

FOCUS ON FOOD: A STUDY OF FOOD CULTURE AMONG VANCOUVER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

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Abstract

The industrial model of agriculture and food systems has led to environmental and soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, and an increase in the prevalence and availability of inexpensive processed foods that are high in calories and fats but low in micro-nutrients (Lang & Heasman, 2002; Muller, Schoonover, & Wallinga, 2007). The transition to a healthier and more sustainable food system will require increased involvement from various stakeholders participating constructively in all aspects of the food system. Promoting this kind of food citizenship among young people, in venues such as public schools, holds great potential for facilitating broader food systems change (Rojas et al., 2011). To do this requires an understanding of young peoples' current eating and food-related practices and the influences on those practices, including the deeper meanings ascribed to different types of food selections and behaviours. The *Focus on Food* study reported here seeks to understand food culture among grade 9 and 10 students in Vancouver, as well as how they frame their food choices. I conducted small semi-structured focus groups during which student participants discussed their lunch selections and typical eating behaviours, their perceived influences on those behaviours, and their experiences and opinions about various ways of eating that resonated with them. The study found that participants often framed food as either "good" (usually harmless) or "bad" (often coinciding with being harmful) products. Most participants said that they valued natural foods and ingredients, whereas they were suspicious of those that seemed artificial or unfamiliar. Participants described attempts to avoid or resist "bad" foods and to seek out "good" ones, and many wanted more information about and/or control over the foods available to them. Some participants expressed dissatisfaction with disengaged eating experiences (like fast food consumption), and said that they would prefer more engaged food experiences, such as preparing

and enjoying their own “good” food. Initiatives to promote healthy, sustainable, and enjoyable eating should continue to engage students in constructive and hands-on food-related learning activities, during which they can acquire skills and knowledge while positively contributing to human and ecological health.

Preface

This fieldwork conducted for this research study ("Focus on Food" Secondary School Study) was covered by UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board approval (UBC BREB Number: H11-01901). As the Graduate student primarily responsible for this research project, which was done as part of the Community-University Research Alliance Think&EatGreen@School, my role was to take the lead in designing, planning, and managing the focus group research project, to recruit the team of research assistants and the focus group participants, to schedule and moderate the focus groups (with the exception of one focus group moderated by Joshua Edward), to transcribe the focus group discussions, to systematize, code, and analyze the data (including transcripts, notes, and photographs), and to report on and disseminate the findings (a process which includes the writing of this thesis).

Colleague Joshua Edward, PhD candidate in Integrated Studies in Land and Food Systems, served as moderator of one of the focus groups (April 16, 2012, at David Thompson Secondary School) and assisted in the pilot testing of the focus group protocol. The team of focus group assistants, who facilitated focus groups by taking notes and assisting with the set-up and clean-up before and after focus groups took place, consisted of Riujia (Cici) Niu, Nancy Yp, and Brian Lam. Other colleagues and mentors were consulted during the project design phase and gave feedback regarding the study design and the structure and content of the focus group guide or protocol. These included my advisory committee (Drs. Gwen Chapman, Jennifer Black, and Alejandro Rojas), Vancouver Coastal Health community nutritionist Sarah Carten, colleagues Joshua Edward and Keleen Wiseman, the team of focus group assistants mentioned above, and a few other undergraduate colleagues: Catherine Montes, Gurpreet Dhanda, and Chandni

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Most importantly, thanks to all research participants for sharing your thoughts, letting me record your words, and best of all, for your enthusiasm and curiosity. Writing about our conversations was very heartening, and it taught me a lot. I'm impressed by the consideration you've already given to important food issues that I knew very little about until so recently. My heartfelt thanks to the teachers, club hosts/leaders, and school administrators for letting me conduct these focus groups, and for welcoming yet another University researcher into your schools.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Min, for listening to my endless food-related rants, encouraging me when I seemed hopelessly stuck, and helping me to keep things in perspective. I couldn't have done this without you.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the research project

Adolescents in Canada reportedly eat fast food frequently, do not eat enough fruits and vegetables (Garriguet, 2007), and consume more dietary fat than is recommended for good health, putting them at risk for chronic disease and health problems (Health Canada, 2009a). Further, many youth in Canada have expressed confusion about health guidelines (Urueta-Ortiz, 2009), frustration with relatively poor access to healthy food, or bombardment with less-healthy food (Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004). Some have even expressed that they feel manipulated (by advertising, for example) when it comes to their food-related decisions (Ontario's Healthy Kids Panel, Murumets, & Munter, 2013). This thesis project addresses issues of interest to adolescents regarding food-related decision-making, and how they frame the issues that are important to them.

Understanding young peoples' views on eating, as well as the various influences on their eating behaviours, can facilitate attempts to promote healthy and sustainable¹ eating among youth, who will hopefully continue to shape and be shaped by the food system in a positive way as adults (Story, Neumark-Sztainer, & French, 2002). The ways in which individuals interact with food are situated within the overarching food system, and the various social, environmental, and health-related determinants and consequences of that food system. One important influence on eating practices are the meanings that people ascribe (both consciously and subconsciously) to particular food selections and behaviours: that is, what those selections and ways of eating can be expected to accomplish, and what they say about the people who engage in them (Vaisey,

¹ In this thesis, the term 'sustainable' used on its own refers to environmental or ecological sustainability, unless otherwise indicated. For the purpose of this thesis, something can be described as (environmentally/ecologically) sustainable if it encourages biological systems to endure into the foreseeable future in a functional and healthy manner.

2009). These meanings ascribed to food and eating are important to understand if people's relationships to food are to be influenced and encouraged for the better.

For this thesis research project, I conducted small focus groups with participating students from four Vancouver secondary schools. The focus group discussions were used to elicit the participants' relevant experiences and opinions regarding their food consumption decision-making² at school and in general, as well as regarding various ways of eating, including healthy eating, sustainable eating, ethical eating, vegetarianism, dieting, (eating) fast food, bulking up, and eating for pleasure. Broadly, the objective of this research was to gain a better understanding of food culture among grade 9 and 10 students in Vancouver, as well as how they frame their food choices.

1.2 About the researcher's approach: Lenses and perceived reality

I borrow from the conceptual framework of 'Learning with Life' (Rojas, 2009) to structure this section of my introduction, to help the reader to understand what led me to perform this particular research project, and also to provide background information that will help the reader interpret the contents of this thesis. Specifically, I first review personal experiences and areas of interest that influence my interpretations of reality as it currently is, as well as how I think reality 'should be.' As part of this process, I will also describe relevant challenges and opportunities within the current food system, based on my interactions with relevant literature. This 'reality as I perceive it' provides context and background information to help the reader interpret my later analyses and conclusions.

² 'Food consumption decision-making', as I use the term, includes all decision-making around food consumption, including deciding what food to procure and how as well as where to procure it from, whether / how to prepare it, how much to eat, how to eat and with whom, what to do with packaging and leftovers, etc.

My background in social anthropology contributes to and was influenced by my particular interests and approaches; I am suited to and interested in the study of why and how people eat what they eat, from their own perspectives, and how they conceptualize and frame the issues surrounding food-related decision-making. As an anthropologist by training, I take the view that people collectively co-construct their reality by interacting with, consuming, and producing culture (including food culture), as is consistent with a constructivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The global food system as it exists today can be thought of both as influencing and emerging from society's broader notions of and concerns about the natural environment, ecosystems, democracy, trade, labour, pleasure, social status, nutrition, health, safety, animal welfare, social justice, and how these things relate to one another within the realm of food and eating. Thus, what individuals communicate through their conversations about food can be immensely informative about a wide range of issues.

My personal priorities and interests with regard to the food system are formed in part by my background in (International) Development Studies. Specifically, I tend to view food systems' impacts on human health through the lens of social and ecological responsibility, in the sense that I regard long-term human health as one of numerous desirable qualities that emerge from equitable and responsible interactions between human communities and biologically diverse ecosystems that are inherently rich in renewable wealth and resources. My 'utopian vision' is a food system that arises from and contributes to resilient and healthy ecosystems, of which humans are a part.

This 'utopian vision' acts as a standard against which I compare reality as I perceive it, and thereby shapes my notions of how food-related issues can be approached constructively. The insights from this study in light of relevant literature in the field, as described in my Findings and

Discussion sections, further inform my conception of ‘reality as it is’. The ‘realm of the potential,’ or reality as I believe it could be in the future (optimistically but not unrealistically), helps to shape my Conclusion chapter, where I discuss implications of my analysis, recommendations for action and possibilities for future studies.

After introducing some relevant challenges posed by the globalized food system in the following section, I will move on to summarize my specific ‘problem’ or challenge statement, and provide some necessary background information from the literature regarding what is known about adolescent food choices. Doing so will help establish the rationale for my thesis topic and help the reader to understand my findings, discussion and conclusions. Having established the rationale for my particular research project and thesis topic, I will identify my specific research objectives, and outline the significance of the study.

1.3 Challenges within the globalized food system: Reality as I perceive it

The following section is not a literature review per se, and was not completed prior to data collection. Rather, I have drawn on various sources, some of which I was acquainted with prior to my involvement in this study, but many of which I encountered over the course of researching various topics and themes that emerged during data collection, analysis, and throughout the writing of this thesis. Much of this section was written after my Findings and Discussion chapter had already been partly written, and provides background information that I perceive as being particularly relevant to my analysis and discussion of the focus group data.

The main food system related opportunities and challenges that are discussed in the following section pertain to: localized vs. globalized food systems and their social, ethical, as well as ecological implications; the consequences of increased consolidation of power over the

food system and reduced crop diversity for human health and wellbeing; the ecological and social impacts of ecologically diversified food production vs. industrial approaches including monocultures and genetic engineering; perspectives on climate change; the role and impact of food ‘waste’ and nutrient recycling. While all of the topics covered have important implications for food consumption decision-making, some topics are more widely-discussed and frequently taken into account, whereas other matters may be considered less often or by fewer people. Many of the topics were touched on to some extent by focus group participants in this study, while other topics remained more-or-less peripheral during the focus group discussions, as will be explained in the Findings and Discussion chapter.

1.3.1 Local and global food: Place, trade and ethics

Small farms managed by local people are an immense asset, since these farms are often well-suited to produce food appropriate for the particular climate, resources and needs of their communities (Follett, 2008). Local food is tied to the concept of food sovereignty, which the international peasant movement Via Campesina defines as people’s right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems (as cited in Carney, 2012). Strong local food systems often allow farmers to retain a greater share of the retail purchase price, and can lead to positive socio-economic development outcomes such as increased income, skills attainment, and enhanced ability to re-invest in local capacity and infrastructure (Burnett, Kuethe, & Price, 2011). A strong market for local food can encourage people to take part in farming who would otherwise not take part (O’Hara & Pirog, 2013). Furthermore, when small farmers have proportional bargaining power in the marketplace and the global political sphere, as

well as dependable access to appropriate resources, they positively contribute to regional as well as global food prosperity (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2009).

There are roughly five hundred million small, mostly rain-irrigated farms in the Global South³ (United Nations, 2013). Unfortunately, many small farms do not have secure or formally-recognized land tenure, and competing land-use interests from trans-national agro-food companies wishing to produce corn, cotton, dairy, ornamental plants, fruits, oil crops, rice, soy, sugar cane, wheat, and certain vegetables present a growing challenge (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2009). Over the past decade, an area of land about eight times the size of the UK has been sold or leased to foreign investors globally, and land deals with foreign investors in the Global South increased about 200% between 2008 and 2009 (Oxfam America, 2013). Waged agricultural workers (who neither own nor lease the land that they work on) have become the heart of the commercial food production system, providing over 40% of the world's agricultural labour; 60% of these labourers live in poverty (International Labour Office, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, & International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations, 2007).

Since the advent of international markets in grain and livestock in the beginning of the 19th century, the day-to-day reality of farmers has been increasingly shaped, for better or worse, by the administrations and capitalist agents governing the flow of inputs and information geared towards producing commodities for the global market (Friedmann, 2005). In order for farmers to competitively produce food crops for the global market, they must overcome challenges including the considerable expense of industrial agricultural inputs (fuel, seed, technology, agro-

³ While 'developing world' is arguably a more widely-used term, I will usually employ the term 'Global South', since the term 'developing' usually implies a state of being relatively less-developed or 'under-developed' compared to industrialized regions, and may further imply that industrialization will necessarily and sufficiently lead to greater prosperity.

chemicals, machinery, etc.), lack of access to appropriate loans and infrastructure (FAO, WFP, & IFAD, 2012, p. 30), the resource drain on rural communities associated with urbanization, and fluctuating global food prices skewed by market speculation, biofuels, and near-monopoly pricing by agribusinesses (McMichael, 2005; Oxfam America, 2013). Due to competitive market pressures, the withdrawal of public supports, and the resulting loss of farming livelihoods, many rural-dwelling people have moved to cities in search of waged work or other informal opportunities (McMichael, 2005, 2009, p. 284; United Nations, 2013).

Ironically, many of the most historically fertile and agriculturally-productive regions of the world are currently classified as ‘food insecure,’ since their citizens lack the food sovereignty (including meaningful control over and entitlement to land and agricultural resources) that is necessary to meet their own needs. Meanwhile, other countries that produce virtually no food but are relatively high-income (for example, various oil-rich countries) are classified as ‘food secure’ since they can afford to import the food that they require (Zurayk, 2012). Nobel laureate Amartya Sen noted over thirty years ago that a global food market driven by supply and demand can be very much out of alignment with human needs: “Market demands are not reflections of biological needs or psychological desires...If one doesn’t have much to exchange, one can’t demand very much, and may thus lose out in competition with others whose needs may be a good deal less acute, but whose entitlements are stronger...Thus, food being exported from famine-stricken areas may be a ‘natural’ characteristic of the market which respects entitlement rather than needs,” (1981, pp. 161, 162).

Right-to-food and food sovereignty proponents alike posit that while healthy and prosperous food systems can and do include international trade, trade relations should not *undermine* rural and agricultural-based livelihoods in either the Global North *or* the Global

South, and should never compromise a region's ability to meet the needs of its people (Carney, 2012).

1.3.2 Biodiversity, micronutrients, and monocultures

A troubling trend from a food sovereignty perspective is the consolidation of the agro-food system into a small number of global firms (Selfa & Qazi, 2005). Globally, the ten largest food companies⁴ control about 15% of all food sales, and the proportion is rising; in the US, this proportion is over 50%, creating a corporate food oligopoly (Moodie et al., 2013). A few popular commodity crops, typically grown in industrial-scale monocultures (Carlisle & Miles, 2013) that are less labour-intensive than biologically diversified farming systems, have come to be used for a variety of multipurpose products, such as hydrogenated soybean oil and (especially in the U.S.) high fructose corn syrup; the livestock industry is the largest consumer of corn and soybeans (Muller et al., 2007). Currently, 75% of world food sales are of processed foods (Moodie et al., 2013).

Of the roughly 7 000 edible plant species of the world that have been cultivated or collected as food since the inception of agriculture, 15 make up the vast majority of our food worldwide (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2011a). Approximately 75% of crop diversity has disappeared from global farmland since the 1900s (United Nations, 2013). The Global Crop Diversity Trust (2013) estimates that only about 150 crops are cultivated on any significant scale worldwide. In many regions of the world, this reliance on fewer crops has led to an increase in the prevalence and availability of inexpensive processed foods that are high in calories and

⁴ Associated British Foods (ABF), Coca-Cola, Danone, General Mills, Kellogg, Mars, Mondelez International (formerly Kraft Foods), Nestlé, PepsiCo and Unilever. Collectively, these ten are part of an industry valued at \$7 trillion, representing about ten percent of the global economy (Oxfam America, 2013, p. 5).

carbohydrates and/or fats, but on the whole, relatively poor in micro-nutrients (De Schutter, 2010; Lang & Heasman, 2002; Muller, Schoonover, & Wallinga, 2007).

Healthy eating includes adequate daily intake of a variety of vegetables (including dark green and orange vegetables) and fruits, grains (especially whole grains), some dairy or fortified alternatives, and a few servings of fish and lean meats or alternatives (especially alternatives like beans and lentils), while minimizing intake of foods that are high in added sugar, fat, or salt, and drinking clean water (Health Canada, 2011). Eating a healthy diet is a protective factor against type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, some types of cancer, and other chronic illnesses (Health Canada, 2011; The Canadian Heart Health Strategy and Action Plan, 2009). However, as the small number of crops that are favoured (and frequently patented) by agri-businesses have come to dominate global farmland and markets, many locally-appropriate foods and varieties of pulses, roots, tubers, and traditional leafy vegetables have been displaced, and people worldwide have found their diets increasingly restricted to processed foods and a relatively small selection of whole plant foods (Lang & Heasman, 2002, p. 266; Oxfam America, 2013).

Nearly one billion people in the world suffer from chronic hunger (FAO, WFP, & IFAD, 2012), and over 30% of the world's population is affected by the 'hidden hunger' of micronutrient deficiencies, a form of under-nutrition associated with diets lacking in a variety of high-quality nutritious foods in adequate quantities (FAO et al., 2012). At the same time, more than one billion people worldwide are overweight or obese, indicating health-relevant trends including the consumption of high levels of calories, refined carbohydrates, sugars, and certain fats (World Health Organization, 2009). While obesity was once considered a problem of affluence, many low-income countries, especially in urban areas, now face a 'double-burden' of

under-nutrition *and* obesity, partly due to the availability of inexpensive, calorie-dense, micro-nutrient-poor foods (World Health Organization, 2013).

1.3.3 Ecological and industrial approaches: The organic food movement(s)

Industrial globalized food systems appear to be out of sync with various ecological needs. The industrial model of agriculture that makes it feasible and economical to produce greater quantities of more highly-processed food from a few key crop varieties is also linked to environmental degradation in the following forms: the loss of plant, insect, and animal biodiversity; soil degradation; water eutrophication from industrial fertilizer runoff; falling water tables; accumulating waste products; and global climate change from the emissions of greenhouse gases (Gregson, 2009; Hole et al., 2005; Lang & Heasman, 2002; Shwom & Lorenzen, 2012, p. 380).

Long-term food system sustainability, as well as overall ecological health and resilience, relies upon a diversity of interdependent plant, micro-organism, insect, and animal species (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2011a; Gregson, 2009). Monocultures, in which one type of crop is grown in a given area with the aid of heavy irrigation and mechanical and chemical fertilizers and treatments, while other plants are eliminated as weeds, tend to suffer greatly from insect and other pest problems in part due to loss of crop diversity (Pawlick, 2006, p. 126). Species abundance and richness across a wide range of taxa tend to be higher on organic farms than on conventional farms (Crowder, Northfield, Strand, & Snyder, 2010; Hole et al., 2005) and organic farms have been shown to out-perform chemically-managed monocultures when it comes to utilizing and strengthening ecosystem services and recycling organic ‘waste’ products (Carlisle & Miles, 2013).

Organic agriculture (and types of organic agriculture modeled after natural ecosystems in particular⁵) can be understood as an alternative food production process that depends on the services provided by a healthy ecosystem, such as ‘pest’ suppression and nutrient cycling. Importantly, organic agriculture derives its name from the use of biological (that is, *organic*) sources of soil fertility and crop nutrients. These nutrient sources include composted plant/animal matter, non-composted plant matter, and manure⁶, rather than synthetic fertilizers that typically contain ammonia produced using energy from fossil fuels (Forge, 2004; Standards Council of Canada, 2011). Specific crop management practices like crop rotation, polyculture, and proper landscape planning are used to support nutrient cycling and the life cycles of diverse beneficial insects, plants, and soil microbes, thereby promoting long-term fertility and productivity (Canada Organic Trade Association, 2010; Hole et al., 2005; Seufert, Ramankutty, & Foley, 2012; Standards Council of Canada, 2011).

According to Guthman (2004, pp. 110–111), increased concern with the social and environmental costs of industrial farming among consumers (in the U.S., Canada and elsewhere) in the 1970s and ‘80s inspired a corresponding growth in the demand for organic foods, suddenly expanding the market for high-value organic ingredients. The gap between organic food supply and the renewed demand came to be filled primarily by larger-scale agro-food businesses that were well-positioned to quickly provide large quantities of products conforming to organic

⁵ Organic growing practices can vary greatly from system to system, in part depending on their principle objectives. Some have made a distinction between “herbicide-free” bio-organic farming, whose focus is on eliminating the use of certain pesticides, and “biodynamic” organic farming, which focuses on fostering and utilizing healthy inter-relationships between plants, animals, and the solar system (Birkhofer et al., 2008), or permaculture which is similarly modeled after natural ecosystems. The term agro-ecology is often used to refer to a way of enhancing agricultural systems by understanding and mimicking natural ecological systems (Altieri, 1995). Organic food production principles are often regarded as being consistent with agro-ecology.

⁶ Ultimately, sustainable food systems that fully ‘close the loop’ will need to address how we deal with animal (including human) excrement and urine, as well as bodily remains. This is not a popular sustainability topic, yet it is a vital one for recovering soil nutrients. Dialogues about alternatives to conventional human-waste management are basically non-existent or occurring at a rudimentary phase in most sustainability and food systems dialogues.

standards for the world market. Under the organic growing standards that emerged, industrial-scale organic agriculture (frequently monocultures) innovatively employed organic as well as certain permitted synthetic inputs to fertilize soil and manage pests on an industrial scale, while not necessarily using the biological diversification employed to meet ecological sustainability issues traditionally addressed by the organic food movement (Carlisle & Miles, 2013; Follett, 2008). Arguably, there has been a corresponding shift in the public's focus from smaller-scale, sustainable farming practices to organic-certified commodities (Follett, 2008). This shift "effectively subsumed much of the organic movement into an organic industry," (Friedmann, 2005) and has been termed the 'conventionalization' of organic (Guthman, 2004).

Many organic food consumers in North America envision themselves as participating in a small-scale, local food revolution, and yet, as more large and multinational companies enter into the organic industry, concerns have been raised about whether (large-scale) organic food constitutes a sustainable alternative to industrialized food systems (Blay-Palmer, 2008, p. 114). Nevertheless, the demand for organic products has continued to expand. Recent growth in demand for organic products is partly attributable to consumer concerns about additives, pesticides, hormones, and antibiotics, which many consumers believe (sometimes correctly and sometimes mistakenly, depending on the applicable regulations and standards in the country or region) to be more prevalent in conventionally grown foods (Lee, Shimizu, Kniffin, & Wansink, 2013, p. 33). Perceived 'crises' or controversies associated with conventional agriculture, including mad cow disease and concerns about human health risks posed by Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), have seemingly reinforced a growing general distrust of conventional agro-food systems (Delind, 2006; Forge, 2004).

1.3.4 Crop species diversity and genetic engineering

While conventional plant breeding has been an extremely effective and relatively inexpensive means of improving historically important traits of sexually-reproducing crop plants, it requires the long-term stewardship of a large plant gene pool in order to maintain a rich diversity of traits to draw from (Manshardt, 2004). Further, conventional breeding methods have proven ill-suited to handle certain diseases, insect population imbalances and other issues encountered in industrial agricultural systems. Some have viewed the widespread adoption of genetically engineered crop seed as holding the potential to reduce or eliminate human hunger by reducing crop damage from specific herbicides and pest insects in industrial-scale farms (Lang & Heasman, 2002, p. 23).

Genetic engineering of crops differs from conventional breeding in that it allows for the utilization of genes and traits derived from different species altogether (plant or otherwise), although it is usually only suited for targeting simple, single-gene traits (typically, resistance to particular herbicides (United States Department of Agriculture, 2012)), and consistently requires regulation and protection of intellectual property in order to make the technologies profitable enough to be worth developing (Manshardt, 2004). The few patented seed varieties that are protected as specialized trade secrets (the most well-known include Bt corn, which produces its own insecticide, and herbicide-tolerant soy) and which are suited to industrial agricultural models, provide income to private seed and agricultural chemical companies (The World Bank, 2007). Meanwhile, knowledge of traditionally-grown plant varieties and the practice of seed saving have declined and given way to agro-industrial monocultures (McMichael, 2005, p. 281). Thus, the world's farmers have had difficulty retaining the rights, access, and entitlement to local resources needed to grow the crops that they and their communities need, while at the same time,

the adoption of industrial agricultural methods typically presents another set of challenges, requiring ongoing inputs of outside funding or subsidization (Leakey, 2013).

During the last two decades, funding in the public sector for crop research has diminished, whereas commercial research in genetic modification and biotechnology has increased (Smith & Gregory, 2012). This increases opportunities for profit-making in the agro-industry sector, but potentially weakens the public sector's ability to find ecologically-mindful and human-friendly solutions to real world problems (Smith & Gregory, 2012), some of which cannot be effectively dealt with through bioengineering (Manshardt, 2004). Genetic engineering has been recognized by some scientists as being potentially supplementary to conventional breeding and good agricultural practices, but not by any means as a viable *replacement* for a diversity of cultivated and wild plant species and varieties (Manshardt, 2004).

1.3.5 Climate and emissions

A prominent environmental issue related to food systems is climate change. Agriculture currently contributes about 30% of human-caused greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Smith & Gregory, 2012). It is more difficult to obtain a meaningful estimate of the GHG emissions generated by the global food system due to the overlap with various sectors besides agriculture, including transportation and industry. While CO₂ emissions from transportation and refrigeration of foods are given much attention in popular media, other greenhouse gases such as nitrous oxide (N₂O) from applications of nitrogen fertilizers to soil, and methane (CH₄) from ruminant digestion, rice cultivation and anaerobic soil conditions also figure heavily into the emissions produced on-farm (Garnett, 2011). Deforestation from agricultural expansion also contributes to the release of CO₂ into the atmosphere (Garnett, 2011).

The quantity of overall emissions and the proportions of different greenhouse gasses generated depend on the type and quantity of food produced and the methods and technologies employed at various stages of the food cycle. Life Cycle Analyses⁷ have found that meat and dairy products as well as air freighted foods tend to have the highest GHG burdens (Garnett, 2011). However, the GHG burden of a food product is not necessarily indicative of its overall ecological impact, and does not normally take into account the nutritional value of a unit of food being assessed, which can make dietary recommendations based solely on GHG burdens somewhat inappropriate or misleading, in addition to being difficult to calculate, as has been illustrated by attempts to develop an optimal diet from a GHG emission reduction standpoint (Macdiarmid et al., 2012). Therefore, it is important to consider the overall life cycle (in terms of ecological, social and nutritional impacts), in addition to the carbon or GHG footprint.

The province of British Columbia aims to reduce its GHG emissions to 33% below 2007 levels by 2020, and 80% below 2007 levels by 2050, as part of the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Act and the Local Government Statutes Amendment Act (Moreau, Moore, & Mullinix, 2012). To accomplish this, emissions would need to be reduced at all levels of the food system, including agriculture, processing, packaging, transportation, retailing, catering and consumption, preparation, and waste management/recycling, and stakeholders involved in various aspects of the food system must be involved in order to meet GHG reduction targets in British Columbia (Moreau et al., 2012). Some actions that individuals can take that are conducive to emissions reduction as well as other positive ecological outcomes such as reducing impacts in terms of water use, energy use and land use include reducing meat consumption and eating a mostly plant-based diet where possible (De Schutter, 2010; Garnett, 2011; Macdiarmid et al., 2012;

⁷ Theoretically this involves adding up all carbon emissions throughout a product's life from the production of inputs to final consumption and disposal of waste.

Sustainable Consumption Project, 2013) and avoiding the waste or loss of food (Barker et al., 2007; De Schutter, 2010; Garnett, 2011; Sustainable Consumption Project, 2013).

1.3.6 Resources and waste

An issue that has gained visibility in recent years is food waste. Incredibly, 30% to 40% of the food produced⁸ in the global food system never reaches a human stomach (Smith & Gregory, 2012). A large portion of crops grown (about 30% in the UK, for example) is never harvested since it would only be rejected by retailers' high standards for appearance and size (Institution of Mechanical Engineers, 2013). Anywhere between 30% and 50% of food purchased by consumers in wealthy countries is discarded by the purchaser due to inadequate storage or household management practices, and also due to in-store advertising, pricing, and promotions that lead shoppers to over-purchase (Institution of Mechanical Engineers, 2013). Putting scarce land and resources to relatively inefficient use is also related to the concept of food loss. For example, a recent study found that growing plant food intended for human consumption as opposed to livestock feed or biofuels could increase available food calories by as much as 70% (Cassidy, West, Gerber, & Foley, 2013), although of course this would not address other nutritional requirements, and there is no guarantee that everyone would have equitable access to that food.

The issues of food *packaging* waste and the need to recycle food packaging are perhaps even more frequently addressed in popular media than that of preventing food waste through food systems change and/or individual action (Maniates, 2001). The composting of food scraps has also gained attention as a means of diverting compostable materials from landfill, and to

⁸ This does not include items that are edible and nutritious for humans but which are not widely recognized as food (for example, discarded vegetable peels), nor does it take into account resources that are re-allocated for biofuels and other non-food commodities.

recover the nutrients that would otherwise be lost. There is substantially less emphasis, in mainstream discourses, on the need to recover nutrients from human and non-human animal waste (i.e. manure and excretions) (Jenkins, 1999). It has been pointed out that the mainstream paradigm regarding ‘waste’ management is problematic in and of itself, since it does not recognize that organic materials resulting from food consumption are in fact resources in need of recapture in order to feed the soil and close the food system loop (Jenkins, 1999).

1.3.7 Linking global food systems challenges to actions

Meat and certain dairy products are fairly consistently regarded as having higher environmental footprints, in terms of GHG emissions and the amount of land and water resources used, than most plant foods (Garnett, 2008; Macdiarmid et al., 2012; Riley & Buttriss, 2011; Smith & Gregory, 2012, p. 26). For these reasons, the reduction of meat consumption is often prescribed as a positive measure in terms of sustainable consumption (De Schutter, 2010; Macdiarmid et al., 2012; Sustainable Consumption Project, 2013). However, it has also been noted that the high environmental footprint of meat is often a product of how livestock are raised and what they are fed (Garnett, 2008, pp. 56, 57; Gerber, 2013; Smith & Gregory, 2012, p. 26), which suggests that meat consumption need not necessarily be eliminated altogether.

When it comes to food-related behaviours with positive environmental impacts, people often think of avoiding excessive packaging, buying their regular food staples from local sources, eating organic, and reducing food waste (Macdiarmid, 2012), all of which can be important; however, fewer people consider changing what their typical diet consists of, such as eating locally suitable, seasonal foods where possible (Delind, 2006; Garnett, 2008). Among other changes that must take place in order to reduce chronic hunger globally, there is a need to

reduce overconsumption where it is currently prevalent, to shift towards nutritious diets with lower environmental footprints, and to reduce food losses and waste wherever possible throughout the food production/supply/distribution chain, in order to reduce unnecessary strain on ecosystems and food systems (FAO et al., 2012).

Thus, it is important to remember that the transition to a more ecologically and socially responsible food system that is responsive to its stakeholders would require organization among stakeholders, and policy change. Nevertheless, there are links between certain consumption behaviours and positive environmental, social, and health-related outcomes. This is especially the case when consumption is understood broadly, not just as buying and eating food products, but also as choosing, procuring, preparing, using, and recycling as well (Ahava & Palojoki, 2004).

1.4 Challenge statement

A better food system, consistent with many overlapping sets of needs and priorities related to ethics, sustainability, and health, would allow for (at the least) the long-term provision of a variety of nutritious foods, including adequate micro-nutrient-rich foods, using socially equitable, non-exploitative relationships and interactions, in such a way that the resource base upon which the food system depends is maintained or enhanced (Carlisle & Miles, 2013).

Broadly, I propose that one major barrier in reaching such a goal is the fact that the current food system is not responsive to or in keeping with the long-term needs and priorities of most of its stakeholders. This disjunction is made evident by the 870 million people worldwide who are chronically undernourished, and many more malnourished and/or food insecure (FAO et al., 2012), as well as those whose livelihoods producing food for the global food system are

unacceptably precarious, hazardous, or inadequately compensated. It is also made apparent by the fact that a growing portion of global food production, processing, distribution, and sales are coming to be controlled by a shrinking number of large food companies at the expense of human and ecological health and wellbeing (McMichael, 2005, 2009; Moodie et al., 2013).

A growing number of people have expressed dissatisfaction with and resistance to the types of products (material and cultural) offered and promoted to the public by food companies (Blay-Palmer, 2008; Delind, 2006; Selfa & Qazi, 2005). Many individuals are engaging in conscientious daily decisions when it comes to what they personally eat (and how they present these decisions to other people) in ways that they find to be meaningful, worthwhile, and consistent with their values and sense of identity.

A popular approach to responsible eating is to use one's dollars to 'vote' for, and thereby encourage the ongoing availability of certain food products already offered in the market. While food accounts for a large percentage of household ecological footprint in Canada (Mackenzie, Messinger, Smith, & Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2008), and while making responsible food consumption choices can be an important contributor to reducing negative health and environmental impacts, this process has several limitations: it cannot introduce new options into the market; it does not address policy and power dynamics that influence the food system's level of responsiveness to different stakeholders' needs and priorities (Maniates, 2001; Rojas et al., 2011); purchasing power determines the relative impact of 'votes' made with dollars, and the capacity to vote at all (Alkon, 2012); and ecologically sustainable and socially responsible options are more expensive in part because conventional options fail to take ecological and social costs into account (Oxfam America, 2013; Pollan, 2006). Issues of transparency and information asymmetry (i.e. retailers and manufacturers having more

information about food products than consumers) complicate the process even further. Therefore, simply ‘voting with your fork’ is likely insufficient to create lasting or widespread food systems transformation on its own, without accompanying changes to food-relevant environmental, social, and trade policy, for example.

In cases where making responsible food choices as a consumer is recognized to be inadequate or impossible, for example, where corporate interests are seen as having inordinate influence, an alternative approach is to seek greater control or influence in the food system, or to support or help to create what are seen as alternative food systems (Blay-Palmer, 2008). These expressions of desire for change to, or independence from the globalized food system as we know it can be very enlightening with regard to public priorities, perceptions of what food is ‘for’ or what it ought to be for, as well as how people perceive and construct their ideal or preferred roles within the food system. A better understanding of these and other undercurrents and frameworks can contribute to ‘next steps’ towards achieving a food system that is more participatory and more responsive to its stakeholders.

This study focuses on secondary school students’ experiences, opinions, concerns, and priorities about different aspects of food and eating, because youth engagement is an important part of the transition to a more responsive food system. Adolescents who engage positively with the food system will hopefully continue to shape and be shaped by the food system in a positive way as adults. In order to encourage and remove barriers to youth engagement, it is necessary to understand their current concerns, priorities, and understandings regarding food and ways of eating. The school setting in particular is an important medium for enculturation and holds great potential for initiating and encouraging social and cultural change (Rojas et al., 2011).

1.5 Alternative food systems and food citizens

I conducted this study in close connection with the Think&EatGreen@School (TEGS) project, a Community-University Research Alliance involving the University of British Columbia, the Vancouver Board of Education (or ‘Vancouver School Board’), Vancouver Coastal Health, and numerous community organizations and stakeholders. The overarching aim of this community-engaged project is to aid the transition towards healthier and more sustainable school food systems in Vancouver, British Columbia. A specific goal of TEGS is to work with students, teachers, educators, school staff, parents, and other stakeholders to enable experiential learning about food systems, and ultimately, constructive engagement within the food system as ‘food citizens’ with corresponding rights and responsibilities. Since environmentally and socially responsible engagement with the food system (including responsible eating) requires an awareness of health-related, social, and ecological implications of food systems (Rojas et al., 2011), the aim of this thesis research - to better understand student participants’ perspectives on various food consumption related issues - is in support of the TEGS project’s broader objectives for transitioning towards healthier and more sustainable school food systems.

Within the context of the TEGS project, many teachers and community partners have expressed that in order for healthy and sustainable food initiatives to have long-term impacts in schools, a substantial portion of the school community must be actively involved and invested. Many have further expressed that students especially ought to take leadership roles for initiatives to be as meaningful and ingrained in the school culture as possible. Proponents of health promotion have found that school-based health initiatives are more likely to succeed if they involve multiple stakeholders, including students (Albert Bandura, 1998; MacLellan, Holland, Taylor, McKenna, & Hernandez, 2010). Thus, ongoing dialogue with students is beneficial to

gain a better understanding of their priorities and opinions about the food that they eat, among other food-related issues and opportunities.

In the next section, I will highlight some of the evidence suggesting that Canadian youth tend to be disengaged or distanced from positive eating practices. Most of the next section is written primarily from a nutrition and/or healthy eating perspective, since that is where most of the literature to date is focussed. In addition, it is important to note that the pursuit of healthy eating has been an important driving force behind many of the initiatives promoting food systems transformation in schools and other public institutions.

While most of the research regarding adolescents and food has been focused on nutrition or healthy eating, there is a growing body of work demonstrating that many healthy eating principles (such as avoiding overconsumption and eating a mostly plant-based diet rich in vegetables and fruits) are conducive to ways of eating that have positive environmental and social outcomes (Clonan & Holdsworth, 2012; Denyer, 2008; Hamelin, Lamontagne, Ouellet, Pouliot, & O'Brien, 2010; Riley & Buttriss, 2011). Therefore, much of the work aiming to encourage healthy eating among adolescents can simultaneously promote positive dietary choices from a social, ecological, and human health perspective.

1.6 Adolescent food choices in Canada

As stated previously in the 'challenges within the globalized food system' section, more than one billion people worldwide are overweight or obese, indicating health-relevant trends that are linked to the availability of inexpensive, calorie-dense, micro-nutrient-poor foods (World Health Organization, 2013). The impacts of these trends on adolescent health in Canada are an important aspect of this broader issue. The 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey reported that a quarter of Canadians had, on the day prior to taking the diet survey, eaten fast food

(Garriguet, 2007). Among 14-18 year-olds, fully one third had done so. The survey also revealed that 53% of male children and 63% of female children aged 14 to 18 consumed less than five servings of fruit and vegetables daily (Garriguet, 2007). Boys' average daily consumption of regular soft drinks increased from 68 grams at ages 4-8, to 376 grams at ages 14-18; and for girls, the increase was from 47 to 179 grams (Garriguet, 2008). Additionally, more than 15% of adolescents aged 14 to 18 years had fat intakes that exceed the recommended maximum of 35% of energy (Health Canada, 2009a). Further, studies have shown that young children as well as youth have concerns or worries about food and eating (O'Dea, 1999) and many do not feel well informed, or may even feel manipulated by advertising, when it comes to making good decisions about food (Ontario's Healthy Kids Panel et al., 2013).

Since poor food habits formed in childhood tend to persist into adulthood, it is especially desirable to form good food habits early in life (Albert Bandura, 1998; Loeb, 2009; World Health Organization, 1998). Secondary schools can play key roles in supporting healthy and sustainable eating practices among youth, especially since up to 50% of students' total daily energy intake takes place during school hours (Gleason & Suitor, 2001). This section reviews some information relevant to establishing approaches for effecting positive change to address some of the aforementioned issues. I also present some background information from the literature pertaining to adolescents' eating behaviours, and influences on those behaviours, to provide context for later discussion sections.

1.6.1 Theoretical approaches to health promotion

The theory and practice of health promotion can work towards broader food systems change by empowering people regarding their own health and the factors that contribute to it. The BC Coalition for Health Promotion (2013) refers to 'Health Promotion' as planned actions

that aim to empower people to have ownership of their own health by gaining control over its determinants, including food security, peace, shelter, social connectedness, a sustainable ecosystem, income, and access to education and employment opportunities. The Coalition emphasizes its focus on solutions derived through community development, health education, and citizen participation and advocacy, as is consistent with the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. Further, equity and social justice are recognized as enhancing health by contributing to individual and community empowerment, and allowing for cooperation and community participation towards long term solutions to society's health concerns (BC Health Promotion Coalition, 2013).

Various psychosocial theories of behavioural change (relating to psychological processes in interaction with social environments) have contributed to current understanding of how individual and social factors contribute to health or disease. Some of these models have been specifically applied to study environmentally-friendly behaviours (Chao, 2012), with the aim of encouraging positive behaviours that contribute to personal and ecological wellness. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) highlights the link between beliefs and intentions, and holds that intentions play a large role in determining reasoned behaviours. It posits that an individual's beliefs regarding the outcomes or other salient attributes of a health-related behaviour (or an environmentally-responsible behaviour), their beliefs about social norms (especially perceived social pressures and beliefs about how others view the behaviour), their motivation to comply with those norms, and the degree to which they feel they can control the performance of the behavior, all combine to affect that individual's intention to perform the behaviour. The theory has been used to understand health-related actions. For example, work using the Theory of Planned Behaviour suggests that adolescents' families, especially mothers, often played an

important role in reinforcing healthy eating behaviours, while peers particularly influenced activity levels and exercise (Rhoades, Al-Oballi Kridli, & Penprase, 2011).

Social Cognitive Theory is concerned with the interrelated socio-structural (i.e. pertaining to the structure of society) and personal determinants of health, and posits that people are both agents of change, and responders to change. It is recognized that people observe their own and others' actions and their outcomes, and the likelihood of repeating a given behaviour is influenced by the expected outcomes and the estimation of one's own ability to complete tasks (a.k.a. self-efficacy) (A. Bandura, 1977; Albert Bandura, 1998). Researchers who have utilized Social Cognitive Theory to understand the performance of health behaviours have recommended equipping people with the knowledge and skills to manage their own health habits, and providing social supports, including health policy initiatives, to sustain those healthy habits (Albert Bandura, 1998).

Proponents of Social Cognitive Theory have recognized the role of school-based initiatives in enhancing health by providing students with the knowledge, skills, and sense of efficacy to set goals and to monitor and regulate their own progress (Albert Bandura, 1998). However, it has been emphasized that despite the important role that schools can play in encouraging health, school-based models of health promotion should "operate in concert with home, community, and society at large," (Albert Bandura, 1998, p. 644) in order to succeed. Further, people's beliefs in their *collective* capacity to effect social change play an important role in the public health approach to health promotion.

In addition to behavioural change theories, social ecological approaches to health promotion have also been applied to the understanding of food decision-making. These approaches move away from an emphasis on individual behaviour change, and broadly explore

several interdependent levels of influence on health, including psychological, biological, socioeconomic, cultural, political, and environmental (Larson & Story, 2009; Stokols, Allen, & Bellingham, 1996; van der Horst et al., 2006). One implication of this model is that positive dietary choices are more likely to occur and to be sustained over time if the environment (both micro-level environments such as in homes, schools, and community centres, as well as macro-level environments, or the broad institutions and infrastructure such as the health system, the media, and federal government economic policies) supports healthful food options (Larson & Story, 2009, p. S56). Food-related decision-making, as viewed from an ecological perspective, is a process involving individual (eg. biological and psychological), social, cultural, environmental, economic and public policy influences (Canada & Health Canada, 2013, p. 10).

In the case of public schools, micro-environmental variables might include aspects of the physical and economic settings of schools and surrounding areas, such as the prices, availability and accessibility of various food options (which are in turn influenced by overarching policies and socio-economic contexts). Environmental factors also include elements of the social environment, such as influences from peers to eat certain foods or to spend the school lunch period a certain way. Individual characteristics such as gender, socio-economic status, age, and ethnic background also influence how individuals interact with and interpret their school food environments (Delva, O'Malley, & Johnston, 2007). The theories that have been described in this section help to shed light on and provide a framework for interpreting some important findings from empirical studies about adolescent food practices, preferences and concerns.

1.6.2 Empirical studies of adolescent food preferences and concerns

Individual food preferences can be an important predictor of consumption patterns in young people; young people tend to eat what they like, when circumstances allow for it (J.

Shepherd et al., 2006; Taylor, Evers, & McKenna, 2005). Adolescents have particular expectations and preferences regarding food, and it has been shown that young people tend to develop preferences for foods they are familiar with, and more broadly, that their experiences and environments shape and reinforce their preferences over time (Cooke, 2007).

Children and adolescents also have concerns about certain foods and the expected outcomes (a construct from Social Cognitive Theory) of consuming them. In a study of three primary and three secondary schools, about one third of the aged 6 -19 children and adolescents surveyed were concerned or worried about eating certain foods or drinks (O'Dea, 1999). Most of those with concerns were older girls who were worried about weight control. Boys and girls seemed to have different types of food-related concerns: girls tended to feel guiltier about eating, and boys tended to be more concerned than girls about food poisoning (O'Dea, 1999). The study also found that parents, especially mothers, were more likely to restrict the diets of their daughters than those of their sons, and tended to restrict sugary foods more often than fatty foods (O'Dea, 1999). The most common reason participants gave for their parents forbidding certain foods was that the food was unhealthy, and the second most common reason was that the food would cause weight gain. Other reasons given included tooth decay, hyperactivity, acne, and diabetes. Thus, parental modeling and influence can play an important role in dietary behaviors of adolescents and children, inside and outside the home.

Social contexts can be of particular importance for high school students' stated food preferences as well as their actual eating behaviours. According to Sebald (1989), adolescents pay particular attention to what their peers do, say, and think, and social influences tend to be very important (Pasupathi, 1999; Suls, 1993) as youth form and solidify their identities (Erikson, 1950, 1968) during their transition to adulthood. In support of this, a review of social network

analyses of young people's eating behaviors showed that among secondary school students, groups of male friends were very much alike with regard to fast food consumption frequency (Fletcher, Bonell, & Sorhaindo, 2011, p. 549). Male and female adolescents in Canada commonly report eating with friends at school and/or fast food restaurants (McPhail, Chapman, & Beagan, 2011; Urueta-Ortiz, 2009).

In a review of studies pertaining to environmental correlates of obesity-related behaviour in youth (van der Horst et al., 2006), availability of fruit and vegetables at the household level was associated with higher fruit and vegetable intake in four out of seven relevant studies reviewed (Cullen, 2001; Cullen et al., 2003; Kratt, Reynolds, & Shewchuk, 2000; Reynolds, Hinton, Shewchuk, & Hickey, 1999). Other studies suggest that among young people, household availability is an even stronger predictor of energy-dense snack food consumption than of fruit and vegetable intake (Ball et al., 2008; de Bruijn, Kremers, de Vries, van Mechelen, & Brug, 2006).

Conversely, cognitive factors such as self-efficacy and perceived importance of healthy behaviour have been seen to play a more important role in predicting adolescents' fruit and vegetable consumption than in predicting their consumption of energy-dense snacks and fast food (Ball et al., 2008). This may indicate that while availability of energy-dense snack foods might predict consumption of those items, young people may not be so quick to eat fruit and vegetables, even when they are made available, unless healthy eating is seen as important and feasible.

It has been observed that students interact with, navigate, and influence their school food environments in complex ways, and different individuals may respond to public health interventions and policy changes differently. For example, when energy-dense snack food was

restricted in some U.S. high schools as a response to school food policy, some students reported compensating for these restrictions by eating more junk food/beverages outside of school (Vecchiarelli, Takayanagi, & Neumann, 2006). Some students (most of whom were female), however, did the opposite, adopting healthier eating patterns by consuming fewer carbonated sweetened beverages *even outside* of school (Vecchiarelli et al., 2006).

Findings such as these serve as a reminder that influences and relationships governing food decision-making among adolescents are complex, and effective policy changes and interventions should recognize and respond to the needs or priorities of the diverse individuals affected by them. Based on the literature, issues of particular influence may include immediate and broader food environments; personal concerns and priorities about various issues including but not limited to health, safety, and body image; and the influence of family, peers, and perceived social norms regarding food as well as gender roles. Less is known about how young people perceive and contextualize the various factors and concerns that may influence their food-related decision-making (especially factors such as environmental sustainability or ethics specifically), since there has been a relative absence of qualitative research to inform current understandings in those areas. Thus, a major focus of my research study is to explore how some secondary students frame and experience their food-related decision-making, and what kinds of factors they identify as being important to them when it comes to food.

1.7 Specific research objectives

The objectives of this research are to explore grade 9 and 10 students' perspectives of food-related issues and factors that impact how they make decisions about food consumption.

1.8 Significance of the study

The transition to a more healthy and sustainable food system will require time and involvement from numerous stakeholders, and recognition that their priorities and perspectives are valuable. Some nutrition and food-related interventions that are designed to improve eating practices of adolescents are carried out without an understanding of the factors that affect youths' food choices and priorities (Frewer, Howard, & Shepherd, 1996). It has been suggested that nutritionists and social scientists must do their best to 'keep up' with public discourses about food, and strive to understand people's conceptual frameworks and agendas, rather than try to impose overly rationalist models for change that don't resonate with the public (Fiddes, 1994).

My hope in conducting this research was that by contributing to a better understanding of the attitudes and perspectives of participating secondary school students around food and eating, the results of this study can stimulate further dialogue and discussion among researchers involved in food culture (adolescent food culture in particular), as well as stakeholders interested in teen eating practices, such as teachers, nutrition educators, food activists, parents, and teens themselves. The findings and resulting discussions may lead to the identification of strategies for school and community food initiatives, and questions for further investigation when planning or conducting these initiatives. There may also be broader implications for youth engagement and other types of inclusive food movement activities.

The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of the factors that affect some secondary school students' food choices and eating behaviours, their perspectives on various ways of eating, and how they understand food issues. The results will promote further dialogue and research that can in turn be used to inform food-related initiatives (perhaps especially in schools), or ways of explaining adolescent eating behaviour.

Chapter 2: Methodological approach and research methods

2.1 Methodological approach

Because my goal was to examine food decision-making processes and related opinions and experiences from participants' perspectives, I used a qualitative methodological approach, which is also consistent with the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study (*Encyclopedia of public health*, 2008, p. 1223). I did not have precise expectations about what I would find, and I was not testing a research hypothesis or measuring a relationship between two variables. Therefore, a quantitative approach would not have been appropriate. My intention was not to reveal the prevalence of any particular food-related decisions or opinions, and my findings are not intended to be generalized to wider populations. Rather, my aim was to get a better understanding of what issues were of concern to participants, and what meanings they ascribed to different ways of eating. The conversations that participants shared with me provide insight into some of the ways that students decide what to eat, and how they might understand or perceive various food-related topics.

2.2 Methods

I used focus groups with secondary school student participants as the primary method for this study because my goals included gaining a better understanding of food decision-making in the highly social context of the school environment, and focus groups allowed me to approximate a typical school lunchtime setting. I also felt that focus groups would seem less formal than one-on-one interviews, which are often used in qualitative research, and that the study would be less awkward for participants if they did not feel 'singled out' regarding their

opinions and experiences. Focus groups also allowed me to hear more participants' perspectives with the time and resources available to me.

2.2.1 Ethical considerations, pilot test, and peer feedback on research design

In preparation for recruitment and data collection, I secured UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) approval (H11-01901) for the study, and a member of my advisory committee, Dr. Jennifer Black, had previously obtained Vancouver School Board (VSB) approval to study "What Shapes Food Practices on School Days?" (please see appendix A for VSB approval letter). I recruited a small team of undergraduate research assistants to take turns assisting me at focus groups by taking notes.

With the expertise of my academic supervisor Dr. Gwen Chapman, six Undergraduate research assistants (recruited via a volunteer position listserv for UBC Land and Food Systems students) were given an orientation to the basics of conducting focus groups. These assistant researchers were also required to complete the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans online training. The goal of forming this team was to ensure that one assistant would be available and prepared on any given day to assist in note-taking during a focus group. In practice, only three participants assisted during the focus groups and were offered small honoraria. With the feedback of my academic advisory committee (as well as Sarah Carten, Community Nutritionist with Vancouver Coastal Health and co-investigator with the Think&EatGreen@School project; Kelleen Wiseman, lecturer in Food and Resource Economics and researcher at UBC; research colleague Joshua Edward, a PhD candidate in Land and Food Systems, and the small team of undergraduate research assistants), I developed a guide

for the focus groups, along with a note-taking guide for the research assistants (please see appendix B and C).

Co-moderator Joshua Edward and I conducted two ‘pilot’ or trial focus groups as focus group moderation training/practice, and to test the focus group guide and note-taking guide. Five undergraduate student participants were recruited via a volunteer position listserv for UBC Land and Food Systems students, and the pilot focus groups both took place on UBC campus. All participants signed consent forms (appendix E) and received a free lunch as incentive for participating. I moderated one of the pilot focus groups, Joshua Edward moderated the other, and we each received feedback from the team of Undergraduate assistants, Kelleen Wiseman, and Dr. Gwen Chapman.

Throughout the study, all participants’ identities were protected by the use of code names or pseudonyms in written work. All focus group participants recruited from VSB schools (i.e. all regular participants) were required to obtain written consent from their parent or guardian, and also signed a participant assent form themselves. The consent and assent forms (please see appendices E and F) included a few questions about the participants: their age, grade, gender, and whether they were eligible for the subsidized lunch program at their school. Unfortunately, the subsidized lunch question turned out to be difficult for students and parents to interpret. Usually parents checked off ‘yes’, although when I clarified to participants at ice-breaker lunches that students were not part of the subsidized lunch program by default, and that it was different from simply purchasing cafeteria food, almost all participants indicated on their own forms that they were not, in fact, part of the subsidized lunch program. One participant was genuinely part of the subsidized lunch program, and did not spend the \$6 that I provided her with for lunch, explaining that she didn’t need it because her lunch was already paid for in advance.

2.2.2 School recruitment

Sarah Carten, Community Nutritionist with Vancouver Coastal Health and a partner of the Think&EatGreen@School project, helped connect me with several secondary school teachers and administrators who were willing to allow their students to volunteer to participate. Having completed this preparation phase, I obtained permission to recruit volunteer student participants from six Vancouver public secondary schools, and was ultimately able to recruit from four of them (I was not able to recruit enough students to conduct any focus groups in the other two schools). I had also sought, ideally, to gain access to schools that varied in their school food environments and retail environments, in order to get a wider variety of experiences from various types of school settings. However, ultimately participation was determined by schools', stakeholders', and students' individual interest and willingness to take part (and parents' willingness to give consent).

2.2.3 Participating schools' background information

Each school was unique in many respects, and all were fairly culturally heterogeneous. The focus group participants were largely of East Asian (Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, and/or Korean) decent, and this predominance was partly a reflection of the schools' demographic characteristics. Information provided here about the schools is from my observations as well as Think&EatGreen@School research-related interviews and observations, and prior school reports by Undergraduate students involved in the Think&EatGreen@School project through Community Service Learning opportunities.

School #1

School #1 is attended by roughly 1700 students in grades 8 through 12, and is located in an ethnically-diverse neighbourhood populated by single-family residences, commercial developments, and some townhouses. The school is within a 5-7 minute walking distance of several food retailers including three fast food fried chicken restaurants, a Subway sandwich restaurant, several Vietnamese, Chinese, Italian, Greek, pizza and sushi restaurants, produce and grocery stores, and several convenience stores. School staff and administrators have observed that many students bring lunch from home⁹.

The school is quite active with the Think&EatGreen@School project. It has implemented several initiatives to promote healthy eating and improve environmental sustainability, including a seasonal Farm-to-School salad bar (which had not been very popular with students except when salads were provided free of charge at promotional events; the salad bar has since been converted into a sub sandwich bar and has reportedly gained in popularity); a compost program (whose success has waxed and waned in the face of challenges like getting students to separate their waste, and the limited capacity of the composter; the cafeteria has used compostable plates in the past, but cost is sometimes an issue) including student compost collection from the surrounding neighbourhood; and a school food garden and indoor growing spaces that have been maintained by a student club (with ongoing support from community non-profit partners) and that sometimes provide small quantities of greens and herbs to the cafeteria. In addition to the regular home economics 8th grade classes and foods 9 and 10 classes, students can learn about cooking and food preparation at their school's teaching cafeteria through the culinary arts

⁹ The school store has a microwave that students can use, but only if they pay 25 cents or make a purchase. No other microwaves have been observed.

program. (The ACE IT program allows participating senior students get a head start towards obtaining professional certification as a cook.)

The school's cafeteria can seat about 400 students, or roughly one quarter of the school's population. In addition to prepared sandwiches, baked goods, soups, drinks (including milk, chocolate milk, and juice boxes) and a few other items, the cafeteria offers a regular daily entrée, which ranged in price from \$4.50 to \$5.25, as well as a healthier entrée option selling for roughly the same price. The 'hot lunch program,' or subsidized lunch program, allows qualifying students (usually students from low-income families, or those who can otherwise demonstrate that they are in need of the program) to pay \$60 per month or whatever they can afford for a daily cafeteria regular entrée or sandwich lunch.

Administrators have expressed concerns in the past about the school store (run by students in the Marketing 10 class) selling pizza three times per week when the school-wide limit is supposed to be once per week. I observed three beverage vending machines at the school: one in the cafeteria and two by the gym. Vending machines contained sports drinks, flavoured milk, juice, (zero-calorie or 'diet') soft drinks¹⁰, and bottled water. Fundraisers selling food are held only a few times per year and are usually initiated and run by the student council, according to school administrators.

School #2

This school has a student population of about 1400, and is located in a relatively secluded residential area. However, there is a Little Caesars pizza, 7-eleven convenience store, bubble-tea shop, and an Asian market serving lunch specials located about six blocks away. The school has

¹⁰ Full-sugar soft drinks are prohibited from being sold in VSB schools under provincial guidelines.

a reputation for being environmentally active. It has a seasonal farm-to-school salad bar (available during warmer months); an outdoor vegetable garden that student environmental clubs are involved in with support from community not-for-profits, which sometimes provides some herbs and other items to the cafeteria; some fruit trees, and some indoor food-growing also takes place sporadically. The school has a student environment-club-managed compost system that includes vermicompost and a community organic-waste collection service by students. The teaching cafeteria hosts the culinary arts program and the ACE IT program, and there is also an after-school cooking club led by volunteer secondary students that engages elementary school students from feeder schools.

The cafeteria seats about 250 students, which is about one fifth of the school's population. There is a 6-week rotating menu for \$5 hot entrées, plus other items like baked goods, side salads, fruit/veggie cups, baked fries¹¹, sandwiches, soups, and drinks (such as juice boxes, milk, chocolate milk, bottled water, and sugar-free spritzers). The cafeteria tends to use compostable paper plates and sometimes compostable cutlery, depending on affordability of these utensils and the compost system's capacity.

The schools' store (once again, run by Marketing 10 students) sells snacks and beverages including frozen bars and ice cream bars, cornitos (a packaged salty snack), chips, juice, water, and diet/calorie-free soda, and is usually open at lunch, during breaks, and for a short period of time after school. Food fundraising sales are prohibited at this particular school, and there are reportedly no bake sales due to health and safety concerns, although the cafeteria will 'cater' school events like sports games.

¹¹ Fried foods are prohibited in VSB schools under provincial guidelines (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, 2010).

School #3

This school has a student population of over 2 000, and is located in a mostly residential area. The closest places to purchase food off-campus (including a gas station, Subway sandwich restaurant, and an A&W fast food hamburger restaurant) are about a 10-minute walk from the school. It has a school garden that a Leadership 10 class and a school environmental club are involved in maintaining with community not-for-profit partner support, though the garden did not provide any food to the cafeteria at the time of data collection. The school initiated a Farm-to-School program in an attempt to integrate some local/fresh food into the school food system. The school compost system collects food waste from classrooms, and since there have been challenges in the past with maintaining this system using only student volunteers, a Leadership class has become involved on a regular basis. The students at the school have been actively involved in promoting tap water consumption and reducing bottled water sales/consumption among students at the school, but also in the outside community.

The cafeteria can seat about 150-200 students (about one-tenth of the student population), and the school store is located directly across from the cafeteria. Both are open for breakfast before classes start as well as for lunch. The cafeteria is not a teaching cafeteria; rather it is a contract cafeteria run by an outside catering company. The cafeteria sells hot sandwiches (burgers and/or veggie burgers, for example, for around \$3.75), simple side salads, drinks (such as juice boxes and milk tea), veggies and dip, and \$5.25 hot entrées on a rotating 2-week menu. Chinese food and pasta are available consistently each week. Student clubs hold food fundraisers, and stakeholders from the school have sometimes expressed concern with the healthfulness of the food sold in those fundraisers, as well as in the school store (which frequently sells pizza, for example).

School #4

About 970 students attend this culturally diverse school located in a semi-dense retail environment. Administrators have described the school's population as 'one of the most vulnerable.' There are various types of food outlets within a few (on average, about four) blocks of the school, such as Pho and sushi restaurants, convenience stores, McDonald's and Subway.

The school's compost program has been running on-and-off, and at one point, the sustainability club was involved in maintaining it. At the time of the focus groups, this school was a 'pilot school' (along with many others) for a particular composting company's services. At the time, VSB was trying to settle on a service to use for district-wide organic waste collection. There is no school garden on-site, but the sustainability club and Leadership class, as well as a Life Skills class, have visited a nearby greenspace/community herb garden to gain experience harvesting and identifying herbs, and have incorporated some of these herbs into the cafeteria meals.

The teaching cafeteria hosts the culinary arts program and ACE IT, and sometimes caters for school events and fundraisers. The cafeteria seats around 190 students (about one-fifth of the school population) and is only open at lunch period. Hot entrées are available for \$5, as well as side salads, a few whole fruit items (such as apples or oranges), dessert cups (such as gelatine dessert or pudding), baked goods, sandwiches, soup, and drinks (for example, juice boxes, bottled water, milk, and chocolate milk). The subsidized lunch program provides a low-cost cafeteria lunch to eligible students. The school store has been closed for some time. Food fundraisers take place at the school, though the information on their frequency is ambiguous. The Parent Advisory Council (PAC) sells baked goods and chocolate, which raises funds for school

programs, but also raises health-related concerns among some school stakeholders and competes with cafeteria sales.

2.2.4 Participant recruitment

Recruiting participants and conducting the focus groups themselves took place during the 2011/2012 school year (more specifically between November 2011 and June 2012). I used convenience sampling to recruit student participants from the schools. Within each school that granted permission to recruit participants, several supportive teachers and club hosts allowed me to speak to their classes or to make announcements at Student Council and eco/environmental-club meetings¹². As students signed up for the study by indicating their interest in person or via email, I provided each of them with a parental consent form and a participant assent form to complete, and I invited them to an ice-breaker lunch that I scheduled at their school's cafeteria during regular lunch period.

I visited student council meetings and school eco/environmental clubs, as well as Foods, Planning, and Woodworking class (although none from the woodworking class participated in the study), and a message about the study was communicated to students in Leadership class¹³. A Community School Team also helped me to recruit students by allowing me to hold an 'information lunch period' during which students could sign up for the study. Some of the students recruited via a particular method may have also been taking part in one or more of the other courses, programs and clubs above, and there was some overlap between categories. A few participants found out about the study from friends or peers. At each school I also put up posters

¹² All participating schools had environment clubs, but I was afforded the chance to recruit from only some of them. Therefore, schools #1 and #2 contributed more participants from environment clubs and Leadership class, and the other two schools' participants were mostly drawn from Foods and Planning classes.

¹³ Planning courses covered topics of career planning, personal health, and life management; Leadership courses covered a variety of topics and themes, including environmental sustainability and social responsibility leadership.

(please see appendix G) with basic information about the study, and my contact information. As an incentive and a thank-you, participants were offered a free lunch in their school cafeteria at each of the two group meetings (i.e. the ‘ice-breaker’ lunch that acted as an introduction to the study, and the focus group discussion itself), and a \$10 gift card (for iTunes, Chapters, or Cineplex). Participants were given their gift cards after their focus group discussion was completed.

2.2.5 Size and structure (grade and gender) of the focus groups

My goal had been to have three groups from each of four schools with 4-5 student participants per group. Because the focus groups were conducted during the 45 minute school lunch period, it was necessary to have fewer participants per group than the typical recommendation of 6-8 (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Having a maximum of five students per group allowed for more in-depth conversation and contributions from all participants, and made the groups relatively easy to manage logistically in the available time.

I invited grade nine and ten students to participate because I felt that grade eight students, who would be in their first year of high school, might be less able to clearly articulate any well-established attitudes and opinions about their (relatively new) school food environments. I wanted the age-range of participants to be relatively small in order to minimize unnecessary complications in comparing participants’ comments and feedback (age was not a study parameter). Also, I wanted the participants in each focus group discussion to regard each other as peers on equal terms as much as possible. Convenience was an important factor regarding why I did not recruit students in grades 11 and 12 instead of 9 and 10; Foods and Planning 9 and 10 classes were some of the most accessible classes for recruitment purposes. At one point, I invited

older students in grade 11 to participate as well (via posters and at Student Council meetings), but ultimately no grade 11 students participated.

My goal had been to conduct one focus group of all females, one of all males, and one of both males and females in each of the four schools to allow for a more diverse spectrum of discussions about food topics and decision-making to emerge. For single-gender groups, the focus group moderator was the same gender as the participants. (In practice, this meant that for the one all-male focus group, my colleague Joshua Edward acted as moderator, while I moderated the remaining 13 focus groups.) Since gender is socially-constructed and socially-contextualized, it stands to reason that forming groups of different gender configurations might help to distill certain influences or topics of interest (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Bem, 1981). There may be topics and food decision-making patterns that are more likely to emerge only in single-gender groups or only in the mixed-gender groups due to perceptions of gender-appropriate food practices. For example, I had originally anticipated that some participants might refrain from discussing certain food-related behaviors (such as eating a lot of fast food), or potential motivators for food-related decision-making (such as weight management or concerns about body image) in front of members of the opposite sex, which would be consistent with the findings of some studies (Harrison & Jackson, 2009, p. 9) and the methods of similar focus group studies (Chan, Prendergast, Grønhøj, & Bech-Larsen, 2009, p. 478; Urueta-Ortiz, 2009). At the same time, mixed-gender groups might allow for a greater diversity of opinions or topics to emerge within a single focus group discussion. Overall, therefore, it seemed prudent to host both mixed-gender and single-gender groups.

Further, in my original study design, one of my goals was to see whether any differences would emerge between mixed-gender, all-male, and all-female groups in terms of the lunches

selected or how the participants talked about different food-related topics. European and Canadian research among adults has identified cultural associations of traditional masculinity with the consumption of red meat, as well as connections between femininity and eating more vegetables (McPhail, Beagan, & Chapman, 2012; O'Doherty & Holm, 1999; Roos, Lahelma, Virtanen, Prättälä, & Pietinen, 1998). Regarding food-related attitudes and affect, Dutch college women were more likely than men to feel guilty about eating food (Steenhuis, 2009). Women in Montreal reported being more likely to choose comfort food as a response to negative emotions, whereas men were more likely than women to choose these same foods as a response to positive emotions (Dube, Lebel, & Lu, 2005). Therefore, the structure of the focus groups was also designed to allow for an investigation of potential gender differences in food selections and talking about food-related topics. One important consideration, of course, is that gender identity is somewhat of a spectrum, and that even within groups consisting exclusively of participants who identify as girls or as boys, a great deal of gender diversity may exist (Gender Spectrum, 2014).

2.3 Data collection

I was not able to conduct the target numbers of all-male focus groups and mixed focus groups because 48 of the 60 students (80%) who volunteered to participate were female. This itself is interesting, and may be related to the apparent prevalence of female participants in some of the school environmental clubs and other courses that I recruited from. It might also be due to the way in which food tends to be a more salient issue for girls and women than for boys and men due to socialization and cultural factors (Allen & Sachs, 2007). Ultimately, as shown in Table 2.1, I conducted a total of nine all-female focus groups, four mixed focus groups, and only one all-male focus group for a total of 14 focus groups each one with 3-5 grade 9-10 students. By

the end of the study, 60 participants had participated (48 girls and 12 boys). (For a more detailed break-down including where students of each focus group were recruited from, please see appendix H.)

Table 2.1 Characteristics of focus groups and study participants (n)

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	Total
Focus Groups:	5	4	2	3	14
Female	3 (5,5,5) ¹	3 (5,4,3)	2 (5,3)	1(4)	9
Male	1 (4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1
Mixed	1 (3M,2F)	1 (4F,1M)	0 (0)	2 (2F,2M; 2M,1F)	4
Participants	24	17	8	11	60
Female	17	16	8	7	48
Male	7	1	0	4	12
Grade 9	4	5	8	9	26
Grade 10	20	12	0	2	34
14 y	2	5	8	6	21
15 y	16	9	0	5	30
16 y	6	3	0	0	9

¹ First number is the number of focus groups conducted. Numbers in brackets are the number of participants per group. F/M is female or male.

Participation in the study involved attending two meetings: an ice-breaker lunch and a focus group discussion. Each group of participants met with me at lunch time in their school cafeteria for the ice-breaker lunch, where they were given a cafeteria voucher or cash in the amount of \$6 to purchase lunch from their school's cafeteria, since a knowledgeable VSB stakeholder had indicated that students at Vancouver high schools spend approximately \$6 on the average school meal, including a beverage.

Students selected their lunches and returned to a table with me, where they photographed their lunch selections and then ate together. During the lunch, I introduced (or re-introduced) myself and what I was trying to learn through the study. I collected completed parental consent forms and participant assent forms, explained what participants could expect during the focus group discussion, informed participants of the date of their focus group discussion meeting, and answered questions. Other than these steps, the lunch was unstructured and informal. At the first

few ice-breaker lunches, an assistant was present to make notes of relevant observations from the informal meeting. However, it proved impractical in the long run to have an assistant present at each of the ice-breaker meetings, due to scheduling complications, so I only required an assistant to be present to take notes at the focus group discussions. I recorded field notes from my memory immediately after each ice-breaker meal.

The ice-breaker lunch provided an opportunity to observe the group of participants interacting with each other, and with their school's cafeteria environment. During these informal meetings, I was able to get a sense of the group dynamic, how well everyone knew one another, how everyone got along, whether there were any particularly shy or very outgoing participants, and also to gauge everyone's level of familiarity and initial impressions of the cafeteria (since many students did not eat there regularly), and to help create a relaxed yet respectful tone for the focus group discussion to follow. The short (45 minute) duration of focus groups made it important to have an ice-breaker meeting prior to the focus group in order to tend to 'housekeeping issues' like consent forms. Importantly, the ice-breaker also served to ground the focus group discussion in an actual eating experience (memories of which were evoked by the photos that participants took of their food selections). By first sharing an every-day school food decision-making experience, I hoped to facilitate a more detailed and realistic conversation about how participants make decisions about what to eat at school and in general.

A focus group was scheduled within one week of each group's ice-breaker lunch, and took place in a relatively quiet space in the school during lunch period (I used classrooms, a small gym area, and a counselor's lounge that administrators allowed me to access). Each focus group session lasted the full 45-minute school lunch period, minus the few minutes that it took to

bring lunch from the cafeteria into the room where the focus group discussion took place¹⁴.

Focus group discussions were audio-recorded, and a research assistant took notes on any observations of interest, and captured key points of the discussion.

I used the focus group guide that I had developed (please see appendix B) in each focus group. To begin the focus group discussion (after reiterating that participation was totally voluntary and asking the participants to respect one another's input and privacy), I asked each participant to look at the photograph they took of the lunch they chose from the school cafeteria during the ice-breaker, and to talk briefly about why they chose that lunch. In the next section of the focus group, I asked participants about what they usually ate for lunch on a typical school day (i.e. what foods and drinks they typically consumed, and whether they typically brought lunch from home, purchased food at school, purchased food from elsewhere, or did something else) and what factors influenced or shaped that typical lunch. Where needed, I asked probing questions to elicit relevant information about the potential influence of dietary restrictions, convenience, cost, parents, peers, and other factors. Probing questions were also used at times to stimulate discussion about students' perceptions of the school and neighborhood food environment.

In the third section of the discussion, participants chose several discussion topics from a list of nine that I had written on a flipchart beforehand, which I revealed at this point in the discussion. The number of topics selected depended on the size of the group and the time remaining in the discussion, but the maximum number of topics selected was five. The items on the list were: Fast Food, Social Eating, Bulking Up, Healthy Eating, Dieting, Sustainable Eating,

¹⁴ School administrators kindly made it possible for me to issue 5-minute early dismissal notes for participants, allowing them to leave class a few minutes before the lunch bell rang and get their lunches from the cafeteria before a lineup developed. In most cases, this strategy worked and the focus group discussions were able to begin on time, shortly after the lunch bell rang.

Ethical Eating, Vegetarianism, and Eating for Pleasure. The order in which I listed the topics on the flipchart varied from group to group, and participants could also create their own topic if they had something they particularly wanted to discuss that did not appear on the list.

The breakdown of discussion topic selections by the number of groups that selected it (out of the total 9 female focus groups, 4 mixed groups, and 1 male group) is outlined in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Number of groups selecting discussion topics (n)

Discussion Topic	Number of Groups Selected Discussion Topic			
	Female (n=9)	Male (n=1)	Mixed (n=4)	Total (n=14)
Fast Food	8	0	3	11
Healthy Eating	5	1	3	9
Dieting	6	0	1	7
Vegetarianism	6	1	0	7
Eating for Pleasure	4	0	2	6
Social Eating	2	0	2	4
Sustainable Eating	2	0	2	4
Ethical Eating	1	0	0	1
Bulking up	0	1	0	1
Other	1 (accommodating dietary restrictions in the school cafeteria)	0	1 (distinguishing 'good' foods from 'bad')	2

I had developed this list of nine topics based on their predicted potential to spark interesting conversation about different goals, ideals and values potentially underlying food decision-making, as well as practical and social aspects of food and eating that were likely to be encountered day-to-day by participants. A preliminary review of literature pertaining to youth eating behaviour had revealed that fast food consumption was seen as an important issue by both researchers and young people (Bauer, Larson, Nelson, Story, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2008; Davis & Carpenter, 2009; McPhail et al., 2011, 2011; Nixon & Doud, 2011; Powell, Auld, Chaloupka, O'Malley, & Johnston, 2007) as was the connected issue of social eating (Fletcher et al., 2011). Similarly, the topic of 'eating for pleasure' was included since taste (a part of eating for pleasure) is often reported as important in shaping adolescent food choices. I was also interested in the topic since Paul Rozin (Rozin, Bauer, & Catanese, 2003; Rozin, Kurzer, & Cohen, 2002; Rozin, 1989), Kate Soper (2009), and others have remarked on the apparently suppressed or conflicted

role of pleasure when it comes to eating in some Western cultures, and the impact that this can have on mental, physical, and emotional health, as well as on broader societal approaches to food.

Issues such as dieting (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010) and vegetarianism (Beardsworth & Bryman, 1999; Ruby, 2012), were likely to be areas of interest to at least some members of this particular age group, and also had the potential to reveal gender-related differences in ways of eating and thinking about food. ‘Bulking-up’ was added as a potential counterpart to dieting, since the literature suggested that males were less likely to report personal experiences with ‘dieting’ but still might report building strength, fitness, health, and/or managing their appearance through food choices (Wright, O’Flynn, & Macdonald, 2006).

Healthy eating and sustainable eating are priority topics for the Think&EatGreen@School project as well as for my own academic and research interests, along with ethical eating, for reasons explained in detail in my introduction chapter. An “other/ choose your own topic” option was also included so that participants could discuss any matters that they felt were very important to them, but which did not appear on the list. Feedback was provided by members of my academic advisory committee, experienced members of the Think&EatGreen@School project team (including a representative from Vancouver Coastal Health), as well as UBC Land and Food Systems undergraduate participants of two pilot focus groups, which helped to develop my final list of topics, including how the topics were worded and presented to participants.

In an earlier draft of my focus group guide or protocol, I had planned to ask participants to define what they think it means to ‘eat well’ before discussing any topics from the list. After pilot focus groups were conducted, however, it became apparent that this exercise did not encourage much conversation, and took up too much time. However, with the use of appropriate

follow-up questions, specific and relevant comments about eating well emerged spontaneously from conversations on various other topics, making the ‘eating well’ question somewhat redundant. Therefore, in the end, the ‘eating well’ section was left out.

For each selected discussion topic, participants discussed what the topic meant to them, or what it made them think of, and reflected on how the topic related to their own ideal and actual eating practices (i.e. Did it relate to what they thought it meant to eat ‘well,’ and if so, how? Did it relate to how they ate personally, and if so, how?). In the final section of the focus groups, participants were asked to share their thoughts about how boys’ and girls’ eating practices and concerns compared, and whether/how they might talk about these things differently. I disclosed that I had purposely organized groups that were either all-male, all-female, or mixed, and I asked follow-up questions including whether participants thought they might have selected their food or talked about food and eating differently if they had been assigned to a different kind of group.

Despite the advantages of the focus group method, I anticipated that certain individuals may be more reluctant to speak (either in general or on certain topics) in a group setting than in one-to-one conversations. Therefore, as advised by Krueger and Casey (2000) in their guide to conducting focus group research, I did my best to promote an environment that would be comfortable for everyone to share their thoughts, by emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers to any questions, that views would vary from person to person, and that I was interested in all different kinds of opinions and experiences. For each major topic, I asked individuals if they had any ideas to share if they did not volunteer any comments, and I regularly asked follow-up questions such as: “Does anyone else think the same way? Are there any

different ideas or experiences?” in order to create opportunities for everyone to make relevant contributions on each topic.

2.4 Data analysis

I transcribed each focus group audio recording verbatim. The issue of overlapping discussion segments, which made hearing and transcribing individual comments difficult at times, was helped by the notes taken by the research assistant. I uploaded the finished transcripts along with related field notes into Atlas.ti, a software program that facilitates qualitative data management and analyses. Each transcript was coded and analyzed using standard focus group analysis procedures (Krueger & Casey, 2000) to identify main themes and areas of divergent opinions. When preliminary coding (that is, assigning ‘codes’ or labels to ‘quotations’ or segments of the transcript based on the type of content) was complete, I re-examined the codes and quotations and reflected more specifically on how they informed my research objectives, and I generated a smaller number of new, more targeted codes that overlapped with existing codes. (A list of discussion topic related codes and overlapping theme codes, categorized by ‘family’ can be found in Appendix I.) I generated a report including all of the codes and corresponding quotations for each of the nine main discussion topics, as well as for the ‘typical meal’ discussion sections and the gender-related discussion sections. I then worked to identify key themes that recurred within and/or across several different focus groups and/or discussion topics.

Some of the areas I focused on in my preliminary analysis were the descriptors, associations, and evaluations (positive or negative) of different types of food or different ways of eating; perceived relationships between main discussion topics (for example, how dieting and healthy eating compare/contrast; ways of eating that were seen as both sustainable and healthy, etc.); participants’ rationale/justifications and reported influences for their food choices;

inconsistencies or contradictions, especially between ideal ways of eating and actual reported practices; and where/how participants said they learned about food. In my analysis, I periodically reviewed the ‘raw’ data (transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings) in order to keep my written interpretations as consistent as possible with what was being said in the context of the particular focus group discussion. My academic advisor also reviewed some of the transcript segments with me and provided feedback on my preliminary interpretations.

To form interpretations of emerging themes and to develop my discussion section, I compared the key themes to findings from relevant academic literature. I also discussed the findings of other studies done as a part of Think&EatGreen@School with my UBC research colleagues, in particular those who have worked on project SF-EAT, a series of interviews with school stakeholders and observations of school food environments, and Food Practices on School Days, a survey study of grade 5-8 students regarding their food-related practices during the school day.

I also compared themes emerging from mixed focus groups, the all-male focus group, and all-female focus groups, and looked for any major themes or recurring opinions that were raised by male participants versus female participants. To a smaller extent, I also compared themes emerging from different schools to see if there were any major apparent differences; however these comparisons could only yield limited information since participant recruitment methods varied by school. To help me make these comparisons, I created document ‘families’ in Atlas.ti for all-female groups, mixed groups, and the male group, as well as a separate ‘family’ for each of the four schools.

I qualitatively analyzed photographs from the cafeteria lunches (please see photo samples in section 3.2, Typical meals) in an attempt to identify popular food choices and food

combinations within and between groups and schools, and also to identify any possible differences between females' food selections and males' food selections. However, it should be kept in mind that different menus for different schools and on different days of the week confounded any controlled comparisons.

2.5 Quality and rigour of methods used

As mentioned previously, one of the important benefits of being part of a research and action alliance like Think&EatGreen@School is the ability to obtain feedback from colleagues holding a wide range of perspectives and knowledge. Advisory committee members, fellow graduate students, and stakeholders working closely with Vancouver Schools provided input regarding the focus group protocol and methods used, as well as the methods of recruiting participants and the logistics of conducting the focus groups. For example, TEGS project co-investigators with experience in day-to-day school schedules were able to advise me on the benefits and drawbacks of conducting focus groups during lunch period vs. after school, and so on. This feedback contributes to the quality and appropriateness of the methods used in this study. Pilot testing the focus group protocol was instrumental in gaging the likely effectiveness of the focus group protocol at eliciting appropriate and useful discussion, and helped me to refine the questions and probes adopted in the final protocol.

As the primary researcher and moderator of the focus groups, my own perceptions and lenses regarding what it might mean to eat healthfully, ethically, 'well', or sustainably have an effect on how naturally-worded follow-up questions and probes would be asked during discussion moderation. This also applies to my co-moderator, who moderated the male focus group. In order to avoid deterring or encouraging certain participant responses over others, our

adopted approach during focus group moderation was to ask fairly simple questions according to the focus group protocol, and then allow participants to speak. If we were asked what a term meant, we asked participants what they thought. If we were unclear on what a participant response meant, we asked follow-up questions such as “can you tell me more about that?” or “what do you mean by ____?”

Regarding my personal impacts on the analysis of the data collected, and how I presented the results of this analysis, I would encourage the reader to regard the sections that follow as one ‘story’ that emerged. Other researchers, no doubt, would have focused on different stories or aspects of what was said during the focus groups, and would have interpreted their relative significance somewhat differently. I include direct quotes and paraphrases throughout my discussion, in order to provide the reader with some context to support my conclusions and interpretations, and to let the participants’ voices come through to some extent. The opinions highlighted in quotations obviously do not reflect the opinions of every participant, nor should they necessarily be seen as representing static or unchanging views of the individuals that expressed them in a given moment. I did my utmost to always keep this in mind during my analysis, and I hope the reader will also keep these limitations in mind while reading.

Because I used a convenience sample rather than a random sample of students from school populations, the findings of the study should not be seen as applying to all grade 9-10 students at the participants’ schools, or to grade 9-10 students in general. The goal of the study, rather, is to gain understanding of the opinions and experiences that were discussed, and draw potential implications from them.

Chapter 3: Findings and discussion

3.1 Introduction to the findings and discussion

In this chapter, I present the key themes and findings from my analysis of the focus group data, and make comparisons to the literature. While participants expressed diverse views, for the most part they seemed to categorize food as products that were either presumed to be ‘bad’, or ‘good.’ While the foods that were described as bad were very often presumed to be harmful or risky, the ones described as good were almost always presumed to be safe. As well, appearance, taste, nutritional value, reputation, and ethical considerations influenced participants’ categorization of foods as either ‘bad’ or ‘good’.

Participants described attempts to avoid harmful or ‘bad’ foods and to seek out ‘good’ ones, and various strategies they employed to negotiate their priorities regarding food. They sometimes felt misled or insufficiently informed in their food-related decision-making, and they expressed mistrust for certain types and sources of food, especially those that were seen as unfamiliar, unnatural/artificial, or those whose production or preservation methods were seen as unnecessary, harmful, or which were not well-understood. In addition, matters such as price, perceived value, family influence, and social situations had an impact on the way participants reportedly eat. In large part, participants navigated their concerns about food by seeking more control over, or more information about the foods available to them. They favourably evaluated foods that they perceived to be free of unwanted substances, associations, or processes. Most participants said that they valued natural foods and ingredients, and expected these to be healthy and not risky or harmful. There were also comments suggesting that natural foods were seen as being ‘good’ in a more abstract sense, including from an environmental and ethical standpoint.

This chapter begins with a brief description of participants' typical meals and snacks on typical school days. This is followed by a section covering two broad categories of food, entitled 'good foods' and 'bad foods'. The main categories of 'good food' that I will cover are: healthy, vegetarian/vegetable, organic, and local; the reader will notice that there is overlap between these categories and qualities of food, as many of them were seen as being interrelated. The main categories of 'bad food' covered are fast food and GMOs, and these two categories were sometimes associated with each other as well. The reader may be surprised that 'fat' does not appear as a category or quality of 'bad foods,' since participants did frequently discuss the importance of avoiding fat overconsumption for the sake of good health and physical appearance. However, it was not appropriate to categorize fat as a type of 'bad food,' since the context (such as the presence of other nutrients like calcium or iron) and the type or source of fat ('natural' or added, for example) seemed to play a role in participants' willingness to accept it, or to accept high-fat food items as potentially 'good.' Participants' attitudes and opinions about fat will be addressed throughout the findings and discussion section.

The fourth section of this chapter is dedicated to the cross-cutting themes that I recognized as intersecting many participants' conversations on various topics, and which seemingly played important roles in shaping participants' evaluations, attitudes, and understanding about food overall, and aided them in categorizing food as (for the most part) either 'good' or 'bad,' and in their food-related decision-making as well. In short, the 'cross-cutting themes' section is dedicated to how (often interrelated) notions and impressions about health, naturalness, sustainability, ethics, pleasure, gender, culture, and 'control' or agency over one's food intersected with conceptions of 'good' and 'bad' food and impacted reported eating behaviours. The reader will notice that the topic of gender is woven throughout the 'meaningful

categories of food and ways of eating’ section, as well as appearing as a cross-cutting theme; this is for clarity, because participants were asked specifically to share their thoughts about how gender might affect the ways in which people relate to food, and they also brought up gender-related issues spontaneously in various discussions. The discussion of cross-cutting themes will build up to the conclusions chapter, which will address some of the implications for how to promote secondary school students’ positive engagement in the ongoing transitions to healthier, more sustainable food systems.

3.2 Typical meals

Figure 3.1 Several cafeteria meal selections



Above is a small sample of photos participants took of their cafeteria selections.

Participants talked about the cafeteria as well as other school food sources. Their described preferences and selections usually revolved around a number of factors, including price or value, the appearance of the food, expected taste based on previous experience with similar items, and convenience-related factors like line-up length. Combos or entrées with side dish(es) were popular options, often because they looked like a ‘good deal,’ seemed fresher than other options, and were fast and convenient to order and pay for. That said, vegetarian participants tended to avoid the entrées since they frequently contained meat.

Many participants remarked that there were at least several fast food restaurants near their school, although very few reported that it was practical to frequent these restaurants during the short school lunch period; for those that did visit fast food venues, most preferred to go after school, often with friends. Most participants regularly brought lunch from home, and quite a few said that they never purchased food at school.

Schools had different retail environments, and therefore items purchased off school grounds varied from school to school. At schools where food retailers were ‘too far away’ for participants to buy food during lunch period (this was reportedly the case for schools 2 and 3, but not necessarily for schools 1 and 4), purchases were still sometimes made after school¹⁵. Participants who purchased food off-campus during school hours or after school often reported going with friends or in a group as a social activity, though one or two went alone if they were craving certain items. Popular items included instant noodles or confection from 7-eleven, fries from fast food chicken restaurants or McDonald’s, specialty drinks (ex: frappuccinos) from

¹⁵ It is worthwhile to note that visual observations and interviews that TEGS researchers conducted with school stakeholders suggest that older students in grade 12, who are more likely to have ‘spare’ class periods or to have a car, may be more likely to go off-campus during the school day to buy food.

Starbucks, bubble tea, fast food pizza, fast food burgers/sandwiches from McDonald's or A&W, Asian-style foods (such as a chicken with rice special combo), and Subway sandwiches.

Many participants reported buying items like chips, nuts, cornitos (a salty packaged snack), ice cream, pizza, sushi, or samosas from their school store, where applicable. Vending machine items (like granola bars, chips and other salted snacks, bottled water, juice, and diet/sugar-free beverages) and school store items weren't necessarily purchased during lunch period; they were also sometimes bought before class, between classes, after Physical Education (several participants mentioned being particularly hungry or thirsty at this time) or after the last class of the day.

3.3 Meaningful categories of food and ways of eating

Foods, based on how they were discussed by participants, could be roughly categorized or placed along a spectrum from 'bad' to 'good' depending on the qualities they possessed. At the 'bad' end of the spectrum were descriptors and qualities including 'artificial,' high-salt, high-sugar, high-fat, processed, and containing 'chemicals' or pesticides; at the 'good' end of the spectrum were qualities like fresh, healthy, natural, home-made/made-from-scratch, and 'real.' Participants described healthy, organic, local food and vegetables in positive terms, and sometimes referred outright to these categories of food as 'good,' or as having a conspicuous absence of 'bad' qualities, whereas the opposite was generally true for fast food and genetically modified foods.

The spectrum of 'good' and 'bad' foods largely overlapped with, but was not exactly equivalent to, a spectrum of healthy versus unhealthy food. Being healthy was a quality that was fairly consistently attributed to 'good' food, although goodness encompassed qualities in

addition to healthiness, such as being ethical. A very important quality of ‘good’ as well as healthy food was the perceived absence of ingredients or qualities that suggested harmfulness, or which might make the food unsafe or risky to eat. Further, foods seen as having ‘bad’ or harmful qualities were also frequently presumed to have been modified, ‘processed’, or interfered with in some way that made it different from its ‘real’ or natural state. Thus, ‘good’ and ‘healthy’ food was also linked to the concept of ‘real’ or genuine food. For example, whole plant foods like vegetables and fruits, as well as familiar foods like yoghurt, milk, and cereal were seen as healthy, whereas ‘processed,’ ‘artificial’ foods, or foods thought to contain ‘chemicals,’ were seen as unhealthy. Fast food or genetically modified foods exemplify the category of ‘bad’ foods, and were thought of as being highly processed, artificial, chemical-laden, and therefore unhealthy (and problematic in other ways, including ethically).

The participants themselves sometimes, though not always, used the terms ‘good’ and ‘bad’ to describe foods and types of foods, and indicated that they thought about how to distinguish between good and bad when it comes to food. For example, in one mixed focus group (school 2, #4), participants opted to invent their own discussion topic, and a female participant suggested that they discuss “what makes a food good or bad.” Participants suggested that checking the nutrition label and ingredient list could help to determine if a food is good or bad (specifically by assessing the amount of sugar, sodium, and the number of calories, as well as looking for any allergens). In addition, one female participant made brief comments about fair trade and organic food, which she considered to be ‘good.’ She elaborated rather vaguely that in the case of organic food, it is good to know that “they aren’t using anything bad.” Elsewhere in the focus group discussion, she referred to organic as being healthier, and another participant in the group remarked that organic foods do not contain pesticides. This is a more obvious example

of how foods were regarded as ‘good’ if they were perceived to be free of certain unwanted components, such as chemical pesticides. This principle, which seemed to suggest a kind of ‘negativity bias,’ or tendency to assign greater importance to negative traits or qualities than to positive ones (Rozin & Royzman, 2001), was reiterated frequently during the focus group series, as will be discussed throughout.

3.3.1 Good foods

The categories of ‘good’ food and ways of eating that will be described in this section are healthy food, vegetables and vegetarianism, organic food, and local food. The reader will notice that even though the section is called ‘good’ foods, I also mention some of the ‘bad’ foods or food qualities (including meat and fatty foods) that participants discussed where relevant. This is due to the fact that, as mentioned in the introduction to this section, participants tended to discuss and describe ‘good’ food by contrasting it with ‘bad’ foods or bad food qualities; it was therefore necessary to refer to some ‘bad’ food qualities in this section. These ‘bad’ foods and qualities will be elaborated on in greater detail in the ‘bad foods’ section.

3.3.1.1 Healthy food

Healthy eating was the second most popular discussion topic (after fast food) selected by participants in this focus group series, and participants referred to health-related concepts and concerns throughout their discussions, even outside of conversations about healthy eating. This shows a strong familiarity with health-related frameworks for thinking about food. Further, participants frequently and spontaneously identified and described foods as ‘healthy’ or ‘unhealthy,’ and evaluated foods differently (as good or bad, for example) depending on their presumed healthiness. This suggests that ‘healthy food’ was an important and meaningful

category for participants. While the title of this section is ‘healthy food,’ in reality, participants talked about much more than simple types or examples of foods that qualified as ‘healthy’; they talked about various strategies, motivations, approaches and abstract concepts related to the practice of healthy eating. These will be elaborated on in the following subsections.

3.3.1.1.1 How to eat healthfully

Overall, participants defined healthy eating in several different and often complementary ways, including restricting junk food consumption (or sometimes ‘balancing out’ junk food with healthy items); restricting fat, calorie, sugar and salt intake; maximizing intake of vegetables and fruits; consuming whole grains, dietary fibre and dairy products; getting enough iron, calcium, vitamin C (as well as ‘vitamins and minerals’ in general) and protein; getting the correct amount of servings from each food group; choosing ‘fresh’ foods (which were often associated with whole plant produce and were thought of as healthy, chemical-free and additive-free); and staying hydrated with healthy beverages like water. Most of these measures (especially restricting fat, calorie, sugar and salt intake while eating enough vitamins and minerals; eating vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and dairy products; and getting the correct number of food group servings) are consistent with the findings of numerous other studies on how young people and adults define healthy eating. It has also been noted that freshness often conveys an impression of healthiness (Oakes, 2004), and that ‘balance’ and/or variety is seen as important for healthy eating (Chan et al., 2009). Avoiding certain allegedly harmful components seemed important to many participants, who discussed the benefits of ‘chemical-free’ and organic food, as well as the importance of avoiding pesticides, GMOs or genetically engineered (GE) foods, and other things that were thought of as being ‘artificial’ or ‘not natural.’ For some participants, avoiding or

reducing meat consumption was also seen as healthy, sometimes because meat was seen as being high in fat.

Most participants felt that they ate fairly healthfully, and most (with a few exceptions) asserted that they actively made efforts to do so. They did this chiefly by trying to avoid eating too many widely-recognized ‘unhealthy foods’ and/or ‘junk foods’ such as fast food, chips, chocolate, and ice cream, which they tended to recognize as being more easily available, more convenient, and generally tastier than ‘healthy foods’ like vegetables and fruit. They also conveyed the importance of taking care not to over-eat (i.e. eat too much food, regardless of whether it is healthy food or not) either at individual meals, over the course of the day, or longer time periods.

While participants sometimes talked about trying or wanting to choose healthy foods such as fruit, veggies, dairy, and whole grains, their comments about healthy foods or healthy food qualities were often preceded or accompanied by remarks about the avoidance of unhealthy foods, ingredients and food qualities. For example, vegetables were often referred to as being healthy because they are low-fat or low-calorie, in addition to being high in minerals and vitamins, and natural foods’ presumed healthiness was often explained by referring to the drawbacks or supposed risks of consuming artificial food or ingredients. Some participants did report making an effort to consume adequate quantities of certain nutrients (sometimes in order to avoid health problems, as will be explained in the ‘motivations for eating healthy’ sub-section) by examining food labels or choosing foods that they associated with being high in those nutrients: specifically, protein from meat, beans and nuts; iron from meat and other foods; calcium from dairy; and ‘vitamins and minerals’ in general, especially from vegetables. Participants also named principles or strategies for healthy eating such as being ‘in control’ over

what you eat (sometimes implying that self-control or will power were necessary for healthy eating), knowing what is in your food (including ruling out suspicions of any potentially harmful ‘chemicals’), and avoiding foods that make you feel sick or sluggish.

For many participants, healthy eating also meant ‘balance.’ Participants most commonly defined balance as consuming adequate servings from each food group. For example: “Like you have a little bit of everything so, you eat vegetables, grain, like all the food groups,” (female participant, mixed group, school 2, #4). Some participants defined balance more generally as getting a variety of foods containing different minerals, vitamins and “nutrients.” Getting appropriate numbers of food group servings according to Canada’s Food Guide and choosing a variety of foods within those groups are both in keeping with healthy eating practices recognized in Canada (Health Canada, 2011). While participants regarded vegetables as healthy, some (male and female participants) felt that vegetarians run the risk of having ‘unbalanced’ diets if they are not especially careful to consume adequate meat alternatives like beans and nuts, and to find alternative sources of iron. Meat was usually thought to be healthy in moderate quantities due to its iron and protein content, though its healthy aspects were often seen as being partly offset by other factors such as being high in fat, and participants disagreed on whether meat was strictly necessary for a healthy diet or not. This will be explained further in the vegetables and vegetarianism section.

In one case, balance was framed as not having *too much* of any food group or nutrient. As one participant put it, balance meant: “Having all the food groups in moderation. So like nothing a lot. For example not a lot of protein when you don’t need it,” (female group, school 2, #3). Several participants, especially but not exclusively female ones, felt that it was healthy to avoid eating ‘too much’ meat, usually due to its perceived high fat content. Interestingly, several

female participants from one focus group specified that meat tended to be fatty because it was typically cooked in (added) fat. Male and female participants agreed that fast food burgers were not healthy, and this was especially the case for the Big Mac, which is notorious in popular culture and media for being very high in fat. The implication of this is that participants recognized that there can be relatively ‘healthy’ and relatively ‘unhealthy’ ways of preparing or presenting meat; not all meat was seen as being equally healthy or unhealthy.

Many participants also mentioned that limiting one’s intake of ‘junk foods’ is necessary for achieving balance in the diet. On the other hand, some participants framed balance as a matter of compensating for ‘bad’ food/nutrient intake by consuming healthy foods or nutrients. For example, a female participant in a mixed group (school 2, #4) reported that “you should always have a piece of fruit after you eat junk to balance it out,” and mentioned that she learned this from a teacher. A European focus group study similarly revealed that some secondary school students understood a ‘balanced’ diet to be one that incorporates both ‘healthy’ foods and ‘unhealthy’ foods. For example: “As long as you have like a good balanced diet, you eat like chips (fries) in school and have a good diet at home...you should be fine,” and “Have only chocolate and sweets at the weekend and have healthier foods during the week,” (McKinley et al., 2005, p. 546). Thus, it seems that some youth understand balance as a compromise between tasty but less-healthy foods and healthy but less-tasty foods. On a related vein, during conversations on the topic of eating for pleasure, many participants expressed that health and pleasure were at odds with each other. This tension between healthy eating and eating for pleasure will be discussed in greater detail in the cross-cutting themes section.

In a small mixed focus group (school 3, #10), two male participants initially indicated that they didn’t make much of an effort to eat healthy. One of them later elaborated that since all

food is acceptable to eat, then as long as a person does not eat junk food (such as candy bars) exclusively and also eats some ‘fresh’ foods like fruit, then this is acceptable and ‘balanced.’ This take on healthy, ‘balanced’ eating illustrates that the concept of foods that are ‘not recommended’ or ideally avoided in non-emergency situations (like candy and pop, whose only significant nutritional value comes from calories from sugar (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, 2010) may be unintuitive or difficult to grasp for some. The participant above seemed to assume that because all food is (by definition) nutritious, it must follow that choosing a variety of available foods is all that is required for a healthy diet. Indeed, some have argued that in most cases, this principle ought to be true, given that a diversity of nutritious foods are actually available for consumers to select from (Rozin, 1989, p. 377).

The intuitive supposition that all foods made available to consumers ought to have a legitimate role in a healthy diet is reflected in the fact that some Canadians mistakenly believe that there is (still) a fifth food group which houses all of the ‘other’ foods that don’t seem to belong in any of the four food groups in Canada’s Food Guide. A focus group study in Vancouver, for example, found that youth often thought there was a fifth food group: junk food (Urueta-Ortiz, 2009, p. 66), and in another study, a young person named ‘desserts’ as the fifth food group, and stated that people should consume foods from *every* group in order to be healthy (McPhail et al., 2011, p. 304). The notion that there are foods that do not belong in any food group is likely, therefore, somewhat unintuitive for some people.

3.3.1.1.2 Motivations for eating healthfully

While some research has found that adolescents have only a limited concern for their future health (Bissonnette & Contento, 2001), a few *Focus on Food* participants did talk about

long-term disease prevention as a motive for healthy eating. For example, a participant in the male focus group expressed that healthy eating, and specifically eating less sugar, salt and fat while eating more fruit and vegetables, was important for avoiding diabetes. He explained: “I heard on the news that there’s more diabetics now,” and so diabetes prevention had become especially important. In a female group (school 4, #8) participants discussed fast food over-consumption as a risk factor for diabetes, stroke, and heart problems, due to its high fat content. In a mixed group (school 2, #4), a female participant also reported monitoring her salt and sugar intake by looking at the nutrition information on food packaging. She did not immediately provide a reason for why she did this, but a male participant in the group chimed in to suggest that doing so might help to prevent diabetes and ‘artery clogs,’ suggesting that he was aware of these health issues and recognized that eating behaviours can influence them. According to Health Canada (2012a), high sodium intake can lead to high blood pressure, which is a risk factor for stroke and heart disease, as well as for type 2 diabetes. Therefore, while there is no direct link between salt intake and diabetes, it seems reasonable that participants mentioned high salt intake (as well as high fat and/or high sugar intake) in connection to diabetes and heart problems.

While most discussions about disease prevention pertained to nutrients or types of food that should be avoided or only consumed in moderation, two participants in a female group (school 2 #14) talked about the benefits of dairy consumption (specifically cheese) for health and for the prevention of health problems, including helping young people to “get taller” and to promote good bone health so that “when you get old you won’t hurt yourself too easily.” Dairy products, when they were discussed by participants in *Focus on Food*, were consistently

evaluated positively and described as healthy, which is consistent with findings from other focus group studies with youth (McKinley et al., 2005, p. 548; Urueta-Ortiz, 2009).

Physical appearance and body size, shape or weight were also mentioned as potential motivations for eating healthy. In one conversation about healthy eating in a mixed focus group (school 3, #9), a female participant suggested that a reason for eating healthy might be “because you’re going on a diet...because you don’t wanna eat fat things because you don’t want to get fat from it,” indicating that she associated healthy eating with attempts to avoid becoming fat. In conversations about dieting (which occurred almost exclusively among female participants), dieting was usually presumed to primarily reflect a desire to lose weight, sometimes with health in mind, and sometimes for aesthetic reasons regardless of health outcomes. Most participants agreed that pursuing a thinner body, a smaller stomach, and in a few cases becoming more attractive or ‘pretty’ were very common motivating factors for going on a diet (though not necessarily for them personally), along with potentially wanting to ‘get healthier’ or to feel better. While some forms of dieting, such as those that included purging, fasting, or taking diet pills, were seen as strongly divergent from healthy eating, other ‘diets’ primarily involving cutting down on junk food and eating more fruits and vegetables were seen as synonymous with healthy eating. One or two participants suggested that some people might diet primarily in order to be healthy.

Further, slimness was seen as a facilitator of good health, as illustrated by one participant’s comments:

...there’s nothing wrong with wanting to like slim down, ‘cause it is good for your health not to be like fat or anything. Or like if you think you’re a bit large and you

want to slim down, there's nothing wrong if you're dieting properly with like the exercise and like the healthy veggies and stuff like that. (female group, school 1, #1)

Another participant seemed to regard slimness as an indicator of good health. She commented that her peers in the focus group were all 'healthy' judging by their appearance, but that sometimes other people who are 'unhealthy' wish to lose weight in order to improve their health (female group, school 2, #3). Thus, slimness and weight loss were sometimes equated with good health. A potential negative implication of such assumptions could be a failure to recognize the importance of healthy eating (not to mention exercise) regardless of one's appearance.

In a conversation about fast food, one participant from a female focus group (school 3, #7) expressed that eating fast food might make one 'feel fat,' especially if they ate fast food alone, outside of a social context. This focus group, like most groups, also regarded fast food as unhealthy. (The relative acceptability of eating fast food and other less-healthy foods in social situations was also reflected in other comments in the focus group series, such as those suggesting that celebrating or socializing with friends is a good time to indulge in 'junk' food like pizza, ice cream, or fries.) Many other focus groups talked about the high fat, oil, or 'grease' content of fast food, and one female focus group (school 4, #8) referred to it specifically as 'fattening,' indicating that getting fat might have been seen as a potential outcome of eating fast food.

In addition to long-term health concerns and physical appearance, immediate physical comfort or the avoidance of discomfort were also motivators for healthy eating. Specifically,

participants mentioned that healthy eating could lead to the improvement of day-to-day mental and physical functioning, make a person feel ‘good’ in an overall sense, and help them to avoid the immediate or delayed feelings of ill-health, nausea or feeling “gross,” which could sometimes result from eating too much ‘junk’ or fast food.

In a few cases, participants reported that eating healthy made them feel good both physically and also in a more abstract, moral or virtuous sense. For example, in one female focus group (school 2, #3), a participant expressed that, “Normally when I have two options, I pick the healthier one. Just because it feels – it feels better, like, yeah! I’m doing a good thing! It’s good for me. But really I feel sad ‘cause I can’t eat the bad thing [laughs].” This comment indicated both a desire to eat ‘bad’ food, and a positive feeling resulting from choosing a ‘good’ (in this case, healthier) food instead. While the participant acknowledged some mixed feelings about making healthy choices, she further qualified her comment by saying that, “healthy food can taste better than the non-healthy food, especially because after eating non-healthy food you sometimes feel sick. Like the nauseous feeling of eating something gross.” Thus, making healthy food choices was seen as being a ‘good thing to do,’ as well as sometimes being a more desirable (or less unpleasant) thing to do. In addition, in this case, the appeal of healthy eating was framed as being dependent on context and on the available options; the participant highlighted the fact that to reject the less-healthy or ‘bad’ food and pick the healthier one *instead* was an example of ‘doing a good thing,’ and that healthy eating is an especially attractive option *after* having indulged in a less-healthy food.

3.3.1.1.3 *Intersections of healthy eating with eating for pleasure*

A dominant theme emerging in conversations on the topic of ‘healthy eating’ as well as ‘eating for pleasure’ was that these two ways of eating were often thought of as being at odds

with each other if not mutually exclusive. Many *Focus on Food* participants expressed the opinion that foods that taste good are not usually ‘good for you,’ and that eating for pleasure is likely to correspond with indulging in less-healthy foods. One participant’s reasoning was straightforward: “I don’t like vegetables. So eating for pleasure won’t be vegetables and healthy stuff, it would be something unhealthy, I guess,” (female group, school 3, #7).

‘Eating for pleasure’ was sometimes described as occurring in an automatic or less-controlled fashion. A male participant in a mixed group (school 2, #4) mentioned that it is easy to eat an excess of foods that taste good - especially desserts. Some participants stated that eating for pleasure should only be done in moderation, for example by eating smaller quantities of the unhealthy-but-tasty foods, or by making sure not to ‘indulge’ too much or too often. Consistent with this expressed need for self-control and moderation, eating for pleasure was also associated with binge eating on two occasions (once in a female focus group [school 4, #8], and once by a female participant in a mixed group [school 2, #4]). Many participants recognized that this compulsive and difficult-to-control type of eating for pleasure might become problematic from a health perspective.

Some participants indicated that a compulsion to over-eat or to eat unhealthy foods might arise from boredom or negative emotional cues, the logic being that people eat tasty foods in an attempt to compensate for displeasure. Several participants reported eating unhealthy foods, or overeating in general, when bored, stressed (such as when studying) or upset. In a different focus group study, secondary school students similarly reported eating snack foods and chocolate out of boredom or ‘depression’ (McKinley et al., 2005), indicating that such behaviours are not necessarily unusual. According to this particular framework, in which eating for pleasure amounts to unhealthy eating, and healthy eating is regarded as less pleasurable, eating for

pleasure was therefore framed as a practice that is only justifiable in certain situations or contexts, with adequate measures of control taken; not as a regular or every-day practice.

Some focus group participants felt that eating for pleasure could be compatible with healthy eating. For some participants, novelty was associated with greater pleasure, making it relatively easy for them to enjoy certain tasty but less-healthy foods in moderation or only on special occasions, without this leading to overindulgence. Several participants described novelty, potentially including an exotic setting or context, as adding to pleasurable eating experiences. For example, a female participant (school 4, #6) shared the following:

Like when you're going abroad like on vacation. And then you take--you're at a restaurant or something, I don't know, and you order something and you--it's like a real, it's a treat, it's like, say it's like an amazing chocolate crepe in France or something...you sort of eat it slowly and savour it and it's so pleasurable.

Other participants also described savoring delicious food on 'special occasions' or as part of celebrations as being particularly enjoyable. Several groups suggested that part of fast food's appeal came from the fact that it was different from food they would normally eat. Participants from a female focus group (school 3, #7) commented that because fast food was different from what they typically ate every day, they craved fast food every few weeks or months. One participant elaborated: "we don't usually eat burgers at home; we eat rice...I grew up eating rice every single meal of the day."

Some participants suggested that eating too much of certain kinds of food (especially 'junk food' or 'fast food') would actually diminish the enjoyment of those foods. For example, a participant reported that when she ate fast food almost every day for a week when she was in

America, she became ‘annoyed’ with it and no longer enjoyed eating it (female group, school 1, #13).

While most of the participants felt that eating for pleasure was not healthy if done too often, a few participants took a different view, articulating that healthy eating and enjoying healthy food itself can be pleasurable. A participant in a female focus group (school 1, #1) suggested that: “I think eating for pleasure’s pretty good if like it’s more healthy foods and not like all that junk food that people eat for pleasure too.” Another participant from the same female group commented: “Well I think eating’s always a pleasure... like if it tastes good and you eat it, it just tastes nice to you. Like isn’t that already a pleasure to be eating good food?” The implication of this approach to eating for pleasure is that every time a person eats, the event can be pleasurable, and that the enjoyment of foods besides ‘junk food’ is not only possible but inherent in the experience of eating. In the same focus group, participants also contrasted “store snacks,” which they felt were typically either ‘too salty’ or overly sweet, with “the stuff you make at home for yourself, like the stuff our cooking teacher teaches us,” including ‘savoury appetizers’ like samosas. In this case, the participants regarded the home-made (or school-made) appetizers more favourably than the overly salty/sweet snack-foods that they could purchase at a store, thereby demonstrating their appreciation for a variety of flavours, including those that are more subtle.

A participant from a female group (school 2, #4) indicated that eating for pleasure was conducive to more than just eating junk food, and that the experience of making and eating healthy, ‘real’, home-made (or potentially ‘school-made’) food is especially enjoyable: “When you like make something that’s really healthy for you and it tastes like really real and like good...that’s enjoyment for me.” Similarly, a participant in a female focus group (school 2, #3)

associated eating for pleasure with a more deliberate and leisurely eating experience, as opposed to quickly eating whatever is ready-to-eat, or having to ‘grab something quick to go.’ For her, a barrier to eating for pleasure was a schedule that didn’t seem to allow for eating more freshly-prepared foods. She explained that, being busy in the evenings, she would often quickly eat a ready-prepared meal option at home rather than “making something.” The attitude that taking the time to prepare something, and deliberate, slow-paced eating can often be preferable and more pleasurable than rushed eating or eating ‘on the go’ was also expressed by several participants in their discussions of fast food, which will be explained in more detail in the ‘bad foods’ section.

3.3.1.1.4 Intersections between healthy eating and gender

Further to the perceived tensions between pleasure and healthy eating, some comments indicated a perceived affinity of girls/women to healthy eating, and of boys/men to eating for pleasure. Several female participants felt that male participants would be likely to select ‘eating for pleasure’ as a discussion topic (along with bulking-up and fast food), and that boys and men would be more likely to eat just for the pleasure of it.

Several participant comments shed some light on this presumed tendency for women to eat healthy and for men to eat for pleasure. Several female participants expressed the opinion that ‘guys’ typically care less about eating healthy, or simply do not think about what they eat as much as girls do. A participant from a female focus group (school 2, #3) remarked that she suspected guys typically ‘just eat’ when they feel like it, without much regard to schedules or ‘routines,’ and she associated this unstructured, impulsive approach with ‘eating for pleasure.’ (However, she also hastily stipulated that she *personally* tended to eat this way as well.) In a mixed focus group (school 3, #9), a male participant expressed that males might be more likely to care about or to discuss the importance of taste, whereas females would likely discuss “what

foods are fattening.” There was some conditional agreement with this point, though two female participants asserted that girls care just as much about taste as guys “at times.” The view that women are generally more deliberate and disciplined about eating, whereas men tend to be more relaxed, spontaneous, and pleasure-seeking when it comes to eating, is a prevalent one, and has been supported to some extent by several studies (Beardsworth et al., 2002; O’Doherty & Holm, 1999; Oakes, 2004; Rozin et al., 2002).

According to one theory, women are influenced by cultural constructions of femininity that expect and instruct women to follow ‘virtuous’ eating patterns by foregoing selfish pleasures for the sake of nutritional or ethical principles (Beardsworth et al., 2002). Consistent with this, women tend to report more feelings of guilt towards food than men do (Rozin et al., 2002) and they tend to report feelings of guilt most often when consuming between-meal snacks and after-dinner snacks, especially when these include candy, ice cream, potato chips, nuts, cake and cookies (Steenhuis, 2009). It is possible that guilt or concerns about over-indulgence act as a barrier to enjoying food in some situations. Many participants talked about the importance of not over-indulging when it comes to eating for pleasure, although none described experiences of feeling guilty per se about doing so. The participants of a female focus group expected that girls would be more self-conscious when talking about eating a lot of fast food, whereas most guys would not care (school 4, #8). Some of the language used indicated concerns or at least awareness of possible weight gain, and one participant from a female group (school 3, #7) said that one possible effect of eating for pleasure would be that if you eat a lot you might gain weight and become a “couch potato.”

Some comments implied that women’s apparent tendency to eat healthier than men was related to the fact that food-related skills and knowledge are the domain of women more so than

of men. In one case, a female participant suggested that this difference could be connected to the fact that ‘guys’ don’t know how to prepare food for themselves, or don’t bother to do so, and are therefore more likely to be limited to packaged food and snacks:

Mixed group School 2, #4

P2¹⁶ – Um for guys, um, I don’t know this might be a bit stereotypical, but like...majority of the guys, they tend to game like in front of the TV or of course the computer, um so they don’t usually bother making their own food, so they just grab the nearest thing that’s possible, like - [loud laughter from others]

P1 – Oh god-

P2 – chips or something. And then for girls, right, um some of us actually know how to bake and cook so we actually take the time to cook or put something together – but that might not be true. It’s just a thought.

This perspective is consistent with the pervasive cultural concept in Canada (and elsewhere) of females as being more involved in cooking and food preparation and more proficient at food preparation (Mroz, Chapman, Oliffe, & Bottorff, 2010).

Participants also suggested that women have more concerns about their appearance, motivating them to eat healthfully. The implication of these comments is that the apparent gender differences around healthy eating do not necessarily indicate that women simply place greater value on healthy eating for its own sake than men do. Rather, participants suggested that a variety of mitigating factors encourage women to pursue different food strategies (which are more conducive to healthy eating) than men.

A few participants, such as one from a female focus group (school 2, #14), commented that perhaps both guys and girls care about healthy eating, but differ in terms of how they define what it means to eat healthy. A participant from a different female focus group (school 4, #6)

¹⁶ In direct excerpts from transcripts, participants are assigned a code (such as P1 or P2) to protect their anonymity. The moderator’s comments are labelled ‘mod’ for short.

suggested that males and females would likely agree that, for example, eating a lot of cake and similar foods would be unhealthy. Another participant in the group agreed, but added that guys would likely frame healthy food as food that adequately fuels their higher activity levels, whereas girls might perceive healthy choices as those which allow them to slim down. (This theory, besides pointing to a difference between how men and women might view healthy eating, also suggests that one's definition of healthy eating can be subjective, and may depend on what one hopes to accomplish through one's dietary choices.)

Participants expressed similar opinions regarding gender differences when it comes to dieting. Some participants felt that guys simply do not care about their looks as much as girls do, and therefore do not bother with dieting. Yet other participants thought that guys *do* care about their appearance, but since their ideal body type (usually taller, bigger, and more muscular) is different than that of girls (usually thinner, or according to one female participant, 'curvier'), the respective techniques they use for managing their bodies are different. Female participants thought that guys used techniques to manage their bodies including consuming more protein, consuming more food in general, or simply not paying much attention to what they eat and focusing on working out instead. The media was seen as an influence on these different 'ideal' gendered body types.

Interestingly, only female participants reported personally having tried dieting, including cutting out certain junk foods, and eating less overall. However, male participants did report reducing dietary fat intake, eating less, cutting out junk foods or certain junk foods, eating more protein, exercising more, 'burning fat', and getting or staying 'in shape' through exercise and

food choices¹⁷. However, when male participants discussed these practices, they were not framed as examples of ‘dieting,’ but rather were discussed in the context of either ‘healthy eating’ or ‘bulking up.’ This suggests that dieting, regardless of what it entails, was not seen as a particularly acceptable activity for boys or men to engage in.

3.3.1.1.4 Summary

In summary, participants displayed their familiarity with the notion of healthy eating, and expressed various ways of conceptualizing it, including avoiding too much fat, salt, and sugar, avoiding ‘chemicals,’ ‘artificial’ and overly processed foods, and seeking a ‘balanced’ diet by getting the right quantities of different categories of food. They also talked about numerous categories of what they considered to be healthy food, especially vegetables, fruits, as well as whole grains and dairy products. Motivations for healthy eating included the avoidance of future health problems, maintaining physical appearance and/or attaining slimness, avoiding immediate bodily discomfort, and also more generally because it is a “good” or right thing to do. Many participants saw healthy eating as conflicting with eating for pleasure, but several participants expressed that healthy eating could be pleasurable, and that deriving pleasure from eating was commensurable with good health. A few participants even mentioned that taking time to prepare

¹⁷ In addition, one male participant from a mixed focus group (school 2, #4) explained that he had selected Nestea Zero because it had ‘zero calories’, unlike other available beverage options like Coca Cola. (His comment was somewhat confusing to me since the Coca-Cola and other pop options available at school should also have been – and appeared to be, in my observations - calorie-free versions, since regular pop is no longer allowed in VSB schools.) This comment was not linked to dieting, nor was dieting discussed as a topic during that focus group. Interestingly, his comment was the only reference to any zero-calorie or ‘diet’ version of conventional beverages or foods in the entire focus group series, aside from one other comment from a male participant in a different mixed group (school 3, #9), who stated that he avoided the ‘diet drinks’ found in school vending machines because of the unpleasant after-taste, and tended to get beverages such as milk tea from the cafeteria instead. It could be that because diet foods are not typically marketed to/for children, the youth in the focus groups were not attuned to these options and therefore did not comment extensively on them. Now that many VSB secondary school vending machines stock zero-calorie beverage options, it would be interesting to hear more students’ perspectives on zero-calorie and ‘diet’ beverages in the future.

and then savour food that they knew to be healthy and good was especially enjoyable. In conversations about gender, participants expressed that girls and women are generally thought to engage in and/or care more about healthy eating practices, whereas boys and men are more likely to eat for the pleasure of it.

A topic that overlapped with healthy eating, and that was almost as popular a discussion topic, was vegetarianism, which is covered in the following section.

3.3.1.2 Vegetables and vegetarianism

This section deals with the interrelated topics of vegetables as a type of ‘good food,’ and vegetarianism, a way of eating. Because of the way participants discussed these themes, part of the section pertains to some of the potential reasons for avoiding or limiting meat consumption that participants brought up, in addition to reasons for consuming vegetables or following a diet that focuses on plant foods. Vegetables were very frequently described as both ‘healthy’ and ‘good’ foods, during discussions about healthy eating as well as vegetarianism and dieting. Further, participants had positive associations with eating more vegetables and fruits and less meat, and many participants evaluated vegetarian diets as positive for animal welfare and/or health reasons, and in a few cases, for environmental sustainability. This enthusiasm for plant-focused diets, at least in theory, may be linked to a growing recognition among the North American public that a diet rich in a variety of plant foods is often more health promoting for humans and the environment (Barilla, 2014; Nestle, 2000).

There were five self-described vegetarian participants in *Focus on Food*, all of whom were female, four of whom attended the same school, and three of whom were in the same

female focus group (school #2, #12). Three explained that they had been vegetarian since birth, and two of these said that they were from an Indian family or culture. Many non-vegetarian participants showed interest in vegetarianism as a discussion topic, and were aware of several possible motives for following a vegetarian diet, including animal welfare, health (a few female participants and a male participant talked about this), and in one or two cases, sustainability-related concerns. Further, many non-vegetarians expressed that they personally shared some of these concerns, especially for animal welfare, and often for health-related reasons as well (with some caveats). This section on vegetables and vegetarianism begins by discussing how these themes intersected with healthy eating ideals.

3.3.1.2.1 Health, vegetables, and meat

Regarding health, most participants had positive, though conditional, opinions of vegetarianism, and particularly favoured the idea of diets consisting of only a small amount of meat and plenty of vegetables. Besides general assertions that vegetables are healthy, and remarks such as, “our parents told us vegetables are good for you,” participants talked about vegetarian foods as being ‘lighter,’ having fewer calories, less fat, and being less greasy. For example, participants from a female focus group (school 2, #14) talked about the benefits of consuming less meat and more vegetables during a discussion about healthy eating, “because [vegetables] don’t have too much calories” whereas meat has “too much fat and stuff.” Another female focus group (school 4, #8) suggested that vegetarianism is sometimes used as an effective and healthy weight-loss diet.

Participants from this focus group also mentioned that vegetarianism “seems healthier, ‘cause then you kind of stay away from meat, and meat has grease - you cook it with butter and

stuff like that.” This comment connects to two interconnected ideas: the idea that plant foods, unlike meat, are not ‘greasy,’ and the idea that plant foods, unlike meat, are less likely to be cooked or prepared in a way that *adds* fat. Although not all participants specified that meat’s supposed greasiness was due to how it was cooked (most participants who stated that meat was greasy or fatty and did not elaborate as to why that might be; these participants may have thought of meat as inherently greasy), the notion that cooking methods factor into the perceived healthiness of meat is interesting, and might imply that meat is not always seen as being *inherently* fatty, as has sometimes been suggested (e.g. Oakes, 2004). The view that meat is less healthy due, in part, to being cooked in fat could also be connected to the recurring concept in the focus group series that less processing and less human intervention when it comes to food is generally more desirable for reasons related to health, and/or also for reasons that may have more to do with a vague apprehension of unforeseen risks, or a sense that food-related technology and innovations are moving too fast or without adequate caution. It may also be linked to a generally positive attitude towards foods that are suited to being consumed raw, as many vegetables and fruits are.

This preference for ‘unmodified’ or less processed foods, including raw, unprocessed vegetables and fruits, is reinforced by remarks such as that of a female participant from a mixed focus group (school 2, #4) who said that she tried to avoid purchasing juice, which she described as ‘bad,’ because, “I don’t believe that it’s all natural sugar, like 100% juice.” In this case, natural sugars occurring in fruits were seen as acceptable (although it should be noted that *health* was not specifically alluded to in this instance), but added sugars in juice were not. Similarly, in one case (female group, school 1, #1), during a conversation about entrée options in the school cafeteria, the oil from melted cheese was seen as ‘natural’ and therefore less objectionable than

some other oils, suggesting that the *type* of fat mattered to participants, and that in some cases, natural, or naturally-present substances were more likely to be accepted than added ones (such as the added fat that one might use to cook meat). This recurring concept of ‘natural’ foods and natural food qualities is discussed in greater detail in the ‘valorization of natural’ section of ‘cross-cutting themes.’

Despite the tendency to describe meat as fatty compared to vegetables and vegetarian foods, participants often stipulated that since meat is a source of iron and protein, it is healthy to include at least some meat in the diet (usually ‘only a little’ or in moderation). These attitudes were somewhat consistent with findings from a study in Ireland and England in which secondary school-aged focus group participants felt positively about eating steak, but also associated it with fat (McKinley et al., 2005). Participants from one female group acknowledged that although meat could be considered healthy (for example: “meat is healthy too - meat’s got iron in it,” (school 2, #14)), it was not *necessary* to eat meat as long as adequate plant-based alternatives were consumed. On the other hand, some participants felt that a completely meatless diet could lead to health risks such as iron deficiency or a general lack of ‘balance’ in the diet. A participant in the male focus group (school 1, #5) stated that although he was interested in becoming vegetarian in the future, and personally thought of vegetarianism as a healthier way of eating, he was limited by the type of food made available to him by his family, which in turn was influenced by their perception that a meatless diet would be inadequate in terms of certain nutrients like iron.

3.3.1.2.2 *Animal welfare and ethics*

Vegetarian and non-vegetarian *Focus on Food* participants indicated that they were concerned with animals' wellbeing, their freedom from pain and discomfort, and their ability to 'live free' outside of captivity, or possibly in accordance with their natural inclinations, before capture or slaughter. These concerns arose often in the conversations about vegetarianism. An Australian study by Lea and Worsley (2003) showed that non-vegetarians often referred to health-related motivations such as consuming more vegetables and fruits (74%) and consuming less saturated fat (65%) as potential reasons for why others might follow a vegetarian diet. They were less likely to name animal welfare (36%) as a motivation, though women were more likely than men to agree that vegetarian diets can help animal welfare. By contrast, in *Focus on Food* (in which 80% of participants were female, although whether this gender ratio encouraged the relatively strong focus on animal welfare is unknown), at least as many participants discussed animal welfare concerns as health concerns, and a large portion of the time devoted to conversations about vegetarianism was spent discussing animal welfare.

Participants who reported feeling 'bad' about consuming meat, and correspondingly felt positively about the idea of vegetarianism, tended to use the word 'animals' (or sometimes 'fish,' 'chickens,' or 'cows' specifically) in their discussions, rather than consistently using the term 'meat.' For example, one participant made reference to the practice of 'killing animals' as 'unappetizing' (male focus group, school 1, #5). Participants sometimes talked about 'bizarre' or 'weird' situations in which it suddenly became obvious that meat comes from animals, such as in a butcher shop. In a female group (school 1, #11) in which there were no self-described vegetarians, several participants reported feelings of ambivalence about eating meat: "When I eat chicken, I think of a chicken. Like a real chicken. So it makes me feel kinda weird," and, "I don't like going to the butcher shop. Ya. Because it's bizarre." This type of surreal experience has also

been noted by Devine and Sobal (1998) and Beardsworth & Keil (1991), who reported that individuals who had converted to vegetarianism for ethical reasons, especially at a young age, were more likely to have undergone a ‘conversion experience’ in which they suddenly become keenly aware that meat comes from animals (as cited in Ruby, 2012, pp. 143, 144). Based on *Focus on Food* participants’ comments, it seems likely that witnessing the connection between animals and meat might make animal welfare concerns more compelling for some individuals, even if it does not always lead to conversion to vegetarianism.

The bizarreness of the notion of animals as food may be linked to several interrelated trends. Most urban-dwelling consumers are relatively unfamiliar with butchering and preparing animal carcasses; outside of relatively less common butcher shops, meat is often purchased pre-sliced, pre-cooked or prepared in a form that makes it less identifiable as an animal product (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2011b). On the other hand, consumers are relatively familiar with animals as living pets and companions, and animals are often depicted as having human-like personalities in popular forms of entertainment (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2011b). If meat has increasingly come to be regarded as a product of modifying (familiar) animals into food, and if being altered from a familiar state is often seen as unfavourable and/or ‘unnatural,’ as Siipi (2012) explains is often the case, then meat might be perceived unfavourably for this reason.

Some participants had more specific concerns about animal welfare, and potentially with animals’ ability to live according to their natural inclinations before slaughter. One participant suggested that the acceptability of consuming animals as meat “depends on how the animals are treated,” and another participant suggested that eating fish was less ethically problematic than eating ‘land animals,’ since “people fish and then, like [fish] live free and stuff. And you don’t

coop them up in cages.” The comment “you don’t coop [fish] up in cages,” implies an awareness that some *other* animals raised as food *are* cooped up in cages. (The comment might further indicate that the participants in this group were not familiar with aquaculture, or based on the comment that “people fish,” they may have perceived that fishing rather than aquaculture was the dominant method by which people procure fish to eat.) Another non-vegetarian participant agreed with this assessment, remarking that at dinnertime she wouldn’t touch the meat on her plate, whereas, “I might pick at the fish a bit though.”

Thus, the participants expressed that if animals were treated according to certain standards, then eating them might be more acceptable than it would otherwise be. This distinction sometimes allowed them to choose the presumably less objectionable of several animal protein options. This relatively positive attitude toward fish, if prevalent, might be relevant to the successful uptake of school lunch programs that incorporate oily fish (to ensure the adequate consumption of riboflavin and vitamin D, for example). However, it may also be important to take the source of the fish into account, if students are aware of the existence of ‘farmed’ fish, and if they find it problematic for fish to be raised in pens rather than wild-caught.

3.3.1.2.3 Impressions about vegetarianism and vegetables: Fresh, natural, and ‘light’ food

Certain associations with vegetarianism and/or vegetarian foods seemed to contribute to participants’ positive evaluations: Participants linked vegetarianism not only to an absence of meat, but also to specific foods like vegetables, tofu, and salads, and types of food or food qualities including ‘fresh’, ‘natural’ and organic/GMO-free food. Many of these associations will be discussed in further detail in the following organic food section.

Non-vegetarians sometimes expressed general attitudes (usually positive) about vegetarians themselves. In a female group (school 4, #6) that included one vegetarian, a non-

vegetarian participant reported that her family had tried being pescatarian for a month because, “my Dad, he seems to think that people who don’t eat meat are like more awesome.” The vegetarian participant in a female group (school 4, #6) commented that non-vegetarians sometimes possess misinformed or misled ideas about the typical vegetarian meal or diet: “Everybody thinks you just eat a salad.” Interestingly, there was a conversation about dieting in a mixed-gender focus group (school 3, #9) in which a male participant linked dieting to vegetarians, and associated both dieting and vegetarianism with eating salads and lighter meals.

3.3.1.2.4 Sustainability and sustainable food

For a few participants, ‘sustainable eating’ evoked the idea of adopting vegetarianism, restricting meat consumption, or avoiding certain animal food products. A participant from a female focus group (school 1, #1) expressed that people might pursue vegetarian diets for sustainability reasons, though she did not elaborate. Participants in one female focus group (school 2, #14)¹⁸ openly expressed uncertainty as to what it might mean to ‘eat sustainably,’ but after some brainstorming, they eventually contributed some ideas relating to land usage and energy considerations. Specifically, they said that eating vegetables would be good for the environment because “[vegetables] would be a primary producer,” alluding to a previous discussion the group had had about the relative energy efficiency and land use efficiency of raising plants versus raising animals¹⁹. This was the only mention in the entire focus group series of the concepts of land use and energy exchange between trophic levels (or any related topics such as food webs or chains). Further, it was the only apparent link made to the concept of

¹⁸ This group had not selected sustainable eating as a discussion topic but nevertheless offered opinions on the topic when prompted.

¹⁹ It is perhaps noteworthy that this reasoning was not necessarily applied to animal products in general. No comments were made about animal products other than meat in terms of land or resource use, and the participants went on to discuss the health benefits of milk and cheese (“because it’ll help you grow”) without stipulations of any kind.

ecosystems.

In another case, participants linked sustainable eating to choosing dolphin-safe tuna, because doing so would not endanger dolphins as individual creatures and as a species. Thus, species conservation (and potentially animal welfare as well) were linked to sustainability. The ways in which participants linked sustainable eating to these and other concepts will be visited in more detail in the cross-cutting themes section.

3.3.1.2.5 Gender

In one female focus group (school 1, #1) during a conversation about gender, a participant remarked that they found male vegetarians to be ‘cool’ because ‘they care enough’ to follow a vegetarian diet. While participants in this focus group series did not openly discuss vegetarianism as primarily a female or feminine dietary practice, the comment above seems to indicate awareness that male vegetarians are less common, making them seem notable in a positive way.

Consistent with a tendency towards different gendered approaches to meat and vegetarianism, most participants in the male focus group emphasized the importance of meat to them personally and stated that people “need” meat, whereas the other participants in the focus group series expressed that eating meat was not strictly *necessary*, though many participants valued and enjoyed it.

Three of the four males in the male focus group expressed fairly strongly that they felt meat was a necessary part of the diet, and that they personally needed meat:

P4 – I – I eat a lot of meat so...

Others - [laughs]

Mod – OK

P4 – Gimme a plate of meat, I’ll finish it.

...

P2 – Um, I'm gonna um – I'm gonna go with [P4 name]. Uh if like - I told my step-mom this – if I need meat, I'll eat it [soft laugh]. That means I – I will take a steak, and I will eat it. Out of the fridge and I will put it in the frying pan and I will eat it. Regardless, 'cause sometimes you need meat. And if - I don't care [inaudible]

P3 - Basically what he said.

...

P3 – Ya. Also like just, 'cause my family is also involved in this, because every single time we eat, there is always meat. There's very little vegetable, there's a lot of meat. That's how we eat. So I grew up and I grew up eating that, so I'm still eating that.

Gough & Conner (2006) found that UK men stated a preference for large portions of food, usually revolving around meat, and survey data suggested that men may be more likely than women to endorse the idea that a healthy diet should always include meat (Beardsworth et al., 2002), or that humans need to eat meat (Lea & Worsley, 2003). Several female participants in the *Focus on Food* study expressed strong enthusiasm for eating meat such as steak; in one case a non-vegetarian participant told a participant who had been vegetarian from birth that she was 'missing out.' While several female participants communicated that to abstain from meat is or would be difficult, and some also reported concerns that fully meatless diets would not be adequate in terms of protein or iron, no female participants asserted that meat was strictly necessary. Thus, there may have been some difference in the degree to which male and female participants valued the presence of meat in their diets.

As mentioned previously, a male participant associated both dieting and vegetarianism with eating salads and lighter meals. In addition, male and female participants also linked vegetarianism to dieting, another practice that tends to be thought of as feminine. Vegetarianism and dieting have both been connected to 'virtuous' eating habits (that is, eating habits that reflect an awareness of and willingness to act on ethical or nutritional principles, usually at the expense of personal enjoyment or comfort), which in turn tends to correspond with a more feminine way

of relating to food (Beardsworth et al., 2002). This matter of the feminine reputation of vegetarianism will be revisited in the cross-cutting themes section, in the gender sub-section.

3.3.1.2.6 *Summary*

Participants frequently described vegetables and plant-focused diets as ‘good’, for reasons related to health, animal welfare, sustainability, preferences for relatively unaltered, fresh, and or ‘natural’ foods (all of which were associated with vegetables and/or vegetarianism), and more vague impressions about the desirability or appropriateness of vegetarianism and/or eating plenty of vegetables, or by contrast, about the undesirability of eating a great deal of meat.

3.3.1.3 *Organic food*

Organic foods were brought up during conversations about healthy eating, sustainable eating, vegetarianism, and ethical eating, and were consistently framed as ‘good.’ In addition, participants associated ‘organic’ with other qualities and descriptors they felt were positive, including ‘healthy,’ ‘local,’ ‘fresh,’ ‘unprocessed,’ ‘chemical-free,’ ‘natural’ and ‘real.’ These associations were likely influenced by the reputations and meanings of organic food contained in various cultural and media messages. It was not always clear whether participants evaluated organic foods positively *because* they were linked to these other positive qualities, or whether their impression of organic as ‘good’ was independent of these associations.

It should be noted that despite their positive attitudes towards organic, participants did not necessarily feel that they or their families were in a position to procure organic foods instead of conventional ones; they often referred to organic as being too expensive and/or not available at the market or store where they typically shopped for food. In a few cases, they explained that

their parent(s) didn't know the difference between organic and conventional, and so their family would typically buy and consume conventional food.

The following sub-sections address how the concept of organic was interwoven with several other issues and qualities: 'natural,' plants, healthy food, and 'chemicals,' and what these associated qualities reveal about participants' overall understandings of what organic means, and why it was seen as 'good.'

3.3.1.3.1 Natural

The concepts 'natural' and 'organic' seemed strongly related to each other in the minds of participants, all though this link was rarely explained. Similarly, Saher (2006) noted that participants in her study found organic to be especially natural (and genetically modified foods to be the least natural). The participants of a female focus group (school 4, #8) said that organic meant "natural," "fresh," "nothing added to it," "no pesticides," thereby emphasizing the untainted and unprocessed nature of organic foods.

In another female focus group (school 2, #14), participants expressed that eating organic food would be a good example of sustainable eating, and speculated aloud among themselves about exactly why organic might be 'good for the environment.' After a time, they suggested that this might be because with organic food "everything's natural," and "not artificial." They further proposed, on an apparently related note, that organic foods did not need to have artificial "stuff," such as wax, preservatives, or pesticides added to them. Thus, in this case, organic's natural-ness seemed to be related to its freedom from additives that were perceived to be artificial (or perhaps whose incorporation was recognized to be an artificial and therefore unsustainable process, although the emphasis seemed to be placed on the artificialness of the 'stuff' itself, rather than the process of adding these substances). The concept of naturalness as it relates to food in

general, and other possible explanations for why it is often evaluated positively, will be investigated in more detail in the cross-cutting themes section, in the sub-section entitled ‘preference for natural food.’

3.3.1.3.2 (*Unprocessed*) plants

Whole vegetables and fruits were very consistently compatible with participants’ notion of organic. When providing examples of organic foods, *Focus on Food* participants named items like salad and apples (school 3, #7). The only processed organic product mentioned in the series was organic chips, which were brought up as an exception to the perceived rule that organic foods are healthy. The apparent association between organic and whole plant foods (which in turn were described as ‘natural’) could be because ‘fresh’ or whole vegetables and fruits (vs. processed foods) seemed more heuristically compatible with ‘organic,’ since it was typically construed as unaltered and un-tampered-with.

Similarly, a Swedish study found that even when unsure of the definition of ‘organic,’ people more easily identified specific items as organic if they were whole produce rather than processed foods (R. Shepherd, Magnusson, & Sjöden, 2005, p. 353). The connection between organic food and ‘fresh’ whole produce could also be related to the fact that organic produce is a more longstanding, and therefore perhaps more familiar category in Canada’s (certified) organic food industry, although sales of organic manufactured products have grown rapidly and continue to grow (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2010). In a recent focus group study in Vancouver, at least one of the youth participants thought that food identified as fresh was also therefore organic (Urueta-Ortiz, 2009, p. 61).

Pertaining to plant foods specifically (as opposed to animal products), the participants in a female focus group (school 4, #8) linked vegetarianism to eating organic because, “[vegetables

are] very fresh and like from the earth.” At least one of the participants in this group may have even assumed that all or most fresh vegetables are organic, judging by her comment: “[Organic food is] a lot healthier than most like junk food. My mom always likes to eat more organic stuff. My dad always puts salad on the table ‘cause ya, he wants us to eat healthier.” It seems, therefore, that participants from this focus group strongly associated organic foods with fresh vegetables such as those in salads. Other participants (female group, school 2, #14) drew parallels between vegetables and organic food, designating them both as healthy. Participants from a female group (school 4, #8) mentioned both ‘vegetarian foods’ and organic foods as examples of ‘real’ food, and contrasted them both with genetically modified food (genetically engineered *meat* was the example they specifically discussed) which was regarded as ‘not real.’ In addition, the only organic animal product mentioned in the focus group series were eggs, though participants seemed unsure of the distinction between organic eggs and Omega-3 eggs, and only mentioned them briefly, saying that they are ‘expensive.’ Thus, it seems that meat and animal products, along with processed foods, were also seen as being less compatible with the concept of organic. The seeming incompatibility of animal products and the concept of organic will be further discussed in the cross-cutting themes section regarding ‘ethical concerns.’

3.3.1.3.3 Healthy food

Most participants who discussed organic food associated it with being healthy. This assumption is a commonly-observed one (Lee et al., 2013) and may be influenced by messages encountered in various advertising, product packaging, and media. A few comments suggest that organic food had an overall reputation for being healthy in participants’ minds, sometimes despite a given food’s other qualities. In a conversation about the healthiness of organic vegetables, one participant in a female focus group (school 4, #8) added the caveat: “well,

organic junk food - organic chips - I guess that's organic junk food. It still seems healthy." The organic chips, which served as the exception proving the perceived rule that organic foods were generally healthy and unprocessed, might have still seemed healthy because of the 'halo effect,' a cognitive bias studied by Richard Thorndike in the 1920s, in which the positive qualities of a person or thing make other unrelated characteristics seem more positive. An American study revealed that participants estimated organic-labeled foods (including cookies and chips) as having fewer calories, and thought that they tasted lower in fat and higher in fibre than identical foods without the organic label (Lee et al., 2013). It seems, therefore, that an item labeled organic, even if it is processed, high in fat and salty, can sometimes come to seem healthy through the health halo effect, due to organic's overall reputation for healthiness.

Organic food may also have seemed healthy because it was associated with other qualities that were thought of as healthy or positive in general, such as being natural or unprocessed, and being typified by whole, 'fresh' vegetable foods grown without harmful chemicals.

3.3.1.3.4 Chemical-free

In addition to organic's positive reputation and its associations with 'good' food qualities and categories (such as 'fresh' and 'healthy'), an important element of the definition and positive image of 'organic' also seemed to be what it did *not* contain or come into contact with. One of the most common specific features that participants attributed to organic foods was being free from 'chemicals' such as pesticides. It seemed relatively intuitive to *Focus on Food* participants that organic and 'chemical-free' foods were less harmful to human health. For example, one of the male participants from a mixed focus group (school 3, #10) said that to him, healthy eating means 'organics' (which the group suggested meant 'local,' 'no pesticides,' and 'not processed').

When I asked the group why they thought organic was related to healthy eating, the female participant replied, “Well it’s just putting chemicals in the body that’d be bad,” and the male participant who had mentioned pesticides echoed, “I’d just rather not have like chemicals and different things in my food.” This seems to indicate that for these particular participants, the ‘chemicals’ themselves (and potentially other unidentified or unknown ‘things’) were problematic, rather than simply signifying, for example, that a food had been through a *process* that they deemed to be problematic. Indeed, in the focus group series, there was a tendency for many participants to suggest that foods were ‘bad,’ or at least risky, unless they possessed a redeeming quality such as being from a trusted source, being familiar, or being organic and therefore presumably un-tampered-with. This tendency will be revisited throughout the bad foods section, and explored in the cross-cutting themes sections, particularly under the headings of ‘dominance of health,’ ‘preference for natural food,’ and ‘control and the importance of knowing what’s in your food.’

3.3.1.4 Local Food: Food-miles, emissions, and connectedness

In *Focus on Food*, local food was discussed during conversations about health, sustainability, and ethics. All participants who talked about local food evaluated it positively. Local food was mostly defined and discussed in terms of geographic proximity and/or country of origin (participants often referred specifically to food originating from within Canada). Its environmental benefits were framed in terms of reducing or eliminating fuel used in transportation, and also reducing waste from packaging. In addition to the issues connected to food miles and shipping food long distances, there were a few cases in which local food was associated with food from farmers markets, being free from pesticides, and enhanced consumer

health. Transparency and ‘knowing what’s in your food’ was another of the positive aspects of local food that participants mentioned.

One or two participants’ comments implied that local food systems provide the benefit of interconnectedness between farmers and consumers. In a conversation about ethical eating, a few participants in one female focus group (school 2, #12) associated local food with purchasing from farmers markets rather than conventional grocery stores, thereby “supporting our farmers.” One of the participants also suggested, “... it’s good because like you know where your food comes from and you can like talk to the farmers on like whether...they pour pesticides in there or not and stuff.” Thus, being able to talk to and interact with farmers was associated with having better access to knowledge about issues that participants perceived to be important for consumers to know. In a different female focus group (school 3, #7), another participant’s comments focussed on the interpersonal relationships between farmers and consumers; specifically, she discussed how her family was friends with the farmer who supplied their eggs.

These understandings of ‘local food’ were somewhat consistent with the outcomes of studies in the United States by the Food Marketing Institute, which found that consumers’ motivations for buying ‘local’ food from grocery stores or from direct markets (for example, farmers markets) usually included freshness (82%), support for the local economy (75%), and knowing the source of the product (58%) (Martinez et al., 2010). Other popular reported reasons for buying local food included getting to know your farmer, reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, and consuming healthier, tastier, and fresher foods as opposed to processed, chemically-preserved, or nutritionally-depleted foods (Burnett et al., 2011). In British Columbia, some of the commonly promoted reasons to buy local (often defined as within BC) include better health, freshness (which in turn is linked to an absence of the need to “gas” unripe-picked

produce), environmental sustainability, and supporting BC farmers and the local economy (FarmFolkCityFolk, 2011).

Focus on Food participants did not, however, comment on ‘freshness’ in connection with local food, as did 82% of the respondents from the Food Marketing Institute study. This is somewhat surprising, since freshness was an important quality for many *Focus on Food* participants when it came to the foods they chose from the cafeteria, or their stated preferences in general; participants referred to freshness (or absence thereof) in conversations about organic food and fast food, as well as vegetarianism. However, in several instances, specific examples of produce including apples and eggs were mentioned in combination with the idea of local food, whereas processed foods never were, indicating the apparent compatibility of whole fresh produce (as opposed to processed foods) with the concept of local food, even though participants did not use the word ‘fresh’ in conjunction with ‘local.’

3.3.1.5 Summary of ‘good foods’ section

In sum, participants very consistently expressed that they valued vegetables, organic and local foods, as well as foods and ways of eating that they regarded as healthy. Many of these (and a few other related) qualities and categories overlapped: vegetables were explained as being ‘good’ for reasons related to health as well as animal welfare and (occasionally) sustainability, and local foods were associated with better health, as well as organic (and pesticide-free) foods and whole, unprocessed produce. Participants viewed organic food products as ‘good’ due to their positive overall reputation, their association with positive qualities or categories like ‘fresh’, healthy, ‘natural’ unprocessed plants/vegetables, and their supposed lack of ‘chemicals’ and other negative or potentially harmful elements. Importantly, many foods and ways of eating

described as ‘good’ were seen as free from certain unwanted substances and processes. This leads to the next section, entitled ‘bad foods.’

3.3.2 Bad foods

Just as some types of food were consistently mentioned in a positive way, others tended to be evaluated negatively by most of the focus group participants. Participants from several focus groups expressed mistrust of some types of food (such as fast food and GMOs), particular food sources (like certain fast food chains), and certain claims about the healthiness of particular foods and diet products/plans. They expressed concerns or suspicions that some foods or products were unnatural, ‘not real,’ or that they were somehow misrepresented by the companies selling or producing them. Further, the ‘unknown’ or hidden elements of various every-day food items, including unpronounceable or unfamiliar ingredients and substances appearing on food labels, seemed to convey a lack of transparency and a subjective loss of one’s ability to know and be ‘in control’ over one’s eating. These unfamiliar ingredients and substances (and/or possibly the processes that their presence implied), were often perceived as a threat to personal bodily health or wellbeing. For example, a female participant from a mixed group (school 3, #10) remarked that when purchasing food at the store, she would avoid items that have “a lot of ingredients that I can’t even pronounce,” and many other participants similarly expressed this preference for more familiar, recognizable, and recognizably-natural foods. ‘Artificial’ foods were especially associated with hazardous or unknown elements, whereas ‘natural’ foods were consistently evaluated positively. Furthermore, the freer of unknown and potentially hazardous or risky aspects or ingredients a food was, the better it was perceived to be.

This section is divided into subsections addressing two types of food that were quite consistently held up as examples of ‘bad’ foods whenever participants talked about them: fast food and GMOs (genetically modified organisms). Fast food was the discussion topic that was selected by the largest number of groups, and fast food also emerged during conversations about healthy eating, social eating, and dieting. GMOs came up spontaneously during a few conversations about fast food, ethical eating, and vegetarianism. In a few of these conversations, fast foods were associated with GMOs, and these two types of food were seen as sharing certain qualities such as being artificial and processed.

3.3.2.1 Fast food

Participants’ descriptions and evaluations of fast food overall (and specific examples like burgers, fries, pizza, fried chicken, chicken nuggets, pop, and onion rings) quite consistently placed it at the ‘unhealthy’ and ‘bad’ end of the food spectrum, although its taste and convenience were appealing for many participants. Participants associated fast food with mostly negative qualities such as being unhealthy, not fresh, greasy, and full of salt. Many (female and male) participants described fast food as being oily, greasy, or particularly high in fat. Fast food was most often described as being prepared very quickly, often by deep-frying, and sometimes after having been frozen for long periods of time. Processed, deep-fried, take-out, and drive-through were also given as examples of fast food. Participants from a female focus group (school 1, #1) suggested that fast foods are ‘ready in about five minutes,’ highlighting the ready-made or pre-prepared nature of fast food. For a few participants, fast food suggested additives, fillers, and addictions (male participant, mixed group, school 1, #2), preservatives and pink slime²⁰ (female

²⁰ A common name for lean finely textured beef (LFTB). A series of news reports in 2012 raised controversy and consumer concerns over the use of LFTB in commercial ground beef and other meat products (Satran, 2012).

group, school 1, #11), Styrofoam packaging (female group, school 2, #3), GMOs (female group, school 4, #8; mixed group, school 2, #4); and a few participants called fast food ‘disgusting,’ at least in principle (female group, school 2, #12). Participants also expressed a great deal of suspicion about fast food, which was associated with several perceived health-related and ethical issues, including hidden health risks, manipulation of consumers/farmers, and even deception regarding ingredients and nutritional information.

In this section, I will first discuss the ways in which fast food was typically defined by participants and what it meant to them, including how it was linked to large-scale, high-efficiency, low-cost, corporate food production. I will review some of the specific elements or qualities of fast food that were thought to make it ‘bad,’ particularly from a health perspective, including salt and fat content, processing and preparation methods, and lack of freshness. I will discuss factors that, according to participants, made fast food attractive and/or popular despite its drawbacks; some factors were features of fast food itself (such as being tasty), and other factors were more systemic, such as a relatively fast-paced, industrialized culture or lifestyle. I will also review some of the mitigating factors that made some types of fast food seem better or less unhealthy than others. Lastly, I will review some of the ethical concerns that participants expressed with regard to fast food’s production and marketing, and how those concerns reportedly impacted some of the participants’ decision-making about fast food consumption.

3.3.2.1.1 What is fast food?

When asked ‘what is fast food?’ participants usually began by listing large, well-known fast food chains, indicating a strong association between fast food and the companies or brands

Interestingly, the participant who brought up pink slime associated it with fast food products marketed as chicken products, such as chicken nuggets at McDonald’s and other venues.

associated with it. In one female focus group (school 2, #14), participants explicitly used the words ‘big business’ and ‘big corporation’ when talking about where fast food comes from. McDonald’s was mentioned fairly consistently, and it was also the most heavily-criticized. Wendy’s, KFC, FreshSlice, Dairy Queen, Starbucks and Subway were also mentioned in some focus groups. In a female focus group (school 1, #1) McDonald’s salads were reported to contain just as much fat as a Big Mac, and were referred to as “salads” in sarcastic implied quotation marks, suggesting that they were merely junk foods being masqueraded as healthy choices. Similarly, the nutrition information provided for McDonald’s products was suspected of being ‘lies’ (school 2, #12). It seems likely that this mistrust was partly rooted in the reputation of the McDonald’s brand specifically, and perhaps also the perceived corporate nature of fast food in general.

Fast foods were associated with certain hidden health risks linked to high fat and salt content, as well as additives, ‘chemicals’, and germs. Many participants emphasized the unknown elements of fast food, expressing, for example that ‘you don’t know what’s in it,’ in terms of the ingredients, their freshness, and their relative quantities (such as the amount of salt and fat). Participants of one female group (school 4, #8) stressed this point (“*They* [MacDonald’s restaurants] don’t even know what they put in there!”), and also expressed concerns about unsafe, under-cooked, or salmonella-contaminated meat in fast food restaurants. A few other participants commented on the poor sanitation of fast food restaurants, and indicated a general mistrust of fast food (female participants, mixed group, school 2, #4).

Many of the participants mentioned that fast food is not freshly cooked, but rather prepared from a ready-made and often preserved condition. A male participant in a mixed group (school 1, #2) distinguished between the “factory” in which the food is made “cheaply and in

large quantities,” and the place in which it is “re-heated.” This analogy suggested a kind of fast-food assembly, in which food is pre-prepared on an industrial scale ahead of time, as opposed to being cooked on-site to be consumed shortly afterwards.

A female participant from a mixed focus group (school 2, #4) stated that fast food is not “real” like the food from other kinds of restaurants. When I asked the participant what she meant by ‘real,’ she replied: “it’s not frozen as long, I would say,” thereby highlighting the concept of fast food as not-fresh. As mentioned in the ‘good foods’ section, the apparent ‘freshness’ of foods has been found to be important to young people in Vancouver (Urueta-Ortiz, 2009), as well as North American consumers in general, often for health reasons (Oakes, 2004). Harvey Levenstein (2012) suggested that frozen foods may carry a negative stigma due to the common practice in the early twentieth century of freezing foods that were already beginning to spoil. Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1983) positioned ‘fresh’ as the opposite of rotten. Freshness is also a theme of nouvelle cuisine, and is framed as preserving flavours of fresh (i.e. recently harvested/procured) ingredients by cooking them for shorter periods of time (if at all) and avoiding elaborate cooking methods that take away from the taste of the ingredients (Gault, 1982).

Judging by the way they described fresh foods, *Focus on Food* participants potentially understood ‘freshness’ in a few different ways, including being free of chemicals; being organic; being crispy (or hot, in the case of cafeteria entrées) rather than soggy, lukewarm, or greasy; and not having been frozen (although one male participant [mixed group, school 3, #9] argued that frozen vegetables were still a healthy choice). A female participant from a mixed focus group (school 2, #4) remarked: “Fast food tends to be like really like greasy while other ones are like freshly cooked,” suggesting that ‘freshness’ and ‘greasiness’ may have been thought of as

opposing qualities, perhaps due to how certain foods were being cooked or prepared from a frozen or otherwise preserved state. Thus, while different participants used the term ‘fresh’ to mean a few different things, many participants thought of freshness in terms of recentness of procurement/preparation, newness in appearance and/or texture, and also being minimally preserved or processed. The quality of freshness seemed to bring a reassurance of quality, healthfulness, as well as safety, whereas an obvious lack of freshness was linked to mass-produced foods, greasiness, and potential health and/or sanitation risks.

3.3.2.1.2 Tensions between ideals and practices

In general, *Focus on Food* participants expressed that despite its negative aspects, fast food was sometimes appealing due to its widespread availability, short procurement time, taste, and its inexpensiveness compared to other restaurant options. One participant (female group, school 1, #13) concisely summed up her opinion about fast food as follows: “I feel that fast food is convenient. But it’s not good for you all the time. And plus it’s, um, it’s not expensive like many other restaurants, so that’s why probably many people choose to have fast food instead of going to an actual restaurant.” While many participants reported craving fast food, they referred to several reasons for avoiding eating fast food too frequently, including the unhealthiness of fast food, feeling ‘gross’ after eating too much of it, and increased risk of diabetes, stroke and heart problems. Many of these motivations for avoiding frequent fast food consumption were related or very similar to some participants’ reasons to eat healthy by avoiding ‘eating for pleasure’ or eating junk food too often (as was discussed in the ‘good foods’ section under ‘healthy food’).

A Canadian study by McPhail, Chapman, and Beagan (2011) found that most teens regarded fast food as unhealthy, and while a few reported avoiding fast food completely, most

consumed it and felt guilty about it, and a few ate it without guilt, although they stated that it was unhealthy. While *Focus on Food* participants made no open admissions of guilt about eating fast food, one might interpret implied guilt in statements that rationalized or downplayed fast food consumption such as: “I only buy MacDonald’s when they give us coupons,” or “I try not to eat fast food but I like it a lot.” A few statements suggested regret, such as: “you realize what you’re eating, and you’re just like uugh, I should stop eating this... but then it like tastes good so you just keep on eating and you don’t wanna waste money so you just eat it until it’s gone.”

During discussions, participants sometimes shared and commiserated over failed attempts to avoid eating fast food. They offered justifications of their fast food consumption, saying that it is very hard to avoid, especially when in a rush, since “it’s everywhere,” (mixed group, school 1, #2), it’s “the fastest,” and it tastes good (female group, school 4, #8). A male participant from a mixed focus group (school 1, #2) described the appeal of fast food as follows: “Well you know, it’s like cheap food, it fills you up, it tastes good, it’s almost everywhere.”

Some participants commented on the influence of what might be called ‘fast food culture’ in a more general sense. One participant in a female group (school 1, #1) alluded to fast food being part of a broader fast-paced culture: “It’s probably primarily convenience [that makes fast food popular]. ‘Cause we’re like, industrialized cities, high maintenance, everybody’s work, and they have to get around places, so nobody always has time to settle down and make [food].” A participant from a different female group (school 1, #13) remarked that since fast food is usually something that she and her family get while ‘in a rush’, she had come to think of fast food as something that is *eaten* quickly, in addition to being procured quickly. Interestingly, she also suspected that eating fast food has, over time, encouraged her to eat faster in general - even when she is eating at home, for example. This statement complements the observations of several other

participants who associated fast food with ‘being in a hurry,’ and saw frequent fast food consumption as conducive to a rushed lifestyle.

Promotional deals or coupons for fast food restaurants were mentioned several times in different focus groups as a reason for visiting fast food restaurants, especially with family. In fact, a few participants claimed that they only visit fast food restaurants when they or a family member have a coupon, which one participant estimated was about five times per year (female group, school 1, #1). (It should be noted that although various participants estimated their fast food consumption frequency - estimates varied from several times weekly to several times per year - estimates of this kind were not necessarily accurate, and on a few occasions, peers in the same focus group would make contradictory remarks such as, ‘you ate fries with me yesterday.’) Specifically, coupons for McDonalds (female group, school 2, #3; female group, school 1, #11), free Slurpie promotional offers at 7-eleven, and Happy Hour²¹ at Starbucks (female group, school 1, #11) appealed to some participants, and reportedly encouraged them to buy fast food items, if only sporadically.

Despite the impressions that price, deals and coupons made on the participants, there was debate in several of the focus groups as to whether fast food could accurately be classified as inexpensive; some participants suggested that people (in general) eat fast food because it is cheap, whereas others disagreed, asserting that making food at home was actually more affordable. One male participant from a mixed focus group (school 1, #2) commented that fast food *production* is cheap and occurs on a large scale; this is an important distinction from general characterizations of fast food as cheap, and from classifications of fast food as inexpensive *for the consumer*.

²¹ A half-price specialty beverage promotion that took place between 3pm and 5pm (after school).

3.3.2.1.3 Mitigating factors, and 'different' kinds of fast food

Some participants supposed that certain fast food outlets served healthier or 'better' food than others, and this perception may have been influenced by marketing, advertisements, media representation and the overall reputations of certain fast food restaurants as well as participants' personal experiences. For one female participant from a mixed focus group (school 2, #4), being able to "watch them" prepare the food at Subway, as well as the supposed use of "fresh" as opposed to "old" ingredients, was preferable and indicated better and healthier fast food than "things like McDonald's and Wendy's." The gesture of preparing food in front of the customers seemed to create the impression of transparency, and also to demonstrate that the food was freshly prepared and therefore healthier. It is noteworthy that Subway restaurants use the slogans, "Think Fresh. Eat Fresh" and, "Subway. Eat Fresh." It may be that marketing influenced how the freshness or other qualities of those particular fast foods were perceived. A recent Canadian focus group study drew similar conclusions about the effects of fast food marketing, and also noted that its participants said that Subway's food was healthier because it visibly displayed some of the 'fresh' ingredients used (Urueta-Ortiz, 2009, p. 61).

In a different female focus group (school 4, #8), a participant noted that Wendy's seemed like a better fast food option than McDonalds because Wendy's burgers tasted 'real', whereas McDonald's were 'soggy' or 'greasy' and therefore seemed as though they were 'genetically engineered.' Another Canadian study similarly found that some of their teen participants felt better about eating at Wendy's than McDonald's, and one boy specifically commented that he liked Wendy's "way better than McDonald's" because the burgers at Wendy's are less greasy (McPhail et al., 2011, p. 305). Interestingly, well-known Wendy's slogans have included, "You know when it's real", and "It's way better than fast food." It seems especially likely that youths'

comments were influenced by ads in light of the work suggesting that convenience and fast foods are often marketed specifically to young people (Bugge, 2011; Goren, Harris, Schwartz, & Brownell, 2010; Kelly et al., 2010; Powell, Szczypka, & Chaloupka, 2010).

Some participants also evaluated fast food differently depending on which country it was from. Participants from one female focus group (school 4, #8) commented that fast food from the United States was particularly greasy, ‘gross’, and unhealthy, as well as cheaper and therefore easier to consume frequently than the fast food in Canada. One of the participants remarked, “I remember going to the U.S., my sister bought like a cheeseburger and then the grease actually went through the wrapping. So it’s not really good.” In another female focus group (school 1, #13), a participant shared that in the U.S., fast food restaurants were relatively more widespread than in Canada. She also implied that this was a drawback, since eating fast food too often is not enjoyable: “When I was in America, I had to like eat fast food almost every day, for like a week. ‘Cause there were like no actual restaurants. And so, pretty, got pretty annoyed with it [laughs].” In a study with Norwegian teenagers, participants were also found to be particularly opposed to American fast food chains (Bugge, 2011). This attitude may reflect a somewhat nationalistic sentiment (potentially relating to the recurring theme that when it comes to food, familiar is better), or a perception that the U.S. is more fast-food-friendly, and more conducive to extreme examples of the qualities that fast food encompasses.²² It could also be linked to a concern that the growing prevalence of fast food outside of the U.S. constitutes a kind of Americanization. Further, it seems likely that by identifying Canadian fast food as healthier than American fast food, participants would feel somewhat better about their occasional (Canadian) fast food consumption; it is therefore possible that this negative attitude towards American fast food was

²² Interestingly, in a different female focus group, the influence of America and American celebrities were linked to unhealthy diets in the pursuit of extreme thinness.

used by participants to excuse their fast food consumption.

3.3.2.1.4 Ethical concerns, manipulation and deception

As previously stated, most participants admitted to consuming fast food at least occasionally, and tended to express the opinion that while fast food should usually be avoided, it was acceptable to consume it sometimes. However, participants in one female focus group (school 2, #12) made strongly anti-fast-food comments and seemed to have deep mistrust for fast food in general, rather than just certain chains or brands of fast food. Referring to fast food as ‘disgusting’ and ‘unethical,’ they cited negative ethical and food-safety implications of the methods used to raise animals for fast food meat (i.e. fast food’s apparent connection to Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) – although participants did not use the term CAFOs specifically - their unsanitary conditions, and their use of ‘hormones and steroids’), and the presumed dishonesty in displayed nutrition facts and ingredients, along with high fat and salt content, as reasons why “you should never eat fast food.” Participants cited the documentary Food Inc., which they had viewed as part of a voluntary for-credit course at school, as the source of some of the information they’d learned about fast food. According to one participant, the documentary depicted:

...A chicken factory, or like a slaughterhouse...they trick farmers or get farmers ...to grow their chicken, and they inject it with like...hormones and stuff, and steroids, and then... they’re usually – they’re so fat that they can’t stand up, so basically when they, like when they pooh, they like sit in their pooh. And I feel like that was like really disgusting, unhealthy, really un-hygienic, and like it’s really gross.

Another participant added, “I think that’s like unethical eating,” and went on to comment on the lack of transparency (and possibly outright deception) that she ascribed to fast food restaurants, along with common health-related concerns: “if you look at some of the nutrition facts, which they’re not even telling you everything that’s in it...but it’s ridiculous how much like salt and stuff is in it.” The first participant quoted above (on the topic of ‘chicken factories’) echoed this concern, and reiterated that fast food is unhealthy, regardless of claims to the contrary: “Ya...First of all, I’m pretty sure those [nutrition facts] are lies and they’re trying to make it a bit better than it actually is. And, I found it funny, because the salads were just as bad as their burgers.”

Despite the expressions of disgust, the participants quoted above acknowledged that fast food tastes good. However, most participants in this particular focus group expressed that they would avoid fast food despite its agreeable taste by consistently bringing food from home, opting to get food or a ‘filling’ beverage from somewhere other than a fast food restaurant, or if necessary by postponing their meal until later on (i.e. waiting until arriving at home to eat).

Another female group (school 4, #8) seemed to assign some responsibility to the makers of fast food by suggesting that it is formulated to be irresistible.²³ They emphasized the fact that fast food companies make ‘a lot of money,’ and that even though their food is very fattening and unhealthy (potentially leading to diseases like diabetes), “you can’t [stay away from it] because it’s good,” and another participant added, “it generally looks better or tastes better than regular food ... ‘cause they make it that way.” To address their concerns with fast food, the participants from this female focus group reported sometimes making their own ‘fast food’ at home (as an

²³ This contrasts somewhat with a comment about ‘fast food addictions’ in a mixed focus group implying that individuals have some responsibility to be mindful in order to avoid developing an addiction: “Some people are, some people turn to fast food um too quickly, and they don’t think about it, and eventually they nee- uh they start to have a craving for it, and it gets into their system,” (male participant, school 1, #2).

example, they described a breakfast modeled after the egg McMuffin), which they felt was a better alternative, “‘cause I make it. So I know what goes in my food.” This theme of increasing control over one’s food - sometimes specifically in order to reduce specific perceived health risks, and sometimes seemingly to reassure one’s self in a more general way that the food is familiar and safe, with no ‘unknown’ elements to worry about - emerged in several different focus groups during several different discussion topics, and will be addressed in the cross-cutting themes section under the heading of “control and the importance of ‘knowing what’s in your food.’”

3.3.2.1.5 Summary

In sum, most participants felt that fast food was unhealthy and should not be consumed frequently. In addition, many participants seemed concerned with the hidden or unseen aspects of fast food. They were sceptical about whether the ingredients being used were genuinely what they seemed to be, and whether those ingredients had been procured, handled, and prepared in an approved-of manner.

This sense of disapproval and/or mistrust of fast food, which varied in strength across individuals and groups, seemed to be partly rooted in the apparent industrial and/or corporate nature of fast food. Participants referred to the large profits generated by the fast food industry, and sometimes used terms like ‘big corporation’ to describe popular fast food companies. Some participants’ comments suggested a sense of being manipulated or misled for the sake of profits. Several participants also seemed to feel that fast food’s popularity or prevalence was a reflection of a fast-paced and industrialized culture and lifestyle.

The sentiments expressed by the participants are mirrored in various publications and discourses that have positioned fast food as the opposite of ‘slow food’ in terms of the values it

represents. If slow food represents that which is regionally unique, mindful of ecological and social principles, rich in aesthetic appreciation, and lively with human interaction and creativity, fast food has been construed as its antithesis: homogenous, environmentally damaging, mindless and rushed, corporate and mass-produced, deskilling/deskilled, and impersonal (Delind, 2006; Martinez et al., 2010; Sassatelli & Davolio, 2010). In addition (and sometimes in connection) to the risks and drawbacks associated with fast food, participants also expressed some similar misgivings about GMOs and genetically engineered food products. These are addressed in the following section.

3.3.2.2 *GMOs*

When they were brought up, Genetically Modified Organisms (referred to in the focus groups alternately as GMOs, genetically modified foods, or genetically engineered foods, even though these categories are technically different according to Health Canada²⁴) were usually a target of scepticism or outright negative evaluations. Three focus groups (one mixed group and two female groups) talked about GMOs during discussions about fast food, vegetarianism, and ethical eating. Participants expressed concerns pertaining to health, ethics, or a combination of both. Environmental concerns with GMOs were not identified (at least not as such).

It has been argued the public has developed a ‘complex of concerns’ in reaction to the emergence of recombinant DNA technology into civil society (including into the realm of food), and that within this complex of concerns, environmental, agricultural, socio-economic, and ethical issues tend to be blurred (Devos, Maesele, Reheul, Speybroeck, & Waele, 2007). Some

²⁴ Health Canada considers an organism to be genetically engineered “if it was genetically modified using techniques that permit the direct transfer or removal of genes in that organism. Such techniques are also called recombinant DNA or rDNA techniques.” It considers an organism to be genetically *modified* if “its genetic material has been altered through any method, including conventional breeding” (Health Canada, 2012b), contrary to the more common understanding among Canadians that GM would *not* include conventional breeding.

have attributed this ‘blurriness’ to laypeople’s poor understanding of the process behind and implications of genetic modification, and to an irrational fear of the unknown.

Others, however, have pointed out that people do not ordinarily understand riskiness solely in terms of the statistical likelihood of personal harm; rather, they also tend to consider factors such as freedom of choice, respect for nature, democracy, irreversibility of potential impacts, and the fallibility of experts (Devos et al., 2007). In the case of the *Focus on Food* participants, concerns expressed mainly centered around the ‘unnatural-ness’ or artificialness of GMOs (in one mixed focus group, for example, participants explained to me that a genetically modified food was bad because, as they reiterated: ‘it’s artificial,’ ‘it’s genetically modified!’ and ‘it’s not real.’); the unknown (or presumed negative) consequences of the use of GMOs, including consequences for human health specifically; and the fact that GM products are not labeled or identified as such, which limits consumer knowledge about what they are eating and presents ethical issues.

3.3.2.2.1 *Ethics, the unknown, and transparency*

A participant from a female focus group (school 2, #12) expressed ethical and health-related concerns with GMOs in general, using an example of tomatoes ‘injected with fish genes.’ She saw GMOs as ‘disgusting’, ‘unethical’ and a potential human health hazard. She felt that the development and use of genetically modified food products was potentially dangerous, saying: They took genes from a fish that lived on the bottom of the sea because they could better withstand cold... They put that in the tomato²⁵, and, like they actually sold it. And there was a

²⁵ A transgenic tomato modified using genes from a white flounder was developed in 1991 to be resistant to frost and refrigerated storage. However, it was never sold. The first commercially-grown genetically engineered food granted a license for human consumption was the Flavr Savr tomato, which the participant might have also been thinking of. The Flavr Savr was briefly available for purchase before it was discontinued in 1997. In addition, a variety of transgenic corn used for animal feed made its way into taco shells even though it was not approved for

lady who had like a chicken fajita or something and then she was allergic to whatever chemicals they put in it, and she had like, a horrible allergic reaction.

In addition, she identified a negative ethical implication of not communicating to consumers that a food contains genetically modified ingredients: “And, a lot of times they don’t tell people that it’s genetically modified. And that’s really unethical because people should know what they’re eating.” This concern touches on the previously-raised issue of transparency and deception addressed in the fast food sub-section.

The same participant implied a contrast between organic food and genetically modified food, saying that organic food is ethical specifically “...because then you know that you don’t have people injecting random stuff in whatever you’re eating.” She elaborated that ‘random stuff’ might include pesticides, foreign genes, and hormones (which had been mentioned previously in this group’s discussion about chickens raised in concentrated animal feeding operations for fast food). The idea of ‘random stuff’ being deliberately injected into food suggests mysterious food production methods taking place in a very non-transparent manner. Non-organic food, including genetically modified food, is described somewhat like a science experiment occurring behind closed doors.

The participant’s concern regarding genes being injected into food seemed to indicate a sense of relative powerlessness and unawareness about what was being put into food. Her concern may have also partly stemmed from a realization of the pervasiveness of industrial food production in general. Genetic modification is an especially conspicuous example of the sheer extent of industrial agriculture’s intervention in the natural world, as well as its dependence on advanced technologies and a steady supply of synthetic chemicals. The push for mandatory

human consumption (due to concerns that it may cause allergic reactions in humans), leading to a massive recall in 2000 (“FDA Releases List of Recalled Corn Products - ABC News,” 2000).

GMO food labeling, and the general desire for greater transparency about ‘what is in our food’ is widespread in Canada, and this desire has increased as the growing prevalence of intensive farming, corporate control, biotechnology, cloning, and food safety scares have created a cautious public (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2011b, p. 4).

There are currently no government standards in place in Canada regarding the labeling of foods derived from, or explicitly not derived from, genetic modification²⁶ (though some foods are voluntarily labeled ‘non GMO’ as ascertained by an independent organization called ‘nongmoproject.org’), which potentially adds to public conjecture and confusion about which foods typically contain genetically modified ingredients, and what those ingredients would typically be (Nestle, 2014). For example, anti-GMO protests or literature often feature images of odd or dangerous-looking tomatoes or other vegetables, although at present, very few whole fruits and vegetables available for sale are genetically engineered, whereas most processed foods in Canada do contain ingredients derived from GE crops, such as GE soy and corn (Antoniou, Robinson, & Fagan, 2012).

3.3.2.2.2 Fast food connections: Artificialness, chemicals, the unknown, and manipulation

Participants from two focus groups (one mixed group and one female group, from separate schools) associated fast food with GMOs. This may have been because both of these food categories were thought of as artificial and containing elements of the ‘unknown,’ concealed, or unfamiliar, and because both were thought of as unhealthy or potentially harmful. A female participant from a mixed focus group (school 2, #4) suspected that some fast food

²⁶ A standard exists for voluntary claims about the use of genetic *engineering* in the production of foods and food ingredients: producers can label foods as ‘not a product of genetic engineering,’ for example (Health Canada, 2012b). According to Health Canada’s broad definition of GMOs (i.e. an organism whose genetic material has been altered via any method), very few foods in Canada (if any) would be considered *non*-genetically modified, whereas only a few varieties of whole vegetables and fruits, and a large percentage of packaged processed foods, would be considered to be or to contain products of genetic engineering.

restaurants were probably “using GMOs,” since the food looked “so good” as to arouse suspicion. When asked what she thought about GMOs, the participant said that genetically modified foods were ‘not real.’ (She had also described fast food as both unhealthy and ‘not real.’ Elsewhere in the focus group discussion, this participant associated ‘real food’ with qualities such as being healthy, home-made, and organic; It seems therefore, that perceived ‘realness’ may have emerged from a sense of familiarity and safety.)

A male participant then added that GMOs were ‘artificial’, and a second female participant remarked that they tend to contain “really bad chemicals that really can affect your health” (although a third female participant disagreed with this assessment, asserting that there is no clear evidence that consuming GMOs leads to negative human health consequences, based on what she had learned from ecology class). These concerns are consistent with the findings of other studies indicating that foods identified as genetically modified were seen as less natural and less healthy (as well as less necessary and less tasty) than their non-genetically-modified versions, and that these unfavourable evaluations in turn led participants to be less accepting of GM foods (Tenbült, De Vries, van Breukelen, Dreezens, & Martijn, 2008).

It is possible that *Focus on Food* participants associated GMOs with ‘chemicals’ because most of the Genetically Engineered crops commercialized so far are specifically modified to withstand or tolerate the application of particular herbicides, as is the case for the well-known roundup-ready soybean (United States Department of Agriculture, 2012); to produce particular insecticides with the goal of reducing crop damage by certain insects, as is the case for Bt corn and Bt cotton; and/or to resist other types of ‘pest’ organisms (Nicolia, Manzo, Veronesi, & Rosellini, 2013). However, no participants mentioned pesticides specifically in connection with GMOs, even when they demonstrated a familiarity with the existence of pesticides by discussing

them in other conversations (about organic foods, for example). It is possible, therefore, that the overriding reputation of GMOs as being ‘unnatural’ as well as unhealthy or harmful, led participants to presume that GMOs tended to be contaminated by (non-specific) ‘chemicals,’ since they so commonly appeared in other artificial and processed/modified foods (including fast foods).

In a female focus group (school 4, #8) participants remarked that the meat in certain fast food restaurants (McDonald’s was given as an example), was greasy and soggy as opposed to the ‘fresher’ and more ‘real-tasting’ meat found in some other restaurants. Because of these negative qualities, they suspected that this meat was ‘genetically engineered’ (GE) and therefore ‘not actual meat.’ It seems likely that this association between fast food meat and genetic engineering was partly due to a general sense of mistrust regarding fast food (and certain fast food restaurants especially), and because GMOs likewise represented a category of food that was perceived as high-risk and ‘unknown’ or unfamiliar.

It is interesting that participants in this group raised concerns about GE meat, since there are currently no GE animals approved for human consumption (though a GE ‘enviropig’ and a GE salmon have been developed) (Health Canada, 2009b). Perhaps the fact that they brought up meat specifically was a coincidence; they may have simply associated fast food (incidentally, in this particular case, fast food meat) with ‘artificial’ things, and GMOs sprung to mind as another example of ‘artificial’ food. It is also possible that these participants found the concept of GE meat more worrisome and therefore more worthy of discussion than GE plants. This would be consistent with the findings from study in which some consumers found genetic modification of plants to be more acceptable than GM of animals (Frewer et al., 1996). It has been suggested that altering or interfering with sentient creatures is more widely recognized as ethically problematic

because doing so potentially infringes on those creatures' prerogative to live or to act according to their natural inclinations (Witten, 2013). This attitude is consistent with other *Focus on Food* participants' ethical objections (voiced during conversations about vegetarianism) to livestock being 'cooped up in cages' rather than being caught from the wild (female group, school 1, #1). Plants, on the other hand, are not typically regarded as having innate 'behaviours' or roles that they are motivated to fulfill, which might make their modification seem less intrusive or offensive.²⁷

After prompting, one of the participants from this female focus group briefly explained her understanding of the *process* of genetic modification, which she said was based on a program she had watched. (At this point, the conversation shifted from 'genetically engineered' meat to *plant* agriculture. Perhaps this shift occurred because the participant was not familiar with the actual process of genetically engineering animals for meat and therefore chose to discuss plants instead): "It helps make food faster. Like the agriculture, um so they engineer some plants so there would be more of it. Instead of growing organic plants which takes longer. Ya, so I guess it's kind of good but it's not really that good if it's not completely healthy." Unlike the two other focus groups that linked GMOs to harmful 'chemicals,' participants from this focus group did not specify why GM plant foods would be less healthy. They may have assumed that this would be the case due to the reputation of GMOs for being less healthy simply by virtue of being altered or modified from what is perceived to be their natural state (Tenbült et al., 2008). It might

²⁷ I would argue that this perspective disregards plants' roles in an ecosystem. If a plant's only function were to feed humans, then a genetically modified plant might very well be regarded as *functionally* as well as substantially equivalent to a non-genetically modified one. If, on the other hand, a plant is recognized as having multiple roles, including providing food or habitat for other animal and insect species, and interacting with various organisms in an ecosystem, then a typical genetically modified plant would not likely be considered functionally equivalent to a non-genetically-modified one. Watts, Ilbery, & Maye (2005) similarly point out that genetic modification is a form of reductionism or 'atomism' typical of product-focussed food systems, since plants are manipulated for a few particular traits that make them more valuable as commercial products, without regard for their other roles.

also be the case that participants assumed that an (supposed) increase in plant quantity and speed of growth would necessarily imply a trade-off in the resulting food quality.

Some researchers (Marris, 2001) have suggested that the public at large is ambivalent about GMO crops since it recognizes both potentially positive and negative dimensions of biotechnology in various overlapping realms. In the above example, the agricultural process involving genetically engineered plants (as the participant understood it) was described as ‘kind of good’ in terms of presumed faster plant growth and/or higher yields. The issue seen as being problematic was the supposed reduction in the end product’s healthfulness. This is consistent with many popular messages and media regarding GMOs (Thichava, 2013), which tend to focus on human-consumer health risks. (A similar bias applies to popular discourses about organic foods, as will be discussed in the cross-cutting themes section).

3.3.2.2.3 Summary

In sum, participants expressed concerns with GMOs related to perceived risks to consumer health, which seemed connected to the ‘unnaturalness’ or artificialness of GMOs and often to the chemicals associated with them. Participants were also concerned with the ethical implications of the lack of transparency with regard to genetic modification of food. Some participants suspected fast food of being genetically modified, perhaps because both categories of food were seen as highly artificial and processed, as well as unhealthy, and likely containing chemicals.

3.4 Cross-cutting themes

Certain themes appeared during various discussions throughout the focus group series. The remaining sections of this chapter are devoted to exploring these cross-cutting themes and

their potential roots and implications, by making comparisons to relevant literature. I will address eight cross-cutting themes that I identified as playing an important part in shaping many of the focus group discussions, and which appeared to influence the ways in which participants thought about food and/or navigated food decision-making:

- Health, and more specifically the dominance of healthy eating as a framework for understanding, categorizing, and making decisions about food;
- The preference for ‘natural’ food and the quality of natural-ness;
- Ethical concerns and considerations, including issues around transparency/honesty, animal welfare, and harmful qualities or food-related practices more generally;
- The desire to have more control over one’s food and to ‘know what’s in your food,’ in response to a general wariness of unfamiliar food, and especially foods that are perceived to be artificial, processed or highly modified;
- Tensions and conflicting issues around the importance of pleasure as it relates to food;
- (To a more limited extent) sustainability as it relates to food, and more specifically, a waste/emissions-reduction focussed approach to sustainability (as opposed to an ecological framework, for example);
- The influence of gender, and culture/ethnicity.

These themes are very much interrelated and overlapping. For example, I posit that the preference for ‘natural’ is partly linked to a sense of familiarity with certain foods, and a corresponding impression of greater safety and health. In addition, participants’ comments indicated an attitude that human intervention in the realm of food is often unacceptably destructive and/or risky, thereby sometimes carrying negative ethical implications for artificial/unnatural foods, and leading to a sense that natural foods are more ethical and ‘good’ in

a general sense (above and beyond healthfulness). In a related way, some participants expressed that reducing food-related packaging waste, minimizing emissions from food miles traveled, and avoiding foods that could endanger certain animal species, constituted examples of eating sustainably. Thus, most participants' conceptions of 'sustainable eating' were consistent with the notion that contemporary food systems are problematic due to their polluting and/or destructive tendencies, and that to reduce these tendencies is generally what is meant by being 'sustainable.'

Despite certain concerns and ideals shared by many participants, they did not necessarily perceive that they were able to act on these ideals and preferences, due to various factors including conflicting ideals and preferences, family and other social/cultural influences, and lack of access to accurate information or appropriate, accessible, affordable foods. Evidently, as a result of these various perceptions regarding health, naturalness, and ethical concerns, many participants expressed a desire for greater transparency in the food system, and also for a greater degree of control over their food.

The first cross-cutting theme to be covered is the dominance of health as a framework for understanding and making decisions about food.

3.4.1 Dominance of health

Healthy eating was a very popular discussion topic, and all participants demonstrated familiarity with healthy eating as a framework for discussing and evaluating food and ways of eating, employing this framework during conversations on many different topics. This was shown in the previous sections on good and bad foods, where health consistently appeared as a key consideration. For example, one of the main reasons vegetables were described as 'good' was their perceived healthfulness, and fast food was condemned in part because it was seen as

being unhealthy. Organic foods were primarily thought of as being chemical-free, healthier versions of non-organic foods, and health was mentioned as an advantage of eating local food. GMOs were discussed in terms of their perceived potential risks to human health (and the ethical consequences of preventing people from acting to reduce their exposure to those risks), whereas the genetic modification process was not specifically discussed as being problematic, and in one case was regarded as ‘kind of good’ since it presumably allowed for food to be grown faster and in larger quantities.

During conversations about dieting, physical appearance was acknowledged as an important motivator for controlling dietary intake among people in general, and especially women and girls. However, participants did not usually state that physical appearance was a motivator for them personally, and they were critical of forms of dieting that focus on weight-loss for the sake of appearance alone. Health was viewed as a much more acceptable reason for dieting than appearance. Although some participants admitted to having tried dieting (for weight loss and/or for health), they were quick to remark on how bad it is to diet in response to media, peer, or family pressure to look a certain way. In conversation, dieting was often treated as a ‘dirty word’ due to its associations with poor self-esteem, anorexia, bulimia, and other forms of disordered eating, which were considered extremely unhealthy as well as unattractive and undesirable in a more general sense.

Thus, participants readily adopted health as a lens for discussing food and eating in general. Even the few participants who indicated that healthy eating was relatively unimportant to them demonstrated that they were very familiar with one or more healthy eating frameworks involving concepts like balanced diets and moderating the consumption of fat and calories. That health was a major consideration for participants is not particularly surprising, since healthy

eating is generally regarded as the dominant discourse in Canada when it comes to discussing food (Beagan & Chapman, 2012). Further, the connection between food and the eater's body and bodily wellbeing is fairly obvious since everyone eats, whereas, for example, not everyone in North America has first-hand experience with the process of growing or harvesting food and caring for soil, and so these and other elements of the food cycle may not be as prominent in most of our minds.

If we typically encounter our food fleetingly as a 'snapshot' in its lifecycle, we are more likely to view it first and foremost as a product with implications for the eater's personal health and sense of wellbeing; we may or may not consider the process that gave rise to the food, or its implications. Accordingly, our consumption vocabularies (West, Brown, & Hoch, 1996), stemming from and continually reinforced by our informal and formal education, are relatively well-suited to discuss matters of personal health, and not necessarily very well suited to describing and discussing other elements of the food cycle. This in turn affects the kinds of discourses that tend to take place about food, since it is relatively difficult to speak about food-related concerns that are not clearly linked to food products and their immediate impacts on their consumers.

The focus of this section is the *dominance* (not simply the prevalence) of health as a framework for recognizing, assessing, and understanding the value and suitability of food. When human health is emphasized over ecological considerations, this can be described as anthropocentric. Following from this, when foods come to be viewed primarily in terms of the qualities that have immediate implications for individual consumer health or wellbeing, this can be described as consumerist.

For the most part, participants understood food from a consumer-health perspective, and further, they tended to frame health largely in terms of safety, or absence of harmfulness. This is to say that the way food was typically discussed implied that its primary function was to be consumed without causing harm to the consumer (and also to act as nourishment and a source of pleasure). Other qualities and features of food (including the likelihood of creating harm to animals or to the environment) also figured in discussions, and yet, these considerations were usually secondary, in that they were not discussed as often or in as much clear detail by as many participants, and even then, frequently only with prompting, after consumer-health related qualities had already been discussed.

The dominance of health as a framework for understanding and evaluating food was illustrated quite strikingly by the way organic food was framed as comparatively safe and healthy, whereas other aspects of what ‘organic’ might mean, from an ecological standpoint for example, were generally not addressed or discussed. Thus, although healthy eating and sustainable eating are commensurable and potentially very complementary frameworks (Clonan & Holdsworth, 2012; Denyer, 2008; Mador & Jayatilaka, 2011), there was a strong tendency for participants to discuss the merits of organic predominantly in terms of individual consumer health rather than an environmental or ecological perspective. The relative familiarity of personal health as a framework for understanding the value of food in general may be one reason that participants discussed organic food largely in terms of implications for consumer health, as I will discuss in the following sub-section.

3.4.1.1 Organic as a safer product, as opposed to a beneficial process

Focus on Food participants generally discussed organic foods in terms of the product qualities with direct impacts on consumers, such as safety/benignity, the absence of chemicals,

and general healthiness. Notably, this was the case even during discussions that were supposed to be focussed on sustainable eating.

Participants discussed the perceived link between organic food and better health not only during conversations about healthy eating, but also during conversations about sustainable eating, vegetarianism, fast food, and ethical eating. For example, during conversations about sustainable eating, a number of participants brought up, without prompting, the topics of organic, natural, and chemical-free foods, and expressed positive attitudes towards these foods even though they could not necessarily explain how they related to sustainable eating. When asked to expand on or explain comments expressing that organic relates to sustainable eating, participants stated or re-iterated that organic was ‘natural’ (female group, school 2, #14), was better for the earth, and/or was *healthier* because it didn’t use chemicals (female group, school 4, #6). Participants provided some concrete examples of ‘chemicals,’ including pesticides, herbicides and preservatives, although no participants explained how the use of these chemicals related to sustainability issues.

A possible exception was one case in which participants of a female focus group (school 2, #14) speculated that organic might be good for the environment partly because, “[with organic] you don’t waste money buying artificial stuff to make it taste better.” They elaborated that “artificial stuff” could include things like wax, preservatives, and pesticides. Therefore, their comments seemed to imply that organic food production was less input-dependent (though the function of some of the inputs mentioned may have been misunderstood), and therefore saved money. This could be interpreted as linking chemical-free foods to the benefit of resource conservation, although the emphasis of the participants’ comments was economic and related to taste, rather than ecological.

In short, most participants who discussed the meaning of organic talked especially about healthy (and sometimes ‘expensive’) products free of harmful chemicals; by contrast, organic agriculture or food production practices were not usually alluded to, even during conversations on the topic of sustainable eating specifically. (There were two exceptions in which participants mentioned that in the case of organic and/or local food, no pesticides are *sprayed* - presumably this referred to the production process - and one participant mentioned that pesticides normally allow plants to attack or defend against bugs.)

The simplest reason for this focus on the ‘chemical-free’ and health-related aspects of organic foods might be that participants loosely associated sustainable eating with the idea of ‘organic,’ and yet the positive qualities of organic food that readily came to their minds pertained to the consumer-health-related benefits of eating organic foods. This explanation seems especially likely given that while most Canadian consumers correctly associate organic with little or no synthetic pesticides, they do not typically know what the benefits of organic agriculture are for soil and the environment (Canada Organic Trade Association, 2010, p. 12).

The top three reasons for buying organic in 2007, according to a Canadian study, were health, safety, and nutrition (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2010, p. 9). More specifically, for Canadian consumers, the most important health-related reasons for consuming organic were the absence of ‘chemicals’, antibiotics and hormones (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2010). Marketing research by Context Marketing (2009) and Hartman Group (2009) has shown that foods labelled as being free of antibiotics or pesticides are often perceived by consumers to be cheaper but basically equivalent (sometimes even superior) alternatives to organic foods, and product packaging may reinforce this perception (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2010, p. 10; Canada Organic Trade Association, 2010). Some other North American and European

studies have shown that that organic foods were reportedly chosen for health reasons more often than environmental reasons (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2010; IGD Shopper Vista, 2013; R. Shepherd et al., 2005). It should be noted, however, that this has not been found to be true for consumers of every country; in Denmark, (which has the highest market share of organic products in the world) environmental concerns were cited as the most important reason for purchasing organic food (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2010, p. 10).

The widespread perspective that organic foods are superior because they are ‘chemical/pesticide-free’ is not entirely consistent with the reality of organic certification standards. In Canada, it is true that organic certification requires growers/producers to abstain from the use of most synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, although certain approved synthetic substances are allowable (Standards Council of Canada, 2011). However, counter to some consumers’ perceptions, the Standards Council of Canada notes that organic certification is not a guarantee that a food is free of pesticide residues, and that rather, organic certification is meant to regulate the production *process*; not the final product (2011, p. iv). Indeed, while organic foods often have lower levels of pesticide residues, there is no guarantee that this will be the case, since they frequently come into contact with pesticides and contaminants originating from non-organic farms, for example. In addition, the maximum limits for pesticide residues on food, which are set by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency within Health Canada, based on data submitted by the companies applying to register their pesticides, are the same for organic food and conventional food.

Health Canada’s website states: “To date, there is no evidence to indicate that there is a health risk from eating conventionally grown produce because of pesticide residues, or that organic foods are safer to consume than conventionally produced food,” (Health Canada, 2013).

It has been pointed out that it would be difficult to establish any human health-related impacts of residual synthetic pesticides in the absence of long-term controlled studies on humans (Williams, 2002). On the other hand, the benefits of organic agriculture (or at least the forms of organic agriculture that mimic ecosystems) for supporting biodiversity and species abundance, pest suppression and natural resiliency to pests, and reduced dependence on fossil fuels and synthetic agro-chemicals, are comparatively well-established (Birkhofer et al., 2008; Carlisle & Miles, 2013; Hole et al., 2005; Seufert et al., 2012, p. 231; Tuck et al., 2014). Nevertheless, these ecologically-focused reasons to support organic remain much less popular and/or well-known among consumers in Canada.

Ecological reasons to support organic may be relatively less well-known because they are much less well-advertised to the public via popular media and organic product packaging, and may even be downplayed relative to consumer-health-related benefits. Thus, various cultural discourses and media messages may encourage consumers to experience, regard, and discuss food as consumer-health products. This phenomenon is described in the following section.

3.4.1.2 Organic food products: Packaging and health claims

Numerous messages in popular magazines, e-zines, and websites advise ‘green’ and/or health-conscious consumers to identify fruits and vegetables belonging to the ‘dirty dozen’ category (i.e. those whose *edible* portions are thought to be most contaminated with pesticides when produced conventionally), and to always buy organic versions of these particular products. Meanwhile, the ‘clean 15’ are presented as produce that are relatively safe to purchase even if conventional rather than organic, because they are least likely to be contaminated. For example, the avocado supposedly ‘doesn’t have to’ be purchased organically, because although it is treated with pesticides, it has a “thick skin that protects the fruit from pesticide build-up,” and therefore

need only be rinsed before slicing and peeling (The Daily Green Staff, 2013). The message conveyed by these and similar popular bulletins and health magazine articles, is that the impetus for buying organic commodities is related to personal health – and the avoidance of contaminants in particular - and does not extend much beyond that. The aspects of organic agriculture that can potentially strengthen the ecological and/or social elements of the food system are thereby glossed over. While most of these messages are mostly directed at adult grocery shoppers, they may be read by teenaged audiences as well. Though participants in *Focus on Food* did not talk about organic food product packaging specifically, the view that ‘organic’ pertains to products that are less likely to be harmful to the consumer may be reinforced by organic product packaging and other messages.

Various companies may recognize an incentive to portray organic foods as safer or chemical-free versions of conventional products. This is partly because while consumers may express positive attitudes about organic food and environmental-friendliness in general, they are not correspondingly more likely to purchase organic or other eco-friendly products. Rather, among those who buy organic and eco-friendly alternatives, beliefs about food products’ specific characteristics including taste, price, and effects on personal health are better predictors of product purchase frequency (Grankvist & Biel, 2007). Accordingly, the successful marketing of ‘eco-friendly’ or ‘green’ products tends to emphasize ‘non-green’ consumer value, including benefits like improved health, enjoyment, and safety, alongside a ‘green’ claim, image, or logo. Ironically, successful ‘green’ marketers have tended to avoid overly specific or obvious ties to ecological sustainability, since these types of claims can actually alienate some consumers (Ottman, Stafford, & Hartman, 2006).

This approach to green marketing allows companies to appeal to a larger number of consumers ('green' or otherwise) and can encourage people to buy the products that, for example, make them feel personally 'safer' from food-safety related fears (Blay-Palmer, 2008, p. 127), while providing the added bonus of helping consumers to feel more virtuous or ecologically responsible about their purchase (Ryan, 2012). It has been suggested that in order to continue to benefit from the perception that organic means healthy, "the organic products industry...asserts that organic products contain fewer harmful elements (such as pesticides) and more healthful elements (such as vitamins and minerals)," (Forge, 2004). Thus, green marketing seems to play a role in reinforcing the notion that organic foods are primarily products that promote personal health and wellbeing, while maintaining the heuristic (but vague) association with sustainability or 'eco-friendliness.'

While the apparent absence of chemicals was important in helping participants to designate organic foods as good, 'good foods' (including organic) were also seemingly valued for their connections to positive qualities and categories, including 'naturalness.'

3.4.2 Preference for 'natural' food

As explained in the 'bad foods' section, many participants stated that they preferred to avoid 'artificial' foods and ingredients. Participants described 'natural' foods favourably, both as being 'better' in a general sense, and in terms of perceived healthfulness. On the whole, the preference for 'natural' food was rooted in several interrelated matters: consumer health, desire for familiarity and a sense of safety, concerns about (negative or risky) human interference in food, and a perceived lack of transparency in the food system (especially in areas such as fast food retail).

Participants used the term ‘artificial’ to describe GMOs and substances like pesticides, preservatives, and wax that were thought to be found in or on non-organic produce as well as processed and fast foods. In turn, these substances and foods were thought of as being unhealthy and/or less acceptable in a general sense. In the male focus group, one participant said, “I think anything that is not artificial is healthy. That’s what I think,” and when prompted he said that he had learned this mostly from his parents.

By contrast, participants used the term ‘natural’ to describe organic foods, and according to some participants, organic is healthy as well as ‘good for the environment’ specifically because it is ‘natural.’ Some participants also used the word ‘natural’ to describe the fat found in dairy products, which were described favourably and seen as healthy whenever mentioned in conversation. As mentioned in the good foods section, the oil in cheese was seen as ‘natural’ and therefore less objectionable than some other oils (female group, school 1, #1), whereas the ‘greasiness’ of meat, and especially fast food meat, was viewed negatively, and was sometimes attributed to the way it was cooked or prepared. The natural sugars occurring in fruits were also described favourably compared to added sugars. This suggests that context was actually fairly important to some participants; fat and sugars that did not occur naturally, or which were seen as not belonging in a particular food, were not evaluated as positively as those that did occur naturally.

This preference for ‘natural-ness’ is very common among consumers in North America and beyond. Various studies have shown that consumers strongly prefer products perceived to be ‘natural’ over ‘artificial’ or processed ones (Korzen, Sandøe, & Lassen, 2011; Rozin, 2005; Saher, 2006). Further, researchers have found that consumers tend to view natural food as healthy, and tend to perceive artificial food as posing a health risk (Rozin, 2005; Saher, 2006).

Harrison and Jackson (2009) found that youth aged 13 to 15 described healthy foods as natural as well as nutritious, and Protudjer, Marchessault, Kozyrskyj & Becker (2010) found that youth described unhealthy foods as being artificial, processed, and containing excess sugar and fat.

Saher (2006) assumes that viewing ‘natural’ foods as healthier is an instance of irrational or ‘magical thinking,’ since there is nothing inherent in foods typically viewed as ‘natural’ that would necessarily make them nutritionally superior to ‘artificial’ foods. Siipi (2012) on the other hand, suggests that in order to ascertain whether it is reasonable to value ‘natural’ food more than ‘artificial,’ one must carefully identify what exactly is meant by ‘natural.’

Participants of *Focus on Food* seemed to closely associate natural food with a lack of human influence, while they associated ‘artificial-ness’ with a suite of chemicals and substances added to foods, as well as certain other processes or modifications. It has been suggested that consumers’ tendency to evaluate ‘natural’ food more favourably than ‘artificial’ may be related to an attitude that human-caused changes in the realm of food are proceeding in an unpredictable, undesirable, or undemocratic manner, and that therefore, foods that have been the least altered or ‘transformed’ are preferable (Devos et al., 2007). This notion is consistent with *Focus on Food* participants’ negative comments about the companies producing ‘artificial’ and highly-processed fast food, implying that these companies are manipulative, deceptive, or ethically problematic. For example, as was mentioned in the ‘bad foods’ section, some participants thought that fast food items were formulated specifically to be irresistible to consumers, and as a result were also unhealthy, containing too much fat, salt, additives, preservatives, and other evidence of a high degree of processing. Some participants also commented on the negative health and ethical implications of food-related genetic modification being carried out without informing the public or adequately considering the possible risks for consumer health. Although the participants

described their apprehensions mostly in terms of health and safety, their comments also indicate potentially deeper concerns with a lack of transparency and/or deliberate manipulation of the public.

Further, Siipi (2012) suggests that, “appeals on the naturalness of food can at least sometimes be understood as calls for carefulness and reminders of possible undesirable side-effects and consequences of inadequate risk assessment and risk management” of relatively unfamiliar foods. Thus, the sometimes vague opinion or attitude that natural is ‘good’ (beyond a purely nutritional or human health-related standpoint) may be rooted in a perceived need to proceed with caution in the realm of new and less-familiar foods, food production methods, and foodways.

In addition to viewing naturalness as a lack of human influence (Siipi, 2012), it has also been suggested that consumers usually regard foods that they are accustomed to as ‘natural,’ and anything that alters or modifies those familiar foods as ‘unnatural’ (Manshardt, 2004, p. 2; Siipi, 2012). From this perspective, it would also make sense that *Focus on Food* participants regarded familiar items like fruits, vegetables and dairy products as natural, whereas they perceived genetically modified food or foods with less-familiar added ingredients or potential residues as unnatural. Foods containing many unknown elements and/or ingredients (such as pre-prepared fast food items) were also much more likely to be viewed as artificial.

Fischhoff, Slavic, Lichtenstein, and Combs (1978) found that when it came to various technologies (such as X-rays and nuclear power) and products (such as food coloring and herbicides), associated risks were perceived to be more acceptable if those risks were precisely known, voluntary, controllable, and familiar. Rozin (1989) noted that this principle applies to

and explains common food concerns; For example, since food additives are relatively unfamiliar, not well-understood by the public, and the individual does not control the addition of these substances, the public's level of concern with food additives has been found to be particularly high. Whereas on the other hand, the considerable risks inherent in the act of driving a car, which is a familiar act seemingly within the control and comprehension of the individual driver, may be deemed perfectly acceptable (Rozin, 1989).

It may be 'folk wisdom,' and not necessarily accurate, that foods in relatively unaltered and unprocessed forms are more nutritious and/or safer than those that have been artificially formulated to appeal to human taste, or to meet other priorities that aid in commoditization, such as long-shelf life, or conduciveness to industrial agricultural and food distribution models. However, the widespread tendency to be especially cautious regarding the unfamiliar, including unfamiliar foods, need not necessarily be regarded as a fault. 'Traditional' or familiar foods may be widely and persistently regarded as 'good' because these foods are valued as familiar and culturally-rooted, but possibly also because they are generally appropriate. Paul Rozin (1989, p. 377) explained that familiar cuisines are often preferred and adhered to justifiably from a nutritional standpoint:

The cuisines that guide us in the foods we eat have been shaped over generations and tend to define a balanced set of foods (otherwise the cuisine group in question would be at a serious disadvantage). Thus, peasant Mexican cuisine, lowish in meat protein for economic reasons, includes two staple foods, corn and beans, which together have a balanced amino acid profile.

Popular author and journalist Michael Pollan is well-known for pointing out that humans' co-evolution with various plants and animals traditionally used for food has shaped our

physiology as well as our culture, and therefore, humans may relate and react (both physiologically and psychologically) to traditional cuisines differently than to food products that have been formulated and appeared on the market more recently (Pollan, 2008). For example, it is generally accepted by the scientific community that humans evolved a strong liking for the taste of nutritionally-important substances that have typically been in short supply throughout most of our evolutionary history, such as salt (Morris, Na, & Johnson, 2008). Now that these substances are present in relatively high quantities in many pre-prepared foods, and are easily and cheaply available to at least part of the world's population, many health-conscious consumers perceive the need to exert self-control in order to avoid over-indulging.

Therefore, rather than to attempt to designate particular food items or ingredients as inherently 'natural,' it may be more appropriate to consider 'naturalness' in terms of the suitability of a way of eating as shaped by evolution and biology (Siipi, 2012), taking into account the relevant context of current situations and environments. For example, it could be beneficial to consider it 'unnatural' and unhealthy to consume more of a particular nutrient than the body can handle given a particular set of circumstances and lifestyle (or, along the same vein, to produce and consume more of a particular food or type of food than a particular local ecosystem can safely handle). Some participants did seem to consider 'naturalness' as dependent on context to a certain extent, as was mentioned previously with the example of the natural oils and fats in cheese. On the other hand, some other comments on the presumed naturalness of certain foods may have been rooted in other kinds of common associations and attitudes, such as the idea that foods labeled as organic are therefore natural, or sometimes visa-versa (Canada Organic Trade Association, 2010).

3.4.3 Sustainable eating as environmental harm reduction

In the five instances that sustainable eating was selected as a discussion topic, it was associated with several interrelated issues, namely: recycling and reducing food packaging (especially plastic) waste; organic foods, which were usually equated with chemical/pesticide/preservative-free, healthy, and natural foods; local food and/or farmers markets, associated with reduced packaging waste and/or emissions from transportation, and being able to know ‘what is in the food’; plant-based or vegetarian diets, which were viewed, in one case, as being more resource efficient; and in one case, species conservation (specifically, selecting dolphin-safe tuna). Thus, most participants who talked about sustainability tended to view it in terms of reducing exposure to ‘chemical’-laden food, and preventing pollutants or waste products from being released into the environment. Fewer participants talked about preventing certain animal species’ endangerment or extinction, touched on issues potentially related to social sustainability, and mentioned efficient uses of resources. Sustainable eating was also described in a non-specific way as eating in ways that are good for ‘nature,’ the environment, or ‘the earth.’ This approach to sustainable eating is consistent with many of the waste/emissions-reduction focused discourses and messages contained in mainstream media and advertising, which may or may not be particularly mindful of ecosystems or communities (Maniates, 2001).

The term ‘sustainability’ may have been unfamiliar to some of the participants. When asked what sustainable eating meant to them, a few participants guessed that it meant eating ‘enough,’ eating at a steady pace, eating a balanced diet (including food from all food groups), eating to survive, or eating only to satisfy hunger. For some participants, it was merely the word ‘sustainable’ that was unfamiliar and which initially prevented them from participating in the

discussion. Once their peers provided a few common terms or phrases synonymous with environmental sustainability (for example, the term ‘green’ or the phrase ‘good for the environment’ usually resonated more strongly than the word ‘sustainable’), some of the confused participants were then able to join the conversation. For some, however, it still seemed difficult to think of ways that the environment or being ‘green’ might relate to food. For example, in the female focus group quoted below, some participants were eventually able to name items and concepts that they linked to sustainability in general, but they struggled to link those concepts to food in any specific way:

Female group School 2, #14

Mod – It doesn’t have to be like an official definition or anything like that, but just like –

P2 – It’s so...

Mod – what you guys associate with sustainable eating. Stuff that pops into your head.

P1 – Trees. I don’t know why.

Mod – Trees?

P2 – That’s what I thought too.

P3 – Water.

P1 – Like good for the environment.

Although sustainability is a buzz-word in both academic and popular circles, commonly evoking images of planting trees, conserving water, and saving endangered species from extinction (Maniates, 2001), the notion of sustainable eating may remain somewhat marginalized, or narrowly understood. Although the wellbeing of the natural environment and human communities are intimately connected to food, these connections may be obscured by the vast expanse of far-flung, globalized, and highly specialized industrial activity between the ‘field’ and the ‘fork.’

Although challenging for some, many participants were able to think of some concepts and terms that they linked to sustainable eating. Nevertheless, it seemed difficult for participants

to explain how some of these topics were related to sustainability per se. Participants also seemed to loosely associate many different topics with each other without necessarily being able to explain or elaborate on the connections made. The following excerpt provides an example of a rather complex network of supposedly interrelated concepts (specifically organic food, recycling, local food, and packaging waste reduction) that arose during a female focus group's attempt to define sustainable eating. Participants were openly confused about where some of their immediate impressions about sustainable eating came from, and they were quite creative in their reflections on how some of these concepts might be linked:

Female group School 4, #6

Mod – OK. So [P1 name], you mentioned organic...

All – Ya

Mod – How come?

P4 – 'Cause um, most recycling companies use the word sustainable.

P5 - Recycling is good

Mod – Sorry, what was that last part – most recycling?

P4 – Most recycling companies use the word sustainable.

Mod – Oh, OK, so

P4 – It's just kind--It doesn't have to do with anything, but, yeah.

Mod – How does recycling relate to organic...?

P4 – Uh, well, ya, I don't understand what I just said right there, but um.

Others - [laughs]

P4 – Organic, recycling it kinda, links to each other, I guess.

...

P3 - Well organic is like, it's like locally grown, right? So then...it does kinda link, uh link to recycling because you don't have to use like a box and like ship it from somewhere else like from somewhere far away like from China or something to here.

Thus, sustainability as it relates to food may not have been an easy topic for many participants to explain and discuss in detail, suggesting that sustainability issues may have been less well-understood than other priorities, or may have seemed less relevant or relatable.

3.4.3.1 Species conservation

There was one instance in which participants from a female focus group (school 4, #6)

linked sustainable eating to choosing dolphin-safe tuna in order to avoid species extinction. One of the participants suggested that dolphin-friendly tuna is “sustainable... ‘cause you’re not killing dolphins, right?” Another participant linked this to species conservation by adding the comment, “Ya. ‘Cause we don’t, you know, make certain species die out because of our eating.”

While the conservation of certain species was viewed as an example of sustainability, the issue of biodiversity was not raised during the focus group series, nor was the concept of ecosystems (with the exception of one female focus group’s conversation, in which plant-based diets were described as being preferable because they allow people to consume ‘energy stores’ from the lower trophic levels of an ecosystem). This could indicate a more ‘individualized’ approach to sustainability or environmental issues, both in the sense that it was primarily concerned with the actions and responsibilities of individual consumers (Maniates, 2001, p. 36) (in this case, purchasing or not purchasing a product that affects endangered species), and in the sense that it pertains to the welfare of certain particular species (such as dolphins) as opposed to ecosystems as a whole. This individualized approach also appeared to be reflected in many (though not all) of the participants’ comments about the advantages of local food.

3.4.3.2 Food miles and food packaging

There is no universal definition of the term ‘local’ food. Consumers, producers, and companies may use the term to describe food produced within the same ‘region,’ country, or within a certain number of kilometers. A local food system could also refer to a situation in which food is provided directly to the consumer by the producer, as is the case for some farmers’ markets, or directly to a retailer or foodservice, as is the case for Farm-to-School programs (Martinez et al., 2010). The diversity of understandings of the term ‘local food’ means that there

is a need for researchers to continually explore existing and emerging uses and understandings of the concept, and how these uses and understandings may vary (Selfa & Qazi, 2005).

As discussed in the ‘good foods’ section, the defining characteristics of local food, as described by the participants, were generally related to distance and/or country of origin (local food was often described as food that comes from within Canada). The environmental benefits of local food were framed in terms of reducing the amount of fuel used in transportation, and also eliminating the need for extensive packaging for long-distance transport. In addition to the issues connected to food miles, there were a few cases where local food was associated with farmers markets, enhanced consumer health, and being free from pesticides. ‘Knowing what’s in your food’ was perceived as a benefit of local food.

Indeed, local food is often framed primarily as a matter of minimizing the number of food miles from source to sale, focussing on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation (Delind, 2006; Martinez et al., 2010), regardless of who produces the food and whether the methods of production are place-appropriate or ecologically mindful, for example. GHG emissions is certainly a legitimate subject of study, and North American studies exploring the GHGs linked to food transportation abound (Kissinger, 2012; Natural Resources Defense Council, 2007; Weber & Matthews, 2008). However, GHGs are not the only focus or justification for all local food movements. In fact, it is frequently pointed out by critics of local food movements that the number of food miles traveled by a food item does not necessarily have an impact on its healthiness or overall environmental-friendliness. For example, locally-produced beef (depending on where you live) is not necessarily grass-fed or lean (Edwards-Jones, 2010). One might argue, therefore, that when ‘local food’ is defined *purely* as a matter of food-miles, the term does not necessarily convey many benefits for ecological (or social) sustainability.

While *Focus on Food* participants did not discuss any ecological benefits of ‘local food’ or locally-appropriate food systems per se, their comments did touch briefly on the perceived benefits of being connected with the people who produce their food, and the capacity for increased communication, transparency, alignment of priorities and knowledge, and interpersonal or community support that this would create. Specifically, a participant from a female focus group mentioned that local food meant being able to talk to farmers about their growing practices and to be more informed about where one’s food comes from. While the participant seemed particularly concerned about knowing whether or not pesticides were used, her comment could also have applied more generally to opening up communication between food producers and consumers. Other participants expressed positive attitudes toward ‘supporting our farmers’ by ensuring that they are paid fair prices, for example. One participant talked about being friends with the farmer who supplied eggs to her family, and also mentioned that by procuring local food, she would not have to “feel bad that I’m making people transport the foods.” In this case, the emphasis of her comment was not on ecological or environmental matters, but rather on the interpersonal or potentially social impacts of requiring food to be transported over long distances.

As a social and ecological movement (i.e. a coordinated group action meant to cause positive social and ecological change), local food has been framed as reconnecting food with the place-specific, living systems (i.e. the unique natural environment, climate, history, and culture) that produce it (Delind, 2006; Selfa & Qazi, 2005). Local food also potentially presents an alternative to faceless, nameless food-related transactions, and a reconnection of the respective interests and values of consumers and producers, and sometimes a blurring or merging of these two categories. It has been argued that the most resilient local food systems insist upon

recognizing and respecting the particular social, historical, and ecological contexts from which food arises (Delind, 2006). By employing this broader definition of 'local food,' the potential for its impacts on ecological and social sustainability, and the sense of connectedness to ecological food sources and communities of food producers that it fosters is revealed.

3.4.3.3 Organic as 'free-from....'

As was discussed in the 'dominance of health' section, organic food is often viewed as a safer and less chemically-contaminated version of conventional products. This way of framing organic food may do a disservice to the broader potential of the organic food movement to promote positive ecological and social change. Researchers in the field of 'sustainable consumption' in Europe have recently expressed a concern that although appealing to consumer self-interest is certainly an effective marketing tool, it may backfire as an approach to promoting pro-environmental behaviours in the long run by "further promoting the values that lead to lack of regard for the environment and quality of life for other people," (Mont, Heiskanen, Power, & Kuusi, 2013, p. 71).

However, they suggested that if, for example, 'self-interest' were to be (re-)constructed in such a way that it explicitly includes or even emphasizes "feeling good from doing good things for close people and strangers," (this could further be expanded to include non-humans and even communities and ecosystems) then self-interested motives might still be used in constructive ways to promote positive consumption behaviours. Thus, appealing to the *collective* good, and advocating for societal and environmental health as legitimate reasons to take action toward sustainability, might have potential as an alternative way to approach sustainable consumption (Mont et al., 2013, p. 73). This approach likely cannot be reached through marketing alone (since sustainable consumption pertains to more than just what to buy, but also how much to buy and whether to buy at all), and requires more widespread cultural change in order to be effective.

3.4.4 Ethical concerns

Ethical concerns were raised during the one discussion about ethical eating (only one focus group selected it as one of their discussion topics), during conversations about vegetarianism (concerning animal welfare especially), and fast food was held up as particularly unethical for reasons of animal welfare, and presumed deception or lack of transparency on the part of fast food companies. Eating locally to ‘support our farmers’ and choosing fair trade were provided as specific examples of ethical eating, whereas GMOs were viewed as ‘unethical’ due to perceived health risks and the fact that consumers are not told which foods are genetically modified. Thus, participants’ ethical concerns pertained mainly to animal welfare, consumer welfare, and farmer welfare, as well as with principles of fairness, honesty, and transparency. I will not spend much time reviewing the comments made regarding ethical eating, since these have been discussed throughout the cross-cutting themes chapter. I will, however, explore one matter that was absent from conversations about ethical eating, and which also did not arise during the discussions in which organic foods were brought up: organic and other alternative animal products as ethical substitutes for conventional ones.

A Dutch survey of 15-16 year old school children found that animal welfare was an important reason for consuming organic products (Stobbelaar et al., 2007), and according to Mintel International Group, some Americans concerned about hormones or antibiotics sometimes purchased organic and free-range animal products rather than a vegetarian alternative to meat or dairy (as cited in The Vegetarian Resource Group, 2012). Likewise, some Canadian vegetarian women’s concerns about hormones, animal treatment, and antibiotics were mitigated by the ability to choose organic eggs (Barr & Chapman, 2002). By contrast, in *Focus on Food*, the only organic animal products mentioned were eggs (this was during a single instance in

which organic eggs were briefly mentioned as being ‘expensive’ [female focus group, school 2, #14]) and there seemed to be confusion, in this instance, between Omega-3 eggs and organic ones; The topics of free-range or other alternative animal products were never raised.

Although many participants expressed concerns for livestock welfare, animals ‘cooped up in cages,’ and in one case chickens raised using ‘hormones and steroids’ (female group, school 2, #12), all of these concerns were raised regarding meat specifically; not the production of other animal products, such as dairy or eggs. This might be because conventional dairy and eggs (and other common animal products other than meat) were seen as unproblematic; if this were the case, participants may not have perceived a niche for organic or other alternative animal products. This would be consistent with the fact that the participants who talked about dairy products evaluated it as being unambiguously positive.

Most participants regarded meat with a degree of ambivalence, in part due to its negative ethical implications for animal life/welfare. Participants’ suggestions for addressing the ethical issues that they identified included foregoing meat consumption where possible, or choosing fish instead of other meat. They did not discuss the possibility of raising animals more ethically, so that they would *not* be ‘cooped up in cages,’ for example. It could be that they were not aware of alternative ways of raising animals, or were not very familiar with the concept of organic animal farming and what it would entail. For those who thought that ‘organic’ principally meant pesticide-free, it might have been difficult to imagine how meat and other animal products might fit into this category.

I would also propose that people’s willingness or ability to recognize meat and other animal products as being (potentially) compatible with the concept of organic may be related to

the degree to which animals are understood as having a legitimate role or contribution to make in an organic food (eco)system. Organic sources of fertilizer are extremely important in organic food growing, and the re-cycling of nutrients from both plants and animals are necessary to maintain soil fertility as well as ‘close the loop’ of the food system. Thus, animal presence on an organic farm is mandatory for long-term sustainability, or else fertilizers derived from animals must be brought onto that farm from outside (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 5). However, if a food system is viewed linearly, then excrement, urine, and animal remains become ‘waste’ to be disposed of rather than eventual sources of soil and plant nutrients. If those ‘wastes’ are not recycled into the food system somehow, it becomes increasingly challenging to acquire the nutrients that are normally provided to the soil by animals; Phosphorus is a key example of a macronutrient that is in increasingly short supply for use in soil fertilizer that is simultaneously a very potent pollutant, when it takes the form of phosphates carried away as runoff, for example (Pawlick, 2006, p. 127; Tomlinson, 2010).

Considering the fact that many participants regarded meat with ambivalence (from an ethical perspective as well as a health/safety perspective), and considering meat’s generally negative reputation in mainstream North American food culture (rooted in its association with savagery and/or sexuality) (Oakes, 2004), it could be that participants did not perceive meat to be conceptually compatible with organic’s overall positive, uncontaminated, and benign reputation, and therefore the topic of organic meat did not occur to them. Thus, the apparent incompatibility of meat and animal products with the concept of organic might be due to the popular perception of organic foods as an uncontaminated or chemical-free version of conventional products, rather than as a system of growing food that employs biological diversity and what would otherwise be ‘waste’ as vital resources.

To combat this rather limited image of organic would likely require a rather fundamental shift from a waste-oriented perspective to a resource-oriented perspective, as knowledgeable composting proponents and activists propose (Jenkins, 1999). This kind of paradigm shift could allow for a focus on positive measures such as nutrient cycling and decomposition that support healthy ecosystems, of which all animals (including humans) are a necessary part, as opposed to a paradigm which focuses on simply reducing the negative impacts of human activities on the environment.

3.4.5 Control and the importance of ‘knowing what’s in your food’

Many participants in the focus group series indicated a feeling of lacking adequate control over or relevant information about the food that they ate. While the desire to ‘know what was in their food’ was frequently linked to worries about potential health-related outcomes, it also went beyond this, representing an appreciation for the familiar and trustworthy, and a related preference for greater transparency (and potentially for a more responsive and participatory food system). In many cases, it seemed that participants were not avoiding any particular negative foods or ingredients, or seeking to prevent specific negative health (or other) outcomes; rather, there seemed to be a general tentativeness or scepticism that was related to the unknown or unfamiliar.

As discussed previously in the ‘bad foods’ section, participants’ level of trust for fast food restaurants and companies seemed quite low. Many participants had health-related and sometimes ethical concerns with fast food and GMOs, and sometimes felt that these types of food were being misrepresented, or that foods were not always as good, or as ‘real’, as they were made to seem. While participants may have appreciated the convenience or novelty as well as the

taste of fast food, many reported a preference (in theory if not always in practice) for home-made as well as minimally-processed foods, since this allowed for more perceived control, and less uncertainty.

Participants from various groups sought to increase their subjective knowledge about and control over what they ate. Participants from various different focus groups mentioned the importance of knowing and/or controlling ‘what’s in your food’ during discussions about healthy eating, the advantages of eating local food, and the advantages of eating home-made food as opposed to buying foods prepared outside the home.

Not all comments pertaining to the importance of knowing about or controlling one’s food were specifically connected to health-related concerns or healthy eating per se. In a female focus group, a participant commented that it’s important to know what is in your food in order to eat healthy. She remarked that sometimes when reading food ingredients, her reaction was to wonder: “What is all of this stuff?!” (school 2, #12). In a few cases, participants named particular ingredients or substances that they wished to avoid (or nutrients they sought out in nutritional information on food packaging), but in most cases they did not seem to have had anything specific in mind. Strategies like avoiding foods containing unpronounceable ingredients indicated that participants were primarily seeking food that was familiar or perhaps less processed; not that they were seeking to select or avoid any particular ingredients.

In a mixed focus group (school 3, #10) a male participant associated healthy eating with organic/local food, and he explained that in the case of local food, “I think I’ll have a better chance of knowing what’s in it than like buying food from like McDonald’s...” A female participant then added, “or food that’s been like shipped from across the country.” As mentioned

previously in the ‘good foods’ section, a participant mentioned that ‘supporting our farmers’ by buying local food is positive, since it enhances transparency and provides better assurance that food is free of pesticides. These comments contrast *both* fast food and food from distant sources with ‘local’ food, conveying that local food is not exclusively about geographical distance (even though, as noted previously, participants tended to define local food mostly in terms of geography).

Presumably, procuring food from trustworthy sources (and avoiding less trustworthy sources) acted as a proxy for personally ‘knowing what’s in your food,’ and allowed for a feeling of security. Most participants did not report personally making their own food regularly, although food from home, ‘local’ sources, and farmers markets seemed to invoke a sense of familiarity and certainty. For example, a participant from a female focus group (school 1, #13) commented that when eating foods from home, as opposed to foods purchased at school, one knows which ingredients ‘like salt and sugar’ are present, and in what quantities. (This participant’s lunch was typically prepared by her grandmother.) A male participant from a mixed group (school 1, #2) also suggested ‘grow[ing] your own crops’ in order to have a better quality diet and thereby reduce the risk of chronic disease like diabetes. (Interestingly, this is the only direct reference at any point in any of the focus groups to growing one’s own food. This participant was involved with environmental initiatives at his school, but didn’t report specifically volunteering in the school garden.) A participant from a female focus group commented that some of the food in the school salad bar was from the school’s garden, and that this fact encouraged her to eat at the salad bar (female group, school 2, #14). She did not report being directly involved in the garden herself.

The fact that participants expressed preferences for home-made and local food, but didn't necessarily get involved with regular food preparation or gardening, could suggest that there are barriers to getting more involved in growing and preparing food. It could also partly suggest that participants did not desire to be *personally* in control of everything pertaining to their food (including growing their own crops and preparing their own food from scratch); but that rather, they desired to be in a position where they felt that they could trust the food that they ate, and those who took part in producing, processing, preparing, and distributing or sharing it with them.

Follett (2008) posited that trust is a key element in strong alternative food systems, and that transparency is a necessary precursor to the development to trust. In a transparent food network, participants involved would feel that they have an equal relationship with others in the network, that parties are accountable to one another, and that theoretically, participants have a way to provide input and be heard. Arguably, this is in part instrumental (in order to achieve healthier food, for example), and also partly because being part of a more trusting network can be perceived as a worthwhile goal in and of itself, since it has potential to strengthen the community as a whole and promotes a sense of wellbeing and security to its members. This theme is consistent with a few participants' desire to talk to local farmers about how they produced their food, and to find out more about what went into it.

The theme of seeking or reclaiming control also emerged during discussions about dieting. Participants who discussed dieting (the vast majority of whom were female) associated it with extreme and dangerous weight loss measures like fasting, purging, or taking diet pills, and commented on the importance of avoiding dieting in response to peer or media pressure to look a certain way. Rather, if a person diets, it should be for their own motives such as feeling better, attaining better health or even 'healthy weight loss.' Even where weight loss was recognized as a

legitimate health goal to pursue (several participants regarded not being ‘heavy’ as a part of being healthy), many participants were critical of, and sometimes mocked, popular and celebrity-promoted diet plans or products that claimed to cause weight loss in the absence of healthy eating and exercise. For example, a participant from a female focus group (school 4, #6) remarked: “...when you see a magazine it’s like ‘Oh, so-and-so lost twenty pounds on this diet, you should try it.’ It kind of sort of hits you like ‘ugh.’ It’s not good...Because I don’t know – it’s media. It’s not good for esteem and stuff.”

Distancing themselves from the unattainably thin body images they encountered in the media, one or two participants asserted that it was ‘bad’ as well as unattractive to be *too* skinny. No participants reported participating in any ‘extreme’ or ‘unhealthy’ dieting practices themselves, although many talked about personally practicing more ‘healthy’ methods of weight loss like cutting out junk food, which they felt they should do regardless of their physical appearance, to pursue their own priorities in terms of being healthy and feeling good. This way of framing the issue of dieting (as something that should be done for ones’ own reasons, rather than in response to pressure from the media or peers to look a certain way) seemed to be an example of reclaiming control or autonomy over diet-related decision-making.

3.4.6 Food and pleasure

In the ‘good foods’ section, I discussed the tension that many participants perceived between health and pleasure. For some participants, the trade-off between health and pleasure was relatively straightforward – healthy food was not tasty, whereas tasty food was not healthy, requiring them to do their best to strike a rough balance between the two priorities. Since eating for pleasure implied a trade-off, indulgence seemed to demand justification. Participants

described eating for pleasure as being motivated or triggered by various positive or negative emotions, situations, and stimuli. Some examples that participants mentioned included eating ‘for fun’ in social situations (ex: going out for ice cream or eating chips at a party); eating alongside entertainment (popcorn with movies); on special occasions or during celebrations (desserts while on vacation, or at birthday parties); in response to external cues (including commercials, cooking shows, or pleasant food smells in shopping centers); in response to ‘cravings’; depression, loneliness, sadness, stress, or boredom; as a distraction (from stress); to reward oneself (“after a really hard week”); compulsion (in the case of ‘binge’ eating); and in moments of weakness, because it is ‘easy’ to do.

A few comments, however, indicated that healthy foods and healthy ways of eating were commensurable with pleasurable eating. Some participants mentioned that healthy eating could make a person feel good in a physical and psychological sense, whereas eating too much “junk” food could actually lead to feeling “gross” or other feelings of displeasure. In addition, choosing good food that is good for you had the capacity to make some participants feel positively about themselves and their selections.

Further, and perhaps most interestingly, one or two comments indicated that preparing and savouring healthy food is especially pleasurable and that indeed, eating (good food) is inherently pleasurable. Taken together, I would argue that some participants’ comments indicated an appreciation for what might constitute a form of alternative hedonism, a framework for defining what it means to enjoy a high standard of living, which recognizes and values various sources of enjoyment, pleasure, and fulfillment outside of mainstream capitalist consumer culture. It is based on the premise that even if modern consumerist society were indefinitely sustainable, it still would not be a desirable way of living, since it is un-pleasurable in

many respects (Soper et al., 2009). This framework supposes that adopting a well-rounded lifestyle in which one derives meaning and pleasure from activities other than (although not excluding) consumption of commodities would better satisfy human desires to be creative, active, and to have a sense of meaningful agency in a community/ecosystem. According to this school of thought, many people are beginning to recognize that the pleasures of material affluence are not only tainted by their negative ecological and social effects, but that more fundamentally, they are not fulfilling on their own, and the almost compulsive (though futile) pursuit of satiation via material consumption alone can thwart other types of enjoyment, and ultimately lead to dissatisfaction (Soper et al., 2009, p. 4).

I suspect that the ability to take enjoyment from eating a wide variety of nutritious foods, rather than only a small number of foods regarded as ‘unhealthy’ or ‘junk,’ could potentially lead not only to a healthier and more varied diet, but also to more overall enjoyment. This is especially considering that participants’ comments about eating ‘junk food’ compulsively in an attempt to remedy bad feelings or to fill an emotional ‘void’ did not include any mention or indication that such efforts were ultimately fulfilling. Whereas by contrast, participants who regarded healthy eating as enjoyable were able to describe several first-hand enjoyable food experiences in some detail.

Alternative hedonism may be worth encouraging from a health perspective since it is conducive to the enjoyment of preparing and eating healthy foods. From an environmental and social perspective, as Mont and colleagues (2013) pointed out, a form of self-interest that could encompass “feeling good from doing good things” is more constructive, and more conducive to positive ecological change and social equity. If pleasure derived from food is not limited to self-interested purchasing and consuming (if other forms of engagement with food can also come to

be regarded as enjoyable), this enhances the possibility of developing a more holistic and engaged view of people's role in food systems.

3.4.7 Gender

An area that I specifically set out to investigate as part of this study is perceptions about how gender relates to food and eating. I asked participants to contribute their ideas on the topic, and they also brought up gender spontaneously in a few instances as well. Although there were many more young women represented in the focus group series than young men (80% of participants being female), and only one all-male group was hosted, there were several important trends and implications pertaining to gender that have been touched on throughout the findings and discussion section, which I will explore in further detail here.

As mentioned in the 'good foods' section on the topic of intersections between healthy eating and gender, there were differences in how the female and male participants discussed pleasure as it relates to eating, and potentially in how they navigate the apparent tradeoffs and tensions between health, appearance/body weight, and pleasure. For example, some participants posited that girls and women care more about healthy eating, about how they look, and/or are more skilled in food preparation, allowing them to eat more healthy foods prepared from scratch.

Other participants observed differences between feminine and masculine strategies of managing health and appearance, and posited that while both guys and girls both 'care' about these priorities, they may understand and approach them differently. In essence, these participants touched on a theme discussed at some length among researchers of gender and food: the tendency for males and females to ascribe different meanings to types of food and ways of eating. For example, some researchers' work has indicated that women typically frame 'dieting'

as a means to attain or manage an ‘ideal’ body shape and weight, whereas men tend to frame it as a way to attain fitness and strength (Mroz et al., 2010). Similarly, some researchers have found that in America, women tend to depict healthy eating according to mainstream ideals centering around the avoidance of dietary fat by eating mostly vegetables and fruits, whereas men (while still to a large extent recognizing these practices as healthy eating ideals) are somewhat more likely to use additional criteria to judge the healthiness of foods and diets, and to sometimes regard nutritious foods as healthy even if they are high in fat (Oakes, 2004). Oakes (2004) suggested that the avoidance of fat is largely due to persistent cultural ‘food reputations’ or biases that may or may not accurately reflect the healthiness of particular foods and eating patterns. He posited that women care even more about avoiding fat than men because of media and cultural messages that promote female thinness.

In the *Focus on Food* focus group series, while the importance of foods free of ‘bad’ or unhealthy components was certainly a theme that emerged, fat was not the only component that participants (male and female) evaluated negatively or sought to avoid, and dietary fat was not always thought of as inherently negative. Nevertheless, avoiding the over-consumption of fat may have been perceived as more important among the female participants than among the male participants, judging from the way that female participants made attempts to justify the consumption of potentially fattening and ‘junk’ foods as well as fast food.

While both mixed groups and female groups talked about positive situations that coincided with eating for pleasure (such as celebrations and socializing), the negative situations and cues that reportedly encourage eating for pleasure, other than boredom (i.e. experiencing break-ups or feeling depressed, sad, or lonely) were only mentioned by female participants, and usually during female focus groups. The rationale was that in these negative situations, eating

items like chocolate, ice cream, chips, or ‘junk food’ can serve as a “distraction” from stress (female group, school 4, #6), is expected to make one feel happier, or even to fill an emotional “void.” Some of the examples given (such as breakups and loneliness) were framed as general examples that may or may not have been experienced by the participants personally, whereas other examples (especially being stressed, bored, or upset/sad) had been experienced by the participants themselves. For example, a female participant in a mixed focus group (school 1, #2) explained that when studying for biology, and feeling “not very happy,” she would eat in order to feel better.

It is uncertain whether the female participants who made the above kinds of comments were personally more likely to use food to alleviate unpleasant emotions than their male peers, since they spoke mostly in general terms. Female participants may have discussed incidents of eating for pleasure according to their perceptions of what is normal, expected, or acceptable. For example, exposure to sitcoms and other media depicting the almost cliché scenario of women drowning their relationship sorrows in a tub of ice cream might encourage young women to discuss eating for pleasure in similar terms.

Nevertheless, it seems plausible that women might feel relatively more pressure, not only to avoid eating ‘junk food’, but also to justify any instances of this particular type of eating by framing as a remedy to an emotionally painful or unpleasant state (such as facing stress, depression, loneliness, or recovering from a break-up). This pressure is part of a broader socio-cultural framework in which women’s pleasure is generally less socially acceptable and therefore tends to be accompanied by more guilt, and may be more easily offset by concerns for health, ethics, and/or weight/body-management (Rozin et al., 2003).

In addition to differences in how young women and young men navigated health, appearance and pleasure, the gender composition of the focus group series may have had an effect on how vegetarianism and animal welfare were discussed. It is uncertain whether the popularity of vegetarianism as a discussion topic, and/or the relatively strong focus on animal welfare is related to the number of female participants that participated in *Focus on Food*. Although one male participant was interested in potentially becoming vegetarian, all self-described vegetarians in the focus group series were female, and the participants who most strongly emphasized the ‘need’ to eat meat were male. This is consistent with the findings that both omnivores and vegetarians in Western cultures have rated vegetarians as more moral and significantly less masculine than omnivores (Ruby & Heine, 2011) and those whose favourite foods are steak or beef were rated as more masculine and less feminine than those whose favourite foods were vegetable dishes (Rozin, Hormes, Faith, & Wansink, 2012).

In addition, participants associated vegetarianism with ‘eating light,’ ‘eating salads,’ and occasionally dieting, another conventionally feminine way of eating. Both vegetarianism and dieting have been connected to ‘virtuous’ ways of eating (i.e. adhering to ethical or nutritional principles, often at the expense of personal enjoyment or comfort), and virtuous eating tends to correspond with a more feminine way of relating to food (Beardsworth et al., 2002). Healthy eating, as well as compassion for non-human animals (even in situations that have nothing to do with food or vegetarianism) are more often considered to be feminine phenomena than masculine (Ruby, 2012). Considering this, along with the fact that health and animal welfare are two of the most often-cited motivations for adopting vegetarian diets, it is not surprising that most vegetarians are female (Ruby, 2012).

Thus, vegetarianism seems conducive to mainstream concepts of femininity, and may be a more popular discussion topic among women and girls, since plant-based foods and meals are seen as ‘lighter,’ healthier, and more conducive to maintaining a thin body, and also because vegetarianism is often equated with a benign and/or compassionate regard for animal life. Vegetarianism might also be seen as feminine because plant foods (especially whole and raw plant foods) are regarded as especially ‘natural.’ In one female focus group (school 4, #8) for example, vegetarianism was linked to ‘natural,’ ‘fresh’ vegetables, ‘from the earth.’ The theory that cross-culturally, women are equated with nature and are seen as being rooted in ‘natural’ and/or bodily experiences, whereas men are seen as more intellectual, cultivated, or ‘cultured,’ dates back at least as far as Ortner (1972), and has been adopted and adapted by numerous academics from various fields (Rozin et al., 2012). In popular Western cultural depictions, the stereotypical ‘tree-hugging’ or ‘nature-loving’ individual is almost always female or feminine, and the term ‘Mother Nature’ in colloquial English points to the feminization of Nature in mainstream Western thinking. This relationship between the feminine and the natural may indirectly link vegetarianism to femininity, in cases where vegetarianism and plant-based diets are seen as more ‘natural.’

3.4.8 Ethnicity and cultural background

While I did not ask participants to identify or discuss their ethnicity or country of birth, some participants referred to eating practices, approaches, or viewpoints that they saw as being influenced by their cultural background, country of origin, family and/or ethnicity. For example, as was discussed in the section on vegetables and vegetarianism, two participants who had been vegetarian since birth explained that this was part of their religious and/or cultural identity. One of them stated that, “being from India, we have like a culture of like being vegetarian.” One

Muslim participant explained that she only purchased vegetarian foods at school, because she had no way of knowing whether or not the meat served in the cafeteria was halal.

On the other hand, several participants expressed that their families and/or cultures were not accustomed to vegetarian diets or meals. A male participant who was interested in going vegetarian for health and animal welfare reasons did not feel able to do so since, as he put it, “I came from a Chinese family and we eat a lot of meat... so it’s really hard for me to try to eat less meat. Yeah. I try to convince my family.” Similarly, the participants in a small female focus group (school 4, #8) expressed that they would like to try vegetarianism, or had tried it in the past (for health reasons), but didn’t feel that they could successfully do so because of the prevalence of meat in their households and in Filipino cuisine in general: “There’s always meat in the house and you see it”; “It seems impossible...to be vegetarian and Filipino...‘cause every-dish has meat in it.” However, two of these participants expressed later on that on the occasions when they were in charge of making their own food or planning their own meals, they tried to eat more vegetables and fruits, as well as salads.

The terms ‘sustainability’ and ‘ethical’ may not have resonated with some of the participants, for several reasons. One of these reasons may have been related to cultural background and/or ethnicity. As noted previously, ethical issues were raised and discussed fairly frequently during the focus group series (during conversations on vegetarianism and fast food, for example) although ‘ethical eating’ itself was not a popular discussion topic. Sustainable eating was not selected as a discussion topic by many groups either. It has been proposed that for some ethnic and cultural groups in Canada, ‘sustainable’ and/or ‘ethical’ eating as it is typically construed and described in mainstream Canadian culture may not resonate as much or be as important as other factors.

For example, it has been found that European Canadians living on the West Coast often adopted a more explicitly ‘ethical’ outlook on ideal eating practices than African and Punjabi Canadians (Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic, & Chapman, 2010), and were more likely to actually refer to particular eating practices as ‘ethical’. This points to, among other things, the likelihood that ‘ethical eating’ and/or ‘sustainable eating’ are often defined, constructed, or discussed in ways that are not necessarily inclusive of or meaningful to all ethno-cultural affiliations and backgrounds. Considering this, it may be prudent to consider that *Focus on Food* participants as a whole placed relatively little emphasis on the topics labeled ‘sustainable eating’ and ‘ethical eating,’ in part because the majority of participants were of Asian background rather than European background. Similar studies with participants of European background would have to be conducted in order to establish this. It is also important to remember that at the same time, many participants expressed tensions between their own ideals regarding eating well, and the ideals and practices of their families. The participants, as young people connected to multiple cultural identities, navigated between various different sets of norms regarding ways of eating, and did not subscribe to a simple culturally-prescribed doctrine regarding how to relate to food.

3.5 Summary

Participants valued foods and ways of eating that they perceived to be healthy and natural, including vegetables and organic foods. They also spoke positively about ways of eating that were consistent with ethical principles of animal welfare, fairness, and transparency, such as vegetarianism (or mostly plant-based diets), eating locally, and avoiding genetically modified and fast foods. Importantly, many foods and ways of eating described as ‘good’ were seen as free from certain unwanted substances and processes, such as ‘chemicals,’ pesticides, and genetic modification, suggesting that participants focused on negative aspects. Participants related many

of the topics that were of interest to them to health-related issues, whereas topics such as sustainability were more difficult for them to reflect on.

Participants had almost exclusively negative things to say about ‘unnatural’ foods like fast foods, overly-processed foods, and genetically modified foods, which they thought of as unhealthy as well as un-‘real’ and potentially risky. Often, the presence of ‘chemicals’ and/or signs that a food had been heavily processed signalled to participants that there may be (often vague or unspecified) risks or hazards associated with that food. Some food sources were also more trusted than others; participants questioned whether fast food ingredients had been procured, handled, and prepared in an approved-of manner, and often suspected that fast foods were somehow not genuine, or had been misrepresented (such as in the case of genetically engineered meat and ‘pink slime’). This contributed to participants’ perception that these foods are not healthy, as well as causing concern with the ethical implications of the apparent lack of transparency.

This sense of mistrust of fast food, which varied in strength across individuals and groups, seemed to be related in part to the industrial and/or corporate nature of fast food, as participants implied that fast food companies are quite profit-driven, and are sometimes willing to misrepresent their products, manipulate people, or subject animals to poor living conditions. Several participants also seemed to feel that fast food’s popularity or prevalence was a reflection of a predominantly fast-paced and industrialized culture and lifestyle, of which they were somewhat critical. For example, several participants noted that most people seem to be perpetually in a rush, and that being too busy to prepare food and sit down to enjoy a freshly-prepared meal means that fast food is fairly common, despite the negative repercussions for

health, animal welfare, farmer/food producer wellbeing, and/or more abstract ethical principles pertaining to transparency, that participants noted.

The apparent conflict between pleasant taste and healthfulness also complicated participants' attitudes toward fast food as well as other "junk food." In addition, this apparent conflict between eating for pleasure and healthy eating may have had a stronger effect on female participants than male participants. Many participants reported seeking increased control over and information about their food in response to some of the concerns that they had regarding lack of transparency, unknown aspects of foods, and/or risks and dangers that they perceived.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

4.1 Overview

The reflections that emerged from the discussion of this study's findings have implications related to my original research objective: *To explore grade 9 and 10 students' perspectives of food-related issues and factors that impact how they make decisions about food consumption.* This study indicated some of the issues that are important to young people in Vancouver Secondary Schools, and what makes these topics important. The findings are novel in that there have not been many other qualitative studies with young people in Vancouver on the topic of attitudes and opinions pertaining to foods and ways of eating. As such, the study was able to point to several themes of interest, such as the tendency to view food primarily as consumer health products, challenges in understanding or articulating how sustainability relates to food, and the likely influence of a food-related negativity bias.

While participants expressed a variety of different associations with food-related topics and ways of eating, including healthy eating, fast food, vegetarianism, dieting, eating for pleasure, and sustainable eating, there were notable similarities across focus groups. Most participants focussed their comments on the immediately apparent qualities of food products, including taste, appearance, expected nutritional quality, and price or value for money. They often used these qualities to help them classify foods as either good or bad. In this sense, they tended to view food through a consumerist lens, in that they discussed foods in terms of qualities that seemed most obviously relevant to them as consumers.

Participants also seemed to focus more keenly on determining whether foods were free from negative substances or qualities, rather than on whether the foods possessed positive substances or qualities. This likely reflects the influence of what has been called the negativity bias, which causes people to give greater weight to negative events and traits (Rozin & Royzman, 2001), and is also likely reinforced by prevalent discourses around food that emphasize the avoidance of hazards to personal safety and health over other considerations.

The perceived tension between healthy eating and eating for pleasure also gave rise to comments that suggested a certain amount of guilt regarding eating certain kinds of food. If most students feel that they ought to eat healthy foods, but that healthy food is not as enjoyable as “junk” food, this could enhance the perception that food related decision-making is a difficult trade-off between avoiding “bad” foods and submitting to the temptation to eat something good-tasting. Also, while many participants initially asserted that gender does not make an important difference in how people eat or relate to food, they nevertheless revealed expectations that there would be gender differences in various eating practices and priorities, including those relating to dieting, bulking up, vegetarianism, healthy eating, eating for pleasure, and eating fast food.

Notably, participants often expressed that women and girls tend more towards healthy eating, dieting, and vegetarianism, whereas men and boys tend more towards eating for pleasure, bulking up, and eating fast food. Based on the ways in which eating for pleasure was described by female participants, it is possible that those female participants felt more pressure to justify eating for pleasure, and they may have experienced more guilt from doing so than their male counterparts.

Notably, some participants were not able to articulate how sustainability relates to food, and tended to explain food issues in terms of health instead. Some, for example, mentioned eating organic as an example of sustainable eating, and reasoned that this was because organic foods are chemical-free or pesticide-free, and therefore *healthier*. More generally, organic food seemed to be understood primarily as a chemical-free product that is safer for human consumption than conventional alternatives, and which is also environmentally-friendly in a vague, non-descript way. I have argued that this understanding of sustainable eating is likely influenced by over-simplified or reductionist ‘green marketing’ and discourses about organic and other foods that emphasize benefits to the individual consumer without explicitly mentioning ecological considerations per se. It could be seen as positive for young people to link their personal health to issues of sustainability, since human health is certainly dependent upon ecological health, and many human health issues and ecological issues overlap to a large extent. However, to view sustainable eating as equivalent to eating foods that are regarded as promoting better consumer health would not be a complete picture, and may prevent more in-depth dialogue about the ecological nature of food and food systems.

On a similar vein, the sustainability-related issues that were raised during focus group discussions typically had to do with ‘individualized’ actions to reduce environmental pollution or

harm to individual animals or species (Maniates, 2001), rather than relating to ecological considerations. While recycling, reducing emissions, and protecting species like dolphins are important (and certainly have wider ecological impacts), the concepts of composting/nutrient cycling, soil health, and ecosystems more generally were largely absent from the conversations in the focus group series. This suggests that participants may not have been thinking in terms of food systems so much as food products, and/or that their vocabularies were not as conducive to discussing food systems as to describing food products.

By its nature, a food system must constitute a closed cycle in order to be sustainable, and for the organisms and populations relying on it to remain healthy in the long term. By experiencing and viewing food only fleetingly as a ‘snapshot’ in its lifecycle, elements relevant to ecological and social sustainability remain largely obscured. For example, the fact that people are embedded in the food system (rather than disconnected consumers of its products) means that they must give back to it and contribute to it in a positive way; not simply make an effort to reduce or mitigate certain *negative* impacts made. Being part of a closed-loop system implies the need to return nutrients to the soil, as well as to encourage food production that makes responsible use of ecosystem services.

The relative lack of familiarity with the ecological nature of food points to a need to support opportunities for youth to experience and understand the connections between health, wellbeing, and ecological sustainability as they all relate to food. Many positive food-related behaviours have been identified as contributing to environmental sustainability, health, as well as positive community development (Hamelin et al., 2010), indicating that multiple goals and perspectives on what it means to eat well can complement one another, rather than competing for attention or eclipsing one another.

I am not positing that topics absent from focus group discussions were necessarily unimportant to the participants. Rather, I presume that the issues that were never raised during the focus groups were less top-of-mind or less obviously relevant than the issues that *were* raised. Also, although participants tended to focus on the food-related traits that they valued as consumers, they did not discuss food exclusively in terms of tangible qualities like taste, appearance, or nutritional value. Fast food raised concerns partly due to a combination of qualities such as being greasy, salty, and highly-processed, and held a contradictory appeal due to its taste, ready availability, and relative inexpensiveness. However, participants also indicated that fast food had other important qualities that were less tangible, such as being artificial, “not real,” or even ‘bad’ in an ethical sense as well as from a health perspective. Many participants’ comments suggested that they paid attention to food qualities that conveyed some information about how those foods had been produced, and which held implications beyond consumer health, although it was difficult for participants to explain or elaborate on those implications. For example, participants expressed positive attitudes toward ‘natural’ food, and the acceptability of fats and sugars was somewhat dependent upon whether or not they had been added through preparation or processing. This preference for natural food seemed partly rooted in the idea that natural is healthy, but also that naturalness was an indication of genuineness, and/or a lack of misrepresentation or unwanted manipulation.

Throughout the discussions, there was a recurring theme of wanting to ‘know what’s in your food,’ even when no particular ingredients or elements were being sought out or avoided. Some participants even expressed indignation at certain food companies and producers that were presumed to be withholding the complete truth from consumers. Many participants were critical or sceptical of messages they encountered regarding fast food (as well as dieting plans and

products, and body image messages), indicating a lack of confidence or trust in many common food and information sources. Meanwhile, many participants remarked positively on local food and purchasing food directly from farmers as well as homemade foods and those prepared in front of them. On a few occasions, concepts related to social sustainability were raised: Specifically, local food was connected to ‘supporting farmers,’ creating relationships between consumers and food producers, and increasing transparency around how food is produced. All of these elements point to a desire for transparency around food as a matter of principle, as well as a matter of personal safety and wellbeing. While the issue of social connectedness in food networks was not fully fleshed-out in the discussions, many of the issues touched upon are of the kind that can be ameliorated by trusting and strong alternative food systems, and progress towards food sovereignty, where people would have the right to collectively define food systems, and to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods (Carney, 2012).

Taking the participants’ perspectives and concerns into account, I will now discuss a few potential implications for the consideration of individuals and groups interested in the school food system, in food education in general, and in youth engagement in food-related issues.

4.2 Implications for taking action

Like many of the *Focus on Food* participants, youth who took part in focus groups for an Ontario study indicated concerns about their food sources and sought to increase their knowledge in order to alleviate their concerns and to gain more control over their food. They told researchers that they felt more capable of making healthy choices when they were well-informed

about healthy eating, and also of media efforts to manipulate them into buying unhealthy options (Ontario's Healthy Kids Panel et al., 2013).

Jaffe and Gertler (2006, p. 143) drew attention to the prevalent issue of consumer 'de-skilling,' a process by which consumers become "increasingly distanced (in time and space and experience) from sites and processes of production." At the same time, Bandura (1998, p. 645) suggested that as people grow more cynical about institutions and systemic factors that impact them to a large degree, they tend to focus their attention on the circumstances over which they command some control. It seems that the gap between the typical consumer and the processes and inputs that give rise to the food that they eat, combined with a sense of scepticism regarding the agents responsible for overseeing or carrying out many of these processes, can create a fair amount of concern and apprehension about food, and among other things, a desire to know exactly what is in one's food.

However, when it comes to providing more information to consumers about food options, popular initiatives such as product labelling can be important, but are also limited in their capacity to create desired changes. Labels are a one-way form of communication; they do not allow consumers to make their priorities known. In addition, Lang and Heasman (2002) have suggested that food labels, without an extraordinarily comprehensive set of enforced and consistent regulations, tend to lend themselves quite easily to purposes more akin to marketing than to the provision of relevant information of concern to consumers. Accordingly, while the popularity of 'natural foods' has continued to rise among consumers, since they signify or suggest unadulterated food that is free from undesirable interference or manipulation, there is endless confusion about what the word 'natural' actually means when it appears printed on the front of a food package (Canada Organic Trade Association, 2010).

Furthermore, labels do not provide the context needed to interpret the information that they contain (Lang & Heasman, 2002, p. 194); this kind of understanding comes from a more participatory and equitable exchange or interaction between consumers and the sources of the food that they eat (including the other people and groups who take part in producing, processing, and distributing or sharing that food). Since no-one can feed him-or-her-self independently of the other stakeholders of the shared food system, it stands to reason that building a stronger basis for trust and equity is needed. While food labels can be very important, to expect that simply proffering more and more information (especially of inconsistent type or quality, without accompanying regulations and standards) to consumers will be sufficient to allow them to follow good food practices is not practical. Similarly, to expect that all the information needed to make the 'right' decision about what to eat can or ought to be provided on a label is equally unrealistic. The distance between consumers and the sources of their food cannot be bridged by a label, or by passively consuming more information.

In what have been called 'strong alternative food networks,' which are characterized by direct interaction between producers and consumers and stronger bonds between the various points of connection within the food network, pertinent information about food is much more readily available (Follett, 2008). Moreover, the direct interactions that take place create a greater awareness and level of interest among all parties of the concerns and priorities of the others involved. Those in the field of local and alternative food movements (Delind, 2006) have reasoned that when a person can come to see themselves as a *part* of a food system, and when they perceive that they have a role to fulfill within that system, the food that emerges from it can become much less unfamiliar and much less worrisome.

In addition to desiring more control over their food, some *Focus on Food* participants' comments demonstrated that engaging with food preparation can be agreeable, can enhance their enjoyment of their food, and can also make them feel good about themselves (although gardening and composting were not mentioned). Some participants indicated that making and sampling various foods in cooking class had given them more appreciation for subtler flavours and “savoury” foods, allowing them to enjoy foods that were not as extreme in their saltiness or sweetness.

Work on what are called ‘consumption vocabularies’ has suggested that when provided with a metaphorical toolbox of ways to describe and think about their own preferences—to assign words to the particular aspects that they enjoy—people can actually develop preferences that are more consistent and better-defined (West et al., 1996). Helping young people to express, understand, and become confident about their own preferences and priorities (perhaps in part by having and then describing new sensory experiences, as some students are already doing in their school cooking classes) could play a role in helping students to engage more consciously and more enjoyably with their food, without always necessarily feeling the conflicted urge to ‘give in’ and eat junk food. Thus, while it remains important to encourage healthy eating overall, it is important to remember that pleasure need not be at odds with health; rather, the ways in which they complement each other should be identified, emphasized and celebrated. This approach to healthy eating (i.e. as enjoyable, thoughtful, and unhurried) is also consistent with the goal of addressing healthy eating without appealing to the kind of self-denial or demonization of certain nutrients like fat, which can be problematic from a disordered eating prevention perspective (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005; Rozin, 1989).

Therefore, rather than simply promoting worry over whether particular food products are ‘safe,’ encouraging greater engagement in growing, preparing, sharing, enjoying, and discussing food in a community setting that builds trust, cooperation, and navigation of one another’s priorities and values (as is promoted in many local food and food sovereignty movements) seems more constructive. Such an approach may also be more likely to yield positive and attainable outcomes in terms of greater satisfaction, health, ecological sustainability, practical knowledge and applied skills, and a stronger sense of community and equitable relationships within the food system. There are growing numbers of positive precedents and success stories involving student leadership and meaningful engagement in shaping food systems, at school and beyond (Brooks, 2012; Learning for a Sustainable Future, 2014; Rojas et al., 2011). In addition, student engagement in developing individual schools’ food-related policies and practices is consistent with recommendations by the Ministries of Education and Health (2010). Projects such as Think&EatGreen@School can continue to support the active engagement of students in food systems, starting with activities including growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing food, and composting at their own schools.

4.3 Limitations

This study indicated some of the issues that may be on the minds of young people in Vancouver Secondary Schools, providing some insight into food-related topics important to them, and what makes these topics important. The study also revealed some of the variety that exists in how young people perceive popular food-related issues. When someone says that a balanced diet is important for health, or that organic foods are good for the environment, we may assume that we know exactly what that particular individual means. Yet there is hidden

complexity in these overlooked phrases, and a dialogue exploring their subjective meaning reveals some of the various ways that these concepts and terms may be interpreted and used.

Only certain kinds of insights can be gained from talking directly to people about their own priorities and practices. Our verbal statements at any given point in time, however honest, are not always accurate reflections of how we act, or even of how we typically think on a regular day-to-day basis. The characteristics of the broader food system, as well as unnoticed influences of the media, friends and family, established habits, new experiences, and particular settings and situations, play a critical role in influencing and changing behaviours, as well as attitudes and preferences (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2011b; Beagan et al., 2010). It must be kept in mind that this landscape, and the dialogues about food that reflect it, are always changing.

Since I used a small convenience sample, it would be a mistake to assume that the participants of this study are representative of their schools or broader populations. Despite the advantages of focus groups as a research method for qualitative richness, the results cannot be used quantitatively (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In addition, peripheral opinions or experiences may have gone unexpressed, despite my efforts to make all participants feel welcome to share their views. The majority (80%) of participants in the focus group series were female, and this may mean that the views and experiences represented would potentially be less likely to resonate with male counterparts. There is also a chance that this study may not have appealed to students eligible for subsidized lunch, since the incentive to participate included free lunch. (Only one participant out of 60 was making use of the subsidized lunch program.) While this study does not claim to be representative of the overall student population at any school, it is still worth noting that lower-income students may have been particularly underrepresented in this study. Therefore,

it would be advantageous for a future study to be carried out that specifically seeks out participation from this demographic.

The focus group protocol was laid out in such a way that the moderator asked about sustainable *eating*; not sustainable food systems, and about healthy *eating*; not a system conducive to healthy eating. (I opted to use what I had hoped would be the most familiar and yet the most inclusive of several possible terms. I had not wanted to use the term ‘healthy food’ or ‘sustainable food’ for example, because I did not want to limit the discussions to particular food items that seemed healthy or sustainable. At the same time, I did not want to use the term ‘food system,’ because it is not widely used outside of this particular academic discipline.) It would be reasonable to point out that concepts that seemed distant from the specific and personal act of eating may not have seemed appropriate to bring up, and may therefore have been omitted from the discussions that took place. However, it can be noted that despite the language adopted in the focus group protocol, participants brought up issues that were not strictly about sustainable *eating*, such as recycling and re-usable containers, as well as where to buy food from. These issues were raised without prompting, suggesting that participants did not interpret the topic of ‘sustainable eating’ as being specifically limited to discussing the act of eating.

4.4 Recommendations for further research

Considering the themes raised by the study and the limitations noted previously, further research is needed in some related areas. Expressions of desire for changes to, or independence from, the globalized food system as we know it can be very informative with regard to public priorities, perceptions of what food is ‘for’ or what it ought to be for, as well as how people perceive and construct their ideal or preferred roles within the food system. A better understanding of these and other undercurrents and frameworks can contribute to taking the next

steps towards achieving a food system that is more participatory or responsive to its stakeholders. Therefore, a more purposeful and systematic investigation of students' specific goals and visions for their own particular schools and local food systems, and any ideas for specific actions they would most like to take, is needed.

Another matter that could benefit from further study is Vancouver students' level of receptivity to guidelines that influence or regulate the kinds of foods available in their schools and other venues. Quite a few participants in *Focus on Food* expressed that they resented being manipulated by media or fast food companies, for example, and that having accurate information and thus more subjective control over what they ate was important to them. At the same time, many participants did perceive the need to offset the ubiquity of fast food and junk food by, for example, finding ways to 'resist temptation,' or in a few cases, by asking parents to keep certain junk food items out of the house in order to avoid creating temptation to eat it. Participants did not comment on, or seem to be aware of, any restrictions to the types of food allowed in their schools, and did not comment on any initiatives to enhance access to healthy sustainable food (such as Farm to School salad bars), or to restrict student access to items like packaged/processed snack foods while at school. It would be very interesting to find out students' opinions specifically on policies or guidelines regarding restricted items in their schools; whether they resent having their choices restricted; whether they welcome the removal of temptation; and whether the ways in which such initiatives are presented to them, and/or the degree to which they play a role in shaping or providing feedback on those initiatives themselves, might make any difference in their attitude. (For example, if a sugary beverage ban were framed as removing industry influence in schools, rather than a restriction of student access to those beverages.)

Further investigation of where exactly students learn about the meaning of frequently-used terms like ‘organic’, ‘fresh’, or ‘natural’ as they pertain to food could shed light on whether product packaging is, in fact, an important source of information about such topics, as was suggested in this thesis. However, the methodology for such an investigation might be difficult to devise. Perhaps a study modeled after Shepherd and colleagues’ (2005), examining how students identify a product as being organic (or natural, and so on) or not could contribute to this line of work. (For example, if packaging identifies the item as organic, but other provided information suggests that it is not consistent with certain qualities typically identified with organic foods, how would that food then be classified? Which factors best predict whether students will classify food as organic?)

In addition, the potential influence of the so-called negativity bias, which seems to cause consumers to focus on the potential dangers or negative aspects of their foods as their primary concern (Rozin & Royzman, 2001), rather than the positive or nourishing aspects, should be investigated further with Vancouver students. In *Focus on Food*, there was a tendency to evaluate a food’s goodness largely in terms of its freedom from ‘bad’ qualities or elements. A general culture-wide negativity bias, through which health has purportedly come to be defined as the absence of disease, for example, has been noted (Lang & Heasman, 2002, p. 196), but I have not been able to find any rigorous studies involving the negativity bias’ impact on youth perspectives of food specifically. Further, studies of whether encouraging positive and enjoyable engagement with food (food growing, preparation, and sharing in cooperative and supportive social settings, for example) can decrease the effects of the negativity bias regarding how food is typically evaluated would be needed.

Regarding students' perspectives on sustainable eating and ethical eating, since *Focus on Food* was not able to obtain many detailed opinions and priorities about these topics using the methodology and scope employed, it could be advantageous for later studies to make more concerted attempts to ascertain whether there are additional concerns and attitudes regarding sustainable/ethical eating, and sustainable/ethical food systems more broadly, that are in fact of importance to students, but which were not detected in the *Focus on Food* study. Using terms that are familiar and accessible to participants, and making use of case studies, recent shared experiences (as a class or extracurricular club, for example) that are relevant to food sustainability issues, or other relatable examples to reflect upon, could help to ensure that students are able to engage in discussions to their full capacity.

In *Focus on Food*, some ways of eating were regarded as feminine or masculine; dieting was discussed as the occupation of women and girls, whereas bulking-up was labeled as a masculine activity. Vegetarianism was not overtly described as feminine, but it was recognized that fewer boys are vegetarians than girls, and vegetarianism was linked to other practices like dieting, eating 'light', and 'caring' about animals. Men and boys were also thought of as more likely to eat for the pleasure of it, without as much regard to other considerations such as health, whereas girls and women were thought to care more about healthy eating, and/or were thought to actually eat more healthfully. Therefore, the popularity of vegetarianism and dieting along with healthy eating as discussion topics may have been influenced by the high representation of female participants in the *Focus on Food* study (although it is interesting to note that fast food was still the most popular discussion topic). It would be beneficial to investigate this apparent trend further, in order to ascertain whether gender indeed plays a role in shaping issues and discussion topics of interest in this manner.

This thesis set out to explore and understand young peoples' views on eating and various influences on their eating behaviours as they perceived them. Based on the participants' tendency to focus on the aspects of food that are most relevant from a consumerist perspective, attempts to promote healthy, sustainable, and enjoyable relationships with food and eating may be facilitated by encouraging opportunities for youth to engage with food in ecologically-minded and community-based ways. However, deliberate and in-depth study is needed of students' concerns for their particular school (and wider) food environments, along with an exploration of specific barriers or challenges that youth might face when trying to engage with their food systems in a more participatory and community-oriented fashion.

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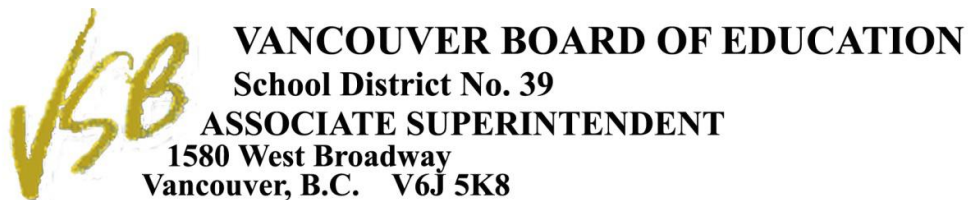
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Appendices

Appendix A: VSB approval



October 21, 2011

Jennifer Black PhD RD
Assistant Professor
Food, Nutrition and Health
Faculty of Land and Food Systems
University of British Columbia

Dear Ms. Black,

Thank you for your research proposal entitled, "What Shapes Food Practices on School Days?" On behalf of the VSB Research Committee, please accept this letter as approval for you to complete your research within the Vancouver district. You have permission to contact administrators, teachers, and students within the Vancouver School district. We request that you make your initial contact with the principal of the school to inform them of your study and provide them with a copy of this letter.

The VSB Research Committee would be very interested in learning of your results and its implications for students. When your research is completed please send us an abstract of the results. Thank you for focusing your work within the Vancouver School District. I wish you the best of luck as you proceed with your inquiry.

Sincerely,
Dr. Valerie Overgaard
Associate Superintendent, Learning Services
Vancouver School Board

Appendix B: Focus group guide

[Preparations: A name tent will have been prepared beforehand and placed at each seat, along with the photograph of their meal from the previous meeting. Flipchart will be set up in a visible, central area, with markers. Verification of parental consent.]

Intro/Reminders: I'm Stephanie – I'm a Master's student and a researcher from UBC. Here we've also got (assistant) who will be taking some notes so that we don't miss any of your comments. Today, I'd like if we could all have a talk about your food experiences at school, the types of things that influence what you eat during the school day, and also how you feel about some different ways of eating.

Feel free to talk about other people's comments and to talk to each other, but please no interrupting or talking while somebody else is talking. We want to hear about all kinds of different experiences and opinions, so if you have the opposite experience as someone else in the group, please feel free to share that. There are no right or wrong answers; We're just looking for opinions or experiences, and how you feel personally. Please be respectful of each other's comments, even if you may feel differently.

Just to remind you, we're audio-recording the discussion so that we don't have to write absolutely everything down, and so we don't miss any of your comments. We will address each other by our first names during this conversation, but any reports or papers that might get written about this study won't identify any participants' names, so your information will be kept private. Also please respect each others' privacy and keep in mind that other participants might not want you telling other people about all the things they said in the discussion today. Please keep what you hear during the discussion to yourselves after the focus group is done.

You can contribute to the discussion however much you feel comfortable, and you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to answer. Your participation here will not influence your grades or your school standing, or your standing/involvement in any clubs, because it has nothing to do with your school

curriculum. Your participation is totally voluntary, and you can stop participating any time you want to. If this all sounds OK, then we're ready to start.

1. (3 minutes) – First, I'd like you to just take a second to look at the photograph of the meal you ate last time we met. I'd like it if you could each tell us about why and how you chose the food that you did.

Go around the table and give each person a chance to talk a bit about their meal and why they chose it.

Probing/follow-up questions:

- *Any other reasons why you chose that food?*
 - *So we've heard you talk about why you chose the [hamburger] – what about the [fries] in the picture? Would you like to share anything about why you chose that?*
2. (7 minutes) I realize that when we shared lunch as a group, that may have been a bit different from your typical lunch period. I'm interested to know how your typical lunch might be different or similar to the meal we shared. What would you typically eat at lunch on a school day? (I realize that you might not all eat lunch during the actual lunch period, so if that's the case, please tell us a bit about that.)
 - a. *Ask these follow-up questions to touch on main points where necessary:*
 - i. *If you eat lunch on school days, what might your typical lunch look like? If you don't eat lunch on school days, can you tell us a bit about that? Can you tell us a bit about why that is?*
 - ii. *How about areas in and around the school that sell food – places you could walk to over lunch break? Can you describe that?*
 - iii. *If you ever buy your lunch (at school or from someplace close to the school), what might that lunch look like? Where might you buy it from? Can you tell us a bit about why?*

iv. *If you ever bring a lunch from home, what might that look like? Can you tell us a bit about why?*

v. *Any other options we're missing?*

b. *Influences to watch for and probe on:*

i. *Parental influence*

ii. *Friend/peer influence*

iii. *Dietary restrictions*

iv. *Cost*

v. *Convenience/Time (prep ahead of time, time to buy, time to eat)*

c. *Probes: Does anyone have similar experiences? Any different experiences?*

3. ~~Removed section: (8 minutes) Now, the next thing I'd like for us to talk about is what you think it means to 'eat well'. There isn't a 'correct answer'—we'll probably all have different ideas about this. What do you personally think it could mean to eat 'well'?~~

~~*Probes:*~~

~~*You used a word/phrase that I thought was interesting. Can you tell us a bit more about what you mean when you say: '____'?*~~

~~*Is this important to the way you eat personally?*~~

~~*Does anybody feel differently about this, or have a different experience?*~~

~~*Anything we missed—anything else that 'eating well' could mean?*~~

4. (15 minutes) ~~OK, so we've talked about what it means to eat well.~~ Now I have a list of different ways of eating that you might have some ideas, experiences, and opinions about. We won't be able to talk about everything on the list, so I'd like for each of you to look at the list and pick one thing on the list that you'd like most to talk about. If there's a way of eating (or something that influences the whole way that you eat) that you really want to talk about that isn't on the list, you can also make a suggestion.

Reveal flipchart page with list of terms (and spaces underneath for key terms):

Fast Food

Social Eating

Bulking-up

Healthy Eating

Dieting

Sustainable Eating

Ethical Eating

Vegetarianism

Eating for Pleasure

Other (your own topic)

Once the items to address have been identified, start with the first item and ask the following (addressing everyone):

- *What does this term mean to you?*
- *Does this term mean something different to anyone? Are there any other ideas on what this term could mean?*
- *Is this important to how you personally eat?*
- *Does anyone feel differently or have a different experience?*
- *(More general probe to get at 'other' or 'opposite' opinions: Can anyone think of reasons why somebody might prefer to eat this way/not to eat this way, or why this way of eating might be important/not be important to somebody?)*

Touch on healthy eating and sustainable eating if nobody brought them up (these are main target concepts):

- *I'd like to ask you a quick question about healthy eating: if you could share just one opinion or idea you have about healthy eating, what would that be?*
- *If you could share one opinion or idea you have about sustainable eating, what would that be?*

5. (5 min) Now I hope we can talk a bit about some ways that men and women might relate to food.

When we set up this study, we intentionally had some groups with only young women, some with only young men, and some mixed, because we wanted to see what kinds of differences and similarities there would be in the types of things each of the groups would talk about.

We all realize that nobody's trying to say that 'all women care about these things or eat this type of thing' or 'all men think that way about food and eat that way.' What I'm interested to know is this:

- A. If we compare the information we get from the all-women focus group discussions and the all-men groups and the mixed (women and men) groups, what do you think we might find?
- B. What differences or similarities do you think we might see between what men talk about and what women talk about when it comes to food?

Refer to the list of 'ways of eating' for probes if need be. Ex: What about in terms of eating sustainably?

What differences/similarities do you think we might see?

Appendix C: Focus group note-taking guide

Date: _____

Site/Location (include room #): _____

Group code (moderator use only – assistants can leave this blank): _____

Moderator Name: _____

Assistant Name: _____

Number and description of participants: _____

Seating Plan (Please draw a rough diagram of where participants sat. Label with their names, as well as with a number code (ex: label them 1 through 4 next to their names). Use the participants' numbers when you record notes (example #1 – leans forward and nods when #2 says organic food too expensive). Also label where the moderator stood/sat, where the assistant(s) stood/sat, and any important details about the room, such as the flipchart or white board, and the door.):

General Guidelines:

- Use the participants' numbers when you record notes (example '#1 – leans forward and nods when #2 says organic food too expensive').
- Try to make notes about who eats what (as far as refreshments go). ☺
- Pay special attention to what you see (i.e. what would not be captured by the tape recorder). For example, obvious body language/non-verbal communication (such as nodding, shaking head, throwing hands up in the air, silent laughter etc.); events (ex: #5 enters the room 10 minutes into the cafeteria meal discussion).
- Things to look for:
 - Signs of particular interest or disinterest/disengagement from the group
 - Signs of frustration
 - Signs of agreement (smiles, nods) or disagreement (eyes narrow, brow furrows, avoids eye contact with speaker or with another participant, fidgets)
 - Where people are looking (or conspicuously not looking) as they talk about certain topics or respond to certain questions
- Try to report visible behaviour rather than simply ascribing underlying reasons for the behaviour. For example: '#1 furrows brow and wrinkles nose when #2 says cafeteria food is awesome' instead of '#1 disagrees with #2 that cafeteria food is awesome'. (You can certainly include speculative notes about motives, but make sure you include the visible behaviour. Ex: '#1 furrows brow and wrinkles nose when #2 says cafeteria food is awesome – (disagreement/disgust?)')
- Use shorthand. Some suggestions (you can develop your own) might include:
 - w/o = without
 - b/w = between
 - b/c = because
 - caf = cafeteria
 - enviro = environment or environmental
 - sust = sustainable
- Capture main points (but not word-for word) to help during the debrief discussion with the moderator and in case the tape recorder fails or data is lost

Note-taking Template:

Introduction/General (prices of items purchased, anything interesting that happened before the actual focus group)

Brief summary / key points
Comments/Observations

Brief summary / key points
Comments/Observations

Brief summary / key points
Comments/Observations

Section 3 – Ways of eating – topic 1: _____

Brief summary / key points

Comments/Observations

Ways of Eating – topic 2: _____

Brief summary / key points
Comments/Observations

Ways of eating – topic 3: _____

Brief summary / key points

Comments/Observations

Ways of eating – topic 4: _____

Brief summary / key points
Comments/Observations

Ways of eating – Topic 5 _____

Brief summary / key points

Comments/Observations

Section 5 – Gender

Brief summary / key points
Comments/Observations

Conclusion/Wrap up

Brief summary / key points

Comments/Observations

Debrief notes (can be filled in as you debrief with the moderator after the focus group – take these questions into consideration as you take your notes during the focus group):

- (1) What are the main themes that emerged in this focus group?
- (2) Did any information contradict what you learned in previous focus groups?
- (3) What did participants say that was unclear or confusing to you? (What do you need clarification on? – Compare notes with Moderator)
- (4) What did you observe that would not be evident from reading a transcript of the discussion (e.g., group dynamic, individual behaviours, etc.)?
- (5) What problems did you encounter (e.g., logistical, behaviors of individuals, questions that were confusing, etc.)?
- (6) What issues require follow up? (Important things that were touched on but didn't get dealt with in enough depth.)
- (7) Does the note-taker have any suggestions for the moderator and vice versa?

Appendix D: Pilot participant consent form

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Faculty of Land and Food Systems
 Grounded in Science | Global in Scope
Food, Nutrition and Health
 2205 East Mall
 Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4
www.landfood.ubc.ca
www.thinkeatgreen.ca



Participant Consent Form
“Focus on Food” Secondary School Study – UBC PILOT test

Main contact: Stephanie Shulhan (MSc Candidate)	Principal Investigator: Dr. Gwen Chapman
Department: Integrated Studies in Land and Food Systems, University of British Columbia	Department: Human Nutrition, University of British Columbia (UBC)
Email: [REDACTED]	Phone number: [REDACTED]
Co-Investigator:	Co-Investigator:
Dr. Alejandro Rojas	Dr. Jennifer Black
Department: Integrated Studies in Land and Food Systems (UBC)	Department: Human Nutrition (UBC)
Phone number: [REDACTED]	Phone number: [REDACTED]

The reason for this study:

My name is Stephanie Shulhan. I am a Master’s student at UBC and a Graduate Research Assistant with the SSHRC-funded Think&EatGreen@School project, which lets UBC researchers, the Vancouver School Board, and other community organizations and members work together to re-connect Vancouver Public Schools to their food sources. I am doing a study in Vancouver Public High Schools as part of my Master’s thesis research. I would like to find out about what the students at Vancouver High Schools think about food, what is important to them about food, and how they decide what, where, and how to eat when they are at school.

I would like to invite **UBC undergraduate students** to participate in a PILOT study to help me to assess the effectiveness of my research project design.

What you will be asked to do if you participate in this pilot study:

The first part of the study will be a group meal (in the McMillan building, UBC). This activity will last about 20 minutes, and is meant as both a conversation starter and as a free lunch to say ‘thank you’ for participating in the study.

The second part of the study will be a focus group discussion in a quiet classroom or office on campus at UBC. The discussion will last about 60 minutes, and will be audio-recorded. There will be research assistants from UBC helping to take notes as well. After the focus group, I will keep the audio recordings password protected on a computer. Only members of the research team and a professional transcriptionist will be able to listen to them.

Personal information and privacy:

During the focus group, you will not have to answer any questions you don't want to. Personal data collected from this study will not be published in any papers or reports. We encourage all participants to keep things other people said during the focus group private. However, since we can't control what participants say to others after they leave the study, you should probably not say anything that you don't want people outside the study to hear.

We will keep personal information we collect safe in a locked drawer in an office on campus at UBC when it is not being used. Only members of the research team will be given access to this information for research purposes.

This study is totally voluntary. Whether or not you participate will make absolutely no difference to your grades or your standing as a student at UBC. The study is not part of any course.

If you have any questions, you can contact Stephanie Shulhan at

_____.

If you have any questions or concerns later on about how you were treated during the study, you may contact the Director of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at

_____.

By signing this form, you are telling us that you agree to participate in this study. You understand that you can leave the study at any time. You also understand that participation is totally voluntary. You have received a copy of this consent form for you to keep.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Name (please print)

Appendix E: Parental consent form

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Faculty of Land and Food Systems
 Grounded in Science | Global in Scope
 Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4
www.landfood.ubc.ca
www.thinkeatgreen.ca
 Focus on Food contact person: Stephanie Shulhan
 Email: [REDACTED]



Parent/Guardian Consent Form
“Focus on Food” Secondary School Study

Main contact: Stephanie Shulhan (MSc Candidate)	Principal Investigator: Dr. Gwen Chapman
Department: Integrated Studies in Land and Food Systems, University of British Columbia	Department: Human Nutrition, University of British Columbia (UBC)
Email: [REDACTED]	Phone number: [REDACTED]

Co-Investigator:	Co-Investigator:
Dr. Alejandro Rojas	Dr. Jennifer Black
Department: Integrated Studies in Land and Food Systems (UBC)	Department: Human Nutrition (UBC)
Phone number: [REDACTED]	Phone number: [REDACTED]

The reason for this study:

My name is Stephanie Shulhan. I am a Master’s student from the University of British Columbia (UBC). I am also a Graduate Research Assistant with the SSHRC-funded Think&EatGreen@School project, which lets UBC researchers, the Vancouver School Board, and other community organizations and members work together to re-connect Vancouver Public Schools to their food sources. I am doing a study in Vancouver Public High Schools as part of my Master’s thesis research.

I would like to find out about what the students at your son or daughter’s school think about food, what is important to them about food, and how they decide what, where, and how to eat when they are at school. I think that their opinions and their experiences about food are important because students should be involved in creating their school food systems. Teachers, school administrators, and other researchers and community members may also be interested to know about these topics. I am asking for your consent for your son or daughter to participate in this study.

What your son or daughter will be asked to do if they participate:

The first part of the study will be a group meal in your son or daughter's school cafeteria. This activity is to make sure that all study participants have some experience with the school's cafeteria. It is also a free lunch to say 'thank you' to the young people participating in the study. This will happen during the regular lunch hour, and participants will sit together at the same table in a group. Your son or daughter will be given a voucher to buy lunch.

Within a week of the group meal, the same group of participants will have a focus group discussion in a quiet classroom or office in your son or daughter's school. The discussion will last about 60 minutes. The discussion will be audio-recorded. There will be research assistants from UBC helping to take notes as well. After the focus group, I will keep the audio recordings password protected on a computer. Only members of the research team and a professional transcriptionist will be able to listen to them.

Personal information and privacy:

During the focus group, your son or daughter will not have to answer any questions they don't want to. Their name will not be put in any papers or reports published about this study. We will encourage all participants to keep things other people said during the focus group private. However, we will also explain to all participants that since we can't control what participants say to others after they leave the study, they should probably not say anything that they don't want people outside the study to hear.

We will keep personal information we collect safe in a locked drawer in an office on campus at UBC when it is not being used. Only members of the research team will be given access to this information for research purposes.

This study is totally voluntary. Whether or not your son or daughter participates will make absolutely no difference to his or her grades. The study is not part of any class or course. As a way of saying 'thank-you' for your son or daughter's time, he or she will be given a gift card.

If you have any questions, you can contact Stephanie Shulhan at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns later on about how your son or daughter was treated during the study, you may contact the Director of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at [REDACTED].

By signing this form, you are telling us that you understand that you can withdraw your consent at any time, and your son or daughter will be allowed to leave the study at any time. You also understand that participation is totally voluntary. You have received a copy of this consent form for you to keep.

Do you give consent for your son or daughter to participate in this study? Yes ☐ No ☐

Parent or Guardian's Signature

Date

Parent or Guardian's Name (print) _____

Son or daughter's name (please print) _____

Email address (to which the date/time of the study will be sent):

Grade: _____ School: _____ Age: _____ Gender: _____

Is your son or daughter eligible for the subsidized lunch program at his or her school, if applicable? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Appendix F: Participant assent form

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Faculty of Land and Food Systems

Grounded in Science | Global in Scope

Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

www.landfood.ubc.cawww.thinkeatgreen.ca

Focus on Food contact person: Stephanie Shulhan

Email: [REDACTED]



Agreement to Participate Form
“Focus on Food” Secondary School Study

Main contact: Stephanie Shulhan (MSc Candidate)	Principal Investigator: Dr. Gwen Chapman
Department: Integrated Studies in Land and Food Systems, University of British Columbia	Department: Human Nutrition, University of British Columbia (UBC)
Email: [REDACTED]	Phone number: [REDACTED]

Co-Investigator:	Co-Investigator:
Dr. Alejandro Rojas	Dr. Jennifer Black
Department: Integrated Studies in Land and Food Systems (UBC)	Department: Human Nutrition (UBC)
Phone number: [REDACTED]	Phone number: [REDACTED]

The reason for this study:

My name is Stephanie Shulhan. I am a Master’s student from the University of British Columbia (UBC). I am also a Graduate Research Assistant with the SSHRC-funded Think&EatGreen@School project, which lets UBC researchers, the Vancouver School Board, and other community organizations and members work together to re-connect Vancouver Public Schools to their food sources. I am doing a study in Vancouver Public High Schools as part of my Master’s thesis research.

I would like to find out about what the students at your school think about food, what is important to you about food, and how you decide what, where, and how to eat when at school. I think that your opinions and experiences about food are important because students should be involved in creating their school food systems. Teachers, school administrators, and other researchers and community members, may also be interested to know about these topics. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

What you will be asked to do if you participate:

The first part of the study will be a group meal in your school cafeteria. This activity is to make sure that all study participants have some experience with the school’s cafeteria. It is

also a free lunch to say ‘thank you’ to the young people participating in the study. This will happen during the regular lunch hour, and participants will sit together at the same table in a group. You will be asked not to bring other friends who are not participating in the study to the table to eat with the group. You will be given a voucher to buy lunch.

Within a week of the group meal, the same group of participants will have a focus group discussion in a quiet classroom or office in your school. The discussion will last about 40 minutes. The discussion will be audio-recorded. There will be (a) research assistant(s) from UBC helping to take notes as well. After the focus group, I will keep the audio recordings password protected on a computer. Only members of the research team and a professional transcriptionist will be able to listen to them.

Personal information and privacy:

During the focus group, you will not have to answer any questions you don’t want to. Your name will not be put in any papers or reports published about this study. We encourage all participants to keep things other people said during the focus group private. However, since we can’t control what participants say to others after they leave the study, you should probably not say anything that you don’t want people outside the study to hear.

We will keep personal information we collect safe in a locked drawer in an office on campus at UBC when it is not being used. Only members of the research team will be given access to this information for research purposes.

This study is totally voluntary. Whether or not you participate will make absolutely no difference to your grades. The study is not part of any class or course. As a way of saying ‘thank-you’ for your time, you will be given a gift card.

If you have any questions, you can contact Stephanie Shulhan at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns later on about how you were treated during the study, you may contact the Director of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at [REDACTED].

By signing this form, you are telling us that you agree to participate in this study. You understand that you can leave the study at any time. You also understand that participation is totally voluntary. You have received a copy of this agreement form for you to keep.

Participant’s Signature

Date

Participant’s Name (please print)

Grade: _____ School: _____ Age: _____ Gender: _____

Are you eligible for the subsidized lunch program at your school, if applicable?
Yes ☐ No ☐

Appendix G: Recruitment poster

[illegible]

Appendix H: Break-down of each focus group: Participant grades, ages, and discussion topics chosen

Focus group	Number of participants; gender	Recruited from	Topics selected	Grades	Ages
School 1 Female	5	Eco-club	Fast Food; Eating for Pleasure; Dieting; Vegetarianism; Social Eating	All grade 10	Aged 15
School 1 Female	5	Eco-club; courses – food- related; word of mouth	Healthy Eating, Fast Food, Vegetarianism, Social Eating, Sustainable Eating	4 participants in grade 9, 1 in grade 10	2 participants aged 14, 2 aged 15, 1 aged 16
School 1 Female	5	Courses – food- related; word of mouth	Healthy eating; Fast Food; Dieting; OWN TOPIC – dietary restrictions in cafeteria	All grade 10	3 participants aged 16, 2 aged 15
School 2 Female	5	Student council; word of mouth	Healthy Eating; Dieting; Eating for Pleasure; Fast Food; Vegetarianism	All grade 10	3 participants aged 15, 2 aged 16
School 1 Mixed	5 (3 male; 2 female)	Eco-club; word of mouth	Eating for Pleasure; Fast Food; Sustainable Eating	All grade 10	Aged 15
School 1 Male	4	Eco-club; courses – food- related; word of mouth	Healthy Eating; Vegetarianism; Bulking up	All grade 10	2 participants aged 15; 2 aged 16
School 2	5 (4 female; 1	Courses – not	Fast Food;	All grade 9	Aged 14

Mixed	male)	directly food-related	Eating for enjoyment/pleasure; Healthy eating; OWN TOPIC - 'what makes a food good or bad'		
School 2 Female	4	Student council; courses – not directly food-related	Healthy Eating, Fast food, Ethical Eating, Vegetarianism	All grade 10	3 participants aged 15, 1 aged 16
School 2 Female	3	Word of mouth; courses – food-related and not directly food-related	Fast Food, Eating for pleasure, Healthy Eating	All grade 10	Aged 15
School 3 Female	5	Courses – both food-related and not directly food-related	Eating for pleasure; Vegetarianism; Dieting; Sustainable Eating	All grade 9	Aged 14
School 3 Female	3	Courses – food-related; word of mouth	Dieting, FastFood, Vegetarianism	All grade 9	Aged14
School 4 Female	4	Courses – food-related	Eating for pleasure; Dieting; Fast food, Sustainable eating	All grade 9	3 participants aged 14, 1 aged 15
School 4 Mixed	4 (2 female; 2 male)	Courses – food-related	Dieting, Fast Food, Social Eating, Healthy eating,	3 participants in grade 9, 1 in grade 10	3 participants aged 15, 1 aged 14
School 4 Mixed	3 (2 male; 1 female)	Courses – food-related	Social Eating, Sustainable eating, Healthy eating	2 participants in grade 9, 1 in grade 10	2 participants aged 14, 1 aged 15
Totals: 9 female groups; 4 mixed groups;	60 participants (48 female; 12 male)	Recruited from courses; Student Council; Eco-club; word of	Each topic was selected at least once – see research findings	Grade 9 – 26 participants Grade 10 – 34 participants	Aged 14 – 21 Aged 15 – 30 Aged 16 - 9

1 male group		mouth	chapter		
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Appendix I: List of code families and codes from data coding/analysis (Atlas.ti)

Code Families

HU: Focus on Food no codes.txt
 File: [C:\Users\Owner\Documents\Scientific Softw...\Focus on Food no codes.txt.hpr7]
 Edited by: Super
 Date/Time: 2013-11-15 21:39:12

Code Family: bulking up

Created: 2013-11-15 16:21:41 (Super)

Codes (17): [bulking up] [bulking up assoc: eat a lot] [bulking up assoc: eat beans] [bulking up assoc: eat protein] [bulking up assoc: exercise] [bulking up assoc: getting larger] [bulking up assoc: getting stronger] [bulking up assoc: heavyweight champion] [bulking up assoc: meat] [bulking up assoc: running] [bulking up assoc: too much protein] [bulking up assoc: unbalanced] [bulking up eval: not necessary] [bulking up personal] [Gender: bulking up/strength] [Gender: dieting vs. bulking up] [topic sel: bulking up]
 Quotation(s): 16

Code Family: caf sel

Created: 2012-10-14 23:22:56 (Super)

Codes (27): [caf sel: 2% milk] [caf sel: apple] [caf sel: brownie] [caf sel: burger] [caf sel: cheeseburgers] [caf sel: chicken caesar wrap] [caf sel: chocolate milk] [caf sel: chocolate muffin] [caf sel: cookies] [caf sel: entree] [caf sel: entree altered] [caf sel: heart smart entree] [caf sel: jello] [caf sel: juice box] [caf sel: milk tea drink box] [caf sel: nestea zero] [caf sel: pudding] [caf sel: repeat selection] [caf sel: salad] [caf sel: salad bar] [caf sel: sandwich, club (sub)] [caf sel: sandwich, tuna] [caf sel: sandwich, veggie] [caf sel: short order] [caf sel: slush drink] [caf sel: soup] [caf sel: veggie burger]
 Quotation(s): 62

Code Family: control/knowledge

Created: 2013-11-15 16:21:56 (Super)

Codes (19): [fast food assoc: don't know what's in it] [fast food assoc: misinformation] [GMO - misinformation/lack of information] [healthy eating assoc: awareness] [healthy eating assoc: bring healthy snacks to school] [healthy eating assoc: control] [healthy eating assoc: creatively incorporate healthy foods] [healthy eating assoc: grow own crops] [healthy eating assoc: home-made; home food] [healthy eating assoc: knowing what's in your food] [healthy eating assoc: re-heat home food] [healthy eating assoc: read nutrition info] [healthy eating assoc: restrict/monitor unpronounceable ingred] [healthy eating assoc: thought/planning] [ingredient list] [local food: know what's in it] [local food: know/talk to the farmer] [nutrition label] [typ lunch bc: know what's in it]
 Quotation(s): 26

Code Family: dieting

Created: 2013-11-15 15:18:15 (Super)

Codes (77): [diet denial] [diet eval: not good] [dietary restrictions] [dietary restrictions: allergies] [dietary restrictions: lactose intolerance] [dietary restrictions: no beef] [dieting assoc: anorexia/bulimia] [dieting assoc: anti-oxidants] [dieting assoc: bland] [dieting assoc: body appearance] [dieting assoc: celebrities/models] [dieting assoc: diet pills] [dieting assoc: diet plans/products/marketing] [dieting assoc: diets vs. dieting] [dieting assoc: difficult to adhere to] [dieting assoc: eating healthy] [dieting assoc: eating less/little] [dieting assoc: effects vary] [dieting assoc: exercise] [dieting assoc: extreme dieting] [dieting assoc: fainting] [dieting assoc: feel better physically and emotionally] [dieting assoc: food as fuel] [dieting assoc: gain weight] [dieting assoc: get healthy] [dieting assoc: health conditions/concerns] [dieting assoc: Jenny Craig] [dieting assoc: laxatives] [dieting assoc: less carbs] [dieting assoc: less fat/fewer fatty foods] [dieting assoc: less meat; more veg] [dieting assoc: light meals] [dieting assoc: lose

weight] [dieting assoc: low fat foods/low calorie foods] [dieting assoc: media] [dieting assoc: no chocolate] [dieting assoc: no ice cream] [dieting assoc: no wheat] [dieting assoc: not eating; starving yourself; fasting] [dieting assoc: not taking time to exercise] [dieting assoc: over-exercise] [dieting assoc: parents] [dieting assoc: peer pressure] [dieting assoc: puberty] [dieting assoc: quality vs. quantity] [dieting assoc: restrict to certain food types] [dieting assoc: restrict/monitor calories] [dieting assoc: restricted/inadequate nutrients] [dieting assoc: salad] [dieting assoc: self-esteem issues/insecurity] [dieting assoc: slim down] [dieting assoc: taking supplements] [dieting assoc: temporary success; long term fail] [dieting assoc: too skinny/unattractive] [dieting assoc: trying to attract boyfriend] [dieting assoc: U.S.A.] [dieting assoc: vegetarianism] [dieting assoc: vitamin C] [dieting assoc: watching what you eat] [dieting assoc: whole wheat vs. white] [dieting assoc: will power] [dieting defn: healthy dieting vs. unbalanced dieting] [dieting eval: doesn't replace exercise] [dieting eval: not good] [dieting eval: not nec bad] [dieting eval: should include veggies] [dieting eval: unhealthy/dangerous] [dieting personal] [dieting personal: ice cream] [Gender: dieting] [Gender: dieting vs. bulking up] [healthy eating assoc: dieting] [lemon diet] [topic sel: dietary restrictions and caf] [topic sel: dieting] [typ drink bc: don't like diet drinks] [vegetarianism assoc: dieting]

Quotation(s): 120

Code Family: distrust/trust

Created: 2013-11-15 16:21:48 (Super)

Codes (47): [diet: false claims] [ethical eating: no GMO] [fast food assoc: chicken hormones/steroids] [fast food assoc: disgusting] [fast food assoc: don't know what's in it] [fast food assoc: GMOs] [fast food assoc: looks good] [fast food assoc: misinformation] [fast food assoc: not real food] [fast food assoc: not sanitary] [fast food assoc: pink slime] [fast food assoc: quality varies by restaurant] [fast food assoc: salmonella] [fast food assoc: taste ambiguous] [fast food assoc: undercooked meat] [fast food assoc: unethical eating] [fresh] [GMO - artificial] [GMO - chemicals] [GMO - disgusting] [GMO - health risks] [GMO - misinformation/lack of information] [GMO - not real] [GMO - unethical] [healthy eating assoc: no additives] [healthy eating assoc: no chemicals] [healthy eating assoc: no MSG] [healthy eating assoc: no pesticides] [healthy eating assoc: not artificial] [healthy eating assoc: real food] [healthy eating assoc: resist temptation] [healthy eating assoc: restrict/monitor unpronounceable ingred] [local food: no pesticides] [natural] [not natural] [oily] [organic: no (unhealthy) chemicals] [organic: no GMO] [organic: no hormones] [organic: no pesticide] [organic: not processed] [pesticides] [sel bc: 'safe'/knew would like; not sure would like alt(s)] [sel bc: don't support bottled water] [sel bc: fresher than alt(s)] [sel bc: similar to food at home] [sel bc: similar to typ lunch]

Quotation(s): 46

Code Family: eating for pleasure

Created: 2013-11-15 15:56:31 (Super)

Codes (60): [eating for pleasure] [eating for pleasure assoc: binge eating] [eating for pleasure assoc: bored] [eating for pleasure assoc: break-up] [eating for pleasure assoc: couch potato] [eating for pleasure assoc: cravings/whims] [eating for pleasure assoc: deliberate] [eating for pleasure assoc: dessert] [eating for pleasure assoc: distract from stress] [eating for pleasure assoc: eating contest] [eating for pleasure assoc: eating to excess] [eating for pleasure assoc: eating to feel happy] [eating for pleasure assoc: fills a void/comforts] [eating for pleasure assoc: foreign food] [eating for pleasure assoc: friends] [eating for pleasure assoc: growth spurt/puberty] [eating for pleasure assoc: healthy] [eating for pleasure assoc: home-made] [eating for pleasure assoc: indulge] [eating for pleasure assoc: junk food] [eating for pleasure assoc: lonely] [eating for pleasure assoc: movies] [eating for pleasure assoc: out for dinner] [eating for pleasure assoc: party/celebration] [eating for pleasure assoc: period-related cravings] [eating for pleasure assoc: rare/unusual treat] [eating for pleasure assoc: real food] [eating for pleasure assoc: reward] [eating for pleasure assoc: sad/depressed] [eating for pleasure assoc: snacking] [eating for pleasure assoc: special 'extras'] [eating for pleasure assoc: taking time to eat/savor] [eating for pleasure assoc: taking time to prep] [eating for pleasure assoc: taste good] [eating for pleasure assoc: tired/end of day] [eating for pleasure assoc: unhealthy/not good for you] [eating for pleasure assoc: vacation/abroad] [eating for pleasure assoc: weight gain] [eating for pleasure eval: fine if healthy foods] [eating for pleasure eval: should be in moderation] [eating for pleasure ex: cakes/cheesecake] [eating for pleasure ex: chips] [eating for pleasure ex: chocolate] [eating for pleasure ex: cookies] [eating for pleasure ex: fries] [eating for pleasure ex: fruit] [eating for pleasure ex: ice cream] [eating for pleasure ex: junk food] [eating for pleasure ex: rice crackers] [eating for pleasure ex: samosas] [eating for pleasure ex: sweet or savory] [eating for pleasure personal] [eating for pleasure personal: ice cream] [eating for pleasure personal: studying, not happy] [eating for pleasure personal: with friends] [eating for pleasure rel to: availability] [eating for pleasure rel to: eating well] [eating for pleasure rel to: schedule] [Gender: eating for pleasure] [topic sel: eating for pleasure]

Quotation(s): 65

Code Family: ethical eating

Created: 2012-11-03 16:15:39 (Super)

Codes (11): [ethical eating] [ethical eating personal] [ethical eating: animal welfare] [ethical eating: eating locally] [ethical eating: fair trade] [ethical eating: no GMO] [ethical eating: organic] [fast food assoc: unethical eating] [GMO - unethical] [topic sel:

ethical eating] [vegetarianism assoc: ethical eating]

Quotation(s): 17

Code Family: fast food

Created: 2013-11-15 15:17:50 (Super)

Codes (115): [disagree w: burgers and fries are necessarily fast food] [disagree w: fast food is cheap] [disagree w: fast food is frozen] [disagree w: fast food is not good for you] [fast food assoc: A&W] [fast food assoc: addictions] [fast food assoc: additives] [fast food assoc: animal welfare] [fast food assoc: available] [fast food assoc: big corporation] [fast food assoc: big macs and fries] [fast food assoc: breakfast] [fast food assoc: Burger king] [fast food assoc: burgers] [fast food assoc: burgers and fries] [fast food assoc: by yourself] [fast food assoc: chicken farming] [fast food assoc: chicken hormones/steroids] [fast food assoc: chicken nuggets] [fast food assoc: convenient/ce] [fast food assoc: coupons/deals] [fast food assoc: craving/mood] [fast food assoc: Dairy Queen] [fast food assoc: deep fried] [fast food assoc: disgusting] [fast food assoc: documentaries] [fast food assoc: don't know what's in it] [fast food assoc: drive-through] [fast food assoc: easy to prep] [fast food assoc: eat fast] [fast food assoc: expensive] [fast food assoc: extra-curricular activity] [fast food assoc: fast (prep)] [fast food assoc: fast food chains changed what people eat] [fast food assoc: feeling fat] [fast food assoc: feeling sluggish] [fast food assoc: fillers] [fast food assoc: food inc] [fast food assoc: Fresh Slice] [fast food assoc: fried chicken made at home] [fast food assoc: friends] [fast food assoc: fries] [fast food assoc: fries made at home] [fast food assoc: frozen] [fast food assoc: GMOs] [fast food assoc: health condition/disease risk] [fast food assoc: hot weather] [fast food assoc: hunger] [fast food assoc: in a rush] [fast food assoc: industry makes a lot of money] [fast food assoc: inexpensive] [fast food assoc: KFC] [fast food assoc: lazy; don't want to cook] [fast food assoc: leftovers] [fast food assoc: looks good] [fast food assoc: mall/out shopping] [fast food assoc: McDonald's] [fast food assoc: misinformation] [fast food assoc: not fresh] [fast food assoc: not part of eating well] [fast food assoc: not real food] [fast food assoc: not sanitary] [fast food assoc: oil/fat/grease] [fast food assoc: on the way to somewhere] [fast food assoc: onion rings] [fast food assoc: parent(s)/family] [fast food assoc: peer influence] [fast food assoc: pink slime] [fast food assoc: pizza] [fast food assoc: pop] [fast food assoc: preservatives] [fast food assoc: processed foods] [fast food assoc: prod in factory] [fast food assoc: prod in fast food chain] [fast food assoc: prod in large quant] [fast food assoc: prod inexpensive] [fast food assoc: proximity] [fast food assoc: proximity to work or home] [fast food assoc: quality varies by restaurant] [fast food assoc: ready-made microwave food] [fast food assoc: salmonella] [fast food assoc: salty] [fast food assoc: snack] [fast food assoc: social] [fast food assoc: special occasion/celebrate] [fast food assoc: strong flavors] [fast food assoc: students bring to school] [fast food assoc: styrofoam packaging] [fast food assoc: Subway] [fast food assoc: sushi] [fast food assoc: sweet] [fast food assoc: take-out] [fast food assoc: taste ambiguous] [fast food assoc: tastes good] [fast food assoc: triple O's] [fast food assoc: U.S.A.] [fast food assoc: undercooked meat] [fast food assoc: unethical eating] [fast food assoc: unhealthy/not good for you/bad for you] [fast food assoc: unusual/atypical] [fast food assoc: weekend] [fast food assoc: Wendy's] [fast food assoc: work] [fast food eval: better than hunger] [fast food eval: good/acceptable in moderation] [fast food eval: gross] [fast food eval: should never be eaten] [fast food eval: too much is annoying] [fast food freq] [fast food personal] [fast food personal: mitigate] [fast food personal: pos assoc] [Gender: fast food] [healthy eating assoc: less fast food] [topic sel: fast food]

Quotation(s): 183

Code Family: GMO

Created: 2012-11-03 16:17:20 (Super)

Codes (10): [fast food assoc: GMOs] [GMO] [GMO - artificial] [GMO - chemicals] [GMO - disgusting] [GMO - health risks] [GMO - misinformation/lack of information] [GMO - not real] [GMO - unethical] [vegetarianism assoc: no GMOs]

Quotation(s): 8

Code Family: healthy eating

Created: 2012-11-03 15:40:19 (Super)

Codes (116): [dieting assoc: eating healthy] [dieting assoc: get healthy] [dieting assoc: health conditions/concerns] [dieting defn: healthy dieting vs. unbalanced dieting] [dieting eval: unhealthy/dangerous] [disagree w: boys don't care abt what's healthy] [disagree w: fast food is not good for you] [disagree w: healthy food ex] [disagree w: want to eat healthy to feel better] [eat well pers imp bc: health] [eating for pleasure assoc: healthy] [eating for pleasure assoc: unhealthy/not good for you] [eating for pleasure eval: fine if healthy foods] [fast food assoc: health condition/disease risk] [fast food assoc: unhealthy/not good for you/bad for you] [Gender: definition of healthy eating] [GMO - health risks] [health condition: celiacs] [health conditions: cholesterol] [health conditions: diabetes] [health conditions: heart problems/artery clogs] [health conditions: strokes] [health eat knowl: recom servings] [health eat knowl: recom water intake] [healthy eating] [healthy eating assoc: 3 meals a day] [healthy eating assoc: activity level] [healthy eating assoc: avail of healthy food in caf] [healthy eating assoc: avoid future health problems] [healthy eating assoc: avoid injury/disease] [healthy eating assoc: avoid pimples] [healthy eating assoc: awareness] [healthy eating assoc: balance/variety] [healthy eating assoc: breakfast] [healthy eating assoc: bring healthy snacks to school] [healthy eating assoc: calcium] [healthy eating assoc: control] [healthy eating assoc: creatively incorporate healthy foods] [healthy eating assoc: dieting] [healthy eating assoc: doing

a good thing] [healthy eating assoc: eating enough] [healthy eating assoc: eating food you should eat] [healthy eating assoc: fibre] [healthy eating assoc: food groups/food guide] [healthy eating assoc: fresh] [healthy eating assoc: fruit] [healthy eating assoc: greens] [healthy eating assoc: health conditions] [healthy eating assoc: home-made; home food] [healthy eating assoc: how body feels] [healthy eating assoc: important when sick] [healthy eating assoc: iron] [healthy eating assoc: knowing what's in your food] [healthy eating assoc: less 'carbonates'] [healthy eating assoc: less fast food] [healthy eating assoc: less meat; more veg] [healthy eating assoc: less soda] [healthy eating assoc: mental performance] [healthy eating assoc: milk, cheese, dairy] [healthy eating assoc: minerals and vitamins/nutrients] [healthy eating assoc: mitigate ('balance it out')] [healthy eating assoc: no additives] [healthy eating assoc: no chemicals] [healthy eating assoc: no MSG] [healthy eating assoc: no pesticides] [healthy eating assoc: not artificial] [healthy eating assoc: organic] [healthy eating assoc: physical performance] [healthy eating assoc: portions/don't eat to excess] [healthy eating assoc: re-heat home food] [healthy eating assoc: read nutrition info] [healthy eating assoc: real food] [healthy eating assoc: resist temptation] [healthy eating assoc: restrict/eliminate junk/bad food] [healthy eating assoc: restrict/monitor calories] [healthy eating assoc: restrict/monitor oil/fat] [healthy eating assoc: restrict/monitor processed] [healthy eating assoc: restrict/monitor salt] [healthy eating assoc: restrict/monitor sugar] [healthy eating assoc: restrict/monitor unpronounceable ingred] [healthy eating assoc: salad] [healthy eating assoc: smoothies] [healthy eating assoc: some meat] [healthy eating assoc: thought/planning] [healthy eating assoc: timing/don't eat after 6pm] [healthy eating assoc: veg] [healthy eating assoc: vegetarianism] [healthy eating assoc: whole wheat] [healthy eating personal] [healthy food] [healthy food ex: cereal] [healthy food ex: fruit] [healthy food ex: milk] [healthy food ex: pasta and salad] [healthy food ex: yoghurt] [healthy food taste ambig] [healthy lifestyle] [obesity/overweight rel to health] [organic: no (unhealthy) chemicals] [sel bc: healthy/healthier than alt(s)] [sel bc: seemed healthy] [self-perc: healthy] [sustainable eating assoc: healthy] [topic sel: healthy eating] [typ lunch bc: healthy] [unhealthy food ex: cake] [unhealthy food ex: chips] [unhealthy food ex: cookies] [unhealthy food ex: oily food] [unhealthy food ex: overly sweet food] [unhealthy food ex: pop] [unhealthy food rel to: feel gross] [unhealthy food rel to: feel sick] [unhealthy pract ex bc: gross; poor digestion] [unhealthy pract ex: eating too fast] [vegetarianism assoc: healthy]

Quotation(s): 169

Code Family: herb., pest., chemicals

Created: 2012-11-03 21:19:56 (Super)

Codes (12): [chemical] [eval: pesticides/chemicals] [GMO - chemicals] [healthy eating assoc: no chemicals] [healthy eating assoc: no pesticides] [local food: no pesticides] [organic: no (unhealthy) chemicals] [organic: no pesticide] [pesticides] [sustainable eating assoc: no chemicals] [sustainable eating assoc: no herbicides] [sustainable eating assoc: no pesticides]

Quotation(s): 15

Code Family: local food

Created: 2012-11-03 16:11:43 (Super)

Codes (8): [ethical eating: eating locally] [local food: know what's in it] [local food: know/talk to the farmer] [local food: less energy] [local food: less waste] [local food: no pesticides] [organic: local] [sustainable eating assoc: eating locally]

Quotation(s): 10

Code Family: organic

Created: 2012-11-03 16:12:29 (Super)

Codes (12): [ethical eating: organic] [healthy eating assoc: organic] [organic] [organic: local] [organic: more expensive] [organic: no (unhealthy) chemicals] [organic: no GMO] [organic: no hormones] [organic: no pesticide] [organic: not processed] [sustainable eating assoc: organic] [vegetarianism assoc: organic]

Quotation(s): 32

Code Family: sel bc

Created: 2012-10-14 23:28:59 (Super)

Codes (48): [sel bc] [sel bc: 'addicted'] [sel bc: 'safe'/knew would like; not sure would like alt(s)] [sel bc: Asian food] [sel bc: balance] [sel bc: balanced] [sel bc: calcium content] [sel bc: calorie content] [sel bc: couldn't find preferred alt(s)/didn't see alt(s)] [sel bc: curious to try] [sel bc: dessert to finish it off] [sel bc: didn't know what to get] [sel bc: didn't want entree] [sel bc: diff from home] [sel bc: doesn't like alt(s) (as much)] [sel bc: don't support bottled water] [sel bc: don't usually eat item] [sel bc: easy/available] [sel bc: entree portion too big] [sel bc: feeling sick] [sel bc: filling/portion/satisfies hunger] [sel bc: food groups] [sel bc: fresher than alt(s)] [sel bc: friend recommend] [sel bc: good deal] [sel bc: healthy/healthier than alt(s)] [sel bc: like sweet/dessert] [sel bc: limited caf options] [sel bc: looked better than alt(s)] [sel bc: looked good] [sel bc: mitigate] [sel bc: never/rarely eat at caf] [sel bc: other partic selected same] [sel bc: pop makes hyper; crash] [sel bc: pref] [sel bc: ran out of entree] [sel bc: seemed healthy] [sel bc: several

components] [sel bc: similar to food at home] [sel bc: similar to typ lunch] [sel bc: stood out] [sel bc: subsidized lunch program] [sel bc: taste] [sel bc: typ caf sel] [sel bc: vegetarian] [sel bc: voucher] [sel bc: wanted vegetable] [sel bc: weather]
Quotation(s): 86

Code Family: social eating

Created: 2013-11-15 15:56:01 (Super)

Codes (22): [disagree w: social eating assoc with eating out] [social eating assoc: better mood than eating alone] [social eating assoc: distracts the mind from food] [social eating assoc: eating with friends] [social eating assoc: encourages to try new food] [social eating assoc: food easy to eat while socializing] [social eating assoc: food is for show] [social eating assoc: formal events] [social eating assoc: going out to eat] [social eating assoc: hanging out] [social eating assoc: influence what/where you eat] [social eating assoc: making connections] [social eating assoc: more conscious of manners] [social eating assoc: more fun] [social eating assoc: party] [social eating assoc: sharing food] [social eating assoc: talk instead of eat] [social eating assoc: talk while eat] [social eating defn: for sake of socializing vs. for sake of eating] [social eating eval: sometimes nice to eat alone] [social eating personal] [topic sel: social eating]
Quotation(s): 26

Code Family: sustainable eating

Created: 2012-11-03 16:03:49 (Super)

Codes (31): [sustainable eating] [sustainable eating assoc: avoid neg env impact] [sustainable eating assoc: balanced meal] [sustainable eating assoc: eating at a steady rate] [sustainable eating assoc: eating enough] [sustainable eating assoc: eating locally] [sustainable eating assoc: eating to survive / eating just to satisfy hunger] [sustainable eating assoc: ecosystems/energy] [sustainable eating assoc: effects of meat transport] [sustainable eating assoc: farmer markets] [sustainable eating assoc: green/good for the earth/the environment] [sustainable eating assoc: healthy] [sustainable eating assoc: land use] [sustainable eating assoc: less meat more veg] [sustainable eating assoc: natural/not artificial] [sustainable eating assoc: no chemicals] [sustainable eating assoc: no herbicides] [sustainable eating assoc: no pesticides] [sustainable eating assoc: no preservatives] [sustainable eating assoc: no wax] [sustainable eating assoc: organic] [sustainable eating assoc: recycling] [sustainable eating assoc: reduce packaging / packaging waste] [sustainable eating assoc: reduce waste] [sustainable eating assoc: species conservation] [sustainable eating assoc: transportation] [sustainable eating assoc: trees] [sustainable eating assoc: water] [sustainable eating personal] [topic sel: sustainable eating] [vegetarianism assoc: sustainable eating]
Quotation(s): 46

Code Family: vegetarianism

Created: 2012-11-03 16:16:36 (Super)

Codes (37): [dieting assoc: vegetarianism] [Gender: vegetarianism] [healthy eating assoc: vegetarianism] [sel bc: vegetarian] [topic sel: vegetarianism] [typ lunch bc: vegetarian] [vegetarianism assoc] [vegetarianism assoc: animal freedom] [vegetarianism assoc: animal rights/welfare] [vegetarianism assoc: animal tested products] [vegetarianism assoc: culture/religion] [vegetarianism assoc: dieting] [vegetarianism assoc: different types] [vegetarianism assoc: difficult to adhere] [vegetarianism assoc: eggs/dairy controversy] [vegetarianism assoc: ethical eating] [vegetarianism assoc: fish] [vegetarianism assoc: fresh] [vegetarianism assoc: healthy] [vegetarianism assoc: less fat] [vegetarianism assoc: less iron] [vegetarianism assoc: less meat] [vegetarianism assoc: less nutrients] [vegetarianism assoc: limited options] [vegetarianism assoc: lower nutrient value] [vegetarianism assoc: need alt protein] [vegetarianism assoc: no GMOs] [vegetarianism assoc: no meat] [vegetarianism assoc: organic] [vegetarianism assoc: salad] [vegetarianism assoc: social stigma] [vegetarianism assoc: sustainable eating] [vegetarianism assoc: tofu] [vegetarianism assoc: veganism] [vegetarianism assoc: vegetarian person/people] [vegetarianism eval: positive] [vegetarianism personal]
Quotation(s): 71

Code Family: waste

Created: 2012-11-03 16:19:00 (Super)

Codes (5): [local food: less waste] [sustainable eating assoc: reduce packaging / packaging waste] [sustainable eating assoc: reduce waste] [typ drink bc: plastic bottle waste] [waste disposal]
Quotation(s): 8