evening I was talking to her as a pile of wet parsley sat on a plastic cutting sheet before her. With a large knife, she told me she was not sure how to cut parsley and I could see she was having a difficult time trying to maneuver the large knife over the small pile of parsley. She then slipped and snapped her hand away in fear that she had cut it. With a deep breath I asked her if she was okay, while she inspected her finger. There was no blood.
The class instructor recognized the lack of kitchen ease and during the fifth week of class she made an attempt to build more independence in the kitchen. To do this she wanted to make the ‘class kitchen’ as similar to a ‘home kitchen’ as possible to enhance as much self-sufficiency as possible. As she unpacked all the spices, cooking sprays and food items we were going to need for class, she said, “I want this to be just like it would be for them at home.” The instructor felt that in previous weeks we had been doing a lot of the ‘food work’ for the participants, and she wanted participants to now take one more step toward kitchen independence. We had been placing all of the food, measuring cups, and bowls needed in cooking stations for participants, and on this night of class we did not group the materials. This evening the class was cooking frittata, macaroni and cheese, and the chocolate cake I just described Tracy making. Like other evenings, when the class participants went to the kitchen to start cooking there was a general sense of confusion. For example, once in the kitchen the participants would stand initially without purpose and often ask what their task was. It also took several minutes for everyone to find the kitchen utensils they were looking for because the utensils were placed around the kitchen (i.e. knives in one place, bowls in another) but after a confusing start and several questions, everything went smoothly.

What do these women reveal about kitchen culture? Is it possible that an unknowing of how to be in a kitchen is a culture unto itself? Sociologically speaking, whether Betsy, Tracy, and Shelly and the many other women like them, know how to be in the kitchen or not, they still have kitchen culture. This culture unlike that of culture I observed with the refugees is defined by a lack of skills and knowledge of how to be in the kitchen, but it is nonetheless their culture. So if this group is not comfortable in the
kitchen, where and how are they getting food? In the absence of spending time in the kitchen to make food, I learned that the many of the rural people in my study are eating ready-made foods and that SNAP/food stamps largely dictate their everyday food practices.

**The ‘Food Stamp’ Experience**

An important aspect of food practices in lower-income populations is the experience of being in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The ‘Food Stamp’ experience is not unique to the rural group in my study, as the majority of people I observed and interviewed are on SNAP/Food Stamps. However, SNAP/Food Stamps define food practices for the rural cooking class participants more directly than the homeless and refugee groups. This will be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters but briefly, the homeless group due to living at the shelter are provided daily meals and therefore, often do not depend on their SNAP/Food Stamps in the same way the rural group does. Similarly, the refugee group had alternative means of getting food, their gardens, and a different relationship with food, which made them less reliant on SNAP/Food Stamps.

Like the people in my study, I use the term ‘Food Stamps,’ which was the former name of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and is still a frequently used term. Federal emergency food assistance programs in the United States can be traced back to as early as 1939. In the last decade however, the number of people on government food assistance has more than doubled from approximately 18 million in the year 2000 to more than 40 million in 2010 (USDA 2011). Therefore, it is not surprising that when talking about food, Food Stamps became a regular theme. Understanding the
‘Food Stamp’ experience in the everyday lives of the women (and man) for the rural residents is an important part of their daily food practices. The findings in the next section illustrate what getting food is like while on SNAP/Food Stamps for the rural cooking class participants in my study, an experience that marks their culture of food.

**The Beginning of Food Stamps**

Single mothers are one of the most food insecure populations in the United States. It is estimated that 35 percent of single mothers are or have been food insecure, more than twice the national average of nearly 15 percent (Nord & Coleman-Jensen 2011). Following this national trend, the rural single mothers in my study talked about the first time they signed-up for food assistance coinciding with the birth of their first child. Even the individuals in my study who were married talked about needing food assistance at the arrival of their first child.

Betsy, for example, was 18 years old when she had her first child and remembers being at the doctor’s office when her mother in-law suggested she apply for food stamps. She has been on food stamps since then and does not see going off them in the foreseeable future, but says that she feels okay about this reality because so many people are on food assistance and that it’s “a part of life”. Shelly, too, applied for Food Stamps when she had her first and only child when she was 26 years old. Laura and Tracy, who were 18 and 22 respectively when they had their first children, had similar experiences. Again, I should note that Laura did not attend the cooking class but I met her one evening when I was making a home visit at Tracy’s. The two women are best friends and Tracy suggested I talk to Laura, as she too, is “a welfare mama” and said she would be happy to share her story with me. Ryan and Dianna, (a rural couple I observed and interviewed
during the pilot phase of my research) while not on SNAP/Food Stamps currently, talked about the role of children in needing food assistance. When their own children were little, and when times were tough, Dianna had to be creative, saying,

> The kids say I can make something out of nothing...When the kids were little we were on WIC\(^2\), they got WIC and stuff. I don't remember there being Food Stamps back when the kids were little. We both worked but there were times [when we struggled]...

The couple explains they received Food Stamps for about three years when their grandchildren lived with them. They explained that currently they are 'not rich, but they are comfortable.'

Being on Food Stamps was a new experience for some of the rural cooking class participants, as they did not grow-up receiving food assistance, while others were very familiar with needing food aid. Betsy and Shelly grew up in families that were not on food assistance. When I asked Shelly if she grew up on Food Stamps she said,

> No. My dad worked for the Coca-Cola company so, and my mom was a nurse, a nurse and a secretary. So, we had money coming in, and the first time [on food stamps], like [Betsy], was when I had my first kid.

For Tracy and Laura however, being on SNAP/Food Stamps was part of their childhood, which has extended into their adulthoods. Laura's parents separated when she was 15 years old. She said that she could remember a time before her parents got a divorce when she was not on Food Stamps, but things were never financially easy in her household. In spite of living a life without financial security, Laura said that she is actually grateful for her upbringing, stating:

> I wouldn't know how to do the coupons, I wouldn't know how to yard sale...know how to go without a microwave for a month...I very, very rarely buy clothes for the kids that's not under $5 dollars.

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\(^2\) Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federal food assistance program
She told me that she would love to give her children what her parents were able to give her. It was interesting to hear Laura talk about her childhood, ‘living paycheck to paycheck’ in an almost nostalgic way. However, Laura is an example of how ‘getting by’ is a culture unto itself and passed on from one generation to another. Her habitus is one of knowing how to be thrifty, saving, and making ends meet, is a skill she learned from her parents and will probably be passed down to her children. While some of the rural individuals grew-up on food assistance, as part of their cultural habitus and other did not, they each shared the common experience of economic strain and the subsequent need for food assistance when having children.

**Shopping Events & Food Selection**

Food shopping for the rural individuals and families in my study is an event that typically happens once a month. I leaned that ‘Food Stamp day’ is on the fifth of every month. This is the day that the federal government distributes the predetermined amount of food assistance (based on income, family number, and equity) to an EBT (Electronic Balance Transfer) card. The EBT card looks and is used like a debit card but can only be used on ‘food items’ (not on alcohol or tobacco products, for example). For people on food assistance, shopping is an outing, an event during which the food stamp recipients spend most of their food money. Laura with three children receives $440 dollars a month in food assistance. She works full time at a local clothing-manufacturing company. She is 25 years old and in the process of getting a divorce. She discusses the challenge of making her food budget work and that she saves money by doing a big food shopping outing once a month instead of doing smaller trips and getting a few things ‘here and there.’ She says:
When I get my Food Stamps on the fifth every month, even if I work till five-six o’clock at night, I’m going grocery shopping that night, cause there’s just more of a chance to go ‘oh, well, I’m tired tonight so I’m just going to go the store and grab this and that’ and then a lot of your money is gone whereas you suck it up and yeah, you’re tired but go do all your grocery shopping, you’re done.

Laura is not alone in doing one big shopping event a month and getting few food items in between. Betsy also goes food shopping once a month and typically spends around $1000 a month on food. This includes taking the kids out to eat a few times a month, usually around the beginning of the month. The kids in her household get to pick where they want to go and pick places like McDonalds, Burger King, and their local Chinese restaurant. Betsy and her family, 2 adults, 2 children and one on the way, get $210 monthly in Food Stamps. It will be going up, however because “another kid is $100 dollars,” therefore, “it’ll probably be 3 something” once her baby is born. While the rural families typically make one big food-shopping outing a month, they all talked about shopping around for good prices and meat.

The rural families shopped at a variety of grocery stores. The places they mentioned include: Wal-Mart, Price Chopper, Shaw’s, Save-A-Lot, and Market Basket. There was an overwhelming agreement that Market Basket had the best prices. In talking about shopping at Market Basket Dianna says she has no qualms about buying reduced vegetables. She says,

I call it the ‘used vegetables,’ the produce, you know, that’s reduced in price, I have no problems buying that too. So you know, sometimes you can get really good fruits and vegetables that are expensive, reduced. You just have to pick through them a little more carefully.
Ryan adds that while they do their big shopping once a month and usually go to Market Basket for most items, they go to Shaw’s to buy their meat: “We shop around. We buy all our meats at Shaw’s...we look at the sales paper...shop around to get the best price.”

While some rural residents face difficulty in food access in terms of getting the amount and kinds of foods they prefer, my observations were made in a location that would not be defined as a ‘food desert.’ According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the people in my study live in close enough proximity to a full service grocery store that they are not in a food desert (USDA, 2011). In addition to accessing food from what some call ‘the normal food system’ (i.e. grocery stores) (Garasky, Morton, and Greder 2004), the rural residents also talk about getting food from emergency or safety net providers like food pantries. Additionally, the rural residents also talked about farmers’ markets and community gardens, but this will be covered in greater detail in Chapter 7 on “The Economy of Practice”, covering food-obtaining strategies.

Each rural family in my study had been to a food pantry. Betsy explains that sometimes when things have been financially difficult, going to a food pantry to get canned goods frees a little money to buy more expensive items like meat. Ryan and Dianna say they too have been to the food pantry when ‘things are tough,’ and expressed gratitude about the kind of ‘help that’s out there’ for those in need, but for Laura accepting this kind of help is painful. She says, “I do not like being on food stamps, I do not like accepting help. I do not like the fact that my child knows what a food pantry is at 3 and 4 years old.” She further explains that because she, like the other families in my study, is doing the majority of her food shopping once a month, many of the food items
she purchases consists of non-perishable items. When perishable items are purchased, they are the first to run out. Laura explains that in her household,

We usually only have fresh, fresh fruits and vegetables in my house once to two, one to two times a month, I buy like frozen and stuff but have fresh on hand, not often maybe bananas and apples but [not] vegetables...Pasta is a huge filler in my house, four out of seven meals a week probably because it's a filler, and for a family of five, I have to cook a pretty big packet of whatever the main dish is, so pasta's a filler. So like, like I gave a plate to the kids and if they want more, sometimes I don’t have enough meat there’s pasta and maybe more vegetables.

Tracy then chimes in, in recognition of the pasta dinner, stating, “and it’s always plain, there’s always just butter and Parmesan cheese on it cause there’s not really anything to put into it…” Another example that gave me insight into what meals consist of was in hearing Shelly and Betsy talk about ‘Banquet Meals.’ These are pre-made meals that come in both single servings and family sizes. I had not heard of them before and Betsy explained that at Wal-Mart or the Dollar store they are only $1. There are several different kinds of these frozen, pre-packaged meals like Mac and Cheese, Philly Cheese Steak, and Chicken Pot Pie. In Betsy’s house, Banquet meals are popular with her children. In telling me about these meals she says, “They’re like Kids Cuisine, you know what them are? They’re just cheaper than Kids Cuisine, they’re like a dollar instead of 4 dollars…and they like um, if [the kids] eat 2 or 3 a day, I’m happy.” Inexpensive, prepared foods, purchased once a month typify the Food Stamp experience of the rural cooking class participants (and Laura) in my study.

The main findings from my observations at the rural cooking class begin to reveal a distinct food habitus. The kitchen culture of the rural residents is in part marked by infrequent time and uneasiness in the kitchen. As these findings have illustrated, the rural cooking class participants in my study are unfamiliar with how to use kitchen utensils and
express anxiety in the kitchen and preparing meals. My guess is that the rural people I spent time with are not alone in their unfamiliarity with preparing and cooking food. But rather, this theme is connected to a larger pattern of cooking illiteracy and food culture in the United States. The availability, easiness, and inexpensive nature of cheap food lends itself to less and less time spent in the kitchen, irrespective of social class. However, if the rural individuals in my study are uneasy in the kitchen, and this is a theme in other communities around the country, is it possible that some populations are becoming so disconnected from food that they are literally losing the ability to cook?

Like the kitchen culture, the ‘Food Stamp’ experience gives insights into the everyday food practices of rural people in my study. This experience is characterized by once-a-month food shopping events, prepared food selections, and first-births that initiate the ‘Food Stamp’ experience. Both the kitchen culture and the ‘Food Stamp’ experience begin to reveal the rural group’s food habitus, a habitus that until now has been undocumented.
CHAPTER IV

FOOD AND LIVING AT A HOMELESS SHELTER: CONTROL AND AUTONOMY IN THE KITCHEN

"The food here is wonderful. Everybody gets fat, nobody gets skinny."

- Paul, Shelter Resident-

Leaving the rural cooking class, I traveled next to a homeless shelter kitchen, where I found a new set of food practices, culture, and ways of being around food. Generally speaking, the homeless population represents the poorest of the poor, and is among one of the most vulnerable groups when it comes to food insecurity and health problems associated with an inadequate diet (Ma, Gee, and Kuchel 2008; Stasser, Damrosch, and Gaines 1991). Yet, at the homeless shelter where I spent my time volunteering in the kitchen, I did not witness an impoverished food culture but rather an environment with its own set of practices around food.

This chapter begins with an overview of homelessness, the shelter, and the basic kitchen operations and happenings in the kitchen. Next, I explore the interplay between the autonomy of getting to cook in the kitchen and the controlled nature of the shelter environment. My findings suggest, like Bourdieu (1984), that the residents prefer functional foods, this is they are more interested in the sustenance of the food over things like appearance and presentation. The latter part of this chapter moves on to describe the
barriers of the physical shelter space and their impact on cooking for the families living there. Interestingly, I found that the women in my study longed to cook for their families, but felt hindered in their ability to do so because of the kitchens in their living space.

**Homelessness & The Shelter**

According to the National Collation for the Homeless (NCH), the exact number of homeless people in our society is unknown, but it is estimated that each year as many as 3.5 million Americans experience not having a permanent and secure place to live (NCH 2011). Historically, homelessness has been linked to de-institutionalization in the mid 1960s when John F. Kennedy pushed for community-based mental health programs (Mechanic & Rochefort 1990). At the time this included a large population of alcoholic men and mentally ill individuals (Strasser, Damrosch, & Gaines 1991). Today, the homeless population is still largely comprised of males and those who are struggling with mental illness and substance abuse; however, the population is more heterogeneous. One of the fastest growing homeless sub-groups are families (Schwartz-Nobel 2002).

For those who are economically and structurally marginalized like the homeless, getting food can be a daily accomplishment. The main ways homeless populations get food are from soup kitchens (mainly operated by churches), welfare hotels, and shelters (Strasser, Damrosch, & Gaines 1991). Additional ways are by rummaging through the garbage for left over food, panhandling for money to buy food at the grocery store or fast food restaurants, and food pantries. Food pantries, however, often have food that needs to be prepared, and without a kitchen these items are not a useful supply of emergency food for the homeless. The homeless shelter is one such place that feeds the homeless, both the residents and those who come in off the streets. Throughout the process of my research I
learned that the quality of the shelter I studied is unique. The space and food at the shelter offer those staying there a safe space with routine meals, which many other shelters cannot offer, routine meals that is.

The shelter was a newly constructed building with a clean and modern feel. The shelter staffs the front desk with two people, making it occupied 24 hours a day. The front desk employees take calls, answer questions the residents may have, and oversee the facility. One afternoon, as I talked to the front deskmen, we discussed the new renovations and its link to behavior. One of the employees, who had worked at the old, 'falling down shelter', said he has observed a positive relationship between the new space and behaviors. Sociologically, this is unsurprising, following the broken windows theory. Briefly, this theory suggests that the physical environment is linked to behavior, specifically criminal behavior (Wilson & Kelling 1982). For example, if an urban space, or, as I am suggesting, a shelter environment, is decrepit and falling down, this translates into anti-social and deviant behavior. Therefore, as the shelter employees alluded to, the new, ordered, clean space of the new building has translated into fewer fights and domestic violence incidences. Additionally, the two employees felt that the improved space had really changed the way people interacted with the staff and with each other.

The facility is divided and, more specifically, stratified, into different levels. The shelter space is stratified because each level comes with certain privileges. Level one consists of 'the singles' that sleep in a bunkroom, which is a large space, with high ceilings and beds. The entire time I spent at the shelter it was at maximum occupancy, with all the beds full and additional mattresses on the floor. Those living on level one have to leave the building each morning at 7:30 a.m. and are not allowed back in the
building until dinnertime, which is 6:00 p.m. I learned that the logic behind this schedule is that the individuals staying on level one should be out looking for work. On the afternoons I spent at the shelter however, I witnessed many of the shelter residents passing their time in the small bus stop building in front of the shelter. Level two is for individuals who are working and have earned a spot in a suite with separate bedrooms, bathrooms and a kitchenette. The other sections of the shelter are for single mothers and families. The families and the residents on level two are allowed to stay in the building during the day.

**Kitchen Operations & Happenings**

Like in many homes, the shelter kitchen was the heartbeat of the building. The newly-built industrial kitchen has stainless steel counters that fit together on the inside of the room to make walkways on three sides of the kitchen. Against the wall of the kitchen, are industrial sized ovens, sinks, a freezer, a refrigerator and a dishwasher. In the back right-hand corner of the kitchen there are two rooms. One an office, and the other is a large food pantry. The food pantry is neatly organized with a cement floor and metal shelves filled with food separated into matching food items such as canned foods, breads, cereals, and spices. The dining room has a cathedral ceiling with metal beams, creating a bright, airy space. There are six round tables with five to six chairs at each and a large American flag hanging from a rafter.

Learning how the shelter kitchen operated was more complicated than figuring out the flow of the rural cooking classes. There were more people, more food, and a larger kitchen space. I was grateful when I met Paul, a 59-year-old shelter resident and previously the kitchen manager, who was eager to talk about the kitchen and his personal
life story. Paul’s large stature, cut off t-shirt, and long salt-and-pepper multi-colored beard made him look like a motorcycle man. He was loud and friendly. Out of all the people I met, Paul had been at the shelter the longest, for 14 months. He owned a masonry business for 15 years and did industrial masonry until he became sick and lost his business. He told me that after he lost his business he “lost everything”, all of his money, cars, and eventually his home. After getting out of the hospital due to a collapsed lung, “Somebody said go to the shelter.” He told me that he thought this was a crazy idea but that “they said its brand, brand new; it’s like a hotel room,” and agreed to come. Upon getting to the shelter he asked for work and was sent to the kitchen, which is where he was still working when I met him. In talking about the kitchen he said, “When you build buildings, working in a little kitchen is kind of easy.” He told me that he is not particularly interested in food per se, but rather the organization of people and food that happens in the kitchen. Paul talked about the various things he did in and for the kitchen, which included things like food shopping or filling in for a volunteer if needed. He also made sure food was available and received food that was getting donated. Explaining how food gets made at the shelter he said:

There are three ways the meals get done here. The volunteers will purchase the food, bring it in, cook the food and serve the food. They do the whole thing. Others just cook and [leave]. Some [volunteers] come and use our food and cook and then sometimes when nobody is coming we [the residents] cook our own food, which we have on stock and we serve ourselves.

During my time volunteering at the shelter, I witnessed each of the food preparation methods Paul talked about. I was there when volunteers came in to cook and left once the meal was done being prepared. I was also there when a volunteer came and cooked the meal and stayed to serve it. During my time at the shelter, about half of the time a
volunteer came in to cook the meal, and the other half the residents cooked and served themselves. While there was some organization in the kitchen as to who is going to cook on what days, there were days when there were not enough people to help get the meal ready and others when there were too many.

Unlike the organized chaos of getting the meal ready, mealtimes for the residents was very structured. The organized chaos was often caused by volunteers being in the kitchen without a clear sense of what to do. It was also difficult to determine who was in charge of the kitchen. Was it the cook? Or the kitchen manager, if one was there? The mealtimes however, were very predictable, at the same time every day. The families eat at 5:15 p.m. and the singles at 6:00 p.m. The reason for the separation is due to differences in lifestyles between the singles and families. I was told there are or could be pedophiles in the singles group and because the shelter does not run NCICs (National Criminal Information Center) to check criminal records, this is how the shelter protects the families and children from potential threats from individuals staying in the singles section. The shelter is also a ‘wet shelter,’ meaning that individuals are not permanently kicked out for drinking alcohol. If they are intoxicated, they are asked to leave the shelter and come back when they are sober or to lie down in med-bed (a ‘medical bed’) until they are fit to be in the shelter. Therefore, the separate meal times also protect the families and children from exposure to substances the singles may be on. Each night I visited the shelter there were about 30 to 40 people eating and a 3:1 male-to-female ratio, which interestingly matches the national statistics on homelessness: three quarters of the single homeless population is male and approximately one quarter is female (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2009). The dining room is quiet when the residents eat.
There is little conversation, a point that will be further explored in Chapter 7, “Economy of Practices”. Additionally, during my visits it took about 12 minutes for many individuals to finish their plate. Second helpings were allowed and many people did come back for more food.

**Autonomy in Cooking & Control in Eating**

The kitchen is an interesting social space that is both controlled by residents and controls them. Shelter residents control the space, as they are often the ones that cook and prepare the meals for the other residents. At the same time, they are also controlled by the space because the power they get in the kitchen is limited and also because of the time and ways the meals are served. One evening at the shelter a staff member told me that while they have the residents cook, keeping a balanced power dynamic is important as they don’t like it when a resident’s autonomy in the kitchen transfers into a desired freedom in other realms of shelter life.

On the evenings when the residents cooked, they experienced a great deal of autonomy. For example, while I heard from one volunteer that new resident cooks often had oversight by a volunteer chef or a shelter staff member, I never witnessed this. The resident cook when I was there was Paolo. Paolo was a 43 year-old-male who had been at the shelter for two months when I met him. He is from Sicily, Italy and told me that he was a chef in Italy during “university to pay for school.” He told me he was going through a divorce and because he was not a citizen he was excluded from any kind of financial assistance and thus had to come to the shelter. On Paolo’s first evening cooking at the shelter, a manila folder hung on a corkboard that had been opened up to make a sign that said:
Meal by Paolo- To nights meal is...
Pastafa gioli
Pizzailoa (Meat)
Salad
Zuzzhine Saute
Sweets, Drink B + B (bread and butter)
Buen Appeteto

When Paolo cooks he is completely in charge of the menu and spends time alone in the kitchen. Paolo was not working outside the shelter, and working in the kitchen is a privilege that many of the other residents do not have. Additionally, working in the kitchen also means that the resident will have the opportunity to move to level two.

Paolo explained how he cooks in the shelter:

I use what I find...this is a shelter, not a fancy restaurant. No wine, no spirits. Um, I cook the way I do in restaurant but last night I made risotto but instead of wine I used chicken broth...I don’t follow recipe, unless really important. Generally, food, herbs, spirits, salt, pepper. [At the shelter] it is very hard to find the right taste, even when I am cooking.

Based on his cooking background, not only was Paolo comfortable in the kitchen but he was also comfortable cooking for large groups.

While the kitchen space offers refuge from many of the realities the homeless face for some residents, the dining room and eating time is much more controlled and routine. At the front of the room, two long rectangular tables are pushed together with a red plastic table-cover over them, it is from here the food is served. In the far corner there is a small bar with cups and bowls on it; a hand written sign reads ‘residents take ONLY one juice, ONLY one milk, or ONLY one coffee until everyone has been served.’ The single residents are not allowed to enter the dining room until 6:00 p.m., and they have to be invited in when the food is ready to be served. During my time at the shelter, a very predictable line would form outside the dining hall door. Every evening this line would
be formed before the food was placed on the serving tables and the volunteers or residents were in place to serve the meal. The following excerpt from my field notes illustrates how meals are served at the shelter:

As they went through the line they knew exactly what they were doing. [The residents] grabbed a red cafeteria tray while the kitchen volunteer held a large white plate and waited for them to tell her what they wanted. I was standing next to the volunteer near the salad as she took the large white plate and asked each person what he or she wanted. The food was served from flimsy disposable foil dishes, the ones that are often used in catering. The volunteer used a large spoon to serve out the pulled pork, beans, and mixed vegetables. As each individual walked through, many of them pointed at what they wanted, exclaiming “that and that” with a straight index finger directly over what they wanted.

The first meal I served was a bit confusing. There was a part of serving that felt like a nice thing to do, while at the same time it felt a bit dehumanizing. The residents did not have control over the portion sizes they received and limited choice in what foods they ate each night. Overall, as I will discuss, many of the residents said the food at the shelter was good, though I did witness some residents leave without eating much, saying that they did not like what was served that night.

While those who cook in the kitchen experience autonomy in food selection and preparation and even in living conditions, those who are served have a different reality. These individuals only have choices when it comes to selecting from the food items that are served. They are also not allowed to serve themselves but have to ask for or tell the server what food items they want, often by simply pointing at the item. Their food choice is controlled along with what time they eat.
Taste & Opinions of Shelter Food

The cultural food habitus of the homeless group I observed fits with Bourdieu’s (1984) findings, in that the distinction of taste is perhaps influenced by socioeconomic status and culture. Like Bourdieu, I found that the food practices of the homeless group could be characterized as functional, both in the ways of eating, as described earlier, and in taste preferences. To clarify, the homeless groups does not have a choice in what they are served at each meal, however, I learned about their taste preferences from the narratives of the residents illustrated by Paul’s excerpt below. This is different than the findings in the following chapter, which suggest that for the refugee group food is not simply for function but filled with sentiment and a culture unlike the homeless group.

Those living at the homeless shelter for the most part felt grateful and content with the food severed at the shelter. The residents said the food was good. In talking about food at the shelter, Shawn, a 56-year-old male who had been at the shelter for five months, said that he liked the food at the shelter. Shawn said, “The food here probably is, I would say restaurant grade or even road house grade, ninety-nine percent of it is very good.” Many of the other residents also said they enjoyed the food. One male resident said he thought the food was ‘awesome.’ Often when the residents were finished their meal and leaving the dining hall, they would say thank you and that the food was good; those working in the kitchen, particularly non-resident volunteers and staff, said it was important to them that the residents liked the food. The newly-hired paid kitchen manager told me that it was very important to her that the residents were happy with their food and while many of the residents were happy with the food, Paolo had mixed feelings. He explained,
Most of the food at the shelter is healthy...it has protein, carbohydrate, fat in good quantity. It's a shelter, they fix what they can...It's safe in the sense that people wear gloves...[but] I like to know what I am eating, [the shelter uses] too many spices. Is it chicken, it is fish? It's the same because of the spice.

However, Paolo was an outlier in his opinion. Paul said, “the food here is wonderful. Everybody gets fat, nobody gets skinny.” While the general opinion of the food is good, Paul also talks about what kinds of food the residents like to eat. He explained that the residents like simple foods, and even when given ‘fancy’ foods they prefer to have the foods they know. For example, Paul said,

Okay, these people here, all right, the people at the shelter um, I have found to be, they like plain food, nothing fancy. The like macaroni and cheese, they like spaghetti and sauce, they like steak and potatoes, they like certain things like that. We had someone like Mr. [Smith] he come in and take a pork loin and he would butterfly it and put beautiful oil on it and he would take um, some nice dried almonds put’em in there with um, what else, apricots, yes, yellow apricots, put some cran-raisins in there, and then put another thing of oil, garlic, close it up, tie it all up, put another baste on it, beautiful. Put’em in the oven. He’d serve it on a plate with russet potatoes and a vegetable and put this sauce all over it and it would be a $50 dollar meal at a restaurant that, you would watch, someone [like] Jack LaPlante prepare, and go, ‘this is great.’ So when he cuts it, you got the yellow thing right in the middle of it, you got all the dark, all the colors and all the sauce. The residents here will take a bite and throw it away. But you take the same meat cut, a pork chop out of it, throw it on a plate with French fries and hrrr, gone! Me, I would take the pork loin, cut it into pork chops, French fries, an hour at the most, throw it out there, every bit of it’s gone. So, I learned what they liked.

As Paul explains, and I observed, for the most part those at the homeless shelter were happy with simple, commonplace foods and presentations. This is contrast to the ‘fancy’ pork loin that the residents were generally indifferent to. In addition to the patterns of food practices and preferences at the shelter kitchen I also found another theme about the barriers of the shelter space for those living in the family units where there were
kitchenettes. The following section describes how the homeless women and mothers at the shelter felt about the cooking environment in their units.

**Kitchen Space & Eating**

The physical environment at the shelter was another key to understanding the daily food patterns of the homeless. As with any social phenomenon, the physical space influenced the social interaction and activities, like eating and preparing meals. I learned that while the shelter’s industrial kitchen can be an empowering place to cook for some, the communal kitchenette-cooking environment for the families and single mothers was a barrier to eating at the shelter.

The kitchenettes at the shelter contributes to the residents’ typical eating, shopping, and disinterest in cooking. The residents said that the physical environment of the shelter’s small-scale rooms and kitchenettes hindered their ability and desire to cook leading to poor eating habits. The impact of the cooking space on the residents is not a new concept. For example, architectural scholars like Kik, Arch and Osborne (2010) explain that our physical surroundings have both direct and indirect influences on the choices we make. Earlier I discussed the shelter kitchen and the dining hall where many of the singles eat each night, but there were several families, mostly single mothers, for whom, for one reason or another, eating in the dining hall does not work. Instead they try to make do with preparing food in the unit they live in.

The units for the families and single mothers are anything but drab and at first glance contradict what one might imagine a shelter space to look like. The shelter’s family social worker, who graciously offered to give me a tour, said she wishes they could get pillows for the couches in the suites to make them a little more comfortable.
This was interesting to me, as it spoke to the balance of fostering a comfortable environment for people to ‘get back on their feet’ with making the space rigid enough to inspire people to get out. In the communal space of the family section there is a small, wooden table with four chairs. With a tile floor and exit signs on the wall, the space is undoubtedly designed for an ‘in and out’ flow of people. While it is nice, it is not personalized in any way, and there is nothing hanging on the walls. A short excerpt from my field notes describes the space:

Beyond the keypad metal door you enter a space with soaring ceilings and metal rafters. There is a kitchenette and I am amazed at how ‘homey’ it looks, with items like spices, pots, pans and cluttered counters that give the impression of ownership. There are even dirty dishes in the sink. The grand windows allow the room to receive light that masks the dark part of the residents’ lives. I am impressed. The common area flows from the kitchen to a couch, TV and chairs. There is a small wooden table with four chairs. The barren walls and multiple stall bathrooms, however, give away the transient nature of the space.

Despite my first impression, I learned from the residents that the space feels oppressive and confined, not a place that inspires cooking. Tina was the first to share with me how hard shelter life is, in general, and when it comes to food. Tina is 41 years old and had been at the shelter for about five months when we spoke. She is a small woman, and when I first met her she was pregnant and had lost all of her teeth. Tina talked about how her “Cubical, jail cell room, that is 6 by 6” forced her to stay out all day and then come home only to do nighttime stuff “like a bath and story time” with her 4-month-old son. Since having her son she said that her diet had been less than desirable and that she was grateful that she was still taking her prenatal vitamins. She explained,

I love to cook but we don’t have an oven upstairs, we only have a two-burner stove and a toaster oven...[living here] I’m just not into the cooking. It’s just too hard, and plus I have people I live with who don’t like to do dishes. I clean up after myself constantly but the dishes are
never done and I cannot stand cooking or doing anything in a dirty kitchen. I can’t. I just can’t do it. And that’s another reason I haven’t been eating.

For Tina the communal space and the lack of kitchen appliances like a stove are a barrier to eating and mealtimes. She goes on to explain her frustration in having to shop a couple times a week due to cabinet space limitations. She reflected on shelter life versus what it would be like, or what it was like, when she had her own home:

It’s hard living here, it’s hard to shop. If I had my own place, I would shop once a month to get the general stuff for the freezer, I stock up on meats in the freezer and canned goods and so forth and then just shop once a week for milk, bread, fruit and like veggies, fresh veggies. So, being here and not having enough room, there is only one refrigerator up there and let me see, four families that have to share it, one small refrigerator, not an average, normal refrigerator it’s a small refrigerator. And I have one cupboard with 2 small shelves. I have to store a lot of stuff in my room, like underneath my bed but my room is really tiny as well...it’s really difficult, now shopping is so hard.

Tina is in a methadone program for pain and goes to the clinic once a day, which she has been doing daily for a year. She explained to me that when her son was born he, too, had methadone in his system and had to stay in the hospital for a month after he was born to slowly withdraw from the drug.

Living at a homeless shelter makes daily tasks a challenge. The limitations of the shelter space also infringe upon the ways Ella would like to feed her four children and husband. Ella is a 29 year-old mother of five, with four of her children living with her and her husband at the shelter and her oldest child with her mother out of state. The children who live with her at the shelter are 12, 9, 7 and 20 months. She is a pretty, well-dressed African American woman who told me she was not like the rest of the people living at the shelter. Her husband was recently honorably discharged from the Coast Guard because he did not make weight. The Coast Guard has weight requirements that
have to be met and because he did not meet those he was let go. They lost their military housing and allowance and have been at the shelter approximately 5 months.

Ella explained that she lives on the ‘family side’ of the shelter and her family of six shares one room. She said, “Me and my husband we have, it’s like two twin beds pushed together and actually I think they were bunk beds at some point. It’s me, my husband, and the little one in the bed. My son has his own bed against like the wall and my two girls they sleep on a mattress on the floor. It’s hard.” Like Tina, Ella expressed how the shelter environment shapes her daily eating habits and is nostalgic about having her own home. She explained,

The kitchen, okay, we all share one kitchen. There is no stove. It a microwave. It’s a toaster oven, there is like a little coffee pot and there’s two refrigerators and each family has one cabinet...I was used to cooking dinner for my kids, my kids were always used to me cooking. I cooked maybe, I cooked enough to last the next day so that way I wouldn’t have to cook every single day more like every other day. Um, my kids were used to that and for me to come here, for us to come here I mean, I could cook back there but like I said there is no oven. I like to make like casseroles and you know bake cookies and cupcakes and stuff like that. I can’t do that. The kids miss that. I could cook here but I’m just not that comfortable cooking in the kitchen, cause it’s not my kitchen. It is the common area but it’s not the same. So, I don’t cook here at all. I haven’t cooked nothing since August and that’s like very strange, I’m used to cooking so much. I mean, I would cook breakfast on Saturdays, I would make chocolate chip pancakes, blueberry pancakes, um, hot chocolate with cookies, coconut white hot chocolate uh, apple pie, sweet potato pie, mint chocolate cookies. I would bake cupcakes, I was always experimenting different things...I love cooking magazines, I love cooking shows, I was always trying out a recipe I seen in like Food and Families or I’m on the website writing down the recipe and then I will try it out, and you trial and error and my kids really enjoyed that.

Ella went on to explain that the major barrier to eating the way she would like to is space, not financial. She said, “It’s not really a money thing, it’s the space,” expressing that if she had more space she would be able to cook instead of just getting the “most
convenient things" that she realizes are not the most healthy options, but, as she said, “I don’t really have a choice cause they got to eat.” Another strain of the shelter environment impacting her family’s eating is the social stigma of being homeless. Ella used to eat in the dining hall with her family and said some days the food was good at the shelter and some days she thought to herself “umm, what was that?” She said it is particularly difficult to eat from the shelter kitchen because she enjoys cooking and was used to cooking for her family. She said there were many nights she would not force her kids to eat what the shelter was serving because she herself did not find it appetizing.

She went on to explain why eating had been more difficult lately:

> For dinner, sometimes we will go down but, my son one day, my 12 year old, I think he said he saw somebody he knew from school, he was a volunteer but the boy did not see him so we kind of don’t go down as much as we used to. So we just buy a TV dinner or a sub from Market Basket or somthin’...I hate that they eat like that, I wish I could just cook them a meal and just be done with it, but that’s typical eating for us, for right now.

As a mother and an African American woman, Ella said she came from a long line of women who know how to cook. ‘It’s a tradition’, which made the shelter situation embarrassing and demeaning for her. The space limitation of shelter living and the limitations these spaces impose on families often falls on the shoulders of the women.

Yet another example of a mother whose desperation of being homeless was exacerbated by the kitchen space comes from Emily. Emily was a 30 year-old woman who I met living in a different shelter than Tina and Ella. I met Emily during the pilot phase of this project and, like Tina and Ella, Emily talked about how different her daily food habits would be if she lived in her own space. She talked about how she would much rather shop once a month, but due to the limited space she has to shop more
frequently. She also talked about the barriers to cooking because of the space. In talking about how she did the cooking in her family of three, she talked about the condition of the oven when she first moved to the shelter. Emily said,

Um, I would not touch that oven until I bought the oven-cleaner cause it was nasty, nobody wanted to touch it, no one was sure how to clean it and of course, I know how to do all that stuff so, I spent hours cleaning out that oven cause it was just disgusting, somebody spilt something over and it just sat there for god knows how long and that bacteria, and I won’t cook when there’s nasty bacteria around.

Based on these findings, there was an undeniable barrier to preferred daily food habits because of the shelter kitchens and cooking space, which was a burden felt mostly by the women with families. This is not surprising based on previous findings showing food labor and the fact that family health considerations are usually made by women (e.g. Beagan, Chapman, D’Sylva, & Bassett 2008; Cairns, Johnson, & Bauman 2010). I was not however, expecting to hear any of the homeless residents talk about missing the ability to cook. The only barrier mentioned by the men regarding cooking spaces and the shelter, was the kinds of foods offered at food pantries (i.e. getting a can of ravioli without a means to cook it). The men typically ate more food from the shelter kitchen than the women, based on the fact that most of the men lived on level one, which did not have a place to cook.

The homeless shelter offered great insights into the food lives of those who are economically and structurally marginalized. Their situation at the shelter clearly constrained their daily food habits. Working in the kitchen and partaking in kitchen operations is a means of more privileges and autonomy both in the kitchen and living space. However, those who do not work in the kitchen have little control over when and what they eat. Additionally, I found that, like Bourdieu’s, the residents’ tastes can be
defined as functional. Lastly, based on my interviews I found that the kitchen environment at the shelter hinders cooking and eating, primarily for the women with families as the shelter.
CHAPTER V

AN EXPRESSION OF FOOD CULTURE: A LOOK AT A REFUGEE COMMUNITY GARDEN

“It was obvious that their garden, like the gardens of many others, was an important, well-kept asset to the family.”

- Field notes, July 7, 2011 -

Like the poor rural and homeless, refugees are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. Recently resettled individuals and families like the ones in my study face a set of challenges different from their native counterparts, such as language barriers, acculturation and economic hardship (Dharod, Croom, Sady & Morrell 2011; Hadley, Zodhiates, & Sellen 2007). Additionally, studies have shown that because much of the food in the United States is entirely new and unfamiliar to the refugees, it too can lead to food insecurity (Hadley et al. 2007).

This chapter, however, is not one that paints a picture of dire food insecurity, food incompetence or food as merely functional; rather, my observations highlight that food practices among the refugees include both mundane day-to-day aspects of getting food (i.e. preparing, cooking, cleaning), as well as meaningful, sacred celebrations with food. For the refugees in my study, the everyday tasks of food include weeding their gardens, growing, watering and cooking food. However, one of the main findings within the
refugee group – one that distinguishes it from the other groups in my study – is the presence of sacred gatherings and celebrations with food.

Food infiltrates every part of the refugee group’s lives — food is a part of their day-to-day life and religion as well as a centerpiece in any celebration or event. Additionally, food plays a significant role in community ties and gift giving as a symbolic extension of the self. This chapter begins with a brief overview of the history of refugees in the United States and a background on the community garden where my observations were made. Following this overview, I illustrate the everyday food practices of the refugee women in their kitchens and then explore the sacred rituals of celebration and food, or what I call food sentiments.

Refugees & The Garden

The United Nations defines a refugee as a person unable to stay in his or her home country due to fear of persecution because of “race, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, religion, or national origin” (2010). The majority of refugees are in the Middle East and North Africa, with 6.3 million resettled individuals in these regions (IPC 2012). This fact is somewhat counterintuitive, as there are also refugees fleeing from these very regions. In 2009, there were approximately 60,200 refugees in the United States (2010).

The African refugees in my study are from Burundi and Somalia and resettled in the United States to flee civil war. Both countries have a long and complicated history filled with ethnic wars, murder, and genocide. Briefly, in the small country of Burundi, there was major political unrest between the Tutsi and Hutu groups. Due to the ongoing conflict, Burundi is now one of the world’s poorest counties (Bundervoet, Verwimp &
Similarly, in Somalia, the civil war was caused by ethnic group tension resulting in many of the Somali Bantu people fleeing their country. In addition to the African refugees, I also spent time with Bhutanese refugees. Bhutan’s government asked the ethnic group of Lhotsampas to leave the country to weaken the group’s pro-democratic movement (Shrestha et al. 1998). While the refugees in my study have been forced from their homes and countries, many of them separated from their families, they have created a small slice of familiarity at their community garden.

The garden sits in a large four-acre field on the outer perimeter of an urban college and is approximately an acre in size. It is an aesthetically pleasing organic garden, consisting of approximately 138 plots situated next to a pond. The idea to start a community garden for the refugee population came from two women, Elizabeth and Ruth. Elizabeth has worked with the refugee population in a variety of ways (i.e. other gardens, as a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church) and Ruth is the director of Immigration and Refugee services through the Catholic Church. The two women asked the help of a man who is an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, who I met one evening in the garden. He explained to me the he was approached and asked if he could find a place for a community gardens for the refugees to grow their own food. The ESL teacher said he looked for places with good soil, space, water, and a source of public transportation. Knowing that the field where the garden sits was once a cornfield, and that the site had access to good public transportation, the ESL teacher asked the local college, who owned the land, if it could be used for a community garden. With great support from the college, community, and local outreach services, the garden began in 2009. The
garden has a small board of directors, who are all volunteers except, Elizabeth, who gets a small stipend as the garden manager.

Elizabeth explained what the first year in the garden looked like, stating, “We tore up enough of this field to put in 54 plots.” The board of directors then had several nights where people could sign up for a plot, using different channels like Lutheran Services and the Unitarian Universalist Church to spread the word about the garden. Additionally, they went to tutoring places, work places, and organizations that had TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) grants to recruit families who might be interested. The first year there were 45 gardeners, with a few people who wanted double plots. By the summer of 2011, the summer I spent time at the garden, there were nearly 120 low-income families at the garden. Elizabeth said they received some seed and plant donations from places like Wal-Mart, Agway, and local nurseries and that she also sent letters to the surrounding schools for donations. The gardeners were asked to pay a $10 cover charge for the plots, however many community members donated money to cover this fee for the families. Elizabeth also placed an ad in the paper asking for donations and received $400 dollars the first year.

The garden is a mixture of cultures, plants, and food, and on many evenings it brings together a diverse groups of people of all ages. In the time I spent there, it was an unassuming place; from the road, only a glimpse of the gardeners working was visible. It was not until I approached the garden, looked through its small pathways and between the tall tomato plants and stalks of corn, that I could see all the life that was truly there. Looking at the plots from the road, there was a gazebo that sat to the right of the gardens along with a picnic table with a small canopy over it. Behind the gazebo, there was a
water pump that I soon learned was not working, and a compost pile with dirt and other organic materials that the gardeners had pulled from their gardens.

Beyond the garden, hidden by a layer of trees, was the watering hole, which is a defining characteristic of the community garden. To get to the watering hole I had to descend down a short mud path. There were wooden planks resting in the mud enabling gardeners to walk to the shallow water edge. This body of water looked like it had potential for swimming in its center, where the water looked clear, clean, and perhaps deep, but at the edge it looked like a bog, with shallow murky edges. When we placed the watering cans on their side to fill them up, the water level was just high enough to fill them half way. I could see that there was mud and algae along with the water that would be taken to hydrate the garden plots. Elizabeth mentioned that initially the gardeners did not want to use the watering hole for fear of snakes, a common obstacle in their native countries, but from my observations this fear was long gone.

The water was a central feature of the garden, where each gardener would get a single, or several, plastic watering pitchers from the gazebo and walk back and forth hauling heavy water pitchers and buckets to their plots. Many of them used wheelbarrows to assist in the laborious task of getting water to their plants. They would either park the wheel barrel at the top of the embankment or roll it down to the water’s edge, placing three or four filled pitchers or buckets in the barrels and rolling them back to their garden plot.

The process of carrying water, the physical involvement of growing food, and the time involved taking care of the gardens resembled a traditional food system. A traditional food system, according Beardworth and Keil (1997), is one with a small,
localized means of production. The food is made and distributed within local boundaries and consumption patterns follow what is in harvest and season, and swings between plenty of food and lack of food. The watering hole and the garden are not merely emblematic of a traditional food system but rather are an example of a slower, localized food system occurring in the midst of a decentralized, large scale, modern food system were many people have constant availability of food (Beardworth & Keil 1997). The garden is an example of a traditional food system, much like that of the refugees’ homeland experience. The gardeners have recreated an agrarian lifestyle in the middle of an American urban center, which is starkly different than many of the rural and homeless people I observed who are unknowingly, yet actively, a part of the modern food system. This distinction between the two systems makes me think about the role of the modern food system in diet-related health problems, as studies have shown that acculturation is positively associated with poor diets (Ayala et al. 2008). This means that the longer a resettled American is in the country, the poorer his or her diet becomes.

The garden itself is a diverse place, but within the garden many of the plots are grouped together by country, with Bhutanese families being collocated as well as varying African families gardening four or five adjacent plots. Additionally, the plots are cared for with different levels of attention. Walking around the garden plots one evening, Elizabeth pointed out a few gardens that had not been tended to and suggested that they belonged to a ‘white family.’ This suggested that for the ‘white family,’ the garden was not a treasured, appreciated place, as it was for many of the refugees. An excerpt from my field notes, on an evening when a young 19-year-old Nepali man was showing me his
garden, illustrates how, for many of the refugees, the garden was a special, well-maintained space:

In parallel lines their garden was filled with various vegetation. It was obvious that their garden, like many others, was an important, well-kept asset to the family. The weedless garden showed dark, watered soil, vibrantly green kale, lettuce, and mustard leaves, and a structure made from branches to support the growing tomatoes. These branch structures are in many gardens in different sizes and shapes and are a webbed, arbor-shaped support for tomatoes.

For many of the refugees, particularly those coming from an agrarian culture, the garden is not only a source of food but also an extension of the self, a place of familiarity and a protective factor of the refugees’ culture (Dharod et al. 2011). Unlike the studies I cited earlier (i.e. Hadley et al. 2007), which found a high prevalence of food insecurity among the refugee groups, none of the refugees in my study said they had experienced hunger. Many of the refugees expressed hardship in being able to afford food and not having enough money in SNAP/Food Stamps, particularly during the winter months, but there was no talk of going without food or being worried that they may have to. I believe that in part this because of the garden’s ability to provide food, community, and perhaps a sense of home and normality.

Another central feature of the garden was giving. My evening observations at the garden were coupled with taking home food. I learned early on in this study that food gift giving is a frequently practiced gesture, and to not accept the gift suggests a lack of acceptance of the giver and his or her culture. I learned this lesson the hard way during a home observation with Ayan. Ayan is a beautiful, well-spoken, 28-year-old mother of 8 children from Somalia. While observing her, she offered me a drink, and to be polite I said ‘no thank you.’ With surprise, and an air of being a bit insulted, she responded, “You
don’t like black people food?” I explained to her that she was gracious enough to let me into her home and I did not want to be a burden. She then explained to me that in her culture when something is offered and not accepted it is a lack of acceptance of the person. Highlighting the individualistic and privatized society that I represent, I embarrassingly apologized and graciously accepted any food offering after that.

With this lesson learned, each night at the garden when I was offered something, I took it, overwhelmed with gratitude. I also often felt a bit guilty, feeling that I should be the one giving food. Within 15 minutes of my first observation at the garden, a young couple filled a plastic grocery bag with mustard leaves to give to me. Another time, Michael, a refugee from Burundi, had me follow him to his plot and told me to pull a zucchini from his garden. I said, “Are you sure?” and he said “In my culture, guests get.” I took the zucchini and then he had me take another one. He then walked around and pulled out an onion and handed it to me, followed by some rosemary he was growing.

The gift of food proceeded throughout the duration of my observations, not only to me but between the gardeners as well. Elizabeth told me, for example, that Ayan is one of the most generous people she had ever met. Even though Ayan had ‘truly a limited income’ she was always offering food. From my time at the garden and among the refugees, I found that Ayan was one of many for whom giving food is a customary practice, regardless of income. Along with giving food as a customary practice among the refugee group, the ease and ability of the refugee women in their kitchens’ also illustrates their food habitus.
The kitchen culture of the refugee women was inconspicuous and unassuming, yet amidst limited kitchen utensils, objects, and even food items I found a dramatic display of everyday food culture. There were no expensive appliances, kitchen equipment, or decorations. The counters were barren and the food in its raw form, with little to no pre-prepared or pre-packaged food. Ayan’s kitchen was my first experience in such an inconspicuous kitchen. An excerpt from my field notes, on an evening with Ayan as she cooked dinner, shows the simplicity of the kitchen space and cooking utensils, as well as the rich cultural food practices:

A large bag of rice sits next to the stove. Ayan takes a bowl to the canvas bag of rice and scoops six handfuls of rice into the bowl for the nine people she will be serving. She used a wooden spoon to mix the rice with a little salt. Without a recipe she flawlessly moves around the kitchen making dinner. Every burner on the stove is filled with pots in various sizes, making noise like an orchestra of food being prepared. There is also a kettle boiling water. Her daughter cut potatoes with a small red pairing knife. Ayan pours hot water from the kettle onto the rice and it starts to boil. On a cutting board on the small counter between the oven and sink, Ayan slices cloves of garlic. She then puts the slices into a small bowl and with the end of her rolling pin crushes the garlic, pounding the handle of the rolling pin over and over into the bowl on the small pieces of garlic. Her eldest daughter stands at the counter at the far side of the kitchen. She has peeled the potatoes.

The two women work mostly in silence. Ayan’s teenage daughter moves about the kitchen without direction, suggesting I was witnessing a nightly routine in the kitchen. The women make an African dish of rice, potatoes, onions, garlic but instead of using a tomato sauce made from scratch, they used spaghetti sauce flavored with bouillon cubes. Ayan explained that she makes both American and African meals. She said:

[I make] American food and African food. I make for the both different time. Sometime my children ask me, ‘Oh, mommy, we need for the African food’, and then I make what they say. Sometimes they say ‘Oh,
mommy, today we need for the American food’ then I do what they want...

On this particular evening, when the African meal was prepared, Ayan insisted that her guests (the research team I was there with during the pilot phase of this project) eat and that her family would eat later. There was a small table in the living room, which was the only piece of furniture; I was told that the family eats together sitting on the floor but that observing this would be difficult.

This scene reveals two important findings. One is the kitchen culture and cooking comfort of the African women. The women exhibited ease and familiarity of cooking and being in the kitchen, skills that were different than those I witnessed at the rural cooking class. The second important finding is the role of women in the kitchen and the transference of cooking knowledge from Ayan to her daughter. Ayan’s daughter’s ability in the kitchen was a directly observable example of how taste, culture, and knowledge are passed from one generation to the next.

A similar observation was made in my home observation with Ira, a 21 year-old female Bhutanese refugee. Ira lives in a two-bedroom apartment with four other family members: her husband, and his brother, sister and mother. Ira is a nursing assistant and her husband works at a bakery. Although Ira told me that every member of her family cooks depending on who is working, during my time with her, her brother-in-law asked her to begin making lunch, as he needed to leave for work.

Ira’s kitchen was remarkably similar in space and feel to Ayan’s kitchen. It was a spacious room with a small walk-in pantry, refrigerator, stove and cook-top. There was a dining room table with six chairs, sitting in front of two large windows. Adjacent to the dining room table, sat another small table with a rice cooker on it. There was a small pop-
out alley with cabinets and a sink off the back part of the kitchen. Ira stood at the stove and, like Ayan, she cooked in a weathered pot and frying pan without a recipe. In the pantry there were no ready-made food items, and leaning on the wall outside of the pantry were large bags of rice stacked together. On the windowsill there was a 32 oz plastic yogurt container, which I learned is how her mother-in-law makes yogurt, by the warmth of the sun.

The last example of women in the kitchen was during an observation I made at a baptism celebration. I was one of a few white individuals at the gathering and also one of the few women who was not in the kitchen cooking and eating. There was a clear gender division in the small apartment where the baptism was held. During the preparation of the meal, there were about seven women of all ages working in the small galley kitchen, while the men sat in the living room talking. When it was time to eat, the women stayed in the kitchen to eat their meal. At one point I stood up and peered into the kitchen, which I could not see from where I was sitting in the living room. I was amused and ashamed at what I saw. I amused because when I looking into the kitchen there were seven women sitting with their plates in hand and small children meandering in and out around the small spaces around chairs. They were packed in the kitchen in such a fashion that, like in an airplane row, one would not be able to get out without the others moving. It was a scene of camaraderie and togetherness. At the same time I felt a bit ashamed as a fellow woman separated from them by race and culture. As a guest I could understand not helping with the preparation of the meal but it felt strange to me to eat with the men while all of the women ate in the kitchen.
Repeatedly, in my observations of the refugees, I could see the role of women and food. While men had a large presence in the garden itself, hauling water, weeding and maintaining the garden, it was the women who were responsible for the majority of the cooking labor (e.g., preparing, cooking, cleaning). From these observations, it was clear that the refugee women are unmistakably cultural carriers of food. They not only teach the next generation of women how to garden and cook, but they also transmit the cultural norms around food to the entire group (i.e., these are the foods we eat, how they are prepared and how we organize ourselves in social gatherings). Women are an obvious part of creating and maintaining the food habitus within the refugee community.

**Food Sentiments**

The cultivation of meaning through food is pervasive in the refugee group in my study. The presence of food in community bonds is strong and visible for the resettled Americans. Sociologically, the collective force of food would not be surprising to theorists like Emile Durkheim (1912). In his book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim explains that an enduring characteristic of humanity and society is the need and capacity to connect with other people (Durkheim 1912: viii). He explained that what makes any society social is bonding with other people through shared rituals. Durkheim (2012) used the symbols and rituals of religion to explore the rationalistic nature of human beings, our need to connect, and the difference in the sacred and profane. The profane refers to the mundane everyday aspect of life. Food can be profane in daily tasks such as preparing, cooking, and cleaning after a meal, although these tasks could certainly be imbued with a great deal of meaning as well. Food is also a symbol of the sacred. It can act as a collective agent, the reason we gather at the dinner table, or for
a baptism, or wedding. Gathering together around food therefore, can enable, create, and foster a sense of collective effervescence.

Durkheim (1912) explained collective effervescence as a feeling of belonging to a group, where an individual acts, thinks, and behaves in a way they would not on their own. Ultimately, situations with a sense of effervescence affirm our collective nature, that we as humans do not live for ourselves alone but to transcend the individual to be part of a larger group, culture and society (Durkheim 1912: 171). For the refugee group, one of the main characteristics I found is that food is an object of ritual and used in affirming the collective nature of humanity. The refugee group, in contrast to the rural cooking class and homeless group, displayed more sentiment and meaning with food.

While the refugees have inconspicuous kitchens and simple, unassuming cooking spaces, these spaces create a place of bonding and a source of building community strength. One example that illustrates the powerful role of food in community and the cultivation of meaning was during the Catholic baptism celebration described above. Michael, one of the refugees I got to know the best, invited me to the baptism, which was for one of his friend’s son.

Michael is 34-years-old, and as I previously mentioned is from Burundi. I met Michael early on during my observations at the garden. He is tall, 6'4", with dark skin, clear English, and a walking cane. He has braided hair and dresses like a westerner, with jean shorts, cell phone buds in his ears, and brand name t-shirts. When I met Michael, he had been in the United States since 2006 after fleeing persecution in Burundi. He has a heartbreaking story but always wore a smile. During the war his entire family was killed and he barely escaped himself. He was shot in his right hip and the bullet traveled...
through his pelvis, permanently disabling him and making it hard for him to walk or stand for long periods of time. One afternoon, in trying to better understand the conflict between the Tutsi and the Hutu, I asked Michael if he identified with a tribe. With a shy look he responded, “Please, I cannot tell you...we are African here, we came here different...we need to make one person...we need to make community.” Due to his conviction to see all Africans, and all people, as his brothers and sisters, he has become like family with another refugee family from Rwanda. It was this family whose son was baptized and for whom he was hosting the baptism celebration that I was invited to.

Although Michael is a faithful Muslim, whom I witnessed fasting for Ramadan, he called one afternoon to invite me to his ‘nephew’s’ baptism and I gratefully accepted the invitation. When I arrived at Michael’s apartment building, he came out to greet me and was wearing traditional clothing, which consisted of yellow printed pants and a shirt to match. As I walked into the small apartment it was filled with about 30 adults and children. The men were dressed in suits and ties and the women were also dressed in formal, but not traditional attire. One of the women in the kitchen was wearing a gray cocktail dress, with her hair up in ringlets, while another was wearing an elaborate red dress, high tan stilettos, and a corset with a sheer shall that wrapped around her top. Before the meal we all sat as the women busily worked in the galley kitchen that looked to be about 8 by 10 feet. The women took large dishes of food from the oven and began placing them on the tables to form a buffet style line. The dishes were prepared and served in disposable aluminum pans. The food was plentiful in quantity and variety. It was truly a feast.
The food was presented on two tables covered with a tablecloth, making it look like one. There were flowers on the tables, and the layout of the food looked as if it were a bountiful garden of colors. The dishes of food included a light brown dish made with banana/plantain, potatoes with an Alfredo sauce, rice, beans, beef, goat, fruit salad, cheese balls (the kind that turn your fingers orange, not real balls of cheese), a green cassava dish, sweet fried bread called mandhazi (like a round doughnut), samosa (vegetable and meat filled pastry like a dumpling common in Indian cultures), and chapatti bread.

At the baptism meal, food was very much a part of cultivating meaning in many ways. Food at the baptism, like many other types of social gatherings, is at the center of why we come together. As is the case with most celebrations like birthdays, holidays, and dinner parties, food is an ever-present aspect of togetherness. In addition to food being at the core of what we gather around, like at the baptism, there were also rituals that surround the event. For example, at the baptism, before the meal began a blessing was given. A man in a tuxedo stood up and gave a greeting and prayer in a language I did not understand. When he was done another man stood up and in English explained that the other man had given a blessing to the baptized child and to the food we had been given to eat. Once the blessing had been given the meal began. After the meal, a woman stood up and thanked everyone for coming to celebrate the occasion, again in a language I did not understand. Similarly, to the toast before the meal, another woman stood up after and translated. This cultivation of meaning tied to food was also evident in the Bhutanese refugee population during the Diwali festival.
The Diwali festival is a Hindu celebration known as the festival of lights that lasts for five days. One evening, when visiting an ESL class, I sat down with Rata and Tashi, two Bhutanese refugees and longtime friends. Rata pulled some cardamom and clove from his pocket and offered me some to chew on while we talked. Both men were born in Bhutan and came to the United States in 2009. They were 44 years old at the time of our conversation. Tashi has a large household; he lives with his parents and three children. Rata lives with his wife and two teenage children. While the two men have garden plots in the United States, Rata explained,

“We had a big farm there [in Bhutan]. You know when I was, uh, I cultivated my farm for two years in Bhutan and, uh, I had a very big farm where we planted, we grows mustard, ginger, and, uh corn, orange, cardamoms...Just so you know, in Bhutan, you know, it is a small country and it is underdeveloped, so at the time of our, you know, the education was not valued, yeah, so that I got only like the middle school up to grade eight and I left the school because of the family farm, I marry at very early age our culture is like that so that I...stay at garden on my land and I had, uh, you know big cattle, we have too many cows and you know buffalos...so I worked the land.

Being without their farms is difficult for the two men. As many refugees explained to me, they are ‘agrarian people.’ Therefore, while the community gardens are appreciated, not having a farm and a longer growing season is hard on the men; harder for them than younger generations who were not accustomed to having land and farming. This is one of the reasons the festival and the celebration of their collective culture around food is so important to them. Additionally, in talking about culture, Rata said,

“I think we might be getting lost. In few years, culture, like, like our kids, they are now following American culture. We fathers are advising them not to forget our culture. If we stay here like for our life long I think it’s difficult to teach kids too.”
The two men were lively when they began talking about the Diwali. The festival is a chance for the men to return to a central cultural feature that, like the baptism, acts as a cultural vehicle. Rata said, “We make a special kind of food...October 28, Diwali, it’s the light of festival. Especially, we makes special food for that festival, roti round bread...fried rice...we make sweet things like candies at home.” Tashi then stated, “Especially, a sister take to her brother.” Rata said,

In that festival the brothers goes to sisters’ house...we call it ‘techara’ and sister give some present to brother, and they give the garland to their brothers, different colors of flowers. And sisters offer gift. Some clothes, some ordinates. It our culture.

Rata told me that he gets ‘tikka’, a red powder to dye the rice that they get from their elders as a blessing. The festival is a chance for the refugees to rejuvenate and celebrate their culture and food plays a central role in this process. The Diwali festival, like the baptism, affirms the social contract and culture of the Bhutanese refugees and food facilitated this process.

Ultimately, the garden and the refugees reveal another layer of meaning in the everyday food practices among low-income groups. I observed the most interaction with food during my time with this group, in both everyday activates like weeding, watering, and tending their gardens, along with observing how food is a significant part of bringing about a sense of collective effervescence in communal gatherings. Additionally, gender played a significant and directly observable role in food preparation. It is obvious that a ‘food habitus’, which consists of cooking competence, is passed from one generation to another. Food to the resettled Americans in my study transcended the meaning of food for me. I was not expecting to see that having a low-income does not have to lead to food insecurity, or being withdrawn from food. By growing food, the refugees maintain a
sense of culture from their homelands, provide for their families, and could perhaps be a
good model for others to follow.
CHAPTER VI

THE BODY & WAYS OF EATING

"The body part of it is... I don't like to take my clothes off. You don't realize when you lose a lot of weight, your body sags."

—Henry, Shelter Resident

Growing public attention is given to the body via the lenses of health, nutrition, and escalating diet-related epidemics like obesity. This is unsurprising with national statistics showing that nearly 36% of the adult population in the United States is categorized as obese (CDC 2012). And while the body is often understood through the medical model, the body is a deeply social entity. Many scholars argue that the body is a means for us to perform and sustain social structures like social class, gender, occupational status, and age (Bourdieu 1984; Gremillion 2005; Ristovski-Slijepcevic et al. 2010). More specifically, in *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) explains that the foods we select are related to each social class's notion of the body. For Bourdieu, the body is an important element of class tastes and practices, as in how we treat, care for, feed and maintain the body (Bourdieu 1984:190; Gremillion 2005: 21). The way we treat the body reveals our class habitus, meaning that the body is connected to class practices by our everyday eating habits, which is simultaneously linked to and reproduces larger social structures (e.g. gender, class). The body literally embodies and enacts everyday practices.
of eating that express individuals' and families' conditioned experiences (Dillon 2010), which, as Bourdieu argues, varies between classes.

This chapter is an exploratory comparison of the rural cooking class participants, homeless residents, and refugees in my study, their food habitus, and its connections to the body, in part by following Bourdieu's framework. The first section of the chapter describes the physical ways of eating among the people in my study: how they feed their bodies, body types, and what this might suggest about each class fraction's concept of the body. The last section of the chapter is again an exploratory look at findings from my study where a shift in an eating habit has occurred. This section is about individuals who changed their eating patterns and bodies through what I refer to as a 'phenomenological rupture in health.' Given the powerful force of habit, which constitutes our tastes and reproduces social class structures, it is important to look at these individuals, as they represent outliers in my study.

**Habitus & Feeding the Body**

After studying how different social classes and occupational groups in France eat, Bourdieu concludes that tastes "depend on the idea each class has of the effects of food on the body, that is, on its strength, health and beauty..." (Bourdieu 1979/1984: 190). Unpacking this quotation from Bourdieu suggests that there are two layers of how habitus is connected to the body. The first is the physical outcome of food on the body, or the literal body type (e.g. size, shape, volume, weight), which is related to how each class fraction thinks about the body. The second layer is the physical approach to eating, how the body is used to eat, and how the body governs the selection of food. For example, Bourdieu observed that the working class (males) in his study preferred cheap, nutritious
foods to keep the body strong. In contrast, professionals tended to focus on healthy, lighter, non-fattening foods that taste good (Bourdieu 1979/1984). Less concerned with feeding the body specifically to work, professionals and higher-class individuals ate more delicate foods like fish, whereas the working class ate more potatoes and meat, resulting in different body types and different physical approaches to eating. However, as Bourdieu argues, what the different classes ate was also related to a deeper 'body schema' having to do with the physical act of eating (Bourdieu 1984:190).

Briefly, he characterized the working class meal by ‘plain speaking, plain eating’ and plenty of food (Bourdieu 1984: 194). Meanwhile, the bourgeois habitus demonstrated form, order, and restraint in eating, and presentation of food; thus, the basic contrast between the two groups was ‘form’ versus ‘substance’ (Bourdieu 1984:196). Bourdieu’s focus was between distinct social class and occupation groups and his research offers a framework for looking at how the various class fractions in my study eat and what this reveals about their notions of the body.

**The Rural Cooking Class Participants & Homeless Residents**

I observed a number of eating characteristics that give insight into the rural cooking class participants’ and homeless residents’ notions of the body. Primarily, my observations of the ways the individuals in each of these two groups fed their bodies suggests each group is focused more on getting the body fed with little recognition for the body’s function or appearance. These conclusions come from the amount of time each group took to eat, and when they ate. First, mealtimes for the two low-income groups were short, plain, with little form (i.e. no regard for meal presentation or aesthetics) and a limited amount of conversation. It took on average about 12-15 minutes for each group to
eat their meal. While people were eating there was little talking, and for the most part mealtimes were quiet. Though many of the people in the rural and homeless groups were not family members, many of them were not complete strangers either, which sometimes appeared to be the case by how little mealtime talking there was.

One evening in August when I was at the homeless shelter I noted the interesting contrast between the 'buzz' and energy that went into getting the meal ready and the subdued atmosphere when the shelter residents were eating, captured in this short excerpt:

I noticed that the group eats very quickly, and Shawn noted they are not interested in nutrition at all. It only took the group about 12-15 minutes to eat. It was pretty quiet and what I would call functional – eating to eat.

For the shelter residents, food did not appear to be about tastes. Even though they sat together at round tables, their seating arrangements did not elicit much conversation. As I state above, food was functional for the residents in terms of substance to keep their bodies going, for survival. This is a different kind of ‘functional’ than the way Bourdieu writes about his working-class subjects. Bourdieu observed certain foods, like meat and potatoes, as functional for a strong laboring body whereas for the residents functional foods are about ‘getting-by’ and seem to be disconnected from the health of a working, laboring body.

The act of eating for the rural and homeless groups is linked to the body in several ways. For example, I learned that for the homeless population, one of the links between the physical act of eating and the body is in their oral health. There were an overwhelming number of people in the rural and homeless groups, who had poor dental health. For example, Shelly from the rural cooking class was missing one of her front
teeth, and Tina from the homeless shelter was missing all of hers. The shelter’s kitchen manager informed me that dental health plays a significant role in what kinds of food she tries to make available at the shelter. I was told that things like bagels and apples are hard on the residents’ gums. This is a challenge because one of the main food items donated to the shelter is bread, so the kitchen manager tries to come up with recipes that use stale bread like applesauce bread cake.

Like the shelter residents, the rural cooking class participants sat together during mealtimes. The family style eating instigated a little more conversation than I witnessed at the shelter, mostly about the likes and dislikes of the meal we had prepared. However, mealtimes were still short, about 12-15 minutes, and conversations were limited. Sitting down to eat a meal and passing a dish to share was not a natural experience for the rural families in the class. This was illustrated, one evening when the children were asked to set the table. They were very excited at the ‘game’ of getting the table ready. It was obvious, however, that this was a practice they were not used to. The instructor gave them specific instructions on where to put the plate, eating utensils, and cups. After walking away for a minute and returning she found that the children had haphazardly placed the forks wherever they happened to land near the plate. She stopped them and explained that the standard setting is to have the forks on the left of the plate, and the spoon and knife on the right.

Another example of food being about substance for the body over form occurred on an evening when I was doing dishes in the rural cooking class’s kitchen. We had already eaten when Shelly’s son came into the kitchen explaining that he was still hungry. He explained that the school lunch food had been bad and he made himself
another taco, which was the evening’s meal. He began eating the taco standing at the counter in the kitchen. When others started to come into the kitchen to do the same, the instructor told everyone that while it was great that people were having seconds, it was important that they do so at the table, sitting together. While my observations of the rural cooking class participants are based on a classroom setting and not in their natural home environment, it seems that eating at the counter, and getting fed with little thought of form, was the natural way of eating, not sitting at the table with a fork on the left side of the plate and a spoon and knife on the right. The physical act of eating was one of spontaneity and substance, with attention to getting food to keep the body going, not how the food was presented, what the dinner table looked like, or the potential for 'togetherness' at mealtimes.

In addition to mealtimes, another finding into the way the class fractions fed their bodies was a pattern of not eating. I was surprised to find how many people in my study talked about not eating regular meals. Mostly, it was the women in my study who said they would go all day without eating. None of the women who talked about not eating indicated they did so as a result of food insecurity but rather of habit. I believe I built a strong enough relationship with the individuals in my study for them to have revealed if their eating patterns were a result of economic hardship, but I continue to question the social desirability issues that come with admitting to food insecurity. I asked the women specifically if they dealt with food insecurity issues and hunger, and they said no, stating that how little they ate (how few meals) was out of choice and habit. Additionally, there was a link between the women who reported not eating very often and overweight body types.
For example, during one class Shelly and Susanne talked about eating once a day. Shelly opened up about her eating patterns during a cooking class about meal planning and breakfast. During this class the instructor asked, “Who eats breakfast?” It came out in the discussion that Shelly and Susanne don’t eat all day long. Shelly said, “I only eat once a day.” She explained that she typically ate only at dinnertime. Susanne said that she typically does the same thing and both women said that it was because they don’t feel hungry in the morning. Both women could be described as overweight, and I found out that both suffer from chronic illnesses. Shelly’s body is broken down, she told us her doctor is happy with ‘any walking she does’, even if it is walking around the grocery store. Susanne also has a hard time with her body as she told us she has fibromyalgia, which frequently makes her sore and weak.

While Shelly and Susanne did not talk about their eating habits related to their bodies, Laura was very articulate in the relationship between her body type and how she eats. She explained:

I’m overweight because of my eating patterns. I have a lot of stomach issues, I am very sick to my stomach all of the time...it’s what I eat and when I eat. I do have anxiety and depression – before I had children – a lot of my health issues...I’m always sick to my stomach so I don’t want to eat and then when I eat it’s not good stuff cause I’m so exhausted and withered...

In addition to not eating many meals during the day, it is clear that many of the women in my study were getting calories from drinking sweetened beverages. The following excerpt from my field notes is illustrative of a common scene I witnessed with the rural women in the cooking class:

Shelly entered the room with an un-opened Nestles Ice Tea in her hand. Betsy too, was carrying a purple colored beverage with the label “Mountain Dew” on it and a small bag of ‘smart’ popcorn. It was as if
instead of greeting this family at the door of our cooking class I was at the
door of the gas station they just left with their afternoon snack. When I
asked what kind of drink Betsy had she and Shelly expressed a sense of
discovery and eagerness to tell me all about Mountain Dew’s new drink,
“the super nova.” Shelly said, “it’s new,” and Betsy said “I’ve haven’t
tried this one yet.”

Betsy and Shelly brought a drink to most classes and on one evening, when we
were discussing sweetened beverages, Shelly had brought a ‘Lipton Brisk’ 20 oz bottle of
ice tea with her and Betsy a 20 oz bottle of ‘Lipton’s Brisk’ pink lemonade, which I
learned during that class consisted of 4 servings, about 27 teaspoons of sugar, in one
bottle. In learning this, the entire table was stunned, including me. Betsy’s face was of
surprise and a little worry as she is pregnant and said she had no idea there was that much
sugar in the bottle. Betsy and Shelly were not the only rural individuals I observed
drinking soda and other sweetened beverages. Laura also shared with me the important
role soda has had in her life. During a conversation with Laura, she said:

   I have a lot of stress in my life...soda to me, is almost like a cigarette in
some ways. Cigarettes are gross and I don’t do drugs, I don’t drink, I
never have. Sometimes I’m just like ‘give me that soda’; it’s a mind over
matter thing. Yeah, I cut down. But that will not go in the grocery cart
unless myself and all my children have everything they need.

Betsy and Shelly were unaware of the amount of sugar and excess calories they were
consuming. Laura, however, felt she deserved sweetened beverages, that they were a
small indulgence. Overall, in both the homeless and particularly the rural group, it
seemed as though there was a disconnection between food and the body. This plays out at
both levels of food habitus and the body, in the physical body types, and also in the
physical act of eating quickly to get fed, with the affect of food on the body a seemingly
distant thought.
The way of eating among the refugee group varied significantly from the rural cooking class and homeless groups. As discussed in the previous chapter, the refugees' food habitus is connected to an expression of meaning and ritual. The refugee way of eating was social and more physically connected to food, both in growing and in eating. For example, during my home observation at Ira's house, Ira explained how typical mealtimes looked. She said:

Um, usually we eat rice, um and some vegetable um, bean [soup of bean]. Sometime if I don't get time he used to cook when [my brother-in-law] doesn’t get time my mother-in-law cooks, my brother, my sister, everybody cooks.

She explained that regardless of who cooks, if they are home together they all sit down at the table and eat together. This practice is important to her and one she enjoys. At her home she offered me lunch and I was able to experience what this way of eating looked like. As I sat in her kitchen, which was decorated only with the looming smells of lunch, we had rice, curry made with potatoes and mushrooms, and a spicy side dish that was too hot for me to eat. I sat with her husband and brother-in-law as she served us lunch (she sat down to eat with us after we had our food). As we ate she explained that her favorite foods to eat are like 'this', curried, pickled foods. The spicy side dish as served on a paper plate. We each had a single spoon for the rice and soup, and mixed and matched plates. Unlike mealtimes with the rural and homeless groups, we talked while we ate, and the meal was approximately 35-40 minutes long.

Like Ira, Ayan also told me that she cooks and eats with her family every night. During my home observation at Ayan's, she fed our research team but I was not able to observe her eat. Elizabeth, the garden manager, told me that typically Ayan's family of
nine sits on the unfurnished living room floor of their small apartment to eat with modest eating utensils. When I ate at Ayan’s home, I sat at a small table that had four chairs. The following excerpt illustrates the meal my research team and I ate at Ayan’s home.

Ayan takes out one multi-colored plate with deep edges and, with a large metal spoon, places a heaping mound of rice on the plate. As she opens the pot cover to the sauce she explains that there are potatoes, onion, carrots, sauce and bouillon. She takes four spoons and places them at the edge of the plate at the 12, 3, 6, and 9 o’clock positions. She then takes the plate to the table and places it in the middle for us to sit down and eat. She then joins her daughter and son on the floor while we sit to eat.

In contrast to the rural and homeless groups, the refugees’ communal way of eating marked one of the greatest differences between the class fractions. The refugees have a more engaged food culture than many Americans. Mealtimes and eating in the refugee cultures takes more time and is more than survival. In contrast, food to the rural cooking class participants and homeless residents is functional, and there is more of a ‘get-by’ interaction, versus food tying a line to other people and other social spheres. There was a great sense that food for the refugees is about others, in contrast to the more private act of eating for the other two groups. In a way, the refugees seem to actively protect their collective food culture, whereas it could be argued that the other two groups in my study demonstrate the individualized nature of American culture.

**Describing the Body Type**

From across the class fractions many of the men and women I observed had heavier body types. In similar shapes and sizes, the individuals in my study carried bodies that revealed a national trend of excess weight. In my impression, the rural women in my study could be categorized as being overweight (and possibly obese, although I did not measure this) at a higher rate than those in the homeless and refugee groups. This follows
previous studies that have found for women, obesity prevalence increases at lower-income levels (Ogden, Lamb, Carroll & Flegal, 2010). It is important to note that while there is a growing literature on how the refugee population is gaining weight the longer they are in the United States (e.g. Bhatta 2012), I did not have sufficient findings on the "refugee body" to write about this trend. For example, only one refugee woman talked about gaining weight (she thinks due to birth control pills) since coming to the United States. Many of the people in my study spoke of being overweight or obese and Tracy from the rural group and Henry from the homeless group, offered the most articulate and open reflections of their bodies. Their descriptions are intended to be just that, body type descriptions, which reflect the physical manifestation of their food habitus.

Tracy endearingly referred to herself as a 'big girl'. The first night I met Tracy, her 5 foot, 11 inch stature was partially covered with a pair of leggings and a tank top. She had dark skin and her coarse hair was dyed red. She was a pretty woman with a confident presence. Her clothes hugged her body, revealing her body composition and showing her small legs, large mid-section, and bulging arms where the skin puckered out to sustain her weight. A few weeks later, Tracy, the class instructor and I were standing together talking about food and health. Tracy told us that she had lost 50lbs over the last 10 months and hoped to lose another 100-plus pounds so she can weigh 200lbs. She told us that for her height and weight it is recommended that she should weigh 150 lbs, but she said she 'is big boned' and that would be too low for her.

Tracy was proud of the weight she had lost and animatedly showed us the parts of her body that had changed. She began by showing us that she used to have skin that hung from her neck, which had started to recede. Next, she lifted her arm to show us that while
there was still skin that hung from the bottom of her upper arm, there was a lot less than
there used to be. She told us that while she still had a belly, it was smaller and did not
hang down as far as it used to, and that she wanted to get those shoes that help tone the
buttocks because she thought she had a flat butt. Then she said, “and look at my
ankles...I have nice ankles for a big girl – I don’t even have cancles.” Unsure of what
‘cancles’ were, Tracy and I explained to the instructor that ‘cancles’ are when there is
little separation and definition between the calf and the foot – when someone’s leg looks
like a stump. I could see the definition in Tracy’s leg as she flexed, and the instructor and
I praised her for her strong calves.

Like Tracy, Henry also talked about his body, although he struggled more with
what being obese had done to his body. One afternoon when I was talking with Henry I
asked him if he would walk me through a day of eating before his heart attacks. With a
tentative look he said, “do you really want to know?” I reassured him that he would not
be judged and he continued:

I would start out in the morning with a cup of coffee, eat one dozen
doughnuts, then go out to breakfast to some little coffee shop and order a
breakfast sandwich...for lunch I would get an Italian sandwich and snack
on combos, the hostess pies, or a jumbo bag of chips and eat the entire
bag. I would buy 2 or 3 liters of soda a day, and soda was my water.

Henry went on to tell me that he never drank water and he knew he was consuming an
excessive number of calories each day. He openly said, “I was depressed, my social life
sucked, [I was] very upset with life, I don’t know if I was actually trying to kill myself, to
tell you the truth, people thought I was trying to.”
In looking at Henry I would have not known that at one time he weighed 500 pounds because at the time I met him he was 280 lbs. He said that losing all of the weight has not been an easy process. The following excerpt illustrates his feelings.

The body part of it is...I don't like to take my clothes off. You don't realize when you lose a lot of weight your body sags.” He shows me the bottom part of his upper arm, which reveals a layer of skin that does not hold the same mass it once did. He goes on to explain that in spots, like under his arm, it’s “a very light fat, it’s cellulite and it’s very embarrassing because, when you, you take your shirt off and your body and skin hangs down so far, it’s unbelievable. It’s all fat. And it looks terrible. And you know, and it’s funny, I’m just going to say it quickly, when you have boobs alright, and you pick [them] up everything disappears and [when] you let go everything sags again.

Henry laughed through his explanation of his body, and what it is like to be in his body with the reminiscence of a ‘body of old.’ He went on to explain,

Even my legs alright, have lines in [them] where the extra skin-fat is just hanging. I have a bicycle so I have muscle tone in my leg, I have good muscle tone in my leg but because of the extra skin and fat in my leg it still looks like I’m huge. So, I’m at 280 [pounds] now.

Henry lost weight after suffering from 4 heart attacks. He told me he wants to talk to someone who has had reconstructive surgery to remove the excess skin before he thinks about doing it. Before the heart attacks he was looking into gastric bypass surgery but he would have had to see a psychologist. Then the heart attacks happened and, he said, “I did it naturally.”

**Phenomenological Rupture & Health**

Everyday habits, particularly eating patterns, are so ingrained that even in the face of mounting medical concerns about diet-related diseases like obesity, individuals’ food habits are hard to change. For some individuals in my study, however, a radical health problem shifted their eating and thinking patterns about food and health. Michael Bell
(2012) refers to this as a phenomenological rupture or “a wrenching experience that causes” individuals to suddenly doubt the trust and knowledge they previously held. While Bell (2012) uses this term in referring to how people change their attitudes and behaviors toward the ecological environment, this term fits perfectly for how a shift in everyday food patterns is a result of a rupture or a wrenching experience, thus causing a ‘phenomenological rupture in health’.

Dianna and Ryan, the rural couple I met during the pilot phase of this project, have been married for 40 years. With a battery of health problems, Dianna was encouraged by their physician to take a cooking class in an attempt to change her diet. In fact, after taking the class Dianna became a regular volunteer, and Ryan decided he too would take the class. Dianna explained that the impetus for her diet change was when she found out she had Type II diabetes, a diet-related disease. She explained her rupture:

Well I had cellulites, I ended up with cellulitis in my leg and ended up in the hospital and that’s where they found out I [had] the diabetes. So then I went to these [classes] where they tell you how to deal with diabetes, you know, changing your lifestyle and stuff...and I’ve gone from being on oral meds and two types of injectable insulin to no meds by changing my diet and losing weight.

Dianna explained that she was diagnosed with diabetes in August 2009 and has lost about 40lbs. In a playful conversation between the couple and me, Dianna said, “I’ve changed, we eat a lot more whole grains now, huh dear?” Ryan replied, “Oh, yes,” making his wife laugh and giving me a small window into the couple’s negotiations in diet over the last year. Dianna then went on to add, “and a lot more fruits and vegetables.” Ryan added, “Salads,” and Dianna said, “Yeah, I eat a lot of salad,” turning to her husband saying, “you’ve started eating a lot of salad too.” Ryan then explained what their diet was like, or their old habitus, before Dianna’s diagnosis. He said their grandchildren had been living
with them off and on for ten years and that they went to McDonald’s and all the fast food restaurants. But since Dianna was diagnosed with diabetes they had not gone to a McDonald’s in about a year.

Dianna’s diabetes diagnosis shattered her everyday reality. The change in her diet resulted from an acute, powerful experience that threatened her health. Her experience shows that while an individual’s food habitus is a powerful constituent in everyday food choices and patterns, a health rupture has the ability to restructure and create a new food pattern, which then becomes the habitus. A phenomenological rupture in health has the unique ability to reveal these taken-for-granted patterns of every day life.

Henry also experienced a phenomenological rupture in health that led to his changed body. He told me that he used to be a commercial fisherman and lobsterman. This was until 2008 when, as stated earlier, he suffered four heart attacks on his boat. He explained that when he fell sick he could no longer work, stating, “I got sick and I lost my house and everything and moved [to the shelter] in May of this year.” He went on to say, “I was fishing and I felt funny and I had 3 flat-line heart attacks right in a row...on the boat, and the last one was at the [doctor’s office]...I couldn’t work any longer...” He went on to explain that he did not have health insurance and that he had approximately 180-thousand dollars in medical bills.

Henry’s health rupture forced him to make drastic changes in his diet. Like Dianna, he, too had a crystallized moment that changed everything. His body became the limiting factor in his work, income, and house. And while he lost everything, his heart attacks gave him that moment where his food patterns and life reflected back on him; he lost everything but gained his body back. Henry and Dianna show how daily habits in
food can be broken down by a wrenching experience that shifts their patterns. While this finding is certainly not always the case with those who have a negative health diagnosis, a phenomenological rupture is one way to shift patterns in food.

The body is a direct manifestation of everyday eating habits and one of the most obvious expressions of habitus. How we treat, feed, care for and maintain the body is a reflection of our everyday patterns. Bourdieu found differences between social classes and I have now seen these differences between the groups or class fractions in my study. Thus, not only does taste depend on each class's notions of the body, I would argue it also affects each class fraction's notion of the body's "strength, health, and beauty."

All of the women in the rural cooking class were overweight. My findings suggest that contributing factors for this include skipping meals, the types of food selected, and sweetened beverages. The homeless group had a mix of body types, while the refugee group was not noted for being overweight. While body schemas are enduring and deeply connected to everyday eating patterns, there are examples of a change in eating habitus and therefore body types.

Habit in everyday food choice is a powerful, taken-for-granted, social experience like many things in our everyday lives. However, as shown in my study, it is possible for a health cleavage, to occur, revealing how food habits affect the body. This phenomenological rupture in health can result in a behavior change and a change in the body; a diabetes diagnosis, and a string of heart attacks, acting as a wrenching experience resulting in changed eating practices.

Lastly, my findings raise questions about the reproduction of inequality through the body. Bourdieu's work found that our everyday habitus is linked to social structures
and the reproduction of inequality—those with the most amount of capital (economic, social, and cultural) pass these attributes on in their family. In addition to Bourdieu's findings, I would argue that the body is increasingly becoming another component of inequality. It is likely that diet-related diseases, like obesity and diabetes, exacerbate the reproduction of inequality. The overweight body leads to a body that does not work, which is getting passed from one generation to the next. While the causality of obesity is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate it is certain that more and more Americans are finding themselves overweight. Whether due to genetics, inactivity, income, food insecurity, fast food, lack of health insurance, food habitus, or a combination of factors, the result is the same: a disabled body from food.
CHAPTER VII

ECONOMY OF PRACTICE AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE AMONG THREE LOW-INCOME GROUPS: RURAL, HOMELESS, AND REFUGEE

“I found that people, they don’t cook food at home, they go to restaurant. They [don’t] even have tea at home. They carry coffee cup from store.”

—Rata, Bhutanese Refugee

This chapter explores the ‘economy of practices’ and ‘cultural competence’ among the lower-income groups in my study. The economy of practice is a term coined by Bourdieu (1984) to describe how individuals and social classes, regardless of social class or the amount of resources they have, employ reasonable strategic investments to increase their economic, cultural, and symbolic capital (Dillon 2010). In the following section, I extend Bourdieu’s theory and concept to show how the rural cooking class participants, the homeless shelter residents, and the refugee gardeners obtain food in the absence of economic capital. The reasonable and strategic food procurement practices—thus economy of practices—are then translated into various forms of capital (i.e. food, social bonding, economic etc.).

Next, I explore the cultural food competence of the groups in my study. Again, I use the term cultural competence in line with Bourdieu’s (1984) concept. For Bourdieu, cultural competence means possessing a family and social class background, knowledge,
and taste that allow individuals and social classes to show, and accumulate, more economic, social and cultural capital (Dillon 2010: 425). This also includes possessing a basic competence, or ease with navigating everyday situations. Based on my observations with each group, there was an obvious range of food connectivity and cultural competence. As previous chapters have described, I witnessed some individuals who were uneasy and uncertain in cooking, along with seeing those who were deeply connected to growing and preparing food. Regardless, however, of how connected or disconnected from food the groups in my study are, the practices I observed are anchored in, and express a food culture of sorts. In comparison to the rural cooking class participants and the homeless shelter residents, the refugee gardeners did not seem as ‘food poor,’ even though each group shares a similar economic situation. Ultimately, my data suggests that a certain kind of cultural food competence may supersede, or be as relevant as, economic capital in increasing the amount and quality of food for the individuals in my study.

**Economy of Practice: Food Strategies**

The people in my study talked about a number of strategies they used to obtain food. These strategies exemplify how the groups in my study employ what various forms of capital they have, in a reasonable way, to feed themselves and their families. This is in slight contrast to Bourdieu’s original concept, in that these practices may or may not result in the acquisition of another form of capital, but rather, is focused entirely on food. Among the types of food obtaining strategies mentioned, the most commonly used practice by the rural group is cutting coupons, SNAP/Food Stamp exchange, and using

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3 All but two individuals in my study receive SNAP/Food Stamps, meaning they are at, or below, the poverty line. For a family of four this means an annual income of approximately 22,000 dollars a year (USDA 2013).
farmers’ market vouchers. The most commonly mentioned method of obtaining food for
the shelter residents was in personal Food Stamp exchange. Additionally, all three groups
discussed food pantries as a means of getting food in times of food shortage, which was
the only strategy talked about by the refugees.

**Food Strategies & The Rural Group**

Navigating the food system with a limited income motivates a variety of methods
of obtaining food. The first food obtaining strategy is using coupons. The individuals in
my study talked about using coupons as a way to save money and get more food. Laura
jokingly took pride in her coupon skills, the number of coupons she uses, and the money
she saves. She explained,

*I’m the coupon queen. So, I’ve been saving, I’ve been breaking the machine, I
joke cause they had to call a supervisor over cause I’ve been breaking the
machine. I’m walking out with a hundred dollars more [worth of groceries].*

Laura was not the only individual in the rural group who uses coupons to get food.
Shelly and Betsy also talked about using coupons as a means to supplement the food they
get each month. Betsy explained that she gets farmers’ market coupons through the
*“Women, Infants, Children’ (WIC) program. The two women told me about going to a
farmers’ market called ‘big papas’ on Saturdays, where food is auctioned to get rid of it
quickly. The women said they like to go to the market because of its fresh food. Betsy
said that she feels comfortable using WIC and SNAP/Food Stamps at the farmers’
markets because she sees so many people doing it: “everybody, there are so many people
[that use WIC].” Shelly concurred with Betsy, saying that food assistance “is part of life.”

Using coupons is a good ‘economy of practice’ example because it takes one set
of knowledge, how and where to find coupons, and exchanges that knowledge for food
and savings. Another strategy used to get food is what I will refer to as ‘exchanges’. I found two types of exchanges: store and personal. The rural people in my study talked about redeeming non-food items at the store for food money. This is different than the personal, more altruistic, Food Stamp exchange discussed by the homeless individuals where they use their Food Stamps dollars to help friends and family get food.

It is important to preface the following data by stating that while SNAP/Food Stamps usage continues to rise in our country, and the stigma surrounding assistance is fading, there are still questions about how frequently the program is misused (DeParle & Gebeloff 2009). I found however, that Food Stamp exchange follows the theory of economy of practices rather than deliberate misuse. For example, one of the women in my study said that when she has no money and is low on SNAP/Food Stamps, she returns an item she obtained through other assistance systems to Wal-Mart for store credit to buy food. She stated:

I don’t think we ever go hungry in my house. If that means going and returning something with no receipt for credit at Wal-Mart to get more food, I’ll do it. My daughter gets her formula through our Medicaid…and they give me more than enough so, because I know I have more than enough, I’ll take three or four cans to the store… I’m not selling my food stamps for drugs…to me, at first I had a hard time, the first time I came up with doing it was when I was really bad off one time, I think I had a pack of diapers I didn’t need anymore or something. But like that 4 cans of formula, cause it’s expensive, it’s pharmacy formula, I got $78 dollars back on a card to go get some food for the kids. It went back right to the kids.

Exchanging baby formula for store credit to buy food was not something this mother was proud of. However, her conviction to not let her family go hungry was stronger than her reservations in exchanging the items. While this strategy may seem unethical, for a full-
time working mother of three, it illustrates the economy of practices used by this rural
mother to feed her family.

Food Strategies & The Homeless Group

Like the rural group, the homeless individuals use a form Food Stamp exchange
as a strategy to obtain food. In an interesting way, being economically and structurally
marginalized makes the homeless group I observed less ‘food poor’, than one might
originally think. Because the shelter provides lunches for those who are working and
dinner every evening, the homeless group’s Food Stamp dollars seem to last longer. This
group did not talk about coupons, or needing to exchange items for money or food.
Rather, there was a pattern of altruistic giving of their Food Stamp money or using their
food money to help other residents at the shelter. For example, Henry talked about giving
some of his Food Stamp money away to other people. He said, “I buy things for
people...if somebody’s hungry, I’ll go up to Market Basket, I won’t give them my
card…”

Shawn also talked about giving his Food Stamps money away. Shawn explained
that if one of his friends has little money and needs food, he would buy a few items for
his friend with his own Food Stamps, allowing his friend to spend their money on other
things. Shawn said he also uses his Food Stamps to buy things for his girlfriend if she
needs them. Shawn said, “Everybody here, now and then, they’ll go get a bunch of cakes
or a bunch of fruit and donate it [to the shelter] on their Food Stamps...everybody chips
in one way or another, volunteers…” Therefore, while individuals from both the rural and
homeless groups talked about exchanging their Food Stamps, they talked about it in
different ways: with one type of exchange leading to more food money, the other social capital and bonding.

A strategy to get food used by individuals in all three groups was attending local food pantries. Twelve people in my study talked about going to a food pantry when they were low on food. Shelly and Betsy have been to the food pantry, and Betsy said she goes “only when I need to.” She went on to say that there are people who go just to get food even if they don’t need to, for example, people who are not in an emergency. She said canned goods are the best things to go for, explaining, “It’s so much cheaper to get the can goods [at the food pantry] and spend your money on the meat.”

Paolo, a shelter resident, said that going to the food pantry was a very hard experience for him. He said, “In May I went to the food pantry. [The] food pantry [is] for people with cooking means, [or that] like cookies.” He told me that because he was Italian they gave him a can of ravioli, and it was not very good, but he was not snobbish so he ate it. He said it was a ‘shameful experience’ and that for him going to a food pantry is nearly futile. Without a way to cook, Paolo and other homeless shelter residents are more dependent on the food served at the shelter. Tina, another shelter resident, said:

[At the food pantry I] get canned goods. They get donated a lot of breads and a lot of baked goods. I don’t get into a lot of the cupcakes, and cakes and all that stuff. But they do help...

She went on to say that it’s hard because the things she gets at the food pantry have to be cooked, and as previously explained she does not like cooking at the shelter. She explained, “I don’t use the pantry that much since we’ve been here because of the situation, plus we have a pantry here downstairs.” Tina and Paolo represent what the other residents shared, that since being at the shelter they do not go to the food pantry as
often because they have food at the shelter and there is no means to cook the food they would get at the pantry.

For those who deal with the threat of being food insecure, food strategies like going to food pantries can be a routine process. This means that navigating the emergency food system is part of their economy of practice. Their knowledge of the emergency food system, such as SNAP/Food Stamps and food pantries, is cashed in for food. Furthermore, while many of the individuals talked about going to food pantries, only two individuals in my study talked about a time when they experienced hunger, and most expressed a gratitude for the food assistance they receive. At the same time, the federal food assistance they receive was not enough: individuals in the rural and homeless groups had to learn how to use what other resources they had to sustain themselves. The low-income people in my study employ a set of strategies, or economy of practices, to literally sustain themselves in obtaining the food they need.

Food Strategies & The Refugee Group

The refugee population also talked about going to a food pantry to get food. However, the discourse surrounding this experience is quite different. For example, Michael went to the food pantry one time in 2010 when his Food Stamps were low. He went to the city welfare office and he was shown where the food pantries were. He said, “When I went there they show me the food,” and, shaking his head, he said, “no I can’t.” He said that the food at the food pantry is not his kind of food and he “ran away,” explaining “but when I have money I can buy fresh food.” Mindu, a 38 year-old Bhutanese refugee, said that she has been without food, and during these times she has gone to the church: “Sometimes we go to the church to [get] the food...that helps.”
Sonam, a 37 year-old Bhutanese refugee, also said she goes to the church to get food, and gets things like “Noodle, rice, bean, canned beans, corn, onion, meat…” Ira said that she too has been to a food pantry and the “free grocery” to get “vegetable, potato, onions.” As Michael suggests, one has to learn how to get food from a food pantry, to learn where they are, and what to get there. Furthermore, while each group talked about going to the food pantry, they each experienced the process differently, including what food items they talked about getting there, suggesting that cultural tastes differentiates food practices within the groups or class fractions in my study.

**Food References & Tastes**

In Bourdieu’s original study and the work he published in *Distinction*, the word taste, generally speaking, refers to the socialized, everyday selections we make. Even our ‘taste sense,’ our seemingly biological likes or dislikes of how food tastes in our mouth, is constructed by how we are socialized, our cultural habitus, rather than a unique personally constructed set of food preferences; in essence, taste is what we know. To examine the differences in taste among the rural cooking class participants, the homeless shelter residents, and the refugee gardeners, Table 3 is a list of food references made during my time with each group, listed in chronological order as they came up in my field notes. This list is not exhaustive but merely a sample of the kinds of foods that were talked about, or that I observed, at each field site.

In comparing the food items talked about or observed at each field site, preliminary patterns of tastes emerge. First, in looking at the foods the rural group spoke of, many are less expensive, nutrient deficient, and require little time or labor in preparing. For example, out of the 47 items listed, 20 of the items are quick, pre-
prepared food items that don’t offer a great deal of nutrition (e.g. Macaroni and Cheese, Cup-of-soup, Ramen Noodles, Debbie’s Cakes). In other words, these foods are cheap in terms of cost and low in nutritional value.

The food items and tastes of the rural group (and low-income groups in general) is fully understood and anticipated by the Cooking Matters™ curriculum. For example, knowing that participants in these classes do not commonly consume many fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, the curriculum includes a ‘taste test’ activity, an activity we did during the second week of class. Based on the Cooking Matters™ instructor’s guide, the instructor chose food items that would “look or taste unfamiliar...(e.g., squash, mango, whole wheat pita)” (Cooking Matters 2011: I-8). For our class, the instructor selected barley, edamame soybeans, kale, mango, rye crackers, and sesame sticks. As the instructor circulated the table serving each of the food items, the class participants talked about the new tastes they were experiencing, with an overall consensus that they enjoyed the taste of mango the best and kale the least. This short activity offers insight into the everyday tastes of the class participants in my study, further suggesting a food habitus that is characterized by quick, easy, and less expensive foods. (See Appendix C for activity).

As noted in the previous chapter, tastes are characterized by substance, and the physical way of eating quickly is reinforced by easy, prepared foods that involve little time or labor for the rural group. Thus, the food references listed below support earlier findings that the rural cooking class participants are disconnected from preparing and cooking foods. It is worth noting that the foods listed in Table 3 for the rural group do not include all the food items that were used in the recipes we cooked for class (See
Appendix C for sample of recipes). The rural food items listed below were the items talked about, or mentioned, by the class participants and more emblematic of their habitus. This is in contrast to many of the foods we used in the recipes during class, which were often different than the day-to-day food selections the individuals in class made.

Table 2: Food References Among Rural, Homeless, and Refugee Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Homeless</th>
<th>Refugee</th>
</tr>
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</table>

The homeless group's food references are a significant shift from the rural group. Unsurprisingly, some of these references follow what would be expected from an industrial kitchen setting. The homeless group has the greatest number (92 food items) and variety of food items and meals. The foods listed in Table 3 are both foods talked about by the residents (i.e. 'what I eat when I am not here') along with the foods served at the shelter. Therefore, while I would argue that the list of foods above starts to paint a picture of a 'homeless person food habitus', it is harder to discern what their food habitus...
is in another context. As discussed in Chapter 4, the meals are prepared at the homeless shelter and donated, making the food items for the homeless group the most diverse. For example, there are meals listed (e.g. Lasagna, Baked Ziti, Casseroles, Bacon, Hash Browns, Grits, Biscuits), along with many other non-meal food items like Pringles, Gushers, Lucky Charms, and Mini-Wheats, which were items individually bought by the shelter residents. Many of the homeless food items and meals are bulk, mass-made prepared meals that meet the basic nutritional needs of the group. While the physical way of eating is quick for the homeless group, many of the food items and meals listed in Table 3 take a great deal of time and labor to prepare.

The refugee group’s food references included approximately 46 food items. Inverse to the rural cooking class participants however, more than half (25) of the food items include raw foods (e.g. Kale, Lettuce, Tomatoes, Zucchini, Mustard Leaves). These foods are both eaten raw and also used in meal preparation. Another interesting contrast between the rural cooking class participants and refugee gardens is the symbolic nature of kale. Kale in the rural group was an unfamiliar, undesired taste, while for the refugees it was a widely grown and eaten food item. The refugee group’s food items also include few sugary items. During a conversation with Ira, she explained:

We eat spicy food, more sour, hot pepper, and American food there’s no sour and hot pepper, so actually I don’t like American food. I like more spicy food, I don’t like sweet also.

In addition to not eating a lot of prepared or sweetened foods, the food items of the refugee group demands time, and labor, and the tastes of this group include mostly nourishing foods. Preparing foods is something that Rata feels is important to his culture. He said,
The American food is not known to us. It, to me...as a vegetarian, I am a vegetarian, so we are not a big culture to go to restaurant to eat...so, we make a food at home and uh, we prepare at home...

Ira and Rata both express the tastes of the refugee group in the desire to prepare their own meals, which takes a certain amount of time, labor, and food knowledge. Interestingly, I found that the refugee group is not simply spending a great deal of time on food because they have more time on their hands than individuals I observed in the other groups, as many of them have jobs, but rather that it appears they spend their spare time (i.e. evenings, weekends) doing food related things.

**Cultural Food Competence**

Upon beginning this study, I expected to find income as the greatest barrier to food within each of the class fractions. I expected that the 'good food is too expensive' barrier would prevail in my findings. However, my findings indicate that when controlling for income (i.e. each group at, or below, the poverty line), one can clearly see that cultural competence impacts food capital. Thus, a cultural food competence (i.e. knowledge and ease with growing and preparing food) begets food capital (i.e. more food, healthier food, and healthier bodies). This is not to suggest that economic capital does not play a significant role in obtaining food, nor do I mean to suggest that the individuals in my study are not struggling to get food; many of them said that while they have not experienced hunger the Food Stamp money they receive each month is not enough. But, as stated earlier, cultural food competence may be as important as economic capital when it comes to getting and securing food.

As Bourdieu would expect, those in my study who have higher cultural food competence are those whose life experiences and habits have provided them with the
know-how and familiarity that make growing, preparing, and cooking food a comfortable and familiar everyday event. In my study, it was the refugee gardeners who showed the highest cultural food competence, a competence that is in continuity with their comparatively greater immersion in and connection to food work. As I discussed earlier (see Chapter 1), cultural competence can result in the acquisition of more cultural capital (and, or other types of capital), and in the case of the refugees, more social, economic, and food capital. Throughout my research among three different sites, the refugees' family backgrounds and food knowledge showed a great deal of cultural competence around food, and much more than the individuals in the rural cooking class or in the homeless shelter. My findings do not mean that the people in the other sites were devoid of food cultural competence, and nor do my findings rule out the possibility that, over time, as a result, for example, of taking cooking classes, they can acquire additional food competence. They do show, however, that the food habitus of the refugees, one deeply connected to the land and to a culture of growing food, provides them with a competence that privileges them vis-à-vis their low income counterparts in my study.

**At the Garden: An Illustration of Culture Food Competence**

For the refugee families and individuals in my study, growing food is a deeply rooted aspect of who they are, an expression of their 'way of life,' and a link to their family background, native lands, and each other. During one of my field site visits to the garden, I met a gardener named Rata who was willing to show me his garden. His plot was immaculate; there was not a weed in it. As we looked over his garden he explained that Nepali people are farmers, and that they are agricultural people who know how to grow things. This notion of being agrarian people was not simply a sentiment to this
gardener nor the others who expressed the same thing to me; being farmers and knowing how to grow food was a learned skill and a source of pride and identity. Rata explained to me that growing food and farming is ingrained in who he is, having been passed down from one generation to the next. In talking about how it feels to be in the United States, Rata said:

Yeah, at first you know we were very frustrated when we come here...the system is different from our country here, you know. We, we, I feel very deprived you know like, ah, we don’t have languages, and ah, we don’t have skills. And ah, I feel very deprived and frustrate here at first...But it is still, you know, we just thinks because our culture is like that you know, rural area in the county side and to have a farm, cattle rearing and have own house, land, like you know, so we have to a live in the country side as in Bhutan but it is not possible here. But, but, but, our dream is that.

Rata went on to talk about his garden plot:

In compared to winter season you know, we buy less vegetable from the stores, and we got a lot of spinach, and uh chilies, tomatoes you know and depend on the gardens for like nearly two months so it really helps...it’s smaller, significantly smaller but the harvest is good, the spinach grow very nicely, the soil is very good one, very wet, it does not become dry very quickly...so we taking care every week, every weekend we just stay in the garden, and weed, watering. There is a big pond, a big pond, near the garden.

Rata illustrates the importance of the garden and the day-to-day, and week-to-week activity of taking care of the garden. His statement “We just stay in the garden, and weed and watering,” shows his culture. As Bourdieu explains, culture is an observable act seen in everyday choices. Weeding, watering and spending time in the garden may seem like a simple act that does not distinguish cultural competence with regards to food, but the longstanding knowledge of how to grow food, that has been passed on from one generation to another, and is enacted every day of the summer at the community garden is indeed cultural.
Like Rata, Ayan also talked about how growing food is a natural part of life in Somalia. She said:

Africa we use for the tomato, beans, like corn, mango, bananas that what mostly we have because that’s [what] we grow in Africa. Because in Africa they don’t have any place like government they can give you any food stamp or something like that, they don’t have it. We just a use all women and men, we just do for the garden to grow some food and you can feed for your family and your child something like that.

Elizabeth, the garden manager, said if there was one thing she wished people could understand about the refugees it is that gardening is a year round occupation for them in their native countries. She continued to explain:

[The refugees] are used to having fresh fruits and vegetables in their diet. They want to keep that part alive, you know, in their new land. Surely you can’t grow everything here, like nobody did a successful mango this year...it takes a little while to get people to understand that yes, when it snows your garden is going to die, even before that it’s going to die. But they’re great gardeners...they are so appreciative...I had one woman say here’s my $10 dollars, I will turn it into $1,000 dollars of food, and she did too, she is a remarkable gardener, how much she got out of her garden. So it allows them to eat good, healthy organic produce. What more can you want out of that?

Here, Elizabeth explains how cultural competence in growing food is translated into other forms of capital. In this case it is economic capital. During another conversation, Ayan also talked about selling her produce to make money during the growing months.

Another form of capital derived from cultural food competence is social capital. Ira said, “It’s really nice to do garden cause you know, we meet a lot of people in garden and we garden fresh food is really tasty, [more tasty] than buy from grocery.” Many of the people I met at the garden were friends with each other, after meeting and gardening together.
I not only heard about how growing food is cultural in my time spent with the refugees, I also observed this finding several evenings at the garden. I learned how ingrained growing food is to their culture and how this knowledge stems from a heritage of farming and prospers into food, social, and economic capital. One evening I witnessed the ease and familiarity of a woman in her garden plot with exchanging only a few words. This was a Bhutanese woman with a small red bindi marking on the point between her eyebrows.

On this evening as I walked around the garden I saw her sitting in her plot and I asked her what she was doing. She explained in a few English words and hand gestures that she was pulling leaves to make curry. From what I gathered she was pulling the mustard leaves, which she would take home, cut, dry or boil, I’m not sure, and then let it sit for a number of days before having the dried spice. She looked to be in her late 30s or early 40s and when she could not say a word that she wanted to in English she displayed a childlike shyness and would try to act out what she meant.

I sat with her on the edge of her plot in the midst of the mustard leaf piles and asked her if I could help. The garden became a different, more intimate place sitting there, in contrast to the aerial view from the gazebo. It was much different to sit so close to a woman tending to her garden, than to look from a distance and see multiple bodies working in several plots across this small little valley where the garden sits. It almost had a private feel as if I had just entered her kitchen. She handed me a small pile of steams and their attached leaves. These were the ones with small yellow flowers and I began to pull the leaves off, looking to her for guidance. We sat in silence until I had gone through my pile. She then started to go around her garden snapping leaves off of their stems with
a twist in her wrist the way you would pick an apple from a tree. She moved around her ‘garden-kitchen’ the way many of us move around the produce section of the grocery store with a natural fluidity. I did not recognize many of the plants in her garden and she was making a bouquet of plants like a florist would, moving purposefully through their flower shop. Unbeknownst to me, she was picking the food for me to take home. This Bhutanese woman, like the other gardeners, showed a natural knowledge of how to be in her garden, and what to do and pick, practices that she had most likely been doing since she was a small child, an everyday act that illustrates her cultural food competence.

A Hierarchy of Cultural Food Competence

In the spirit of Bourdieu (1984), the following section includes a hierarchy of cultural food competence (Figure 1) among the rural cooking class participants, homeless shelter residents, and refugee community gardeners I observed. Inspired by Bourdieu’s hierarchical presentation of ‘The Food Space’ (1984:186) in Distinction, I have organized and ranked the cultural food competences of the groups in my study. As I have illustrated with the findings from this study, it is clear that the refugee group has the most knowledge of growing and preparing food and demonstrated that food has a meaning beyond its substance. The gardeners seemed to posses a generational background of food knowledge, and therefore, in Figure 1, cultural food competence is signified by a (+). The negative sign (-) by economic capital represents that each of the refugee individuals in my study are living at, or below, the poverty line. Time under the refugees has (+/+), meaning the group spends the most time with food, both in preparing and eating during meal times I as described in Chapter 6. Based on the position of cultural food competence and the amount of time the group spends on growing, preparing, and eating food, it seems
clear the refugees are the most familiar with and connected to food in comparison to the rural and homeless groups.

**Figure 1. A Hierarchy of Cultural Food Competence**

The homeless group is the middle of the three groups in terms of cultural food competence. As I have discussed, the homeless shelter had both individuals who cooked and prepared meals in the kitchen and thus were familiar with food, as well as many others who did not participate in making meals, indicated by (+/-) by cultural food competence. The homeless group is also interesting in terms of economic capital as noted earlier. Because this group represents the poorest of the poor and is economically and structurally marginalized, this group also has the opportunity to spend less of their SNAP/Food Stamp dollars than those in the rural and refugee groups, again signified by (+/-). For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, the homeless group talked about having left over food assistance money that they often shared with each other.
Additionally, the homeless group has varied time input into preparing meals and mealtime, again represented by (+/-). As stated, there is a great deal of time spent on preparing meals at the shelter (3-5 hours), yet the meals are consumed very quickly.

Lastly, my findings suggest that the rural group is the most vulnerable group when it comes to food. In contrast to the other groups, the rural cooking class participants are the least connected to food. With little economic capital (-) in combination with an uneasiness and unfamiliarity with food items and how to prepare them, the rural group is without a great deal of cultural food competence (-), relative to the refugee gardeners and homeless shelter residents. Additionally, the rural group spends the least amount of food time in both preparing meals and in the physical act of eating, signified by (-/-) above.

As suggested by my observations, individuals employ a wide range of culturally learned strategies to obtain food. From coupons to food pantries, the individuals in my study demonstrated a general know-how of how to get food with a limited income, thus showing their economy of practice. This rational, individual action in procuring food is also evident in the refugees’ generational knowledge and knowing of how to grow and cook food.

While each of the groups in my study is potentially vulnerable to food insecurity due to their economic situation, each group experiences this reality in a different way. The refugee gardeners in my study demonstrated a higher level of cultural food competence than the rural cooking class participants and homeless shelter residents. With a generational knowledge of how to grow and cook food, the refugees are able to feed themselves and their families.
The findings from the refugee community garden have great implications for the American food system. In comparison to the other low-income groups in my study, with each group on a relatively even ground in terms of income, it is culture that plays a significant role in obtaining food. This means that while income is very important, and individuals and families without a livable wage or reliable source of money face the threat of not having enough food, there is more to the story than economic capital. In short, this study suggests that perhaps it is not simply an economic deprivation that leads to food insecurity but also a cultural one.
"Taste is *amor fati*, the choice of destiny, but a forced choice, produced by conditions of existence..."

-Pierre Bourdieu (1984:178)

This study examined the everyday food practices of low-income individuals purposefully selected from three different sites: a rural cooking class, a homeless shelter, and a refugee garden. It was determined that similar economic conditions do not always yield the same food habits. Based my interviews and observations, I found that individuals at each location have distinct ways of thinking about food, obtaining food, preparing food, and eating food. These food sites reveal that a certain types of cultural food competence can result in varying levels of food security.

This chapter includes a summary and discussion of the five main findings from this study, followed by a discussion on the theoretical connections of my work to that of Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). Additionally, I propose a direction for future research, with a focus on empowering lower-income individuals to have an active role in the research process. Given the enormous social and economic burden our country faces with food-
related problems, such as obesity and the rising number of food-insecure people, it is imperative that we start contextualizing these problems beyond the economic spectrum.

**Summary & Discussion**

*Connectivity to Food*

First, the findings from this study reveal various levels of cultural food competence and connectivity to food among the rural cooking class, homeless shelter, and refugee community garden sites in this research. This became particularly evident when comparing my observations of the rural cooking class, in juxtaposition to what I learned from the individuals at the refugee community garden.

From my observations and subsequent interviews with the rural and refugee individuals, I learned about two different kitchen cultures; one marked by an uneasiness, and infrequent time spent preparing meals in the kitchen; and the other, an unassuming, comfortable, and all-knowing way of cooking from scratch. The rural cooking class women in my study were unfamiliar with kitchen utensils, and expressed anxiety while preparing meals in the kitchen; the most poignant example coming from Betsy, as she nervously tried to figure out how to use a grater when making dessert one evening in class. With an uncertainty in reading recipes and discomfort in preparing meals, the cooking class participants seemed disconnected from food when compared to the refugee group.

The food habitus of the refugee group consisted of cooking competence, which is passed from one generation to another. The kitchen culture of the refugee women was inconspicuous and unassuming. Even with limited kitchen equipment and utensils, and a paucity of food items, I found a dramatic and vibrant display of everyday food culture.
There were no expensive appliances, equipment, or decorations. The counters were bare, the food was in its raw form, and with little to no pre-prepared or pre-packaged food the refugee group appeared to have a healthier lifestyle when compared to the rural and homeless groups.

Perhaps comparing the food connectivity of the rural cooking class participants with the individuals I met at that community garden is an invalid comparison. Hypothetically, if we were able to create a spectrum of 'food connectivity' by various socio-demographic characteristics, we would not be surprised to see that individuals attending a low-income cooking class have weaker culinary skills than people found growing their own food at an organic community garden. However, this finding still has significant implications by simply demonstrating that low-income individuals have different levels of food related skills and knowledge. This is a finding that has not yet been explored in previous research.

*Food, Individualism, & Community*

Throughout this dissertation I have explored the social and communal aspects of food, as well as suggesting that for some, the cultural aspects of food is marked more by independence than by 'togetherness'. As my findings suggests, the rural cooking class and homeless groups demonstrated individualistic food behavior, whereas the refugee group seemed to actively engage in a collective food culture.

For the rural cooking class and homeless groups in my study, the eating experience is characterized as quick, plain, and with little conversation, with mealtimes averaging 12-15 minutes in length. Both at the rural cooking class and the homeless shelter when an individual got their food, they began eating, and did not wait to begin
their meal with the other individuals with whom they were sitting. This isolated food related behavior, in being withdrawn from the social aspects of food, is perhaps emblematic of our American independent culture and an attempt to maintain some sense of individual control. The refugee group on the other hand, actively seemed to want to protect and maintain their collective food culture.

Food is an integral part of life for the refugee group; it is a part of their day-to-day life and religion, as well as a centerpiece in any celebration or event. Eating is a time to be together with family and talk. Mealtimes are longer, lasting approximately 35-40 minutes, and have a collective meaning. Food is communal, and part of the rituals and rules of gathering together, and as I observed, food is particularly central to sacred gatherings and celebrations. It creates and reinforces a sense of collective effervescence in communal gatherings. Like the rural cooking class and homeless people, refugees are vulnerable to food insecurity. Recently resettled individuals and families, like the ones in my study, face a set of challenges different from their native counterparts, challenges such as language barriers, acculturation, and economic hardship (Dharod, Croom, Sady and Morrell 2011; Hadley, Zodhiates, and Sellen 2007). However, in my observations the refugee group spent the most time around food, doing everyday activities like weeding, and watering their gardens, and preparing meals. Additionally, and even in the face of potential food hardships, I found that food plays a significant role in community ties and gift-giving, illustrated by refugees like Ayan, who had a 'truly limited income' but as Elizabeth the garden manager said, 'she is always offering food’ to others.
Women & Food Work

I spent a significant amount of time with both men and women around food throughout the course of this research. It was the women however, that I witnessed engaging in the majority food work (e.g. food shopping, cooking, and thinking about their families food needs). Men too did food work, for example, I observed and wrote about many men tending and working their gardens, but as previous literature suggests, it was the women of my study who expressed the desire to feed and care for their families (e.g. Cairns, Johnson & Bauman 2010; Devalt 1991).

In her ethnographic study of gender and caring, sociologist Marjorie Devalt (1991) found that women are culturally expected to care for the needs of their families, this including their food needs. Further, we view those who do not fill this role as broken, or feel that something must be wrong with them (Devalt 1991). While the women in my study demonstrated unique kitchen cultures, they shared a common desire to care for their families. For the rural women, it was signing up for a cooking class, and as Betsy said, “I’m here for the kids.” The homeless shelter women achingly talked about wanting to cook for their families, in their own kitchens, in their own spaces. Additionally, the refugee women cooked for their families and friends, longing to make them happy. Perhaps the best example of this was articulated by Ayan when she said, “Sometime my children ask me, ‘Oh, mommy, we need for the African food’, and then I make what they say. Sometimes they say ‘Oh, mommy, today we need for the American food’ then I do what they want…”

Based on my observations, not all lower-income women, similar to not all low-income groups, experience food in the same way: this is exemplified by the different food
cultures and narratives I found among the rural cooking class, homeless shelter, and refugee women. While the women in my study express different food cultures and everyday food practices based on the intersection of their class, gender, and cultural background, they all shared a desire to care for and feed their families.

The Body & Ways of Eating

The fourth main finding from my research highlights the link between our everyday tastes and habits, and the body. The body is a direct manifestation of everyday eating habits and one of the most obvious expressions of habitus. How we treat, feed, care for, and maintain the body is a reflection of our everyday habits. Bourdieu states that tastes “depend on the idea each class has of the effects of food on the body, that is, on its strength, health and beauty…” (Bourdieu 1984: 190), and thus suggesting two layers of how habitus is connected to the body. The first is the physical outcome of food on the body, or the literal body type (e.g. size, shape, volume, weight), which is related to how each class fraction thinks about the body. The second layer is related to what food means to the body, the physical approach to eating, and how the body governs the selection of food.

First, what I found related to the physical outcome of food on the body was a pattern of not eating and heavier body types. Many of the women in my study talked about going all day without eating. These women reported that many days they would not eat until early afternoon or the evening. None of them however, indicated that not eating was a result of food insecurity but rather of habit. Although food insecurity was not given as a reason for not eating, I find myself thinking about Glassner’s (2007) proposition that obesity could be linked to binge eating due to food insecurity. As discussed in Chapter 1,
this theory proposes that due to a lack of consistent access to fulfilling foods, those who face the prospect of not eating tend to overeat in times when they do have access to food (Glassner 2007). The findings from my study are not enough to determine if obesity can be linked to food insecurity, but they do contribute to the growing body of literature trying to investigate the connection of food insecurity and obesity (e.g. Institute of Medicine 2011).

Another key finding related to body types and habitus is what I refer to as phenomenological ruptures in health. Body schemas are enduring and deeply connected to everyday eating patterns, yet there were examples of a change in eating habitus and therefore body types in my study. A few individuals in my study had experienced a radical health problem, which led to a significant shift in how they thought about food and health. Michael Bell (2012) refers to this as a phenomenological rupture or "a wrenching experience that causes" individuals to suddenly doubt the trust and knowledge they previously held. For one woman in my study, this rupture came from being diagnosed with diabetes. She changed her diet, lost 40 pounds, and now no longer needs to take diabetes medication. For another man, it was a string of heart attacks, initiating his 200-pound weight loss. Like many habits in individuals' daily lives, food choice habits are powerful social acts that are taken-for-granted. However, as my study shows, it is possible for a health cleavage to occur, revealing to the individual how their own food habits affect their body. This phenomenological rupture in health can result in a behavior change and a change in the body.

In addition to body types, my findings also include observations about what food means to the body, and the physical approach to eating. For example, among the rural
cooking class participants and homeless group food can be characterized as ‘substance for the body’ or as Bourdieu writes, ‘the taste of necessity’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 177), whereas for the refugee group eating extends beyond feeding the body. I found that the rural residents and those at the homeless shelter were not particularly interested in food presentation or aesthetics. Food and eating was more about ‘getting by’ and ‘feeding the body’ versus spending time on how their food was arranged, or the look and appearance of the meals. In contrast, I observed the refugee group on occasion spending time on food presentation. Specifically, as I discussed in Chapter 5, at the Baptism there was a colorful spread of food, presented on a table covered with a white tablecloth, flowers, and a thoughtful arrangement of food items. This presentation and thought of food aesthetics suggests the meaning of food extends beyond substance for the body, and as discussed above, a layer of meaning connected to the social and sacred aspects of food.

Finally, my findings raise questions about the reproduction of inequality through the body. Bourdieu’s work found that our everyday habitus is linked to social structures and the reproduction of inequality- those with the most amount of capital (economic, social, and cultural) pass these attributes on in their family, and thus inter-generational wealth and privileges are reproduced. Extending Bourdieu’s findings, I highlight that the body is becoming another component of inequality. It is likely that diet-related diseases, like obesity and diabetes, exacerbate the reproduction of inequality. The overweight body is one that does not function well. The tendency to be overweight and the attitudes that contribute to this condition are being passed from one generation to the next. While the causes of obesity may be difficult to isolate, it is certain that more and more Americans are finding themselves overweight. Whether obesity is caused by genetics, inactivity,
income, food insecurity, fast food, lack of health insurance, food habitus, or a combination of these, the result is the same: a human body unable to function at its highest potential.

**Culture & Food Security**

Perhaps the most significant finding from this study is the varying food cultures present among low-income groups, and the importance of culture in creating food security. The findings from this study that support this proposition are that individuals employ a wide range of culturally learned strategies to obtain food, and have varying levels of cultural competencies around food.

First, from coupons to food pantries, the individuals in my study demonstrated a general understanding about obtaining food on a limited income, thus showing their economy of practice. The most common strategies used by the rural cooking class participants for obtaining food includes visiting food pantries, using coupons, and redeeming non-food items for food money. The homeless group also talked about going to food pantries, along with an altruistic Food Stamp exchange. This is, the homeless group discussed using their Food Stamp money to purchase food for their friends, and to donate food to the shelter. The refugee group talked about going to food pantries when experiencing food shortages. I found, however, that while each group talked about going to food pantries, they each experienced the process differently, including what food items they talked about getting there, suggesting that cultural tastes differentiates food practices within these class fractions.

Each of the groups in my study is potentially vulnerable to food insecurity due to their economic situations; however, how they experience this reality depends on what
degree of food knowledge they have. The refugee group in my study expressed a higher
cultural food competence (i.e. food knowledge, cooking abilities) resulting in a ‘food
capital’ of sorts (food knowledge that is exchangeable for other resources like selling
vegetables for money), when compared to the rural cooking class participants or the
homeless group. Through family background experiences, and the knowledge of how to
grow food, the refugees are able to feed themselves and their families. Linking back to
theoretical structure of this dissertation, Bourdieu (1984) would expect those in my study
who have a higher cultural food competence, like the refugees, to be those whose life
experiences and habits have provided them with the know-how and familiarity with
growing, preparing, and cooking food. Thus, if one grows up in a family where growing,
preparing, and cooking food is a comfortable and familiar everyday event then this will
likely translate into ones own adult cultural food habitus.

In the spirit of Bourdieu (1984), I used my understanding of the everyday food
practices of the three groups to suggest a hierarchy of cultural food competence (Figure
1), using criteria including cultural competence, time spent preparing and eating meals,
economic availability in terms of food dollars, and the meaning of food to each group. In
proposing a hierarchy, I am not suggesting that all rural, homeless, and refugee groups
have similar levels of food competences to those I observed, as the food observations I
made are dynamic, and as I stated before, relative to the time and cultural spaces I
observed them in. The main purpose of this ranking is to highlight the fact that culture
matters when examining food security and that food knowledge is different among
groups with similar economic experiences.
Specifically, I suggest that cultural food competence is the highest among the refugees followed by the homeless shelter residents, and then the rural cooking class group. As suggested, the rational for this ranking is based on my findings that the refugees have the most knowledge of growing, preparing, and cooking food, and that food has meaning beyond its substance. With a generational knowledge of growing food, coupled with the role of food in collective gatherings, the refugee gardeners demonstrated the presents of a cultural food competence. I found that the refugee group spent the most amount time cooking, and eating (with mealtimes lasting 35-40 minutes). Next, the homeless group is the middle of the three groups in terms of cultural food competence because this group had both individuals who cooked and prepared meals in the kitchen and thus were familiar with food, while there were many others who did not participate in preparing meals. As noted earlier, the homeless group is also interesting in terms of economic capital. Because this group represents the poorest of the poor and is economically and structurally marginalized, members of this group are able to spend less of their SNAP/Food Stamp dollars than those in the rural and refugee groups. Additionally, the time spent by the homeless group preparing and eating meals varied widely (i.e. meal preparation lasted 3-5 hours, while the meals were eaten in less than 15 minutes).

My findings suggest that the rural cooking class participants has the greatest difficulty obtaining and preparing good food and are, therefore, the most vulnerable group in my study. In contrast to the homeless and refugees, the rural group was the least connected to food. Having little economic capital in combination with an uneasiness and unfamiliarity with food items, and how to prepare them, the rural cooking class
participants had the least amount of cultural food competence in comparison to the other two class fractions. Additionally, the rural cooking class participants spent the least amount of food-related time in both preparing meals and in the physical act of eating those meals.

I was not expecting to see that having a low-income does not have to lead to food insecurity, or a lack of food knowledge. By growing food, the refugees maintain a sense of culture from their homelands and provide for their families. The United States has hopefully become a safe home for the refugees who were forced to leave their native countries, and it just may be these individuals who ironically provide us with a healthier model to follow, and end up saving us in return.

**Theoretical Implications**

In applying the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) specifically to the everyday food practices of low-income groups, several implications have emerged. Based on my findings, the main theoretical implications include: 1) the observable aspects of class fractions, 2) the multiple forms of capital and food, 3) culture and food habitus and, 4) questions about the reproduction of food inequality.

First, we often think of social classes in ‘high, middle, and low’ categories, but within these main groups there are several sub-groups with their own cultural habitus. My findings illustrate this concept by showing that the rural cooking class participants, the homeless shelter residents, and the refugee gardeners displayed their own unique food practices. Therefore, the rural, homeless, and refugee groups are examples of low-income class fractions and are evidence of Bourdieu’s concept. Furthermore, these class fractions mediate food practices with respect to the body. Bourdieu (1979/1984) concluded that
taste is constructed by how each class thinks about, cares for, and feeds the body. From the rural, homeless, and refugee groups in my observations, I can extend Bourdieu’s original findings about taste and class differences to the low-income class fractions in my study. Therefore, as noted earlier, the taste distinctions he demonstrated between the classes, so too can be seen within one social class group, i.e. among the low-income class/groups I studied.

The second implication is in regards to Bourdieu’s recognition of the multiple forms of capital (i.e. economic, social, and capital) as they relate to food. While Bourdieu wrote extensively on the multidimensional aspects of capital and about food, neither he nor other sociologists examine how the various forms of capital can be used to obtain food. By examining the relations between capital and food, I was able to illustrate Bourdieu’s concept of ‘the economy of practices.’ While the groups in my study may have less capital than higher classes, they make strategic choices to use what resources they do have to enhance their various forms of capital- in this case, their ‘food capital’, which in turn may increase their economic, social and cultural capital. Each group made reasonable decisions about obtaining food. Whether it was a SNAP/Food Stamp exchange or using coupons, the groups used what resources they had to increase their food capital. As a scholar, it has been exciting to see my empirical findings interlace with, and bring to life the work of Bourdieu, but I would argue that this theoretical implication also has significant practical meaning as well. When it comes to food, understanding the breadth of strategies or the economy of practices used to get food can lead to helping more vulnerable groups secure the healthy affordable foods they deserve.
Bourdieu's concept of culture provided the theoretical rationale for my study and also has direct implications regarding food. As discussed, culture for Bourdieu is an embodied concept consisting of observable activities and practices in our day-to-day lives. Among these are tastes in things like food and eating. Without his conceptual and operational understanding of culture, my work would not have been possible, however, I would urge other sociologists studying food to use and look specifically at 'food cultural habitus.' Because food plays such a significant role in our everyday lives, it seems logical that future research should focus explicitly on everyday food practices or varying types of food habitus present in our society.

The last theoretical implication of my study concerns the social reproduction of inequality. Conceptually, I understand Bourdieu’s theories of inequality stemming from our day-to-day cultural habitus and behaviors, which are learned from the family experiences and the socio-economic environment one grows up in. When it comes to food however, I struggle with truly grasping its meaning. As I have stated throughout this dissertation, it is clear that the people in my study have food hardships based on their economic capital. However, when looking at the knowledge each group has about food when controlling for income, there is a wide spectrum of food knowhow among the three groups in my study; Bourdieu’s theories do not directly address or explain this.

While I did not set out to study class reproduction per se, the variation in everyday food practices among the groups in my study raised questions about inequality. Could there be such a phenomenon as 'the reproduction of food inequality'? I would argue, yes. Perhaps a concept with the same mechanism Bourdieu wrote about with regards to the reproduction of inequality (i.e. everyday distinctions learned from our
social class background, reproduces the social class structure), but looking specifically at food. For example, if the refugees maintain the integrity of their food culture in future generations, then the reproduction of food inequality may persist among the rural and homeless groups but not for the refugees. Or does the refugee’s food knowledge offer a greater chance at upward mobilization in comparison to the other groups? Thus, if this group can grow food and exchange their knowledge of growing food into other forms of capital, then perhaps this offers a greater chance of increasing their economic, social, and cultural capital. While I don’t have the answers to these questions now, at the very least I can say that the variations in food practices among the groups in my study complicates Bourdieu’s original theories about the reproduction of inequality when looking specifically at food.

**Direction of Future Research: A Participatory Health Perspective**

If I ever question the importance of researching the everyday food practices of lower-income groups, I simply return to the devastating status of our nation’s public health. Currently, more than 47 million Americans are receiving SNAP/Food Stamps (USDA 2013), costing approximately $47.6 billion dollars per year (USDA 2013). Additionally, the latest obesity data suggest that one-third of American adults (35.7%) are obese along with 17% of children (CDC 2012). I strongly believe that if there was ever a time to invest economic, social, and cultural capital into a problem, the time is now, and the problem is food. Combating our nation’s food problems is going to take innovative research, which is why I propose future research that fits within a participatory health research paradigm.
To promote health, participatory health research (PHR) is a way for those most affected by health problems “to influence how these problems are addressed in society” (ICPHR 2013: 3). Public health researchers Syme and Ritterman (2009) argue that the best health interventions are those that invite the people affected by a particular problem to participate. Thus, the best health promotion strategies are those that engage the target populations most affected by negative health consequences. Therefore, I would recommend that future research seeking to understand more about food, culture, and health implement a PHR component.

For example, one possible future research project could be to adapt the methodology used in this dissertation to other low-income groups, with a focus on participant engagement. This would allow further documentation of the day-to-day food behaviors among other class fractions (i.e. senior populations, single mothers, other geographic areas), while simultaneously investigating what solution based interventions those struggling with food insecurity might suggest. Like the class fractions in my study, there is little known about the day-to-day food practices of these groups and the challenges they are facing. Documenting the ‘food ways’ of these groups, in addition to the ways in which they see change happening, could be used to better inform the various organizations serving them.

In addition to looking at other low-income groups, it would also be useful to examine everyday food practices among groups of other social classes, again, moving from public food venues (i.e. higher-income cooking classes and community gardens) to private interviews and home observations. As I discussed in the literature review, there are studies that explore the degree to which various social classes are inline with dietary
guidelines, but few that actually observe the everyday food practices of these groups. Furthermore, with regards to public health, we know that the obesity epidemic is not social class exclusive; the disease affects people from every socioeconomic status, again highlighting the potential for participatory health research among middle and high social class groups.

Next, I propose conducting an evaluation study of the Cooking Matters™ class, which also fits with a participatory health research paradigm. During my time attending the low-income classes it became clear that cooking classes for those at risk of food hardship could be a way to reduce the number of individuals and families facing food insecurity. The objective of the Cooking Matters™ curriculum is to teach students how to cook nutritious and tasty meals on a budget. Furthermore, as previously noted, a research team evaluated the effectiveness of such a program and found that the classes do result in behavior changes (Swindle, Susan & Auld 2007). Therefore, one possible direction for future research is to again evaluate the effectiveness of cooking classes as a function of variables including age, race, gender, and geographic location, but also include a means for the participants to actively respond to, and influence the design of the class.

Lastly, I would propose a study that solicits the help of SNAP/Food Stamp participants to examine what is being purchased, what is working, and what is not working from the perspective of those most closely involved with the program. Interestingly, in 2012, Luke Rasiak, a reporter from the Washington Times, wrote a story about Food Stamps, titled “Top Secret: $80B a Year for Food Stamps, but Feds Won’t Reveal What’s Purchased.” Rasiak explains how he tried to determine how Food Stamp
money is spent - what food items are being bought with Food Stamps? He however, was not able to access any data detailing the food items purchased on SNAP/Food Stamps.

Initially, after reading the Washington Times piece, I too thought full transparency of how Food Stamps dollars are spent could lead to reform. After a more thoughtful consideration of such a research project, and revisiting one of the theoretical tenets of my own work, I fear that the approach could result in unintended consequences, further condemning the very population food assistance programs seek to help. Therefore, perhaps the answer is not in a large-scale report that reveals that many SNAP/Food Stamp participants are purchasing cheap, processed, surgery foods, but rather a study that involves those enrolled in the program to find out what is purchased and why.

Previously, I discussed ‘food habitus’, or the taken-for-granted food knowledge we acquire from our family experiences and social class backgrounds. In a way, many of our food habits are not part of our cultural memory, thus, people purchase certain items on Food Stamps because that is what their parents did, it what is known, and feels comfortable. Exposing Food Stamp purchasing behavior, without the involvement of the SNAP/Food Stamps participants, could make an already suspicious general public uneasy with where and how federal food aid is being spent, further perpetuating the stereotypes of the ‘poor diets of the poor’ (NYT 2009). As my study has shown, the assumption that having a limited income means having a poor diet is simply not true in all cases. I do believe however, a study on what is purchased on Food Stamps would show a large percentage of low-income groups are purchasing inexpensive, processed food with low nutritional density. But these decisions are linked to cultural issues, which influence food
choices versus individual agency alone, and therefore, within a participatory health research paradigm, it would be more useful and powerful to involve those in the SNAP/Food Stamps.

Upon entering this study, the idea of systematically understanding culture remained elusive. However, after conducting this work I not only feel it is possible to examine the food culture of low-income groups, but that it is imperative to mitigate undesirable trends related to food. The findings from the rural cooking class, homeless shelter, and refugee community garden I studied have great implications for the American food system. In comparing the three groups, I can conclude that those with relatively similar incomes vary drastically in their everyday food practices. My findings suggest culture plays a significant role in food security. This research indicates that while income is very important, and individuals and families without a livable wage or reliable source of money face the threat of not having enough food, there is more to the problem than economic capital; thus, perhaps it is not simply an economic deprivation that leads to food insecurity, but a cultural one as well.


APPENDICES
### APPENDIX A

**SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWEE CHARACTERISTICS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>SNAP/FA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Separated</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>$440/5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
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<td>HS</td>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>~$200/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betsy</td>
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<td>HS</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>$210/4</td>
</tr>
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<td>Part-time</td>
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<td>Part-time</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>$200/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Part-time</td>
<td>$201/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Part-time</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Refugee</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Part-Time</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>$524/3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mindu</td>
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<td>Employed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonam</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>&gt;HS</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>$200/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

GUIDING QUESTIONS

A. Demographics
  o What is your date of birth?
  o Where were you born?
  o Are you married?
  o How many people live in your household? How many children (under the age of 18)? How many people over the age of 65?
  o Are you currently employed? What do you do?
  o Are there other sources of income? For example, part-time work or any other forms of food assistance?
  o How far do you travel to get your food?

B. Food Security
  o Have you ever forgone a meal so your children/someone other than yourself could eat?
  o If you have ever experienced food shortage, what did you do?
  o How long have you struggled with access to food?
  o Do you like the foods you get from the Food Bank/community kitchen/pantry?
  o How often have you needed any kind of food assistance in your life?
  o Within the past 12 months have you worried whether your food would run out before you got more money/assistance?  
  o How do you feel about getting food assistance?

C. Structural Change
  o In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it to get food you consider to be healthy?
  o If you were president for a day, what would you change in order to make getting food easier/help with food insecurity?
  o What is one thing you want people to know about being in food programs and your experiences with getting food?
  o What is the single most important thing that would help you improve your or your family’s diet and nutrition?

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4 Adapted from the 18-item Household Food Security Survey (CPS)
Introduction

Welcome to Cooking Matters for Families

Thank you for volunteering to share your strength with families in need. In this course, you will engage low-income parents and children in a series of participatory cooking classes designed to empower them to work together to get the most nutrition out of their limited budgets.

Cooking Matters for Families is one of six courses offered by Share Our Strength’s Cooking Matters™, a nutrition education program created to connect chefs and nutritionists with families who can benefit from their expertise.

Background

Share Our Strength’s Cooking Matters™ empowers families at risk of hunger with the skills, knowledge and confidence to make healthy and affordable meals. With the help of volunteer culinary and nutrition experts, course participants learn how to select nutritious and low-cost ingredients and prepare them in ways that provide the best nourishment possible to their families. Cooking Matters is nationally sponsored by the ConAgra Foods® Foundation and generously supported by the Walmart Foundation.

Each of the Cooking Matters curricula uses the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPyramid as the foundation for basic nutrition guidelines, then builds upon these ideas using interactive lessons to teach cooking, food safety, and food resource management.

Evaluation results show that volunteer efforts make a lasting impact, and that Cooking Matters graduates continue to practice the improved eating habits, cooking techniques, and food resource management skills they learned in class.

In addition to the Cooking Matters for Families curriculum for parents and children, Cooking Matters offers the following courses:

- Cooking Matters for Adults
- Cooking Matters for Child Care Professionals
- Cooking Matters for Kids
- Cooking Matters for Teens
- Cooking Matters for Young Parents

Your commitment to Cooking Matters and the families it serves contributes to Share Our Strength’s priority work to end childhood hunger in the United States. Share Our Strength® is the leading national organization working to make sure no kid in America grows up hungry. We weave together a net of community groups, activists, and food programs to catch children at risk of hunger and ensure that they have nutritious food where they live, learn, and play.

Please visit www.strengthen.org to learn about other ways that you can share your strength.

Cooking Matters Guiding Principles

Cooking Matters was created and continues to be offered in accordance with these principles:

1. The negative health and economic effects of hunger and poor diet can be avoided if families know how to shop for and prepare healthy, low-cost meals.

2. Chefs are valued instructors because of their expertise in food preparation and budgeting as well as their creativity and energy.

3. Food is to be enjoyed. Those living on a low income deserve to enjoy their food as well — and need to know how to create food that is delicious, satisfying, and healthy.

4. Cooking and eating meals as a family is an important social activity.

5. Volunteering, or sharing our strengths, is a way to create community wealth.
Cooking Matters’ Recipe Guidelines

Cooking Matters for Families is designed to encourage participants to prepare healthy, low-cost meals and snacks at home. The recipes included in the book, most of which were written by Cooking Matters chefs, were chosen for their popularity with participants and suitability to the program.

Discuss with your Cooking Matters coordinator the possibility of using your own recipes in class. If you do write your own recipes for some or all of the lessons, be sure to consider participants’ cooking skills, budgetary constraints, and access to ingredients.

Please follow the guidelines below carefully. Submit your recipes to your Cooking Matters coordinator when requested so that the coordinator can purchase ingredients and plan to bring the proper materials.

1. Recipes must be low-cost. Remember that the Cooking Matters audience is low-income. Avoid using expensive ingredients that participants may not have access to or cannot afford. A good rule of thumb is that recipes should not cost more than $1.40 per serving. This may disqualify ingredients, including some fish, many fresh herbs, and some uncommon or out-of-season fruits and vegetables.

2. Ingredients should be accessible to participants. When developing your recipe, keep in mind where people shop. If an ingredient is generally not found in an inner-city supermarket, it may not be a good choice — or you’ll need to offer a more common ingredient as a substitute.

3. Recipes should be tasty and nutritious. Keep the Cooking Matters nutrition messages in mind as you create menus for class. For example:
   - Vary the forms, types, and colors of fruits and vegetables.
   - Substitute whole grains for enriched when possible.
   - Use low-fat or fat-free versions of dairy products.
   - Flavor with spices and herbs instead of heavy sauces and salt.
   - Bake, grill, or steam instead of frying.
   - Use canola oil or olive oil instead of margarine.

4. Try to use nonperishable food items. Ingredients such as fat-free powdered milk, canned or dried beans, grains, peanut butter, and canned vegetables and fruit are good because they have longer shelf lives. These foods are often included in emergency food boxes, or are allowable in the Women, Infants, and Children food assistance program.

5. Use raw ingredients instead of preprocessed foods. For example, use whole carrots instead of baby carrots, block cheese instead of grated cheese, and whole broccoli instead of prepackaged. Convenience foods usually have a higher unit price than the raw forms.

6. Limit the use of special equipment. Many households don’t have blenders, food processors, ice cream makers, or other specialized equipment.

7. Recipes should be simple and explained clearly. Write the instructions in short, succinct, numbered steps. Use the recipes in this book as a guide to ensure that the recipe is written at an appropriate level for participants and follows general standards set forth by Share Our Strength.

8. Clearly mark kid-friendly recipe steps. Cooking Matters for Families seeks to encourage parents and children to work as a team in the kitchen. Choose recipes that are appropriate for involving kids, and highlight recipe steps that kids can do on their own or with minimal supervision.
Lesson 2

Activity: Name That Food

**Estimated Time:** 20 minutes

**Materials:**
- 6-8 foods that may look or taste unfamiliar to kids — fruits, vegetables, and whole grains only
- Dips or sauces — yogurt dip, hummus, etc.
- Bowls for each food and any dips
- Toothpicks
- Serving spoons
- Pens or pencils
- Index cards, one for each food
- Small stickers

**Handouts:**
- Taste Test: Name That Food Worksheet, page 12

**In Advance**

1. Purchase 6-8 fruits, vegetables, and whole grains that may look or taste unfamiliar to kids (e.g., squashes, mango, whole wheat pita). Choose fruits and vegetables of various forms.
2. Cut each food into bite-size pieces and place in separate bowls.
3. Arrange the bowls on a front table, with a blank index card placed in front of each. Display the whole form of each food, so that kids can see what it looked like before it was sliced or packaged.
4. Set out bowls of dips or sauces you will offer with the food samples, along with serving spoons for each bowl.
5. Set out toothpicks by each bowl for kids to use as they sample.

**TIP:** If time is an issue, instead of allowing kids to pick up their own sample with a toothpick, plate the bite-sized pieces for them. Then, ask them as a group to guess which whole form matches each sample. After they taste everything, invite them to place their sticker on the index card in front of the whole form of their favorite food tasted.

**In Class**

1. Refer to the Taste Test: Name That Food worksheet.
2. Hold up each whole food and ask kids to name the item. Have them write the correct name on their worksheet.
3. Invite kids to come up and more closely examine the whole foods one at a time. Ask them to write down what they notice about the color and shape of each on their handout.
4. Invite kids to pick up a sample of each food with a toothpick. As they try each sample, ask them to write down what they notice about the texture and to circle if they like it. Encourage them to circle "I'll Try Again Later" if the food was not appealing to them today. Repeat this process for each of the foods.
5. Give each child a sticker and have them place it on the index card in front of their favorite of the foods they tried today.
6. Ask kids to share why they liked certain foods over others and to point out what ones were new for them. Explain that not everyone will like all foods, but it is important to give new foods a try — you never know what you might like! Point out that sometimes you need to try new foods more than once to get used to the taste and decide if you like it. People's tastes also change over time: next year you might like a food that you didn't like today.
7. Remind them of last week's lesson: that we need to eat a variety of healthy foods to be sure our bodies get the vitamins, minerals, and nutrients we need to grow and be healthy and strong.

**TIP:** If you have a separate conversation, implement this activity away from where they are meeting, on an opposite side of the classroom or in an adjoining room.

**TIP:** Consider using the favorite food as the secret ingredient in the Week 6 cooking activity, or include it in another class recipe.

1-8 Instructor Guide • Cooking Matters for Families ©2013 SHARE OUR STRENGTH, WWW.STRENGTH.ORG COOKING MATTERS
Turkey Tacos
Chef John Haddock • Baltimore, Md.
Serves 8, 2 tacos per serving

**Ingredients**
- 1 (15 1/2 ounce) can pinto beans
- Non-stick cooking spray
- 1 pound ground turkey
- 1 cup tomato juice, no salt added
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste, no salt added
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 8 ounces low fat cheddar cheese
- 1/2 medium head of lettuce
- 2 large tomatoes
- 16 taco shells

**Nutrition Facts**

**Directions**
1. Drain and rinse pinto beans well, using a colander.
2. Coat a large frying pan with non-stick cooking spray and brown turkey over medium-high heat.
3. Measure and add pinto beans, tomato juice, tomato paste, chili powder, garlic powder, oregano, salt, and black pepper to the frying pan. Stir well, using a long-handled spoon.
4. Reduce heat to medium and cook until thickened, about 20 minutes.
5. Grate cheddar cheese.
6. Rinse lettuce and tomatoes. Tear the lettuce into bite-sized pieces.
7. Core and dice tomatoes.
8. Place 2 Tablespoons of the cooked meat mixture into each taco shell. Sprinkle with 1 Tablespoon of grated cheese so that it melts onto the meat.
9. Measure and top each taco with 1 Tablespoon shredded lettuce and 1 Tablespoon diced tomatoes.

**Chef's Notes**
- Use any of your favorite sautéed vegetables, low-fat sour cream, hot sauce, or salsa to top the tacos.
- Substitute any type of cooked beans for the pinto beans.
- If tomatoes are not in season, use canned tomatoes without added salt.
- Try using whole wheat tortillas in place of the taco shells, or serve over rice or corn bread.
Chocolate Cake
Serves 16, 2-inch-square piece per serving

Ingredients
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/4 cup cocoa powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
5 Tablespoons canola oil
1 Tablespoon white or cider vinegar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup cold water
Non-stick cooking spray

Special Materials
8-inch square pan

Directions
Kids help with the steps marked with the "little helping hand!"
1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Measure and mix flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, sugar, and salt in a large mixing bowl. Use a fork or whisk to break up any lumps and blend together.
3. Measure and mix oil, vinegar, vanilla, and water in a separate, medium mixing bowl. Blend using a fork or whisk.
4. Add wet ingredients to dry ingredients.
5. Mix until just combined. Do not overmix. Batter will be thin.
6. Coat an 8-inch square pan with non-stick cooking spray. Pour batter into greased pan.
7. Bake 30-40 minutes on middle rack of oven, until the center is firm and a toothpick inserted and removed comes out clean.

Notes
- If doubling the recipe, use 2 (8-inch) pans. This cake does not work well in a 9x13-inch pan.
- To make 12 cupcakes, coat muffin-pan cups with non-stick cooking spray or line with paper liners, and adjust cooking time down to 20-25 minutes or until toothpick placed in the center comes out clean.
- Substitute whole wheat flour for half of the all-purpose flour, if possible.
- Try topping with low-fat vanilla frozen yogurt, or with your favorite fresh or canned fruits.
- For a sweeter cake, use 1 cup of sugar instead of 3/4 cup.

Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 2-inch square piece (53g)
Servings per Recipe 16

Amount Per Serving
Calories 140 Calories from Fat 50
% Daily Values
Total Fat 6g 9%
Saturated Fat 1g 5%
Trans Fat 0g
Cholesterol 0mg 0%
Sodium 200mg 8%
Total Carbohydrate 21g 7%
Dietary Fiber 1g 4%
Sugars 10g
Protein 2g

Vitamin A 0%  Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0%  Iron 4%

Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.
APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

University of New Hampshire
Research Integrity Services, Service Building
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

26-May-2011

Redman, Amy L.
Sociology, Horton Hall
185A High Street
Exeter, NH 03833

IRB #: 5177
Study: The Culture of Everyday Food Practices in Low-Income Families
Approval Date: 24-May-2011

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects. (This document is also available at http://unh.edu/research/irb-application-resources.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie Simpson
Director

cc: File
Dillon, Michele