

Negotiating 'Gastro-anomie': Exploring the Relationship Between Food, the Body &
Identity in Halifax, Nova Scotia

by

Ashley N. MacDonald

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
April 2014

© Copyright by Ashley N. MacDonald, 2014

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature	5
2.1 Food, culture, identity and the “Omnivore’s Paradox”	6
2.2 Food, identity & class	8
2.3 The ills of an alienating food economy	11
2.4 Food normlessness? Exploring the possibility of ‘gastro-anomie’	13
2.5 Food, taste and the body	16
2.6 Conclusions	18
Chapter 3: Situating the Research – Halifax, Nova Scotia	21
3.1 The Nova Scotian economy	21
3.2 Food Security & Nova Scotia	22
3.3 Tradition, Food and Nova Scotia	23
3.4 Food, politics and farming in Nova Scotia	25
3.5 Halifax & Urban Food Systems	27
3.6 Focus of Research: Gastro-anomie and Halifax	28
Chapter 4: Methods	31
4.1 Food-centered life histories	31
4.2 Semi-structured interviews	32
4.3 Participant recruitment	32
4.4 Data Analysis	35
4.5 Ethical Considerations	35
4.6 Study Limitations	36
4.7 Conclusions	36

<u>Chapter 5: Research Findings - Reconnecting with Food Through ‘Mindful Eating’ and ‘Treating the Body Right’</u>	38
<u>5.1 Mindful Eating and the Body</u>	38
<u>5.2 Corporatization and the Global Food Economy</u>	41
<u>5.3 Food Skills and Knowledge</u>	43
<u>5.4 Ethical Consumption and Halifax</u>	46
<u>5.5 Traditional Food, Nostalgia and Family Life</u>	48
<u>5.6 Conclusions</u>	51
<u>Chapter 6: Contesting ‘Gastro-anomie’ – Food-based Identities in the Face of an Alienating Food Economy</u>	52
<u>6.1 Identifying the Ills of a Global Food Economy</u>	52
<u>6.2 Challenging the Global Food Economy: Reconnecting with Food</u>	54
<u>6.3 Food, Meanings and the Self</u>	58
<u>6.4 Conclusions</u>	63
<u>Chapter 7: Conclusion</u>	65
<u>7.1 Recommendations for Future Research</u>	66
<u>7.2 Concluding Remarks</u>	67
<u>References</u>	69
<u>Appendix I: Interview Guide</u>	73
<u>Appendix II: Recruitment Letter</u>	74
<u>Appendix III: Informed Consent Form</u>	75
<u>Appendix IV: Details of Participants</u>	79

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between food and identity. Drawing on the concept of ‘gastro-anomie’, or ‘food normlessness’, it asks how individuals’ make sense of food and eating in the context of an increasingly globalised and complex food economy. Through a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a small number of individuals living in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the thesis outlines participants’ everyday attitudes toward food and eating practices. It concludes that individuals actively seek out and ultimately find meaning through their food consumption practices. Consciously aware of the problems associated with the global food economy, the participants in this study used their food choices as a way to reflexively carve out their identities. Their bodies provided a powerful medium through which they engaged in these efforts.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my research participants for their support by taking the time to talk with me and share their personal experiences of food in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Without their invaluable insight, this research as it unfolded would not have taken place and I am eternally grateful for the contributions of each and every participant in this project.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Dr. Fiona Martin for her motivation throughout this project, and for her indispensable advice and revisions through the years. I would also like to thank Dr. Martha Radice and Dr. Kregg Hetherington for their thoughtful feedback and support for my research.

This research was also made possible by a funding grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to my friends and family who provided me with encouragement and support throughout this project.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis explores the ways in which people living in Nova Scotia think and talk about the meaning of food and the ways that they articulate this meaning to ‘locate’ themselves in wider social and cultural contexts. Based on my interest in how people make choices about what to eat and eating as an identity practice, the thesis engages with contemporary sociological and anthropological research on food, food politics, and identity. As I demonstrate, there are two often intertwining threads in this literature: that the ways in which people relate to food are mediated through a global, industrial food economy that results in food alienation or what is sometimes evocatively referred to as ‘gastro-anomie’ (Fischler, 1988); and that food is strongly connected to identity, memory and meaning-making. This literature provides the lens through which I examine attitudes toward food and everyday eating practices among people living in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The thesis explores how far these attitudes and practices can be described and explained in terms of alienation and how these attitudes and practices, in turn, have profound effects on participants’ identities.

Several contemporary studies explore the various effects that the global, industrial food economy has had on traditional food economies; a quick overview of two of these studies provides a useful introduction to the key themes investigated further in my research. Counihan (2010) and Tye (2010) explore the food practices of women in contemporary Antonito, Colorado and 1960s rural Nova Scotia, respectively. Although these two groups differ in terms of location, climate, culture, class, economic and other social structures, both studies demonstrate that food is inextricably linked to place and identity, and deeply entrenched in family, gender and social relationships. Counihan

(2010) examines the shifting diet of the Antonito community, highlighting tensions between traditional cultural values and the contemporary globalized food economy. She argues that the mere consumption of global, industrialized foods threatens the distinct cultural identity of the Mexicana-Hispanic women she spoke to. She noticed that feelings of alienation from traditional foods were particularly evident for younger generations living in this community, who preferred American ‘fast food’ and had become unfamiliar with the foods that were part of their cultural heritage. Counihan’s study reveals that the food industry can literally alter taste and preferences for certain foods and in so doing, undermine particular cultural groups’ cultural and economic autonomy.

Tye similarly argues that food production in rural Nova Scotia during the 1960s, where she was raised, helped to shape a complex web of identities, such as wife, church lady, teacher, with which her mother identified. Tye (2010) explores how her mother’s everyday food and meal preparation developed from the cultural traditions in Maritime Canada and positioned her in terms of class, socio-economic status and occupation. Tye reflects on the cultural conventions and social restrictions women who lived during this particular time and place faced. She suggests that women of her own generation have rejected these identities in part by refusing specifically to cook in the same ways, thus ceasing to reproduce their ancestors’ recipes. Tye herself rarely uses the index cards in her mother’s recipe box, which she inherited, choosing to cook or bake “healthier” options for her family. Tye points out that the sugar-laden recipes that were popular in 1950s and 1960s rural Nova Scotia do not fit with contemporary ideas about of what it means to be a good cook and a good mother.

Both Counihan and Tye reflect that there has been a shift in food patterns in the home, and this has been contributed to by changing values, and the role, of meals and time, space and division of labour. At the heart of both of these investigations lies an interest in how individuals negotiate of a possibly alienating food economy and how they actively make meaning of their food choices. Both studies also explore the role that food plays in people's lives and in their communities. They demonstrate that food can be produced and consumed as both an obligation and an expression of resistance, and that that the meanings associated with food are fluid, contested and dependent on the social context in question. Both also exemplify 'gastro-anomie' (Fischler, 1988), which argues that individuals today experience a type of anomie related to food (i.e. a lack of social cohesion or group solidarity around food choices, resulting in an anonymity of sorts), resulting in individuals who are unable to construct an identity through food. Instead, individuals make individualized food choices, as youth in Antonito frequenting McDonald's do, highlighting a rise in individuality and a decline in group identity.

This thesis is similarly motivated by an interest in how individuals think about, talk about and engage in food practices within a particular geographic and cultural location. Its aim is to provide insight into how individuals living in contemporary Nova Scotian society grapple with the various issues that surround food and how this shapes their identities. Employing a qualitative design, this thesis uses a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a small number of people to explore the ways in which individuals experience food in a particular context and what these everyday experiences can tell us about the relationship between food and identity within a possibly alienating food economy. As well, I will argue that micro-level and everyday experiences of food

are crucial for a better understanding of food and identity in the context of the contemporary global food economy.

Through an overview of key ideas in contemporary sociological and anthropological research on food, identity and food alienation, the next chapter provides the theoretical framework for my study. This chapter and the one that follows, on the unique demographics and structural features of Nova Scotia, suggest that despite a general increased reliance on a globalized food industrial system, particular cultural and traditional dynamics are likely to continue to shape food choices in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The following chapter, Chapter 4, will outline the study's central research questions and describe the research methods used for this study. Chapters 5 and 6 will summarize my research findings and provide an analysis of what if any influence 'gastro-anomie' is currently having in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and what this can tell us about the relationship between food and identity. Ultimately, this study suggests that individuals actually search for – and find – meanings in their food and food choices, and that these choices are used to reflexively carve out their identities.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Most individuals in 'western' societies live lives removed, quite literally, from the origins of the food that they eat. According to a report by Nova Scotia's Ecology Action Centre, it is estimated that the average food product in Nova Scotia travels 8,000 km from the place of production to the place of consumption. The food economy has become global in nature, with a far greater amount of food— in terms of both quantity and options, from a multitude of locales— to choose from now than ever before. The success of films such as *Fast Food Nation* (2006) and *Food, Inc* (2008) and books like Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) speaks to a growing public concern about the impact of the globalization and industrialization of the food economy. Indeed, people living in 'western' societies appear to be increasingly anxious about the origins of their food, judging from the prevalence of these books and others in popular culture. This anxiety, in turn, appears to be having a profound effect on everyday eating practices and attitudes toward food as demonstrated by the pervasive discourse in the popular media, where often consumers are often portrayed as anxious, confused and sometimes even ignorant.

Historically, the study of food has been left to biomedicine and has therefore often ignored the role of culture. Food has long been a key focus of anthropology and sociology -- this has had lasting effects, namely in terms of the development of food policy that frames individuals as 'empty vessels' simply waiting to be filled with the correct knowledge about which foods to select (Lang, Barling and Caraher, 2009). In contrast, social scientists recognize that food is a key component and expression of both

cultural and individual identity. Social scientific research on the relationship between food and identity provides a particularly useful set of ideas with which to explore everyday attitudes toward food in a globalized and industrialized food economy.

This chapter provides an overview of the primary theorists that have informed sociological and anthropological approaches to food. I focus on two key arguments within this literature: that food is strongly connected to identity, memory and meaning-making and that people's relationships with food are increasingly mediated through a global, industrial food economy. Focusing on the work of Claude Fischler and Pierre Bourdieu, the chapter demonstrates both that eating practices ground us in communities, cultural groups and social classes and that this 'grounding' has changed in profound ways in the wake of a changing food system. I argue that more research on embodied and micro-level, or everyday, experiences of food and eating is necessary to better understand these changes, and to gain new insight into the relationship between food and identity in the contemporary social world.

2.1 Food, culture, identity and the “Omnivore's Paradox”

If we do not know what we eat, how can we know who we are? This is a question posed by anthropologist Claude Fischler (1988), whose work highlights the connection between identity and the consumption of food. Fischler argues that food, quite literally, “transforms nutritional raw materials from the state of Nature to the state of Culture” (1988:1); this refers to the process by which something as seemingly as natural as food actually has significant social meanings, and an idea that originally been explored by Levi-Strauss' culinary triangle (1966). Using an integrative approach in his analysis—

one that incorporates both biological and social aspects of human beings— Fischler argues that there are two key factors that shape our relationship to food. The first is the ‘omnivore’s paradox’, which refers to the basic fact that the human race is omnivorous (our diet is typically not limited to a strict few key foods but is extremely varied) which can result in an overwhelming quandary – if we can eat essentially everything, which of these things should we actually eat? The second principle looks at the answer to this question, the ‘incorporation principle’, which refers to just what lies behind our decisions on which foods to consume (for instance, which ‘food rules’ do we follow). The omnivorous nature of humans, in other words, renders how and what foods we consume social and cultural issues. What we eat is not only laden with meaning but also plays a key role in shaping our identity and our biological bodies.

Mintz (1996) adds to these insights that consuming food is a regular, even mundane, element of human life; as such, it is a sphere of activity in which choice is presented as given. At the same time, this sphere of activity connects the tangible world of things to the abstract world of ideas through a physical action, and thus becomes a way for situating the self in relation to the rest of the world. Mintz (1996) argues that food takes on particular meanings under capitalism. In pre-capitalist, traditional social systems, individuals defined themselves through their interactions with others who occupied the same social system or space. The development of modern capitalism brought about a much more depersonalized public sphere, which compels individuals to turn to other ways of locating themselves, including their consumption practices (Mintz,

1996; see also Campbell, 1987; de Neeve, Luetchford & Pratt, 2008). As such, the act of choosing one's food can have profound meaning for how one wishes to be seen in society, and how one is seen -- essentially, individuals choose a niche amount of food to put forth an identity.

2.2 Food, identity & class

The work of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly the concept of *habitus*, helps to conceptualize the dual social (e.g. cultural symbol) and biological (e.g. nutritional need) roles that food plays in our lives. Bourdieu (1984) focuses much of his work on the social production of class, and on consumption as a principal operator of class differentiation. He states that the relationship between the social capacity to create classifications and practices and the ability to differentiate and understand these classifications and practices defines the *habitus*. One's *habitus* is principally demonstrated in part through matters of taste. Bourdieu (1989) argues that the social production of objects or practices manifests into one's taste; social life essentially operates through particular symbols or signs that serve to distinguish between, for example, 'good' and 'bad' food, or 'natural' and 'unnatural' food. These meanings are constantly in motion, constantly reproducing distinctions that serve to distinguish between 'Us' and 'Them'.

Several scholars argue, therefore, that purchasing power is not the only determinant of food choices; rather the values and beliefs embedded in these transactions are key to understanding the relationship between food and identity (Bourdieu, 1989; Fischler, 1988; Miller, 2008; Roseberry, 1996; Mintz, 1996). In a similar vein, Wilk (2001:249) argues that in a capitalist economy, signs of status that are unobtainable

through money are needed to demonstrate one's class and social differentiations, such as 'breeding' and 'refinement'. It is through the development of the capitalist economy that we have seen – as both Bourdieu and Wilk argue – an increase in the significance of cultural capital. Expanding on Bourdieu, Wilk (2001) argues that notions of morality and righteousness have particularly informed the development of 'ways of knowing' and how to behave in accordance with one's identity. This means that any discussion of food choices that uses moralistic terms is likely to be evidence of class conflict and/or social differentiation (for example, when a member of an upper socioeconomic group defines the food choices of the poor as inferior). Wilk (2001) argues that objects often have moral significance to those who consume them; and that consumers make distinctions about which forms of consumption that are 'bad' or 'good', for example.

Looking at food choices as leverage points to affirm one's values and beliefs may be particularly helpful in understanding how individuals experience, and possibly negotiate, gastro-anomie. To demonstrate this, let's take a look at the recent emergence of 'ethical consumption' practices. Food is increasingly being used to assert membership to moral and ethical frameworks, such as vegetarianism as part of an animal rights ethical framework (Dombos, 2008; Kwan & Roth, 2004). When an individual purchases fair trade or specialty coffee, for example, she or he aligns her or himself with a particular lifestyle, associated with a particular moral code (Roseberry, 1996; Wilk, 2001).

Bourdieu's work has been criticized for inadequately addressing the more blurred class boundaries in post-modern societies, where we are less likely to see strict distinctions between class-based identities (Southerton, 2001). Increased access to mass-produced goods and an expanded consumer market has provided individuals with a myriad of 'lifestyle choices'. As Giddens (1991) argues, these individual lifestyle choices, or identity projects, give individuals a way to navigate the complex and confusing terrain that is characteristic of a post-modern society. Rather than being ascribed and based on class, identity has become more 'fluid'; for Giddens, we are more likely to define ourselves and be defined via "do-it-yourself" life biographies (Southerton, 2001; Beagan et al., 2010, Dixon & Banwell, 2004). Lacking clearly defined traditions, individuals develop these life biographies by being self-aware, reflexive and making everyday conscious choices in line with their own values (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992).

Here, it may be useful to draw on Giddens' theory of the modern self to explain how food and identity operate in a post-modern society. Giddens (1991) argues that modern self is reflexive and consciously carves out its identity in regards to more blurred class boundaries. As he states,

Each of us not only 'has,' but lives a biography reflexively organized in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life. Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question 'How shall I live?' has to be answered in day-to-day decisions (Giddens, 1991: 14).

Although Bourdieu's notion of habitus describes this process as something that plays out somewhat unconsciously, it is likely that the modern self acts out values, morality and class also in a very conscious manner. Beagan, Ritovski-Slijepcevic and Chapman (2010) argue that it is useful to branch these two seemingly conflicting schools of thought together, in order to gain a much more thorough understanding of the micro transactions taking place in ethical consumption. For instance, they argue that there may actually be degrees of reflexivity and *habitus* that co-exist when one constructs a self – that both conscious and unconscious deliberations take place during the process. The following section looks at the conscious deliberations and ethical debates that may occur when an individual must make food choices within a global and industrial food economy.

2.3 The ills of an alienating food economy

Clearly then, food and consumption patterns are topics that are of interest to social scientists and as demonstrated by their work, what we eat is a socially and culturally significant question. Scholarly work in this field characterizes these social meanings as in flux— as lost or in danger of becoming lost— with the advent of a modern and industrialized food system (Belasco, 1990; Mintz, 1996). As I will demonstrate, cultural and global changes have had a powerful impact on traditional relationships with food. Affluent people living in modern western societies have more choice than ever before with regard to food; they must navigate a plethora of food options. What to eat? Where to eat? How much to eat? The various answers to these questions reveal some of the ways in which people's relationships with food are changing.

The increasingly global, industrial food economy appears to have become a significant source of anxiety in 'western' societies. Guthman (2007) reflects on the rising trend of 'what to eat' type books such as Peter Singer's *The Way We Eat: Why our Food Choices Matter* (2006) and Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006), suggesting that their borderline hysterical tone has had a significant effect on public discussion and debate about food. Szabo (2011) raises a similar concern, highlighting the links food journalists and activists have drawn between convenience-food culture and ill health, arguing that this problematic media attention has created an anxiety-ridden food culture.

It is within this context that the industrialized food system has become a symbol of multiple societal ills (Guthman, 2002; Wilk, 2006). As Belasco (1990) points out, the food counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s was a reaction to the general attitudes and values of the mainstream as much as it was to the industrialized food system. Why food has been chosen as the medium of this movement's message could be due to both the significance of food and the immediacy of it in our day-to-day lives (Belasco, 1990; Mintz, 2001). As Mason and Singer state in *Animal Factories*,

The food you consume three or more times daily is your most constant and intimate connection with the environment and the living world around you. If you reflect your concern for them in your food habits, you will be healthier in every way. (*as cited* in Maurer, 2002:188)

This statement illustrates that Singer sees that the symbolic meaning attached to food in our society is something that is no longer value, and that if we look for meaning in our food, this in turn has positive effects for individuals and community health. This close connection between personal and social health is popular in food discourse .

2.4 Food normlessness? Exploring the possibility of 'gastro-anomie'

Fischler's work (1988), specifically his concept of 'gastro-anomie,' explores the effects that a globalized food economy has on the cultural meanings of food. 'Gastro-anomie' refers to the idea that individuals are becoming increasingly disconnected from the origins of their food and therefore the cultural norms surrounding it. Here, norms refer to a social group's food rules (e.g. we eat this type of food, others do not), cultural symbols, and knowledge about how food is produced and how it should be prepared. Individuals today often do not know where their food comes from, are likely to be disenchanted with how this food is produced, and the food they consume, while presented as "natural," is actually produced in an 'unnatural manner' (1988:291). Fischler termed this phenomenon as 'pure consumerism' (1988:280). This concept refers to individuals' consumption of food whose production history is a complete unknown, resulting in a food system that becomes increasingly difficult to navigate. As well, Fischler describes how industrially-produced foods often offer a sensory overload, as they are saturated with chemically-produced 'flavourings'. In other words, individuals experience disconnection with more naturally and traditionally produced foods, even down to the very way that industrially-produced foods taste in comparison to foods in their unaltered state.

A number of more contemporary ethnographic studies have made similar claims about how the industrial food economy has alienated individuals from their food. Based on her extensive research on the Mexicana population in Antonito, Colorado, Counihan

(2009) argues that the increased consumption of global industrialized food threatens this population's unique cultural identity. She notes that Antonito's contemporary youth in particular are less inclined to choose traditional food and are more likely to eat industrialized American food, such as hamburgers and potato chips. This superseding of a local-based system by a global food economy compounds the cultural and economic challenges facing this population. (Counihan describes how the global food economy has also brought about this population's loss of land and water). Traditional societies, therefore, might be particularly threatened by the global food economy as traditional practices and meanings surrounding food can be lost as this economy spreads.

Arguably, the industrialized food system has also resulted in a deskilling or a loss of knowledge in terms of cooking and preparing food. George Ritzer's often cited *The McDonaldization of Society* (1996) explores the deskilling that has resulted from a reorganization of the food economy in western societies, where home cooks increasingly rely on pre-packaged, pre-made meals. Ritzer argues that these meals resemble "no more than a connect-the-dot or painting by numbers" (Ritzer, as cited in Short, 2006:99). This has been argued to have profound effects on the relationship between consumers and food. Jaffe and Gertler (2006) argue that the modern food industry has not only robbed consumers of the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions about high quality, healthy and sustainable food, but also of the very skills needed to prepare these kinds of foods. As they describe, pre-packaged meals are produced to the same strict standards of a meal bought at a McDonald's restaurant: "The consumer can expect a consistent product

that has been engineered to cook, bake, microwave, and taste exactly the same each time” (2006: 144). It is in this context that food has become a “substitutable generic commodity” (Wilk, 2006: 21), something that is mindlessly prepared and consumed.

A number of popular and academic critics, therefore, suggest that industrialist producers have transformed food into a commodity, something devoid of meaning. However, this view has been criticized for overlooking the actual, everyday experience of the global food economy. For example, Short (2006) argues that Ritzer ignores the complex daily work that a home cook engages in has when preparing meals, even when these meals come from a so-called ‘box’. She explains that Ritzer’s ‘deskilling of labour’ argument does not acknowledge the conscious effort that many individuals make, and may very well enjoy, to try out new foods and recipes. For example, many cooks actually seek out new skills that may be different than the traditional idea of cooking by ‘recreating’ a boxed meal, by incorporating cooking techniques or personalizing it to the their own tastes (Short, 2006). As she explains, “[this] challenge driven hobby cook for one can easily be seen as sitting uncomfortably alongside theories of the demise of home cooking” (2006: 100). In other words, Short is pointing out that perhaps food alienation is perhaps not as prevalent as is often assumed.

Similarly, Meah and Watson (2011) argue that food skills are not at all lost but are continuously developed and obtained from a myriad of sources, such as cooking television programs, books, and friends. In their ethnographic study of the ways that

individuals in the United Kingdom prepare food in their day-to-day lives, Meah and Watson found that cooking skills were constantly in flux and were seen at different life trajectories than those of their parents' or grandparents'. For example, one participant in the study described many different points of her life when she did and did not have the time, means or desire to cook a "proper" meal (in contrast to her stay-at-home mother who was able to cook a large meal every day).

While Ritzer (1996), Wilk (2006) and Jaffe and Gertler (2006) have argued that deskilling and a loss of food knowledge are prevalent in contemporary society, others point out that this may not be exclusively the case. It is important to critically examine the 'deskilling' argument, therefore, particularly because it increasingly appears in public debate and the development of food policy. As Meah and Watson (2011) observed, the spread of food-borne illnesses in the UK has been attributed to the problem of "today's generation" who lack proper food knowledge (and so become sick more frequently from ill-kept products at home). Research suggests, however, that if someone relies on ready-made meals, this may not be due to a lack of skill or knowledge but rather a lack of time. Looking more carefully at the individuals' life experiences and/or their life trajectories with respect to food might better illustrate the varied causes and effects of the global food economy.

2.5 Food, taste and the body

Even though our food choices are much more open to negotiation and choice than ever before, these choices continue to make up who we are. Several social scientists have explored this process — the social formation of identity via consumption practices — as

an embodied process (Bourdieu, 1984; Hayes-Conroy, 2010). These thinkers suggest that both embodied and social processes are at work in our taste for certain foods, and that this process shapes our identities in significant ways.

The most famous of these insights is Bourdieu's (1984) argument that distinctions in matters of taste are visceral, that the habitus literally gives us a 'taste' for certain foods. Bourdieu uses the example of working-class men's food choices to illustrate this point. The bodies of working-class-men, according to him, are defined by their physical strength, which in turn, determines what foods these individuals consume. Fish, for example, is not considered suitable for men of the working class; it is seen as too 'light' for those who are defined by their physical strength. Therefore, fish becomes something distasteful to working class men, who instead turn to red meat to fulfill their needs and desires. It is through these very simple distinctions in matters of taste that we come to embody our *habitus*.

Another instructive example of the embodied and social processes at work in our tastes for certain foods can be found in Hayes-Conroy's (2010) ethnographic work on the local food movements in Berkley, California and Nova Scotia. She notes a powerful 'food memory' on the part of her research participants, a memory that she later termed "white bread nostalgia" (2010:738). Here participants' food choices— to eat locally-produced, whole-grain bread while disdaining the likes of 'Wonder Bread', for example— were based on an ethical commitment to alternative food movements. However,

participants occasionally also expressed feelings of a generally positive nostalgia for their childhood experiences of eating industrially-produced, pre-sliced bread. This example illustrates how taste is both figuratively and literally informed by the social world but also quite significantly, illustrates how our tastes are fluid and fluctuating.

Giddens (1991) argues that in addition to being the medium of experiencing food, the body is the vehicle for the reflexive self; here, individuals engage in many body projects that assist the individual by providing a space for which to exert control in the absence of clear and coherent guides to living (see also Shilling, 2003). As Dixon and Banwell point out, “these projects are charged with helping the individual chart a course within the contradictions of the modern economic system: namely, the experience of alienation in production with a promise of meaning in consumption” (2004:121). Shilling (2003:181) notes as well that the body may be seen as the final ‘raw material’ over which the individuals can exert a certain degree of influence, for instance through the food they choose to put into their bodies.

2.6 Conclusions

The relationship between food and identity has been explored in a number of different ways. This literature review demonstrates that consumption practices are more than insignificant, simple transactions, but instead play a key role in the construction of identity. Eating is not only a means of asserting identity; it is also an embodied practice. Through discussing the ways that individuals incorporate certain foods into their bodies, Fischler’s theory of food and identity not only illustrates the social but also the embodied dimensions of eating. As he has emphasized, consuming food takes more into account

than the biological necessity of its incorporation, but it can perhaps be seen as an effort to construct a particular self, which includes a moral or political self (Kwan and Roth, 2004; Atkinson, 1983). As well, in modern societies, it can be argued that the development of one's self is not firmly attached to fixed distinctions but is constantly negotiated and informed by many different social processes, experiences and memories.

Demonstrating how individuals produce 'distinctions' in everyday social transactions, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is a particularly useful way of conceptualizing the fact that food is fundamentally social. An object's symbolic meaning (i.e. whether a food is 'good' or 'bad') serves as a leverage point for developing an identity, which is useful when looking at the identities embedded in food movements. Both Fischler and Bourdieu offer valuable frameworks with which to tease out the broad issues of the relationship between food and identity in light of the modern food system, as consumption can be seen as an exercise of perhaps searching for the lost cultural meanings and norms of food.

Here, navigating a global food economy at times be overwhelming, and paying attention to individuals' body projects is undoubtedly a useful way to unlock the individual experiences of both Fischler's assertion that human beings face an omnivore's paradox and Bourdieu's argument that we use taste to symbolically navigate the social world. In a culture that is especially body-focused, embodiment is another useful framework to consider the ways the self is constructed through consumption choices. As

Shilling states, “To rob the body of its own history and characteristics is to neglect how our embodied being enables us to remake ourselves by remaking the world around us” (2003: 182). If we recall Fischler’s argument, exploring the body in relation to food provides an understanding of just how the self is negotiated and understood in consumption practices.

There is no doubt that the nature of food in a western context has rapidly shifted in just a few generations, but as we have seen, this does not necessarily mean that individuals are participating in this sphere unconsciously. As well, if we are to accept the chilling outlook of gastro-anomie, are we not ignoring the fact that food continues to be both social and cultural? Consumption practices are more than simple transactions with only a trivial meaning behind them; instead, they provide significant insight into the ways in which people construct their sense of self. As such, and as Miller (2008) agrees, individuals express who they are or who they want to be or how they want to be perceived through the objects they choose to consume or own. What is needed to properly understand food, identity and gastro-anomie is more research on the micro-perspectives and everyday embodied experiences of food and, closely related to those, the moral, ethical significance of eating. The following chapter will take a look at the area of where this research takes place, Halifax, Nova Scotia, and at factors likely to influence food and eating in this region. Research that takes the individual experience into account seems necessary given that eating is a private practice, as well as a global and public issue; the choices one makes about what to eat have much broader consequences.

Chapter 3: Situating the Research – Halifax, Nova Scotia

The aim of this chapter is to outline the context of my study, which is the city of Halifax in Nova Scotia, Canada. The chapter begins with a review of general factors likely to shape and influence attitudes toward food in the province, namely the local economy and the relatively strong emphasis on ‘traditional’ food norms in Nova Scotia. I go on to highlight the recent but prevalent public debate and discussion about food and sustainability in the province. I argue that these unique cultural and structural factors make in Halifax, Nova Scotia rich site in which to explore food alienation and the relationship between food and identity.

3.1 The Nova Scotian economy

Nova Scotia is a small, peninsular province with a population of approximately one million (Statistics Canada, 2011). Its per capita GDP in 2010 was \$38, 475, significantly lower than the national average of \$47, 605; overall, GDP growth in Nova Scotia has fallen significantly below the rest of the country’s for the past decade (Nova Scotia Government, 2011). The province’s economy is based on export industries, such as fishing and timber, both of which have declined significantly in the past few decades. In parts of the province agriculture is an important source of economic activity, as is tourism, which accounts for a significant portion of the province’s economy.

Nova Scotia’s economy has been characterized as a low-wage economy, meaning that a large portion of the population holds minimum wage, part-time jobs with no benefits or opportunities for development (‘Can Nova Scotians Afford to Eat Healthy?’,

2010). 14.6% of Nova Scotian households in 2004 reported moderate to severe income-related insecurity, which is well above the national average of 9.2% ('Can Nova Scotians Afford to Eat Healthy?', 2010). In 2009, 16.1% of the working population in Nova Scotia earned at or near minimum wages. Of these individuals, the majority are under 25 years of age and relatively few are the primary breadwinners, however, women are over-represented in this group ('Can Nova Scotians Afford to Eat Healthy?', 2010). In more recent years, Nova Scotia has gradually increased its minimum wage; the last increase in 2013 was to \$10.30 an hour. These increases are generally considered inadequate, however.

3.2 Food Security & Nova Scotia

A recent report of research carried out by the Nova Scotia Food Security Network (2010) – a research group that studies issues of food insecurity in the province on the cost and affordability of a healthy diet in the province demonstrates not only that there has been a significant increase in the price of food in Nova Scotia, but that many Nova Scotian families cannot afford to eat a basic nutritious diet. The monthly cost of a nutritious diet for a Nova Scotian family of four is estimated to be \$725.28, which represents a 35% increase from the cost in 2002 ('Can Nova Scotians Afford to Eat Healthy?', 2010). The authors also found that the cost of a nutritious diet amounted to approximately \$25 more per week in rural than in urban areas of the province, and that access to grocery stores of a particular size had a significant influence on the cost of a household's monthly food bill. The report concluded that households working full time

on a minimum wage in Nova Scotia cannot afford to consistently eat healthy food, demonstrating that Fischler's 'omnivore's paradox' may apply particularly to certain people; some may simply not have the means to make diverse food choices.

The report also found that that people living in these circumstances are likely to experience "food insecurity". The Nova Scotia Food Security Network defines food security as a "situation that exists when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, nutritious, safe, personally acceptable and culturally appropriate foods that are produced, procured and distributed in ways that are environmentally sound, socially just and sustainable" (2008:1). The most immediate threat to food security in N.S. is the affordability of food (Belliveau et al., 2011). With a food insecurity rate of 9.3% in Nova Scotia, which is higher than the national average of 7.7%, many individuals experience food insecurity in the province. These individuals, in turn, are more likely to also experience overall poor health (Nova Scotia Food Security Network, 2008).

3.3 Tradition, Food and Nova Scotia

The findings of the Nova Scotia Food Security Network's study suggest that that there are particular economic structural issues likely to shape people's experiences of food in Nova Scotia, issues that may generate a very anxious relationship to food for some. Another possible influence on people's attitudes toward food in Nova Scotia is the emphasis on tradition—or the relatively strong shared cultural meanings and sense of common heritage—that characterizes the province (Tye, 2010). As Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic and Chapman (2010) found in their ethnographic fieldwork, there is a strong

emphasis on 'traditionalism' in Nova Scotia. Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic and Chapman's study compared Euro-Canadian British Columbians' and Euro-Canadian Nova Scotians' attitudes toward food. The study authors spoke to families who self-identified as Canadians with European, African and Punjabi heritage and compared these groups with regard to their ethical considerations around food. While Euro-Canadian British Columbians and Euro-Canadian Nova Scotians on the surface would seem very similar, these researchers found significant regional differences between them. A large proportion of Euro-Canadian Nova Scotians relative to Euro-Canadian British Columbians tended to draw from cultural and/or traditional discourses when describing their approach to selecting food, and particularly their approach to healthy eating. Euro-Canadian Nova Scotians often described a traditional 'meat and potatoes' dinner as a healthy meal, one that older relatives prepared for them as children. These kinds of references to 'traditional' meals were not made by any British Columbians in the study.

Cultural and traditional discourses also influenced the way Euro-Canadian Nova Scotians talked about ethical consumption. Again, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic and Chapman (2010) looked at the ways that these two regional groups experienced food and found that Euro-Canadian British Columbians demonstrated an overall strong commitment to ethical consumption, while Euro-Canadian Nova Scotians for the most part did not make reference to the same political discourses. Rather, Nova Scotians placed emphasis on the importance of tradition in consumption, describing sustainable production and 'natural' food products as part of a traditional lifestyle. By choosing potatoes from her mother's native county rather than its neighbouring one, for example, one Nova Scotian woman in the study chose to buy local potatoes; she described this

choice with reference to family and tradition rather than a particular political or ethical framework. Interestingly, definitions of 'natural' foods differed between the two provinces, with 'natural foods' in Nova Scotia being identified as food from grandparents' farms while in British Columbia 'natural foods' were defined as organic and chemical-free. This emphasis on preserving an old way of life and cultural heritage would seem to suggest that Nova Scotia is a society that turns to traditions when making decisions about food, more so than British Columbia.

3.4 Food, politics and farming in Nova Scotia

At the same time, there is also currently extensive public dialogue and debate about the political and ethical nature of food in Nova Scotia, as there is in many 'western' regions that have seen an increase in social movements centered on food (Belasco, 1990; Mintz, 1988). The particular focus of discussion and debate in Nova Scotia is the significance of local food and the rising cost of nutritious food (Hayes-Conroy, 2010). A number of different groups in the province have recently been organizing against the corporatization of food and/or for a relocalization of the province's food supply.

One of these groups is the "No Farms, No Food" community coalition in Kings County, Nova Scotia who are working to protect farmland from residential, commercial and industrial development. The goal of this group is to rebuild a farm economy that can sustain farms, the environment and families in the region. This highlights the concern about the agricultural sector in the province, in which the province's increasing urbanization is seen as a particular threat.

It is important to recognize that more than half of Nova Scotians currently live in urban areas (Statistics Canada, 2011). Conversely, small-scale farming operations have decreased by 92% in just over two generations (Statistics Canada, 2011), suggesting that there is increased pressure on few farms to provide a local and sustainable food supply. The majority – 87% - of Nova Scotia’s ‘food dollars’ are spent on imported food, leaving few dollars left to spend on locally produced food (Stott & MacLeod, 2010).

Recent attempts to respond to the issue of local food in Nova Scotia have typically worked towards linking local farmers with consumers. For example, the opening of the Halifax Seaport Farmers Market was part of a public dialogue about providing a new and bigger space for issues of local food, economy and sustainability. A 2004 report on farmer’s markets in Nova Scotia sheds light on just exactly who visits and purchases food from markets, and their reasons for doing so (Fullerton & Mcneil, 2004). The majority of market customers live in close proximity, with 64.9% living within 5 kilometers. The average customer is female and between the ages of 40 to 59, and living in a household with one other person. The most popular reasons for attending the market are to obtain fresh quality produce (i.e. to obtain organic food), to enjoy the social aspect (i.e. the general atmosphere), and to support local farmers and the local community. The same report estimates that the economic benefit generated from farmer’s markets in the province is \$68,285,970, which makes it a substantial outlet for local producers and an important part of the local economy (Province of Nova Scotia, 2005).

However, issues such as the location of the Seaport market (in an area that is socially and economically advantaged), its accessibility (it is located on a very limited

bus route, and not within walking distance of many neighbourhoods of the Halifax peninsula) and its affordability (local and organic food can cost significantly more than processed food in standard grocery stores) mean that this market is frequented primarily by individuals who are relatively affluent. Criticisms of the relative exclusivity of Halifax's Seaport Farmer's market are not unique. It has been argued elsewhere that several food alternatives that begin as a reaction to the global food industry, become incorporated into the mainstream culture as a rather high-end commodity (Roseberry, 1996; Beagan et al., 2010). As well, the majority of those who engage in food politics and those who search for alternative networks of acquiring food in 'western' contexts generally belong to the upper-income brackets of society (Markowitz, 2008). At the same time, developments like the farmer's markets in Nova Scotia highlight a growing interest in ethical consumption in general and in reforming relationships between producers or farmers and consumers in particular in the province.

3.5 Halifax & Urban Food Systems

In conjunction with a growing interest in connecting city dwellers with rural food producers, there is also growing public consultation and interest in alternative food production initiatives within the city of Halifax itself. Like other cities in North America, Halifax has recently seen the emergence of a so-called 'urban chicken movement' as well as a collective urban farm, known as the 'Common Roots Urban Farm' (Common Roots Urban Farm, 2011). Using a vacant lot next to the city's hospital, the Common Roots Urban Farm began as a partnership with the local district health authority in the summer of 2012. A group made up mostly of volunteers turned this space into an urban garden

that consists of community plots, and a market garden (the group's food production is donated to a local food bank), as well as aesthetically pleasing landscapes consisting of native plants. This group sees itself as a "community farm [that is] a piece of health infrastructure – a place where the relationships between personal, community and environmental health can be explored" (Capital Health, 2012). As Common Roots' states on their website:

Our mission at Common Roots Urban Farm is to deepen the connection between our citizens and nature; to empower our community to take a hands-on approach to their environments, to grow [our] own food; and to enjoy restorative landscapes that promote health and well-being. (Common Roots Urban Farm, 2011).

More than just providing a food supply, these initiatives are grounded in discourses of reconnecting the consumer/urban individual with food/nature/the environment and other ideas, and demonstrate that ethical consumption frameworks are a part of the Nova Scotian experience of food as well.

3.6 Focus of Research: Gastro-anomie and Halifax

This thesis engages with Fischler's question, if we do not know what we eat, how can we know who we are? It investigates how individuals actively construct and negotiate the meanings that they associate with food as they navigate a confusing and over-saturated food economy. The ways that individuals incorporate various values and beliefs in response to an alienating food economy in a very specific context will be a useful starting point in understanding the relationship between gastro-anomie, food and identity. This research project focuses on how people's choices about to eat and how eating can be exercised as a practice of identity. The major research question of this

project can be framed as: What do people's food choices tell us about the relationship between food and identity? As a more concentrated approach has been identified as being necessary to fully be able to understand the complexities of food and identity in a modern society, this research project employs such a perspective by looking at the effects of gastro-anomie in a particular city.

As emphasized in the literature review, in North American societies, we are less likely to see cut-and-dry identities based on tradition and class but more blurred identities based on lifestyle and consumption choices (Giddens, 1991; Southerton, 2001). That said, Nova Scotia may be more characteristic of a traditional society with its shared knowledge and a geographical history that spans several generations (Beagan et al., 2010). Conversely, a city like Vancouver with newer roots and cosmopolitan lifestyle is seen as more characteristic of a modern society. In this regard, does Fischler's theory of gastro-anomie carry any weight in Halifax? How is food alienation or normlessness experienced can be a city that is said to be more characteristic of a traditional society?

As Beagan et al (2010) point out, it is likely that we actually see varying degrees of both modern and traditional characteristics across societies, and they argue that a more detailed approach to research on food and identity is needed to explore these nuances, particularly in light of the development of alternative food networks connecting localness, tradition and food. Therefore, this thesis engages with two secondary research questions: Do the people I talked to experience gastro-anomie? What can the experiences of these individuals, living in Halifax, tell us about the relationship between food and identity? By looking at the way in which individuals in Halifax think and talk about the meaning of food, and the ways that they articulate these meanings to possibly

'locate' themselves, we will be able to have a firmer grasp on the relationship between food and identity and the effects on this relationship from a global food economy.

Chapter 4: Methods

This research project employs a qualitative design, and uses a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a small number of individuals to explore the ways in which individuals experience gastro-anomie, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, if at all, and what these everyday experiences can tell us about food and identity. My goal in this research is to consider diverse individuals' experiences and perspectives vis-à-vis food and eating in order to generate greater understanding of the relationship between food, the body and identity. Analyzing these narrative accounts sheds light on the ways that cultural and ethical beliefs are brought into being through consumption practices.

4.1 Food-centered life histories

For this research, I borrowed a technique used by Counihan (2009) who supplemented ethnographic observation with recorded in-depth semi-structured interviews that she termed "food-centered life histories". These narratives focused on interview participants' experiences and memories regarding food production, preparation and consumption, and were elicited through the use of semi-structured interviews. Individual participants were asked questions about their ideals and practices around food production and consumption. Counihan utilized the resulting transcribed, verbal data to gain an understanding of individual beliefs and meanings related to food preparation and consumption, and the role these play in identity construction. Inspired by how Counihan found food to be a very powerful means to spark meaningful conversation with individuals about identity, I decided to borrow from her narrative approach.

4.2 Semi-structured interviews

My aim for this project was to better understand individuals' multi-faceted and complex relationship to and experience of food. I designed a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix I) that would achieve this goal by eliciting individual narrative accounts of food and eating. The interview questions were open-ended and gave participants room to share their personal experiences, thoughts and stories on food. I asked participants questions about their food choices, how they defined good and bad foods, their childhood and/or family memories regarding food and their perceptions of food issues in Halifax. By allowing individuals to give their own accounts of their consumption choices, the interviews were designed to uncover how participants create meaning through the construction of narratives about their experiences of food.

4.3 Participant recruitment

I recruited participants through snowball sampling, beginning with individuals who were 'friends of friends'. I approached sampling as Miller did, "undertaken in the liberal spirit of taking people as you find them and letting them emerge as they would" (2008: 53). Often, my project would come up in everyday conversation and if an individual expressed interest in participating or if an individual knew someone who was possibly interested in participating, I asked him or her to provide contact details. I would then forward these individuals a recruitment letter by email (see Appendix II). I found this to be an effective way to recruit individuals because it put both a 'friendly' or personal face on the study and also gave them a chance to ultimately decline to participate after having reading the more formal recruitment letter.

A problem with this type of recruitment is that it provided a rather limited pool from which to recruit potential research participants. This conflicted with my original goal, to recruit as diverse a sample, in terms of age, cultural background, gender, and socio-economic status, as possible. Due to time and logistical constraints, however, this method of snowball sampling appeared to be the most feasible. I did attempt to address this issue by making a conscious effort to step outside of my immediate social circle and recruit participants from diverse backgrounds. For example, I found one participant through a community kitchen by contacting the group, explaining the nature of my research and asking if they knew of anyone who might be interested in being interviewed. Other participants were recruited by extending my social network (i.e. “friends of friends”) and asking interviewees if they knew anyone who would be interested in participating in this project.

The aim of this project was not to gather any representative data, or to look at a specific subsection of the population who adhere to a uniform set of ethics or experiences. Rather, I sought to better understand the very general, everyday ways that people talk and think about food in Halifax. The questions that I asked in this study are primarily exploratory. As Becker (2012) argues, it only takes a few in-depth interviews to establish that a social phenomenon, such as ‘gastro-anomie’, is more complicated and nuanced than once thought. As such, a single subjective account provides valuable insight into the ways that a ‘grand theory’ is actually lived out by an individual. Based on these arguments, my sampling strategy seemed appropriate to the aims of my study.

The sample that I ultimately recruited for the project was comprised of five women and one man, aged between 19 and 54 (for details of the participants, see

Appendix IV). These individuals came from relatively varied cultural and social backgrounds. They all led relatively comfortable lives in the socio-economic sense; all were university educated, in university or working full-time, professional jobs. Most were born and raised in Halifax, or were from Nova Scotia but had lived in the city for a great deal of time; none identified themselves as ‘newcomers’ to the city. Interestingly, men were more difficult to recruit for interviews; no women I asked to interview refused to participate, while a few men did. The reasons men gave for declining typically went something like, “Well, I like food but I’m afraid I’d be pretty boring to talk to” and/or “I wouldn’t be of much use”. The literature tells us that women tend to be more comfortable and confident about food issues and a large portion of women are still responsible for the food production at home (Short, 2006). Perhaps in line with these insights, the men I tried to recruit for the study did not see themselves as ‘experts’ on food, and therefore felt hesitant to spend an hour talking to someone about the topic. I stopped recruiting individuals after transcribing my sixth interview, as my data had generated sufficient common themes, meaning that sufficient common themes had started to emerge from the interview data.

All interviews took place in a private location determined by the participant, usually either in a booked study room at the university’s library, a café, or their home. Each participant was asked to read and sign two copies (one for the participant to keep and one for my records) of consent form (see Appendix III) that stated the overview, purpose and risks associated with participating in their research. Interviews usually took approximately an hour to complete, with the shortest being 45 minutes and the longest approximately 95 minutes in length. The conversations generally went well, with the

participants engaging enthusiastically with the questions and providing detailed responses.

4.4 Data Analysis

I transcribed each interview shortly after completing it, during the data collection phase of research. This allowed me to make note of preliminary themes early on and determine how effective my questions were. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, after which I engaged in first- and second-level coding.

Preliminary codes included healthy eating, local food, cost of food, and food and bodies. I used these codes to re-examine participants' food narratives, paying particular attention to the ways that individuals organize food choices and the effects food was perceived to have on their bodies, self-esteem and sense of self. My coding strategy was designed to understand how individuals make sense of the world and navigate a global food economy, and developed into the primary themes of my research.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

This project was approved by the Dalhousie University Research Ethics Board. All interviews were confidential and each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect his or her identity. I also took special care to remove any identifying information from transcribed interview to protect individual identities. Although there were few risks associated with this project, there was slight risk of making individuals uncomfortable when talking about food. Issues such as body image or socio-economic situations are inextricably linked to food. I did my best to mitigate any discomfort by posing questions in an open-ended manner, so that individuals could choose to pursue or not to pursue particular topics.

4.6 Study Limitations

Although the participants in my research came from relatively diverse backgrounds, at the time of these interviews, all were leading lives that meant they had a relatively comfortable economic relationship to food. No one was experiencing economic hardship or poor health, so their food choices were not constrained in ways not of their own choosing. As such, this study is limited in so far as it does not address the experiences of those who may not be able to consume certain foods and perhaps have limited purchasing choices in the city. Undoubtedly, the relationship between food and identity and the issue of food alienation might look very different from the perspective of those with more limited consumption choices.

A small sample also makes it difficult to account for variation within the group or associate findings with a particular group of individuals. Despite participants occupying various social groups, differences between individuals were difficult to pinpoint and draw conclusions from. A major limit of the study, therefore, is its inability to make generalizable conclusions about how certain food-related aspects of identity intersect with other types of identity, such as one's household type, socio-economic status or cultural background. Rather than examine possible intersections between food and other identity-based practices, this study focuses more generally on the ways that participants utilize their food choices to put forth food-related identities.

4.7 Conclusions

In the end, several significant themes were generated from the interviews I conducted; taken together, these themes reveal the complexities and nuances underlying peoples' relationships with food and identity as experienced through a global food

economy. Each of the people I spoke to ascribed importance to the negative effects of a global food economy and attempted to find meaning in food in their everyday lives in various ways. In the following chapters, I describe these findings in more detail and explore the intersections between food and identity, and the role that gastro-anomie plays in people's everyday lives.

Chapter 5: Research Findings - Reconnecting with Food Through ‘Mindful Eating’ and ‘Treating the Body Right’

This chapter will describe common themes that emerged from the interviews carried out with participants in this study. The discussions generated demonstrate that eating, especially choosing what to eat, is a complex exercise. These discussions highlight tensions between the importance of food, its traditional and cultural significance, and the industrialized food choices widely available today. Participants were keenly aware of these tensions and attempted to resolve them in their day-to-day lives in various ways. This chapter explains the ways that participants routinely contested ‘gastro-anomie’, namely by ‘mindfully’ preparing and consuming food, by placing their bodies at the foreground of deciding what to eat, and by developing and refining their knowledge of food production and consumption. Many participants also advocated engaging in ethical consumption practices, which appeared to be connected with a strong sense of tradition and local community ties.

5.1 Mindful Eating and the Body

When describing how to choose what to eat, participants often made reference to an interesting dichotomy: the difference between ‘eating mindfully’ and ‘eating mindlessly’. They characterized the former, ‘eating mindfully’ as a thoughtful approach to food whereby individuals critically analyze the food they eat in terms of its health and ethical consequences. Eating mindfully, in other words, was the way in which participants described attempts to modify or control their eating and/or overcome the

sometimes very powerful desire to eat unhealthy foods or eat in an unhealthy, ‘mindless’ way.

For some participants, eating mindfully appeared to be about actively shaping their taste for certain foods. Laura, a 22-year old university student, had recently decided to make the transition from what she called a processed food-laden “standard North American diet” – the diet her parents ate and raised her on– to one based on fresh and whole foods. Laura described this process in terms of reshaping her food preferences. For example, she reflected: “Ever since I stopped eating sugar, I can’t stand the stuff even in my coffee. I find natural food, like an apple, to be sweet enough on its own”. She went on to explain, “I feel like I’m tasting food the way it is meant to be tasted”. This account suggests that taste can be shaped and influenced by one’s desires, values and/or ethical frameworks.

For most participants ‘mindful eating’ was specifically about bodily awareness, an awareness of how certain foods affected their bodies. It was not uncommon, in fact, for participants to use the phrases ‘mindful eating’ and ‘listening to your body’ interchangeably. For example, Alison, a nutritionist in her early 30s, ascribed importance to treating her body well when choosing food and spoke of “building a positive relationship with [her] body and learning how to listen to it”.

Similarly Michael, a competitive runner in his late 20s, felt that he had to eat more healthily than the average person. He remarked that teammates who did not eat well would suffer the consequences in their athletic performance. In his words: “You have to pay attention to the food you eat...I don’t consider myself super strict, but I do pay attention to what goes into my body”. Other participants made similar references to

the importance of ‘paying attention’ or ‘listening’ to the body, to how the body feels or performs after consuming certain foods, and using this as a basis for decisions what to eat.

Participants also often drew a connection between mindful eating (or not), how they felt in or about their bodies, and how they felt about themselves. As Laura described:

I find that healthier foods make you happier. And I feel guiltier...and sluggish and that makes me sad compared to when I eat healthier food. Physically you feel better and on a mental plane, you know that you put good things in your body so you know you should feel good about that whereas if you eat a bag of chips, or chocolate bar, well it's like, "Oh well that was probably not the smartest thing to do." But of course some people would be fine with that. But for me, it's definitely the whole, my whole body. I feel happier, I feel more vibrant. I just, I feel better when I'm eating this way.

For participants like Laura, eating mindfully or not could have a significant effect on self-esteem. Food could make her feel happy, vibrant, “on a better mental plane,” or it could generate anxiety, “sluggishness” and feelings of guilt.

Finally, several participants spoke about eating mindfully in terms of being thoughtful and/or careful about what one ‘puts into’ one’s body. As Elizabeth, a graduate student, described:

To me personally, in terms of what I want to put into my body, food that is good quality isn't something that has been heavily processed, if at all. And it's food that's nutritious, so mostly unprocessed. Personally for me, good quality is whole foods and food that provides your body with what it needs.

From Elizabeth’s point of view, food is a kind of fuel for one’s body, and by eating the ‘right’ foods she is giving her body ‘what it needs’.

At the same time, eating mindfully was also sometimes about overcoming or ignoring the body’s taste for certain foods. As Laura’s account of abstaining from

junk food illustrates, eating mindfully could also mean keeping in check or transcending the desires of a gluttonous body. The body, in other words, was not always considered a reliable starting point for decisions about what to eat.

5.2 Corporatization and the Global Food Economy

The idea of eating mindlessly was also often discussed in a way that connected individual eating habits to broader social and political issues, namely the growth and impact of the global food industry. Most participants considered it very important to connect their personal values, about health, the environment, or the economy to the food on their plates. These individuals were not only aware of which foods are healthy and which are not, but also which foods contribute to the local economy and which do not. They saw themselves as active consumers attempting to create a more just, sustainable and healthy food system through their own food choices.

Several participants were openly critical of the global food industry and the corporate profit motives governing the widespread availability of unhealthy, convenience foods. As Alison reflected,

So much about food today is just about totally manufacturing disgusting, nutritionally void food for no reason whatsoever...well, I guess to fuel the economy.

Emily, an office worker and mother to three adult-aged children recalled that when her children were smaller, the media played a large role in what her kids wanted to eat, an issue that she describes as worse today.

I think that the media has a *huge* impact on people's decisions. It's like, I don't think they should be allowed to advertise to children, like the sugar and stuff they put on TV. And then they tell you that it has fiber in it, to convince the parents that to buy it when it's complete garbage. Or like

saying chocolate milk is equivalent to white milk when there's a truck load of sugar in it.

Other participants talked more generally about poor eating habits as a product of leading busy and 'disconnected' lives. Laura, for example, reflected that individuals living in contemporary 'western' societies so often want food that is immediate, a concept that she imagines would be foreign in her boyfriend's Middle-Eastern homeland.

Like I know that my boyfriend's favourite dish actually takes an entire day to prepare. And you're just sitting there constantly stirring. And I mean if you were to say that to somebody from this culture who didn't know anything about other cultures, they'd be like 'are you serious? I'm just going to cook a hamburger on the BBQ for a few minutes and call it a day!' and then throw potato chips on the side. So there is a big cultural difference for people on this side of the world and theirs is much more slower and focused, and ours is much more rushed and disconnected. We're all about 'Quick, quick, quick!' to get it out in everything we do and if you look at other cultures, it's a lot slower.

Others similarly described food choices based on time and convenience. John, a self-described 'foodie' frowned at this sort of approach: "A lot of people, even at my age [43], I would say or have noticed anyway, think of food as stuffing our faces and not even thinking about anything".

A number of participants suggested, therefore, that people living in 'western' societies need to resist the unconscious or rushed approach to eating facilitated by the availability of fast or 'convenience' foods. They attributed responsibility for the pervasiveness of these attitudes toward eating to a global food industry driven by the generation of profit rather than the need for healthy or sustainable food options.

Some participants also framed poor eating habits in terms of the cost. Several remarked that not enough is done at the socio-political level to make it possible to acquire 'good' food, as it can be too expensive for some.

I mean in Halifax there are certain class barriers to accessing healthy, local let alone organic food and that is a thing that I think really needs to be worked on this city (Elizabeth).

I think economy affects [*being able to participate in ethical consumption*], like people not having a lot of money. Not necessarily for [*community I live in*], because it seems to be okay but in other areas in HRM there are definitely people that can't afford to buy organic and fresh produce so I think that affects it. And they don't know how to shop, so education affects it a lot. Because they don't realize that you can get the same nutrients maybe in something else, they go for whatever's cheaper or they can't afford it in the first place. Or they think "Well I can buy this stalk of celery or a burger" and they think "Well what's going to fill me more?" So I think that affects it (Alison).

Alison, a nutritionist who assists clients to design healthy meal plans, found that there was only so much an individual could do when, often times, the bottom line is hunger and affordability. John also reflected, "I like to see people buying that kind of food [*i.e. local, fair-trade*] but at the same time I recognize the different barriers and different repercussions of why people may not want to buy that kind of food".

Despite participants' emphasis on individual choice with regard to food and eating, they largely recognized that responsibility for food choices cannot fall entirely on the individual; they considered government officials, community groups, societal norms and economic factors important factors that play a role in consuming healthy food.

5.3 Food Skills and Knowledge

Identifying as very active consumers, participants often described the ways in which they go about in their everyday lives to counteract the effects of the global food industry. The people I interviewed cared a great deal about food preparation and meal planning, and spoke about the widespread "disconnection" between people and food that exists in contemporary society. Additionally, participants also found that this

development of their food knowledge had effects on their social lives and participants took note of the steps they took to mitigate any negative effects.

One way in which participants attempted to counteract this disconnection was to develop food skills, such as cooking and the ability to identify the ethical consequences of buying certain types of food. As Nina described:

I guess not knowing [*how to prepare food*] sort of points to an...alienation from the sources of our food and learning how to cook, as food is more and more something that you buy on a shelf as opposed to something that you produce and sort of make something with. I think there's definitely, [a need for] those sort of skills. Also like, for me, those connections had been lost in that process, for sure.

Here Nina describes grabbing a heavily processed, boxed meal as an example of alienation from the source of food, while cooking meals from scratch, on the contrary, can re-create meaning, giving food new value.

Other participants similarly emphasized the importance of cooking. Elizabeth, for example, described how in her work as a volunteer with a community kitchen, visitors to the kitchen would often become quite excited when learning the very basics of how to prepare food:

I know when I first started cooking in a group like that, I found it to be a very empowering experience. And also, a lot of students don't have the space or haven't had access to the learning in terms of cooking. So providing that for people is very nice, providing them to get out and cook, and to be like 'Oh yeah I CAN cook' and 'Oh, this is what you can do with cabbage'. And things like that. So one aspect of our work is also doing workshops on canning or preserving or making apple cider, all these different food skills. So yeah, I think that it definitely serves as sort of a buffer for bringing people together and people can come to a meal or a preparation of a meal with all kinds of different intentions and often, really interesting things can come out of that.

Echoing these sentiments, Alison identified that food knowledge can be foreign and intimidating for many people, but that it does not have to be:

I love cooking and I love cooking with other people. I love putting music on and chopping veggies. I think it's been a lot of self-instruction and something that I always try to convey is that cooking isn't this sort of scary science. Like I don't need to follow the recipe, like measurement for measurement and stuff like that. So [my cooking process] is just a lot of trial and error.

As the above reflections clearly demonstrate, food knowledge was significant to participants. Many described in detail how and when they learned how to cook. Some explained that they learned to cook once they moved away from home and “had to” or when they became particularly interested in eating well or in food ethics. Early trial and error cooking experiences were often described in a bemused manner. As Michael explained: “I cooked A LOT of stir fries early on...they weren't anything special [laughs]”. At the same time, participants clearly also found cooking be empowering. In Emily's words: “Baking my first cake from scratch...I was really proud of that!” Interestingly, few participants described learning how to cook in a traditional sense, that is, by learning from their parents or other family members.

One's refinement of food skills and knowledge was also discussed in terms of its effects on one's social life. I asked participants if food ever featured predominantly in any social events they participate in. Michael answered that if it was, it often went unnoticed or faded into the “background”, reflecting that this was perhaps because his diet was not overly restrictive (meaning that he had no food allergies or other restrictions); for him, food was a taken-for-granted aspect of socializing.

The individuals who identified that food was a predominant feature of their social lives followed a strict plant-based diet, and reflected that their food choices were often isolating at social events. Alison recalled memories of being invited to barbeques and feeling conflicted about attending, not only because it was unlikely there would be any

food she could eat, but also because she felt uncomfortable imposing her own beliefs on others. Nina reflected that:

[G]oing to restaurants could be especially difficult, because often you feel uncomfortable saying ‘hey guys, there isn’t actually anything on the menu I can eat’ and then like, suggesting an earthy hippy place [*laughs*]. So I try to plan in advance, I’ll gently steer them to a place that I know will at least have one thing I can eat then I won’t be sitting there alone not eating, which people tend to notice and point out you know?

For these individuals, socializing was directly impacted by their food choices and their restrictions could be riddled with feelings of exclusion and anxiety. Passively demonstrating one’s food knowledge, however, was perfectly acceptable. For example, Laura spoke of frequently serving friends vegan cookies but passing them off as “normal food” by “not making a huge show of it” but perhaps later on, admitting that the food that they had eaten had been vegan. Similarly, Elizabeth learned to never tell her brother the pancakes she would serve were vegan, otherwise he would refuse to eat them. For some, finding other like-minded individuals was important, yet they were not set on “converting” friends to eat the same things that they do. Here, developing food knowledge and cooking skills was also seen as a source of potential conflict if one’s peer group was not as mindful of food issues as they were.

5.4 Ethical Consumption and Halifax

According to most of the people I talked to, food is an important topic, a “hot-button” issue, in Halifax. Participants described many different reasons, including economic, environmental and health reasons, their own and others’ interest in an alternative food economy and learning new food-related skills. As Elizabeth explained:

And there are a lot of interesting things that are happening within this space. Like on one hand there is this emphasis on local food so like the market and

things like that, and on the other people are really interested in local food and urban agriculture and gardening and things like that. Yeah, and the reasons differ right? (Elizabeth).

Elizabeth noted that many attendees to the community kitchen group where she volunteers were very curious about a return, or a reclaiming of sorts, to an earlier kind of food production through learning how to cook.

I think that definitely some people who come to the [collective kitchen] are coming from that sort of, wanting to know how to be self-sufficient and wanting to know those skills. And for some people, it's about wanting those connections and for some, it's about wanting to get their hands dirty. I think that's a big part of it. And there's also something important that's been a good learning experience for a lot of us, as we work closer and closer with farmers and things like that. It's not idealized, that work, either, or romanticizing. Because it's really hard work. And so to appreciate that as well is important.

Interesting in the passage above is Elizabeth insists that such practices are not “romanticizing”, but instead represent an appreciation for the hard work that goes into food production and a desire for lasting connections between themselves and the food on their plates.

Another common discussion topic in interviews was the debate between local and organic food. Generally speaking, participants saw local *and* organic as the preferred choice; they suggested that this was the ‘better’ choice ethically, environmentally and socially. At the same time, most participants prioritized providing a sustainable food economy at the local level over other food options, such as organic food. As accessing both local and organic food is not always possible for various reasons, participants often had to choose one or the other; local foods were overwhelmingly the preferred choice. Statements such as “I buy local wherever I can” were common. As Michael reflects below:

I choose organic things sometimes, depending on the price but at Sobeys you can get organic at pretty much close to the regular stuff. Like it's not a huge difference, especially since Our Compliments have organics now. So I do choose that a bit. And then I mean, food miles aren't best either. I'd rather buy something local. I'll always buy something local over something not, if it's available.

Overall participants talked about the growing awareness in Halifax and Nova Scotia regarding food issues in positive terms and they were optimistic about the potential impact of these changes. Some saw a return to backyard food gardens and self-provisioning produce, for example, as an important development, unique to Halifax. Others, like Michael, highlighted that alternate foods are becoming more conventionally available, and saw this as a positive step forward.

5.5 Traditional Food, Nostalgia and Family Life

Living in Nova Scotia, these individuals did make reference to the more traditional diets that Beagan et al (2010) and Tye (2010) described as “meat-and-potatoes” – staple foods of a Euro-Canadian heritage. For the individuals I spoke to, these so-called traditional foods were habitually connected with home and family life, yet not always readily incorporated into their present-day diets and sometimes were modified as seen fit. Some had discussed inner conflicts about beloved traditional foods that no longer matched their current beliefs. Participants also spoke about the foods they ate as children and/or food they wished they could prepare themselves but lacked the skills or time.

Several made reference to the family dinners they ate when growing up in a somewhat disdainful way.

My mom...did the cooking, but again my mother was not exactly a health nut then either. I remember on Sundays and Saturdays, well Saturdays

were more like ‘Let’s order out’ but Sundays were always a home-cooked meal. And week nights were very much whatever was convenient at the time, which I think is true for a lot of families, just because during the week you’re working and you don’t really want to deal with coming home and preparing a meal. But I do remember a lot of steamed vegetables, some kind of a meat, or probably a potato or corn. So those are the memories that stick out. (Laura)

Laura recalled the meat-and-potatoes-based meals as a comforting dish at times, but noted that she no longer enjoys such meals, preferring “fresh” and “whole” foods.

Like, I hate carrots because I used to have to sit at the table until they were gone every night at suppertime. I don’t hate them as much I used to now, I’ll eat them now because they’re good for me. But I *remember* sitting at the table and not being allowed to get up because I didn’t finish my carrots. I think it might have been the way they were cooked maybe? They were always boiled. (Alison)

Similarly, Alison prefers to prepare fresh vegetables as an adult and boiled carrots still leave an unpleasant taste in her mouth.

Occasionally, however, individuals would discuss the ways they modified a traditional food in light of their current food beliefs. An example of this conflict emerges in is Laura’s reflection, below, about a meal that had been prepared for her as a child by her mother:

This one thing-macaroni and tomato soup, which is just...macaroni and tomato soup. Yeah, that was one of the convenience meals we would just throw together and have the leftovers the next day. So yeah, macaroni and tomato soup actually holds a lot of memories to me because it was like, well my mother was a babysitter for much of my life, and it was [during the] summer of ’96, that was what we had for lunch every day, and it’s just so...*[sighs and laughs]*...I have actually a lot of positive memories with that food. Like when you heard ‘Wanna have macaroni and tomato soup?’ it’s like ‘Yes!’ It was a big moment! I should make that actually, I haven’t had that in awhile...it’s honestly just macaroni and tomato soup. It’s pretty good! I could probably make a healthier version.

Later suggesting brown rice pasta and a homemade tomato soup as a possible alternative, this dish – despite it being processed-food based – held meanings that were significant

enough for Laura to make it her own, in light of her new ideals. Clearly then, despite a shift away from the traditional Nova Scotian meal or other staple foods of childhood, individuals still placed value on these meals for the memories attached, and desired to modify these dishes in light of current food ideals.

Despite some misgivings about the food that they ate as children, participants considered the tradition of the ‘family meal’ important. Emily reflected

Meals have become rushed, less thought about. Except for Sunday dinners, those are always family meals in my house. Nothing crazy special...just your standard family Sunday meal

For Emily, these ‘family meals’ continued to centered around a meat main dish, with potatoes and a seasonal vegetable on the side (which, she noted was recently seasonal string beans, “fresh from the vegetable stand”). Likewise, Michael explained that although he does not typically prepare the meals his mother would make, he looks forward to visiting home for her cooking, where she often has his favourite meal waiting for him. Participants seemed to view the ‘family meal’ as a break of sorts, a way to sit down and unwind from a hectic and rushed week.

Participants also seemed to be nostalgic about certain childhood food experiences. Certainly some foods they ate as children were steeped with personal meaning, associated with summer holidays or time spent with a loved one who has passed away. Likewise, older generations (such as grandparents) were generally seen as possessing greater wisdom about food and participants sometimes expressed a desire to one day be able to develop food skills that rivaled the generations before them. Descriptions of grandmothers’ legendary baking skills in the kitchen, where they just instinctively ‘knew’

the correct amounts of ingredients without measuring, were often spoken of in awed terms. For example:

Like, my grandmother who would make them, she would make pie and then with the extra crust, she'd make cinnamon buns with them, like little, mini ones. So stuff like that, I haven't had since she died because, well, no one else can make them (Emily).

As someone who also inherited my grandmother's recipes, I laughed with a few participants about how we each had little success replicating them.

5.6 Conclusions

The personal accounts of the individuals I spoke to suggest that food experiences, knowledge and taste are nuanced, and embedded with tension between traditional food meanings and industrialized food choices. To negotiate the effects of an alienating food economy, these individuals discussed the ways that they mindfully approached food choices, and paid particular attention to what they incorporated into their bodies. The following chapter will provide an analysis on the experience of food in Halifax, looking at what this experience of 'gastro-anomie' can tell us about the relationship between food and identity.

**Chapter 6: Contesting ‘Gastro-anomie’ – Food-based Identities in the Face of an
Alienating Food Economy**

This thesis investigates how individuals actively construct and negotiate their relationships with food. The findings of the study suggest that the globalization of the food economy has had a discernible impact on people’s attitudes toward food. Despite the relatively strong local food economy in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and lasting food traditions in the region, for some participants, foods has clearly become a source of guilt, worry and uncertainty. At the same time, the people I interviewed engaged in various efforts to contest these experiences of ‘gastro-anomie’, namely by adopting a ‘mindful’ approach to eating, developing and refining their food skills and knowledge and by advocating sustainable forms of food production. These efforts were reflexive; the people interviewed actively constructed certain attitudes and/or practices with regard to food and in so doing, identified themselves with particular cultural and ethical frameworks, sometimes rejecting the frameworks they previously drew on. The ways in which these individuals described their efforts to combat an alienating food economy therefore suggests that food continues to be a powerful medium and resource with which individuals carve out their identities.

6.1 Identifying the Ills of a Global Food Economy

The global food economy was identified by the individuals I spoke to as a nutritionally, ethically, environmentally, and culturally hollow system. They perceived individual and societal attitudes toward food in the ‘west’ as generally ‘disconnected’, where for most people food is something thoughtlessly chosen from a supermarket shelf, to be eaten ‘mindlessly’. They considered this kind of food unhealthy, its source

shrouded in mystery. Participants described this ‘rushed’ approach to food, based on saving time (on the part of consumers) and making money (on the part of producers) to be the antithesis of a ‘slower’ approach to food based on tradition and/or belief systems. They often expressed a desire to “return” to this slower and “more connected” form of food production and consumption.

In many ways, the phenomenon these participants described vis-à-vis the modern, ‘western’ approach to food, fits with what Fischler (1988) termed ‘pure consumer[ism]’ (1988:280). Indeed, much food now travels thousands of miles from the source of production to the place of consumption; the idea of having certain foods only ‘seasonally’ is virtually unheard of, and an individual has thousands upon thousands of choices to make at the grocery store. Fischler suggests that these changes have also resulted in the loss of a food economy arbitrated through cultural norms; food choices have therefore become individualized and isolated from the source. My study’s participants similarly described this loss as a key problem in so-called ‘western society’ that has resulted in many problems. These problems are evidence of, as research participants insisted, a food economy that is intent on only making money and not supporting a sustainable and healthy food network.

Interestingly the people I interviewed also described industrially-produced foods as tasting ‘bad’ and ‘unnatural’, highlighting the ‘disconnect’ they seemed to experience, right down to the taste of food. Fischler (1988) might suggest that this experience is the result of food being produced more and more in a laboratory and less and less in home kitchens. He notes, for example, that processed foods offer a sensory overload as they are produced with chemicals labeled as ‘natural flavourings’. Likewise, the people I

spoke to were very critical of processed foods and very concerned with the way food “was supposed to taste.” They frequently juxtaposed types of food as “natural” and “unnatural,” viewing those foods ‘prepared straight from box’ as unnatural and troublesome.

Frequently, participants also noted a societal decline in food-related skills and practices. Some suggested that we now live in a society where cooking has become daunting, where many assume that food preparation is best left to the ‘professionals’, that is, not the ‘home cook’. In this sense participants echoed concerns raised by Ritzer (1996), Wilk (2006), and Jaffe and Gertler (2006), who believe that the modern food industry has robbed consumers of vital knowledge and skills, replacing them with pre-made meals that only require a few pushes of a button to prepare. Ritzer is explicit about the deskilling of labour and loss of knowledge with regard to food production that has accompanied the ‘McDonaldization of society’ (1996). According to him, we have lost the ability to cook in creative and inventive ways, a sentiment that research participants in this study shared.

6.2 Challenging the Global Food Economy: Reconnecting with Food

And yet, the people interviewed in this study viewed themselves as rebels against ‘pure consumerism’. They made numerous, conscious efforts to find meaning in their food choices, to decommodify food, to cultivate food skills, and to make ethical consumption choices. They saw themselves as aware of the problems wrought by the global food economy and willing to grapple with these problems on a daily basis. The shorthand participants used to describe this critical attitude toward food was to ‘eat mindfully.’ They spoke of the importance of deconstructing the food on one’s plate,

reading labels, asking questions, purchasing food directly from the place of production. These were examples of how they pulled off the ‘blindness’ and saw food for what it ‘really was’. This ‘mindful’ approach to food seemed to be one of the ways in which participants attempted to treat food as more than a “substitutable generic commodity” (Wilk, 2006: 21).

Individuals called upon a vast amount of knowledge particularly when choosing food. Here, eating mindfully referred to choosing food based on its health and ethical consequences, and demonstrating a conscious effort to overcome a gluttonous desire to eat food ‘mindlessly’. Interestingly, participants’ values and/or beliefs about food had a direct impact on their food preferences, even their actual taste for certain foods. ‘Mindful eating’ also required an awareness of how foods affected the body, which in turn, served as an affirmation for one’s commitment to eating a certain way. In particular, there appeared to be an overwhelming belief for the individuals that if they aligned their food choices with their ethical values then their own individual health was impacted as well. In other words, good ethics equals good food, good food equals good health. Mindful eating, therefore, in other words, is a ‘win-win’ option.

Additionally, the participants I spoke with discussed the importance of developing food skills and knowledge as a way to reconnect with food. “Cooking isn’t this sort of scary science,” Alison asserted while she reflected on how she learned to not only cook, but how to love cooking. Others described a trial and error approach to cooking as something that took time to accept, as it was a practice they had long assumed they were not “supposed to do”. Realizing that they “CAN cook,” as Elizabeth said with enthusiasm, was often considered an important step towards reconnecting with food.

Participants saw learning how to cook, as a small but effective tool to dismantle the global food industry, a way to “take back” food if you will.

Participants did recognize that cultivating or using food skills could be difficult for some and although they generally aimed to take on a more ethical, mindful approach to food, this was not always possible for them. Nina, a former vegan, recalled that when she was vegan, she had “lots of time to make proper meals” and once she began her first full-time job had to go back to being “just vegetarian” because she lacked the time she had once had. Emily, nearing retirement, reflected that she looked forward to trying out more difficult recipes once she had the time. Other limitations included cost and availability, both viewed as increasing one’s likelihood of being “disconnected” from food.

Although none of the participants I spoke to were facing economic hardship, they did notice and experience obstacles to purchasing the “right” kinds of foods. Alison, living alone and cooking usually for only herself, explained that sometimes she feels bad for buying expensive food “if it’s only going to go to waste”, demonstrating that despite her relatively comfortable economic status, the cost of food was a consideration. Laura admitted that a big factor in why she tried to work so many hours at her part-time job while attending school was because she felt tremendously guilty adding to her family’s grocery bill “through [her] different food choices”.

The above examples illustrate that despite that the fact that the organization of food has rapidly shifted in just a few generations, we have not all become “deskilled” in a general sense. The people I interviewed adopted both traditional and modern— skilled and “deskilled”— approaches to cooking, making conscious deliberations about the food

they ate each day, with time, cost and availability being critical determining factors in these deliberations. As Meah and Watson (2011) found, food skills in modern society are continuously developed and constantly in flux. They argue that instances of “deskilling” are better viewed as taking temporary leave from cooking, rather completely abandoning it. The same could be said for research participants in this project, who also interestingly described experiences of “reskilling” that are continuously adapting and updating their food skills. The more micro-level analysis adopted in this study sheds light, therefore, on some of the dynamic ways in which everyday people negotiate living in a more “rushed society” while wanting to adopt a “slower” approach to food.

Another way in which participants attempted to combat the problems wrought by the global food economy was to support local and organic food production, but particularly local food production. Participants described both local and organic food as difficult to procure or prohibitively expensive. Feeling the need to choose “one or the other,” most explained that they would much rather purchase local food. This was in aid of supporting a local and small-scale farming economy, which participants saw as both good for the province’s economy and the “little guys”. The way participants frequently cited the value in sustaining a farming heritage reflects Beagan et al’s (2010) assertion that Nova Scotians’ participation in ethical consumption practices is often motivated by a sense of connection to “traditional” culture or values. They suggest that this is likely because food traditions have yet to be superseded by a globalized food economy in the regional centres like Halifax. In light of the accounts put forth by the people I spoke to, it seems that the global food economy has impinged upon food traditions, but has not completely superseded them. The individuals in my research did not see themselves as

guided by traditional values so much as by a desire to protect a ‘traditional’ way of life in danger of becoming lost forever. They prided themselves on purchasing from local farmers, through a more so-called ‘more traditional’ food system, as a way to maintain connections with food at a community level.

6.3 Food, Meanings and the Self

Because the participants I interviewed identified with various alternative food networks and made very conscious efforts to think critically about food, participating anonymously in the globalised, industrialized food system was something that “other” people did. Many emphasized that finding meaning in food was an individual choice, using sentiments such as “to *me* personally/*this is my* choice/I believe this, I understand if *other people do not*”. Interestingly, this focus on individuality could be seen as an example of anomie, as these individuals made food choices based solely on individual frameworks rather than through community or social bonds. Food, for many of the individuals, was a way to take up abstract ideals in their everyday practices and lifestyle choices, to help make the change they themselves wanted to see happen. Whether abstaining from animal products and identifying with a vegetarian or a slower approach to food, eating ‘mindfully’ was a way these individuals took on a particular identity, one aligned with alternative food frameworks.

This finding can be fruitfully explored using Bourdieu’s arguments that identity is class-based, and that food consumption is part of the social production of class differentiation. As Bourdieu argues, one’s *habitus* is primarily demonstrated, expressed and thought about through matters of taste. The *habitus* helps an individual distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ food, or more broadly speaking, ‘my’ food and ‘other people’s’

food. Bourdieu reflected that this exercise of class is particularly true for individuals who enjoy a middle-class and university-educated lifestyle, a class that most of the people I interviewed belong to. Here, individuals stake out their social status through the goods that they choose to consume and can afford to consume. Indeed, for the people I spoke to, the food in their diets reflected how they saw themselves in the world, as conscious and educated consumers, vegetarians, or ‘foodies’. Their beliefs and practices accorded with their identities, their personal ‘food ethics’. Their food choices were reference points that they used to stake out a ‘foodie’ identity, to differentiate themselves from, and/or connect, with others. This could be especially acute in Halifax, where foodies work hard to distinguish themselves from the norm. Also, given that alternative food networks are a relatively new development in the city, there very well could be less of a ‘community’ to latch on to making the individual to feel as though they are ‘in the minority’.

Because the globalized food market gives consumers access to a vast array of food, however, identifying with a particular lifestyle did require a certain level of reflexivity on the part of participants. They did not make choices about what to eat (or not) unconsciously, based on class, so much as through very careful and considered deliberations about whether these choices reflected their personal beliefs and self-perceptions. In this sense, participants’ attitudes toward food corresponded to Giddens’ (1991) concept of the “do-it-yourself” life biography. That is, participants’ identities seemed to be less ascribed by class, and more emergent, self-conscious and self-aware, contingent on making everyday choices in line with their own reflexively-identified values. According to Giddens, acting out values, morality and class in this very conscious manner is one the hallmarks of the modern self.

Reflexivity was also a feature of the ways participants engaged with the idea of tradition. Participants occasionally discussed food in a manner that evoked a strong sense of, and a desire for, tradition. This was usually in terms of positive memories associated with family life and food, or their nostalgia for the ‘slower’ and more focused approach to food of ‘the past’ (a way of life they themselves had never experienced). Participants also rejected tradition in their discussions of food, however. They often talked about the standard ‘meat and potatoes’ diets of their parents, for example, with disdain. This seeming contradiction in fact demonstrated how participants thought carefully about their food choices and how significant they considered their choices to be, in terms of who they are and what precisely they were rejecting.

If we are to consider that anomie is demonstrated by a lack of social cohesion and group-oriented norms, I argue that the individuals I spoke to expressed some aspects of gastro-anomie, albeit in a slightly different sense than Fischler would have envisioned. Some of the individuals seemed to want to distance themselves from the community or social group that they once were a part of. Paradoxically they associated these more ‘conventional’ eating practices with the global food economy – an economy they saw as alienating and undesirable – and therefore sought to create their own individual relationship to food. Take Laura’s experience, for instance: She spoke in detail of the lengths she took to disconnect herself from the food that her family ate. However, it is only when she discussed her fond memories of the processed food-based ‘Macaroni and Tomato Soup’ that there is a strong sense of social cohesion – through the positive memories associated with the food *and* her mother and childhood friends—in her story. This example suggests that individuals might have difficulty finding identity through

their food choices when they are no longer following the food guides that had been previously tied to group bonds or community norms. In this sense, it might be more accurate to suggest that such individuals find individuality— but not identity *per se*— through their new food choices.

The participants I spoke to advanced a very individualized approach to food. Part of this was their focus on the effects of food on the body (i.e. what food does to *my* body, how *my* personal beliefs affects *my* body). Additionally, the foods they associated with the global food economy and the previous social group they had belonged to were described as having both a negative effect on one's body and how one *felt* in their body. Here, the body assisted in deciding what to eat; insofar as eating well made foods participants feel 'vibrant' and 'energized', their bodies served as confirmation that they were making the 'right' choices about what to eat. Although participants did not acknowledge this, it seemed that ideas about class informed their feelings about food. Consuming foods that are organic, local and/or "whole" (which are often more expensive than processed foods) made participants feel 'vibrant', and possible also upwardly mobile and/or part of a higher class.

Participants wanted to control what they 'put into' their bodies and they abstained from certain things, like processed foods, that were clearly associated with the industrialized food economy and an impoverished and 'uneducated' way of living. The individuals I spoke to often represented a generational shift in Nova Scotia, where some individuals are beginning to reject the traditional frameworks that Beagan et al (2010) had argued to be so central to the experience of food in the province. Eating food belonging to 'other' people was to participate in a personal past of life, such as food that

is part of a global food economy (often described as ‘normal’ food by the participants of this research), which they no longer wanted to be a part of. Here, these individuals abstained from eating certain foods that actually do hold meaning to them, but these meanings were tied to negative class and social associations. Additionally, the significance of connecting food to one’s body highlights that these individuals are perhaps experiencing a social disconnection from food so focus their choices around their body.

This reliance on the body is a key characteristic of modern identity (Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 2003; Dixon and Banwell, 2004). Shilling (2003) notes that there are two characteristics of the modern era that play a key role in this development of a body-focused culture. First, there has been a decrease in the prominence of clear and coherent guides to living such as those found in religion, political affiliation, close-knit communities that had previously gave meaning to human life and, with this, an increase in individualization. Second, individuals have seen the modern era as increasingly chaotic and uncontrollable and thus the body is seen as the “last ‘raw material’ over which the individual could exert influence” (Shilling, 2003: 188). Therefore, bodies “can appear to provide a firm foundation on which to construct a reliable and meaningful sense of self in the modern world” (Shilling, 2003: 188). In other words, the body is the most immediate and easiest sphere over which individuals have control.

This is especially true for food, as Giddens writes, “with the increased efficiency of global markets, not only is food abundant but a diversity of foodstuffs is available for the consumer all the year round” (1991: 31). Giddens highlights that individuals think carefully about the food they eat in order to assert a sense of self. A practice such as

following a whole foods diet or vegetarian diet can be seen as an example of how the body is a site where social values and personal beliefs are internalized and negotiated as part of the individual's identity project. For the individuals in this study, the body indeed seemed to be a vehicle for the construction of a self.

6.4 Conclusions

Two key features of consumption in contemporary western societies are individualized choices and self-responsibility (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) and as such, day-to-day consumption choices are inextricably linked to individuality. The omnivorous nature of humans, rendered complex and confusing at times due to an alienating food economy, means that what we eat is laden with meaning and can also play a key role in shaping our sense of self. This thesis sought to provide an understanding of how gastro-anomie is experienced on the individual level, and what this means about the relationship between food and identity. As demonstrated, the act of choosing food is inextricably linked with one's sense of self, one's ethical beliefs and personal values.

This thesis revealed the various ways that research participants respond to the experience of food alienation, namely through actively finding meaning in their food choices and rejecting one's cultural and/or class background. It suggests that despite the pervasiveness of traditional foods in the Halifax, NS, these foods have become a source of guilt and no longer fit with their current food ideals. As well, individuals engaged in conscious efforts to negate the effects of 'gastro-anomie', particularly by eating mindfully but in doing so, may experience another kind of anomie once they no longer belong to a social group (i.e. feeling out of place at a barbeque, even when among friends). Through the daily challenges of finding meaning in food, participants

reflexively monitored and embodied their food choices and in so doing, created and asserted a sense of self.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The act of choosing one's food is an individual and a private practice, as well as a global and public issue; the individual choices that people make about food have much broader social, political and economic consequences. Social scientists often look at aspects of everyday life and try to connect them to the broader social world. Continuing this tradition, my research has attempted to explore what individual experiences and practices carried out on a day-to-day basis can tell us about how the cultural meanings associated with food more broadly in society today.

The idea that people are more disconnected from the origins of the food they eat provided a starting point for this study. What I found, however, is that people actively search for – and find meaning – through their food consumption practices. Consciously aware of the problems associated with a global food economy, the individuals I interviewed for this project used their food choices as a way to reflexively carve out who they are and who they are not; their bodies provided a powerful medium through which they achieved a sense of self.

The original intent of this study was to shed light on the ways that food is experienced in a particular context. Halifax, Nova Scotia has been described as a city steeped in traditional food meanings (Beagan et al., 2010; Tye, 2009), which Fischler (1988) would suggest influences whether or not an individual experiences gastro-anomie. My research complicates this picture somewhat, as the people I had spoken to describe a city that is being threatened by a global food economy and is losing its traditional way of food. These individuals made their food choices out of a plethora of options, options that were often hidden in a sea of unhealthy, unnatural and overall 'bad food'. They

consciously incorporated food that was in line with their ethical frameworks, sometimes evoking tradition but also sometimes rejecting it. This demonstrates how the construction of the modern self, even in more traditional contexts, is not fixed but reflexive, informed by many different experiences and knowledge bases, and in flux.

The thesis also demonstrated that the act of choosing food can be fruitfully understood by paying attention to the relationship between mind and body. When participants spoke of their ‘mindful’ approaches to food, they in part described a significant embodied dimension of their experiences. ‘Listening’ or sometimes ‘not listening’ to the body assisted them in deciding what to eat and served as confirmation not only that they had chosen to eat ‘good food’, but that the beliefs that informed their practice were correct ‘guides to living’. Confirming some of Giddens’ (1991) and Shilling’s (2003) ideas about the body and identity, this thesis has provided insight into the ways in which body has become a vehicle for the construction of the modern self. The body is a site where social values and ethical beliefs are incorporated as part of individuals’ identity projects; engaging in eating as a body project, in turn, appears to be part of the way people are responding to the perceived worrisome and alienating nature of the global food economy.

7.1 Recommendations for Future Research

For the participants in this project, developing food skills and knowledge was a means of recreating meaning in their food consumption and production practices. They saw learning how to cook, in particular, as an effective tool to “take back” food, to help dismantle the global food industry and to become physically healthy. Interviews alone are not capable of capturing a more in-depth picture of how research participants actually

experience food, however. Supplementing these interviews with ethnographic observation would have helped to uncover the tensions that occur between what people may think is right and what they actually say or do in practice (Wolcott, 1999). This method has been used successfully by a number of different researchers (Beagan et al., 2007, 2010; Counihan, 2009; Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Lockerbie, 2007; Miller, 2008) and more in-depth ethnographic research has the potential to better grasp actual experiences of cooking and food consumption.

Both the relationship between food and identity and the issue of food alienation would undoubtedly look very different from the perspective of those with more limited consumption choices. The participants in my study did not face significant economic hardship and while they came from varied backgrounds, they did represent a relatively homogenous group in terms of socio-economic status. They reflected that one's economic situation plays a significant role in being able to participate in ethical consumption, but they themselves did not face these kinds of limitations. An important area for future research, therefore, would be to explore how individuals living in different economic circumstances experience food alienation (or not) and what the relationship between food and identity looks like from their perspective.

7.2 Concluding Remarks

This research demonstrated that individual perspectives on food and eating offer a powerful lens through which to view abstract concepts, namely 'gastro-anomie' and identity, more clearly. It revealed some of the complex ways in which individual consumers actively give food personal and cultural meaning. Fischler (1988) suggests that the global food economy shapes practices of purchasing, preparing and consuming

food, which has resulted in food alienation and food normlessness. Identifying a need for a closer look at everyday experience, this research explored the more interpretive aspects of consumer practices that have been relatively neglected in sociological and anthropological explorations of consumption in 'western society'. The result demonstrates that understanding of how individuals negotiate the global food economy requires particular attention to the intersections between food, the body and the self.

References

- Beagan, B., Chapman, G., Ristovski-Slijepcevic, S. (2007) Engaging with healthy eating discourse(s): Ways of knowing about food and health in three ethnocultural groups in Canada. *Appetite* 50 (1): 167-78.
- Beagan, B., Chapman, G., Ristovski-Slijepcevic, S. (2010). 'People Are Just Becoming More Conscious of How Everything's Connected': 'Ethical' Food Consumption in Two Regions of Canada. *Sociology* 44 (4): 751-769.
- Belliveau, A., Burbridge, E., Canafio, J., Gazibara, N., Thomas, B., Thompson, T. (2011). *Food Security in Nova Scotia: Working towards resilient food secure communities*. School for Resource and Environmental Studies, Halifax: Dalhousie University.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage
- Becker, H.S. (2012). Interview in: How many qualitative interviews is enough? : expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research. *National Centre for Research Methods* 19: 15
- Belasco, W. (1990). *Appetite for change: how the counterculture took on the food industry*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984.) The habitus and the space of life-styles. In *Distinction: A socialcritique of the judgment of taste* (pp. 169-225). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Campbell, C. (1987). *The romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism*. Oxford: B. Blackwell.
- Common Roots Urban Farm. (2011). Partners for Care. Halifax, NS: Capital Health
- Counihan, C. (2009). *A tortilla is like life: food and culture in the San Luis valley of Colorado*. Austin, TX.: University of Texas Press.
- Counihan, C. & Kaplan, S. eds. (2004). *Food and gender identity and power*. London: Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Csordas, T. J. (1994). Introduction: The body as representation and being-in-the-world. In . Csordas, T. J. (Ed.). *Embodiment and Experience: The existential ground of culture and self*, (pp. 1-23). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- de Neeve, G., Luetchford, P and Pratt, J. (2008). Introduction: revealing the hidden hands of global market exchange. In de Neeve et al (Eds). *Hidden hands in the market*:

ethnographies of fair trade, ethical consumption and corporate social responsibility, (pp. 1-30). UK: JAI Press.

Dixon, J. & Banwell, C. (2004). Re-embedding trust: unraveling the construction of modern diets. *Critical Public Health* 14 (2): 117-131.

Dombos, T. (2008). 'Longing for the West': The geo-symbolics of the ethical consumption discourse of Hungary. In de Neeve et al (Eds). *Hidden hands in the market: ethnographies of fair trade, ethical consumption and corporate social responsibility*, (pp. 97-123). UK: JAI Press.

Fischler, C. 1988. Food, self and identity. *Social Science Information* 27, no. 2: 275–92.

Fullerton, D., & McNeil, S. (2004). *Direct Marketing of Agri-Food in Atlantic Canada: Situation and Outlook*. Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia Cooperative Limited.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Cambridge: Polity

Guthman, J. (2007). *Can't stomach it. Gastronomica: the Journal of Food and Culture* 7 (2): 75-79.

Hayes-Conroy, A. (2010). Feeling slow food: visceral fieldwork and empathetic research relations in the alternative food movement. *Geoforum*. 41 (5): 734-742.

Jaffe, J & Gertler, M. (2006). Victual vicissitudes: consumer deskilling and the (gendered) transformation of food systems. *Agriculture and Human Values* 23: 143-162.

Kwan, S. & Roth, L. (2004) Meat Consumption and Its Discontents: Vegetarianism as Counter- hegemonic Embodiment. Conference Paper. American Sociological Association, 2004 Annual Meeting, San Francisco.

Lang, Barling and Caraher (2009). *Food Policy: Integrating Health, Environment and Society*. Oxford University Press.

Levi-Strauss, Claude & Brooks, Peter. (1966). The culinary triangle. Republished in Counihan and Van Esterik (Eds.). *Food and Culture: A Reader* (2008), (pp. 36–43). New York: Routledge

Lockerbie, S. (2007). 'Nobody loves you as much as rice'. *Anthropology in Action*. 14 (1-2): 41-51.

Lupton, D. (1994) Food, memory and meaning: the symbolic and social nature of food events. *Sociological Review*. 94(4): 664-685.

Markowitz, L. (2008). Produc(ing) equity: creating fresh markets in a food desert. In de Neeve et al (Eds). *Hidden hands in the market: ethnographies of fair trade, ethical*

- consumption and corporate social responsibility*, (pp. 195-212). UK: JAI Press.
- Maurer, Donna. (2002). *Vegetarianism: movement or moment?* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Meah, A. & Watson, M. (2011). Saints and slackers: challenging discourses about the decline of domestic cooking. *Sociological Research Online* 16 (2): 1-23.
- Miller, D. (2008). *The Comfort of Things*. London: Polity.
- Mintz, S. (1996) *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into eating, culture and the past*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press Books.
- Nova Scotia Food Security Network. (2008). *Cost and affordability of a nutritious diet in Nova Scotia: report of 2008 participatory food costing*. Halifax: Department of Health Promotion and Protection.
- Province of Nova Scotia. (2005). *Farmers' Markets and their Economic Impact in Nova Scotia: Customer and Vendor Survey Analysis*. Department of Agriculture. Accessed: <http://www.novascotia.ca/agri/marketing/research/farmersmarkets.shtml>
- Ritzer, G. (1996). *The McDonaldization of Society*. Los Angeles, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Roseberry, W. (1996). The rise of yuppie coffee and the reimagination of class in the United States. *American Anthropologist* 98 (4): 762-775.
- Scott, J., & MacLeod, M. (2010). *Is Nova Scotia eating local?* Halifax, NS: Ecology Action Centre.
- Shilling, C. (2003). *The Body and Social Theory*. New York, NY: Sage Publications.
- Short, F. (2006). *Kitchen Secrets: The Meaning of Cooking in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: BERG.
- Southerton, D. (2001). Consuming kitchens: taste, context and identity formation. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 1 (2): 179-203.
- Statistics Canada. (2012). *Population and dwelling counts, for Canada, provinces and territories, 2011 and 2006 census*. Accessed: [Statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca)
- Szabo, M. (2011). The challenges of 're-engaging with food': connecting employment, household patterns and gender relations to convenience food consumption in North America. *Food, Culture and Society* 14 (4): 547-566.
- Turner, B. (1991). The Discourse on Diet. In Featherstone, M; Hepworth, M. & Turner, B (Eds). *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, (pp. 157-169). London: Sage.

Tye, D. (2010). *Baking as Biography: A Life Story in Recipes*. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Wilk, R. (2001). Consuming Morality. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 1 (2): 245-260.

Wolcott, H. (1999). *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing*. Lanham: AltaMira Press

Appendix I: Interview Guide

- (1) Where did you grow up? Where are you living now? Who is living with you?
- (2) Where did you go to school/what is your highest level of education? What is your occupation?
- (3) Would you say that you are involved in your community, such as social events or volunteer work? What kind of activities do you participate in?
- (4) Who is primarily responsible for the purchasing and preparing of food in your household? By what means, where, and when/how often does this occur?
- (5) How do you make choices about what food to buy and eat? What factors would you say go into these choices?
- (6) How would define food that is of good or bad quality?
- (7) What are foods that you consider to be staples in your household? Are there key meals or recipes that you tend to follow?
- (8) Describe significant food memories or experiences, good and/or bad. (I.e. Were you a picky eater as a child? How did you learn to cook?)
- (9) Are there particular kinds of food that hold significant meaning to you?
- (10) Do you think that Halifax, or perhaps particularly your community or neighbourhood, has any particular issues that are important to consider when looking at food? Such as access?
- (11) Do you take part in any social occasions where food plays a significant part? Do you eat out at all? When, where, why and with whom?
- (12)** Describe food as you see it in the popular media, such as on television or news stories, advertising etc. Is it reflective of your experiences of food?

Appendix II: Recruitment Letter

Ashley MacDonald
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology
Dalhousie University
6135 University Avenue
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3H 4P9

Dear xx,

My name is Ashley MacDonald and I am a Master's student in Sociology at Dalhousie University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study for my thesis project entitled "Negotiating 'Gastro-anomie': Exploring the relationship between food, the body and identity".

Recently in Nova Scotia, there has been increasing public attention paid to issues of food in terms of nutrition, environment and policy but I think that it is also important to consider how experiences of food are shaped by culture and social interaction. The purpose of this study is to examine the meanings of food to Nova Scotians, and how these meanings are connected to their individual and cultural identities. This study will address the following question: What can the choices, practices and beliefs centered on food consumption of individuals reveal about the relationship between food, the body and identity?

People in their everyday lives consume food, so what you think about food and how you experience it is extremely significant in exploring these issues. This research study consists of an individual interview and, if you are willing, an observation of a grocery shopping trip and meal. The interview will ask questions about your memories, day-to-day experiences, and opinions on food practices. This interview will take approximately one hour and will be conducted at a time and place that is most convenient for you.

If you would like, I will be happy to provide you with a report of my thesis findings once my research is complete. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Dr. Fiona Martin at f.martin@dal.ca or at (902) 494-6750.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please contact me so that we can arrange to meet.

Sincerely,

Ashley MacDonald
(902) 478-6681
macdonald.a@dal.ca

Appendix III: Informed Consent Form

Negotiating ‘Gastro-anomie’? Exploring the relationship between food, the body and identity.

Researcher:

Ashley N. MacDonald
Masters Student, Sociology
Department of Sociology & Social Anthropology
Dalhousie University
6135 University Ave.
Halifax, NS B3H 3P9
Email: macdonald.a@dal.ca

Supervisor:

Dr. Fiona Martin
Master’s Supervisor, Professor
Department of Sociology & Social Anthropology
Dalhousie University
6135 University Ave.
Halifax, NS B3H 3P9
Email: f.martin@dal.ca

Introduction

You have been invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Ashley MacDonald who is a graduate student at Dalhousie University, as part of her Master of Arts in Sociology degree. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The study is described below. This description tells you about the risks, inconvenience, or discomfort which you might experience. Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others. You should discuss any questions you have this study with Ashley MacDonald.

Purpose of the Study

Recently in Nova Scotia, there has been increasing public attention paid to issues of food in terms of nutrition, environment and policy but I think that it is also important to consider how experiences of food are shaped by culture and social interaction. The purpose of this study is to examine the meanings of food to Nova Scotians, and how these meanings are connected to their individual and cultural identities. This study will address the following question: What can the choices, practices and beliefs centered on food consumption of individuals reveal about the relationship between food, the body and identity?

Study Design

There are two stages in this research project: (i) A food-related activity to be participated in and observed by the researcher, and (ii) a tape-record interview.

What you will be asked to do

The first stage is an in-depth, semi-structured interview that will be a one-on-one conversation with you and the researcher. The interview will take between one to one and a half hours, and with your permission, it will be tape-recorded. These interviews will focus on the your experiences and memories regarding food production, preparation and consumption.

The second stage is a brief observation period, which would take between 1-2 hours, and it consists of the researcher observing a daily activity of your choice related to food that you participate. This could include a trip to the grocery store or market, or preparing a meal. This portion of the research will not be tape-recorded, but the researcher may take brief notes during this time.

Who can Participate in the Study

You can participate in this study if you are currently residing in the Halifax Regional Municipality, and are over the age of 18 years.

Who will be Conducting the Research

This research is being conducted solely by the Principal Investigator, Ashley MacDonald, who is being supervised by Dr. Fiona Martin at Dalhousie University. Only Ashley MacDonald will have access to the data collected.

Possible Risks and Discomforts

Due to the nature of this research study-experiences and opinions on food consumption and identity- it is unlikely that you may become uncomfortable or feel stressed at any point of the interview. However, if you become uncomfortable at any point during this interview, please remember that you are free to decline to answer any question that you do not wish to answer, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

Possible Benefits

Although there are no direct benefits for participating in this project, your assistance will be extremely valuable and contribute to a richer understanding of food issues in Nova Scotia.

If you would like, I will be happy to provide you with a report of my thesis findings once my research is complete. If you so wish, please contact me and let me know, and I will

store your contact information in a password-protected file on my personal computer in order to send you my findings at the completion of this study.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

All data gathered will be kept strictly confidential. All audiotapes, interview transcripts and notes will be kept in a secure place at all times, and only myself and my supervisor will have access to them. Direct quotes may be used in the final publication or report but any data published will be removed of any identifiable markers, and the adoption of pseudonyms will be used. To further protect your identity, this signed consent form will be digitally scanned and stored in a password-protected file on my personal computer, and the original will be destroyed. Furthermore, the results of this study will be presented as a group and no individual participants will be identifiable. However, although any information you give during this research project will kept strictly anonymous and confidential, if the researcher has concerns about a possible neglect or abuse of a child or an adult in need of protection, the researcher will make these concerns known to the appropriate authorities.

Questions

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Dr. Fiona Martin at f.martin@dal.ca or at (902) 494-6750.

Problems or Concerns

If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Catherine Connors , Director of Dalhousie University's Office of Human Research Ethics Administration, for assistance at (902) 494-1462, Catherine.connors@dal.ca.

**“Negotiating ‘Gastro-Anomie’? Exploring the relationship between food, the body and Identity”
Signature Page**

You will be provided with a copy of this informed consent form to keep for your records.

“I have read and understood the above information. I have been given the opportunity to clarify any uncertainties. I am aware that I am under no obligation to participate, that I am free to withdraw at anytime and that my identity will be held completely anonymous. I consent to participating in an interview and to being tape recorded”

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____
Researcher’s signature: _____ **Date:** _____

“I have read and understood the above information. I have been given the opportunity to clarify any uncertainties. I am aware that I am under no obligation to participate, that I am free to withdraw at anytime and that my identity will be held completely anonymous. I hereby give my consent to take part in the said study and be directly quoted from the interview and have those quotations included in the publications of this research project”

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____
Researcher’s signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix IV: Details of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Occupation	Household Members
Laura	19	F	Student/part-time retail salesperson	Mother, father
Elizabeth	25	F	Graduate Student	Mother, Father
Michael	26	M	Distributor, Sales	Roommates (4)
Nina	28	F	Office Worker	Boyfriend
Alison	30	F	Nutritionist	None
Emily	54	F	Office worker	Husband, three adult children