

THE POWER OF A MEAL: USING AN INTERSECTIONAL LENS  
TO DISCUSS IDENTITY FORMATION THROUGH FOOD

by

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Food is both a uniting and separating force. It unites people under certain traditions and cultures and creates a collective understanding and community with food as its symbolic center. In this thesis, I am interested in exploring the connection between identity formation and food, utilizing an intersectional lens of ethnicity and class to see potential differences in this formation. How does food form parts of one's identity, and what are various social categories that might influence this identity formation? Specifically, the intersections that this research is interested in exploring are socioeconomic status and ethnicity, which are intersections that are often closely connected and impacted by each other. While there is bountiful research to show that socioeconomic status, in tandem with ethnicity, influences what kind of food you can purchase, there is not much research that also involves symbolism and identity formation, giving the research a unique take on this connection. Using semi-structured interviews, 10 participants discussed their own personal relationship to their identity, food, and ethnic culture. These participants were then categorized into two main categories based on class status: college students and post-college participants. General findings saw that while both groups shared common limiting factors that prohibited engagement with their ethnic identity through food, college students had a more difficult time engaging due to lack of financial resources.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures	4
List of Tables	5
Acknowledgements	6
Research Question	7
Literature Review	7
Methods	16
Coding/Methods Analysis	20
Findings	23
Connection between Identity Formation, Ethnic Culture and Food Practices	23
Limiting Factors	25
Encouraging Factors	37
Emergent Themes	40
Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research	42
Conclusion	43
References	45

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Conception of the General Relationship between Identity Formation, Ethnic Culture, and Food Practices, page 25

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: General Interviewee Information, page 16

Table 2: Interview Questions, page 18

Table 3: Codes used in Data Analysis, page 20

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## **Research Questions**

- What is the relationship between ethnic culture, food practices and identity formation?
- How does socioeconomic status influence the relationship between food, ethnic culture and identity formation?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Introduction***

Identity theory attempts to describe the age-old questions ‘who am I?, why am I the way that I am?’. Food studies is an examination of food and its placement in history and society. Additionally, sociology is the study of society, especially the development, structure and function of society. While food studies, identity theory, and sociology discuss the importance and significance of culture, there is little research done on how these three areas of study, specifically each studies’ discussion of culture, are connected and intertwined to understand the interaction between food and identity. This research hopes to highlight the importance of culture in these areas of study to further understand the connection between food and identity, and to create a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the relationship between culture, food, and identity. In addition, this research hopes to explore potential nuances in individual’s personal experiences with food and their identity.

## *Identity Theory*

There are multiple different theories surrounding identity formation (e.g.: social identity theory, personal identity, etc.). However, for this research, identity will be explained using identity theory, which is a widely accepted explanation of identity formation. Drawing on Stets and Serpe (2013), *identity* in this theory framework is defined as “a set of meanings attached to roles individuals occupy in the social structure (*role* identities), groups they identify with and belong to (*group* identities), and unique ways in which they see themselves (*person* identities) (Burke & Stets, 2009)”. In addition, the word *meanings* in this definition of identity is clarified as “individuals’ responses when they reflect upon themselves in a role, social, or person identity (Burke & Stets, 2009)” (Stets & Serpe, 2013). In identity theory, the role of identity is very important within the framework of a society’s social structures. Identity acting within social structures helps “organize an individual’s “place” during an interaction, guide behavior, facilitate the development of stable social relationships, and make interaction possible” (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Since identity is defined as both a distinctive individual formation, yet is inexplicably tied to various social structures, it is important to understand the three main categories that occupy what an identity is: role identity, group identity, and person identity. It is important to recognize that these categories are not separate and passive of each other. All of these various identities interact and overlap with each other, and it is necessary to be aware of these interactions between identities. The two identities highlighted in this review will be group identities and social identities, as those are best understood as relating to culture, race, and socioeconomic status.

*Group* identities are defined as “those meanings that emerge in interaction with a specific set of others, such as family, clubs, or friends...it implies involvement with each other and fulfilling the ways of behaving in each group” (Stets & Serpe, 2013). These identities are not to



be confused with *social identities*, or “the meanings associated with an individual’s identification with a social category” (Stets & Serpe, 2013). *Social identities* include categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class. It is important to note here that not all group identities have the same meanings throughout all stages of a person’s life. Throughout childhood, the concepts within group identity become more abstract and complex, and throughout young adulthood, group identities become more important as young people try to create their sense of self as a group member by examining the various messages, behaviors, and feelings about their group (Stets & Serpe, 2013). The formation of self within these group identities also closely interacts with their various social identities. For example, a young Black man will create an identity in their friend groups that is vastly different from a White woman’s identity in their separate friend group (Phinney, 2008). As a group identity forms, it creates a sense of belonging to that group, as well creating a sense of distinction from other groups. This sense of distinction creates what is known as *in-group bias*, which is the “tendency to favor one’s own group, its members, and its characteristics in reference to other groups”, which are known as the out-group (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2014).

### ***Food and Identity***

“What one eats or chooses to eat communicates aspects of a person’s identity in a manner that words alone cannot” (Pak, n.d.). Food and ethnicity are closely related; ethnic meals highlight the social identity of belonging to one or multiple ethnicities. The food itself, the food practices, and the cultural events surrounding food are all part of the wider group and social identity of belonging to a certain ethnicity. It can also demonstrate how an individual is separate from another ethnicity or culture, therefore creating distinction between the in-group and out-group. Food, then, becomes a vehicle in which in-group identity, and perhaps even out-group

distinction, can occur. A prime example of this in-group and out-group distinction is a study that examined how Singapore, a country known for its diversity of multicultural people, can both preserve one's own cultural identity while also being a part of out-group multicultural events. The researchers observed that while individual cultural food practices were still maintained, cross-cultural food practices were present in the daily lives of Singaporeans. Cultural differences remain visible and identifiable to each cultural practice when Singaporeans partook in different racial and ethnic food practices. This is unlike other multicultural societies, where traditionally colonial populations consume what is deemed out-group foods that can lead to a perceived diminishing of cultural differences (Reddy & van Dam, 2020).

Another example of this group distinction being created through the use of food is demonstrated in prison food. "Gustavo Alvarez, formerly incarcerated author of *Prison Ramen: Recipes and Stories from Behind Bars*, stated that incarcerated people frequently take food from the chow hall back to their cells, often violating prison rules, to cook another meal for themselves...the transformation of institutional food to something more familiar is crucial to reclaiming a part of their identity they held before incarceration, when their identity was not so intimately wrapped up in the control of the carceral system" (Pak, n.d.). Food in this instance is being used to both create unity and provide distinction. Incarcerated people are using food to identify themselves as more than just an incarcerated person, therefore creating a group identity separate from the one forced onto them by the carceral system. In addition, the food they are creating all unifies them through their shared experience of the carceral system, therefore creating an in-group all incarcerated people can resonate with.

Identity is a fluid and multifaceted idea. Different categories of identity are constantly interacting with each other, and society is interacting with these identities in a complex web that

creates who we are as people. It is necessary to recognize the history of certain identities, and speak on how they are rooted in power and oppression, as these identities are incredibly prevalent today. This research is trying to explore the connection between food and identity, but that cannot be achieved without examining how various intersections, in this case ethnicity and socioeconomic status, are involved in the makeup of who one is as a person. Therefore, by engaging with these social identities, this research hopes to achieve a more multi-dimensional and holistic approach to food's involvement in identity formation.

### ***Food and Ethnic Culture***

Race and ethnicity are identities that have strong symbolic meanings. *Race* is referred to in this context as “an ideology that draws distinctions from people’s physical appearance, specifically things such as skin color, eye and nose shape, and physiognomy”, as well as a classification system that hierarchies groups based on power and privilege (Frable, 1997). *Ethnicity*, then, is described as “distinctions based on national origin, language, religion, food, and other cultural markers” (Frable, 1997). The connection between ethnicity and food is complex and can influence many aspects of an individual’s food choices and identity as a whole. For example, a study conducted examining food choices across three ethnic groups found that “contrasts between ethnic ideals of one’s own group (“our food”) and those of another group (“their food”) were apparent through interactions between culture and environmental context when a respondent moved or immigrated” (Devine et al., 1999). For America, this means a lack of ethnic food displayed at traditional and mainstream supermarkets: “meeting ethnic food ideals often required more effort for members of minority cultures than it did for members of majority culture. Immigrants from other cultures found that their preferred fruits and vegetables were not always available. By contrast, for most White who represented the majority culture, ethnic food

traditions went unnoticed because special effort was not required to perform them” (Devine et al., 1999). To compound this issue, minority neighborhoods tend to “have fewer supermarkets and less availability of fresh fruits and vegetables” (Bodor et al., 2010). Other store types within these neighborhoods “did not offset the relative lack of supermarkets in the provision of fresh produce, though they did for snack foods” (Bodor et al., 2010). Not only are ethnic foods harder to access for people within a certain ethnic group, but those same neighborhoods that are predominantly BIPOC do not hold even the majority culture’s fruits and vegetables. However, these barriers do not completely inhibit people from various ethnicities from displaying their culture through food. The study found that expressions of ethnic identity through food choice occurred most often during holidays and family celebrations, which acted as mechanisms for passing on cultural values and ideals and reinforcing ethnic identity. And this reinforcement did not occur solely through eating ethnic food; “...enacting ethnic identity through food involved associating with members of one’s ethnic group in shopping and preparation” (Devine et al., 1999).

These two forms of identity, race and ethnic culture, have not always existed within human society, and it is important to know the history of these identity formations to acknowledge current forms of power and dominance in our society. While race and ethnicity are nothing more than a social invention, their systematic and personal effects on people are very real and multifaceted, and both society and individual people attach much symbolic meaning, whether positive or negative, to these social identities. A prime instance of one of these effects is the intersection between race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

### ***Socioeconomic Status, Race/Ethnicity, and Food***

*Socioeconomic status* (SES) is defined as “the position of an individual on the socioeconomic scale, which is determined by a combination of social and economic factors, such as income, education level, place of residence, etc.” (American Psychological Association, 2021). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has multiple publications showing the connection between race and socioeconomic status. For example, “among the major race and ethnicity groups, Hispanics and Blacks continued to have considerably lower earnings than Whites and Asians in 2022. The median usual weekly earnings for full-time wage and salary workers in 2022 were \$823 for Hispanics, \$878 for Blacks, \$1,085 for Whites, and \$1,401 for Asians” (*Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, 2022*, n.d.). This deep connection between race and socioeconomic status is necessary to understand and create a more interdimensional and complete framework of social identities.

In addition, SES and food are closely connected, as food availability and access are based on financial expenditure. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states that “the risk for food insecurity occurs when money to buy food is limited or not available. In 2020, 28.6% of low-income households were food insecure, compared to the national average of 10.5%. Unemployment can also negatively affect a household’s food security status. High unemployment rates among low-income populations make it more difficult to meet basic household food needs” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). A study conducted in 2019 examined adolescent’s beliefs about healthy eating, differentiating the adolescents by their SES. “Most high- and middle-SES adolescents believe their families eat healthily. They associate these healthy diets with financial privilege and moral superiority. In contrast, few low-SES adolescents describe their families' diets as healthy. While low-SES

adolescents believe that their abilities to eat healthily are financially constrained, these adolescents simultaneously subscribe to the same moralistic discourses that deem healthy eating morally superior” (Fielding-Singh, 2019). This study highlights how SES, food, and identity are all intertwined. A low SES created barriers to accessing and interacting with food that created in these adolescents a morally inferior lens with which they see food and possibly themselves. SES, then, creates another in-group and out-group dynamic, in which high SES groups can be seen as morally superior and separate from low-SES groups, leaving low-SES groups in a difficult position of how to navigate themselves and their group.

### ***Social and Group Identities***

As well as these systematic impacts are personal interactions with social and group identities. Most people who have a low SES are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person of Color) persons; additionally, low SES is correlated to food insecurity and lack of access to food, so most people experiencing food insecurity are BIPOC and minority groups. Research conducted by Feeding America highlights these racial and ethnic disparities in food insecurity; in 2021, the national food insecurity rate for Black people was 20%, for Latinx 17%, and for Native American 20%. In contrast, the national food insecurity rate for White, non-Hispanic was 7% (*Explore Racial Disparities down to the County-Level for Poverty, Unemployment, Median Income, Homeownership, and Disability Status. Contact, n.d.*). A study done by the American Psychological Association found that BIPOC persons view most health-based behaviors as inherently White and middle class. As a response, these participants deviated from potentially health promoting behaviors both to strengthen their in-group identity as well as rebel a historically dominant and out-group identity (Oyserman et al., 2007). In this study, BIPOC persons are defining their in-group by doing the opposite of their viewed out-group, in this case

white and middle class. Therefore, if white and middle-class persons are engaging in health-promoting behavior, BIPOC persons will act in a different manner from that group in order to not be associated or grouped in with a racial and economic demographic that has been rooted in dominance and oppression. Similarly, a study conducted examining the food preferences of individuals who are considered low socioeconomic status found that they preferred foods with “a taste for abundance, corporate brands, and familiar ethnic foods that all worked to constitute and embodied habitus that values and finds pleasure in foods that are low cost and accessible” (Baumann et al., 2017). Overall, food choices are made with sensitivity to affordability or ease of access. However, especially in the case of ethnic foods, food is a form of cultural expression for which the various categories of identity can be explored, especially social and group identities.

## Methods

As food and its connection with identity is both a highly individualized experience as well as a community and cultural experience, the method chosen for this research was in-depth interviews. Participants were gathered using snowball and availability sampling. Availability sampling involves conducting research using participants who are easily accessible to the researcher; in this case friends of the researcher were utilized. Additionally, snowball sampling involves asking participants who have been interviewed if they know of anyone who would be interested in being involved in the research in the future. These interviews were semi-structured, to allow for in-depth answers as well as exploring any potential nuances. In order to achieve the most depth of the connection between identity, food, and socioeconomic status, while also recognizing the time span of the project, there was a total of 12 interviews. 2 of the total 12 interviews were disregarded due to software malfunctions during the interview, resulting in 10 interviews whose data was used for the research. The research aimed to get participants from a variety of socioeconomic statuses, and used college education to approximate for class status.

<b>Interviewee Information</b>	
<b>Gender of Participants</b>	9 female-identifying, 1 male-identifying
<b>Race/Ethnicity of Participants</b>	8 BIPOC, 2 White
<b>Participants' Locations</b>	Oregon, Alabama, Montreal, Canada
<b>College vs. Post-College</b>	7 college participants, 3 post-college participants

9 interviewees were within the *college demographic* (actively in college), while 3 interviewees were in the *post-college demographic* (completed a college degree). The constituents would be initially friends of the primary researcher, and asked if they would like to



participate in the interview. Subsequent follow-up with potential interviewees occurred, and a time and place to be interviewed was established. In addition to snowball sampling, accessibility sampling would be utilized. Due to travel and accessibility limits, all interviews were taken over the phone or over Zoom.

The participants only needed to be a part of one interview, with the intended length ranging from 30 minutes to 1 hour. During the interview, constituents would be asked about socioeconomic status in order to gain an idea of the class status the constituent is coming from. Interviews would be monetarily compensated for with \$20 gift card for their time, and the payment will be given after the interview. If it is an online meeting, the payment will be made through an e-gift card after the interview. In addition, the personal information of the interviewee, such as name, age, etc., would be kept private. Pseudonyms will be used in place of the participant's real name, which will be decided by asking the participants to come up with their own random pseudonym. The code to any identifying information will be a Word document saved onto my personal laptop. The document will be stored through the Primary Investigator's UO OneDrive. No one will have access to the code except myself. This identifying document will be deleted within 90 days after the interview.

These interviews would be recorded on a digital tape recorder, and then transcribed and coded according to themes or trends throughout the interviews. This research utilized Otter Ai for transcription, and Dedoose for coding. The coding software is a popular tool amongst qualitative research, and can help condense hours' worth of interview material into more manageable chunks. The interviews will be recorded to minimize human error and to ensure that information can continuously be retrieved throughout the project. The coding of the data will

help streamline the process of showing potential trends or differences in peoples’ personal experiences. The interview questions are shown below, with probing questions as needed.

<p><b>Background Information</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What is your current education level, as well as the education level of your parents/guardians?</li> <li>● How would you define your current individual income? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ \$0-\$25,000</li> <li>○ \$26,000-\$50,000</li> <li>○ \$51,000-\$75,000</li> <li>○ \$76,000-\$100,000</li> <li>○ \$100,000+</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Has your current socioeconomic status been the same throughout your life? If not, how has it changed over time?</li> <li>● How would you define your ethnicity?</li> <li>● Does your socioeconomic status influence your approach to food? If so, how?</li> <li>● Do you think your purchasing or food making practices would change if you had more time and more money at your disposal? How so?</li> <li>● What kinds or types of food would you eat?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Food and Culture</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What’s your favorite food or meal? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why is it your favorite? What emotions or feelings arise when you think of this food or meal?</li> </ul> </li> <li>● What culture(s) do you consider yourself a part of? This can include race, ethnicity, community, religion, etc.</li> <li>● On a scale of 1-5, could you tell me how connected you are to this certain culture(s)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Could you tell me why you gave them those rankings?</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Do you see a connection between the foods you eat and whatever culture(s) you belong to? By culture I mean your religion, ethnicity, race, community, etc.</li> <li>● Are there specific ways in which you see ethnic culture mattering to how you engage (buying, making, cooking) with food?</li> <li>● In thinking about this connection between culture and food, tell me about a memorable experience you had that centered around food.</li> <li>● Do you have any rituals in your life involving food? (Rituals can include anything around preparing and eating food, such as praying before a meal, eating with chopsticks, eating in your bed, etc. Try and think about your normal eating habits to describe any rituals you might have ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why do you think you do these rituals/ why are these rituals important to you?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Are there any food rituals that you transmit to others/ (friends, family, co-worker, etc.)?</li> </ul>
<b>(For Post-College Participants)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Think about your college experience, how is it different from the way you engage in your ethnicity now?</li> <li>● Do you think kids have any role to play in the way you currently engage in your ethnicity through food practices? How so?</li> </ul>
<b>Food and Class Status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Where do you often grocery shop? In the span of a month, how often you normally grocery shop? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What do you feel like you spend the most money on food wise? (foundational)</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Do you shop at more traditional supermarkets? Do you ever shop at traditionally ethnic or religious grocery stores? What percentage of your total grocery store shopping is the religious/ethnic stores?</li> <li>● Are there barriers (financial, cultural, transportation, etc) that hinder you from where you would want to shop?</li> <li>● Do you feel like your culture (ethnicity) is fully represented in a traditional supermarket? Do you find yourself going to ethnic supermarkets to get all your food needs? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you feel like ethnic supermarkets are as accessible (financially, transportation) to you as you would like them to be?</li> <li>○ Do you feel like not having access to ethnic supermarkets hinders you from partaking in your ethnic identity? Please elaborate.</li> <li>○ If ethnic supermarkets were more readily accessible, would you utilize them more? In what ways?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Food as an Overall Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Besides sustaining life, what ways do you think food affects people's daily lives? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What does preparing and sharing food do for you besides sustaining life?</li> <li>○ Are there ways in which you use food to sustain yourself other than a physical way?</li> </ul> </li> <li>● When are you happiest or most fulfilled, as it relates to food practices? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ When are you your most stressed?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Ending Remarks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If there's a core message I'm to take from this interview of food, class status, race and ethnicity and identity, what would it be?</li> <li>● Before we end this interview, is there anything else you would like to add?</li> </ul>

### ***Coding/Method Analysis***

The data was coded according to particular recurring themes throughout the interviews, and a codebook was produced in order to create definitions of these main themes. Note that personal experiences provide nuance to the codebook below; not every quote or phrase used fits exactly within these definitions. Definitions were created as a guidebook to generally understanding these themes.

<b>Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Food	Any nutritious substance that people eat or drink to maintain life and growth.
Food Practices	Any significant engagement with food; including but not limited to buying food, preparing food*, sharing food*, and eating food.
Preparing Food	The making or producing of a meal; includes actions such as cutting ingredients, mixing, baking, heating a ready-made meal, etc.
Sharing Food	Food is not for only oneself; it is given out to the community* in either a formal or informal way.
Encouraging Factors	Influences in an individual's life that encourage engagement in their ethnic culture through food or food practices. This includes community*, the role of children*, socioeconomic status*, and time.
Community	People living in one certain area, or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, ethnicity, nationality, etc. This can include groups such as family, friends, and third spaces (Ex: a church group).
Role of Children	Children impacting decision-making around food and food practices, whether that is health-based and/or culture-based.
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	The position of an individual on the socioeconomic scale, which is determined by a combination of social and economic factors, such as income, education level, place of residence, etc. This code is further broken

	down into low SES (\$0 – \$25,000) and high SES (\$26,000-100,000+).
Time	Time used to engage with food in significant ways, such as preparing food, sharing food, eating food or buying food.
Ethnic Culture	Distinctions in one’s social behavior, food, norms, and practices that can be attributed to the group one inhabits. These distinctions are due to religion, national origin, etc.
Ethnic Food	Food that is distinct to one’s ethnic group.
Ethnic Practices	Certain norms or social behaviors that are distinct to one’s ethnic group
Identity	a set of meanings attached to roles individuals occupy in the social structure groups they identify with and belong to, and unique ways in which they see themselves.
Physical Health	Decisions with food and food practices one makes that influences their physical bodies.
Mental and Emotional Health	Decisions with food and food practices one makes that influences one’s emotions and mental state.
Limiting Factors	Influences in an individual’s life that limit one’s engagement in their ethnic culture through food or food practices. This includes SES, time, food access, transportation access, and acquisition of knowledge
‘College Constraints’	The financial, social, mental, emotional, and physical challenges of being a college student. This lifestyle includes moving from family to an independent lifestyle, being more financially independent (and insecure) for portions of the year, etc.
Acquisition of Cultural Knowledge	Knowing the details of ethnic food and food practices, without the help of a family or community member. For example, making a food from one’s ethnic culture without calling a parent/guardian.
Moving between Home and Alone	The temporary movement of college students between their home and their college environment throughout the school year. This is marked by a shift to ‘college’ constraints’ (see above).
Food Access	The availability and affordability of food within one’s environment. This also includes the availability and affordability of food distinct to one’s ethnic culture.

Transportation Access	The availability of reliable transportation, either through private or public means.
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## Findings

### *Connection between identity formation, ethnic culture, and food practices*

Throughout the interviews, there was an overall consensus that partaking in one's ethnic culture, either through holidays, large family gatherings, or just day-to-day practices, was an integral part in feeling connected to one's ethnicity. Cate Cane, an interviewee who identifies as Cantonese and White, explained that:

“I think a lot of like my childhood, it [food] was really the only time that all of our family would get together like all the aunts, uncles, and especially like great aunts, and great uncles...I feel like Chinese tradition is really tied to like those big kind of monumental holidays. So like when we were kids, it was like, you'd see each other every birthday and you know, every holiday and every like, especially like an elder's birthday. That's when like everybody would get together like I have these memories of going to this one Chinese restaurant and they would book like five or six tables in just like the dining room, and everybody wouldn't be there and there's like this huge cake and you're like seeing people and you're like I don't know you. I'm like you're a part of our family? But yeah, like that, or weddings too are just huge”.

In this quote, Cate is explaining how these family gatherings were not only the main space to spend time with her family, but it was also the main space to engage with her ethnic culture through food. Cate sees both her family and food as ways to engage with her ethnic culture. In this sentence specifically, food become the foundation on which not only family can come together, but the types of food presented at these family gatherings reinforces the culture

Cate is a part of and identifies with: “I think a lot of like my childhood, it [food] was really the only time that all of our family would get together...”.

Similarly, Remi Raccoon, a participant who identifies as Hispanic, when asked about how she feel like food matters outside of physical necessities, stated: “...[what] you’ve been talking about here is culture right? Like there’s a lot of connections to that. And your culture makes you feel connected to communities”. Remi again highlights this relationship between culture and community. By engaging with a community who shares a common ethnic culture, one strengthens both their own in-group identity with that community, as well as reinscribing the culture that this community participates in. Food in this case becomes that link between in-group identity and cultural engagement.

Additionally, one participant, Astrid Flynn, described how ethnic food mattered to her identity: “I’d say yes, like I feel like food is a very, intimate way that I connect to my culture. Being that, I don’t have family with me here and like my friends that I have here aren’t of the same ethnic background. Like food is like my way of partaking in my culture”. Similarly to Cate, Astrid speaks about how food is an important link to her culture, given that her family is not with her. The lacking presence of Astrid’s family speaks to how family is a strong way to feel connected to one’s ethnic culture, and in addition, the food that she eats helps her feel connected to her culture as well.

All of these quotes and shared experiences point to food as being a connection between the ethnic culture one partakes in, as well as the community one is a part of. In-group identity formation can be strengthened through engagement with one’s ethnic culture, and a main source of that engagement comes from ethnic food practices. A visual image of this general relationship can be seen below.





Figure 1: Conception of the General Relationship between Identity Formation, Ethnic Culture, and Food Practices

### ***“Limiting Factors”***

However, the relationship between identity formation, ethnic culture, and food practices is complicated by “limiting factors”, a term used in this paper to describe influences in an individual’s life that limit one’s engagement in their ethnic culture through food or food practices. The research identifies 4 main limiting factors that affect cultural engagement through food: Financial Accessibility, Time, Access in Stores, and Cultural Acquisition of Knowledge. While some of these themes were consistent across both the college and out-of-college demographic, college participants brought up these factors with much more frequency. Their unique situation of being in a college setting creates a different interaction with these limiting factors than one might experience if they were not in college. College students discussed not only experiencing a lack of control to change certain limiting factors themselves, but also not

having much support from their institution to alleviate limiting factors. Limiting factors within the college setting are referred to in this research as “college constraints”, and they are defined as the financial, social, mental, emotional, and physical challenges of being a college student.

### *Financial Accessibility*

Throughout both demographics, the price of food came up in one aspect or another. For college students specifically, financial accessibility was spoken about much more often. And this sentiment resonates with larger research examining college food insecurity; in a meta-analysis study conducted in 2020 examining food insecurity across US colleges, the overall weighted estimate of food insecurity was 41% (Nikolaus et al., 2020). Bren Beet described in his interview how he tries to navigate food insecurity:

“There’s like maybe a bit of financial stress [when shopping for food]. Like knowing and being completely certain I have enough money for the food is hard...Like I’m going to buy groceries when I have the money to buy groceries, or at least buy a little bit or if I am not sure if I have a lot of money then I will not get a lot of food.”

Abby Apple related a similar experience to Bren’s: “I’m gonna work more this semester, because I have more time. But really...there’s no real way that like, if you can’t get food on campus, there’s no real way to make enough money being a student to go get food off campus.”

Not only does food insecurity cause a range of physical, mental, and emotional stresses, it also presents a hindrance from accessing more ethnic foods, as they are normally more expensive. Astrid, who identifies as Columbian and Peruvian, speaks on her experience going to a Latinx grocery store for foods within her ethnic culture:

“Buying things is a barrier because they’re like expensive. So I buy like, more than three things and I’m already spending way too much over my budget or buy a lot in my [budgetary] terms...It’s also like a monetary barrier in the fact that it’s financially not feasible for me to always be buying from there – items and produce are a lot more expensive there. So I try not to go there [Latinx grocery stores].”

For Astrid, being a college student creates a financial limitation for her to go and buy the foods that are a part of her ethnic culture. When asked why she does not go to a traditional grocery store where items might be more inexpensive, she responds with:

“I feel like traditional grocery stores have the basic things that you would need for some cultural dishes - like if I wanted to make a specific cultural dish I couldn’t ... because it’s like very specific ingredients. Like you’re not gonna find certain ingredients in traditional stores here.”

This quote highlights the complex relationship between financial accessibility and ethnic food. For Astrid and other college students, partaking in one’s ethnic culture through food often means sacrificing more monetarily to buy these foods. However, there really is no other option if these students wish to engage with their ethnic culture through food; traditional supermarkets do not supply the ingredients or foods that are a part of these ethnic cultures.

However, for individuals in the post-college demographic, this financial accessibility did not play as much of a role in ethnic food engagement. When asked if there were any financial barriers that hinder her from shopping, Sasha Strawberry, a post-college participant who identifies as Palestinian-American, stated: “I don’t think so...I don’t feel like ‘Gosh, I wish I made more money so I could buy XYZ [foods]’”. And this sentiment was shared by another post-

college participant, Priscilla Pear, who identifies as Arab-American: “No, I feel very lucky that...it’s never been an issue. Now at this point...I’m like everything feels convenient”. Sasha Strawberry additionally shared her experience of buying from ethnic food stores:

“Do you know Najee's on Valley [River Road]? [Interviewer nods no] It's also a bakery, meaning like they bake their own Arabic bread. It's called Juju's - the bakery part is Juju's but the restaurant is Najee's. And it's also a little bit of a grocery store too. So my kids love labneh, I don't know if you know, it's like a thicker version of yogurt and you eat it. They call it with hummus, where you take the Arabic bread and you just, you know you just use the Arabic bread to, you know, eat it...So I just went actually a couple days ago and I buy labneh, and I buy the bread and then I also buy they have this Syrian cheese and I love making sandwiches with the Syrian cheese”.

In juxtaposition to Astrid’s experience from buying from an ethnic food store, Sasha does not mention the financial limitations when buying from this store. While many college students do take on jobs during school, their income is significantly less than a post-college individual, who can earn up to 44 percent more than a person without a college degree (Louis, 2018). This difference between the college demographic and post-college demographic is important because it highlights the post-college participants’ financial ability to engage with their ethnic culture through food more easily. This financial freedom could then play a role in engaging with one’s ethnic culture through food more often than the college participants, therefore strengthening ethnic identity.

## *Time*

Another serious limiting factor that came up often throughout the interviews was the importance of time in one's engagement with their ethnic culture through food practices. College participants discussed lacking time very frequently throughout their interviews. The college experience is overall understood to be a hectic time, filled with trying to navigate academic expectations, jobs and other extra-curriculars, as well as maintaining a social life. Time is also very important when it comes to food; not just the preparation for it, but also the planning, shopping, and eating of food. In a study conducted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a total 54.3% of students in a sample of 4,845 students reported 'cooking sometimes' or 'not cooking at all' (Soldavini & Berner, 2016). Several college participants discussed how time has impacted their food practices.

Cate Cane: "I definitely think more time [would be beneficial] especially like right now. Just being in college. It is so hard to find the time to actually meal prep and setting away a few hours just to go cook and clean everything up is like a lot of time spent."

Pam Plum: "...like today, I was like, oh, it's two o'clock and I haven't eaten lunch yet. I gotta go get a salad. Like I'm gonna go get something quick. So, like for myself, sometimes time is a struggle."

Katherine Karrot: "So if I had more time, I would say I would plan meals more efficiently, make sure they are more nutritionally healthy for me and probably eat better overall because I have more time and energy to devote to that."

College participants also mentioned specifically how time limits on food practices prohibits their potential engagement in their ethnic food. Astrid describes her wish to cook foods and the time limitations she experiences:

“...because I'm a university student, and I work there's not a lot of time for me to, sit down or I'll sit down but won't go to the kitchen and make myself a complex meal that tastes really good. I kind of just have to [think], how fast can I boil some ramen...”

Likewise, Pam Plum, a Latinx woman, shares a similar sentiment about food within her ethnic culture.

“I would love to like learn how to make tamales or make pozoles and obviously like I would rather get my stuff there in a Mexican place than Fred Meyer. But again, I don't have time to ever cook. So yes [not being able to cook hinders my ethnic identity], but like, honestly realistically how my life is going right now. It doesn't really matter.”

Pam's quote is especially important, as it emphasizes a key point about ethnic food practices. Many of these ethnic meals take time to make; more time than college students can afford to spend making these dishes. Therefore, they will opt out of engaging with their ethnic identity through these food practices as other factors within the college experience require more of their time and energy.

Post-college participants also described the importance of time in preparing food, but did not explicitly talk about preparing ethnic food in their discussion of time.

Sasha Strawberry: “...we also live this hustle and bustle of a life where it's like, grab Culvers on the way home or grab Chick-fil-A on the way home.”

Tracey Turnip: “When am I most happy as it relates to food practices?...when I’m actually in there [the kitchen] preparing the meal...as opposed to getting off work and rushed and I'm gonna throw this spaghetti together and eat it when you get ready. We're not sitting down together, praying together, talking about our day and enjoying the meal...it’s just not rushed.”

There are potential reasons why these post-college participants didn’t explicitly discuss ethnic food when talking about the importance of time. One reason could be that both of these women have children, and so when thinking about preparing food the focus is more on the desires of their children, whose tastes could be geared towards Culver’s and Chick-fil-A like Sasha suggests, rather than food that is a part of their ethnic culture. However, it is important to note the desire of college participants to engage with food from their ethnic culture, and yet being limited in how often they can do so due to time constraints.

Both groups expressed the pleasure they experience when having more time to cook food, regardless of whether or not the food was from their ethnic culture. Similar to Tracey’s sentiment above, Cate also describes her most joyful moments as it relates to food practices:

“...there's just something really nice about taking a long time to prepare, even just like one or two foods when I have the time to and I'm not feeling rushed or stressed. It's just so calming to me. And baking...even if something as like tedious as mixing it and measuring stuff out or putting it in the oven. Just like leaving it for 10 minutes. I'm like, this is great. And it makes me so happy.”

While both groups have very different schedules and different obligations that demand their time, across the board there is an appreciation for intentionally prepared food, where the task

itself is not stressful. As ethnic food does take more time to prepare, it can be confidently stated that college students are not engaging with their ethnic culture through preparing food due to time constraints. Post-college participants might not be engaging with their ethnic culture through food, but it was not explicitly stated that time constraints were the reason for this non-engagement.

### *Access in Stores*

The third prominent limiting factors that came from these interviews was the issue with accessing certain foods in traditional supermarkets. Across both post-college and college demographics the issue of food access was prevalent in discussions surrounding ethnic culture and identity. For context, most traditional supermarkets hold a variety of items, yet ingredients, spices, and condiments that are considered ‘non-white’ are condensed into one aisle, most often known as the ethnic aisle. This aisle can present a problem for people with a non-white ethnicity, as ingredients that are common for their cuisine are excluded in this aisle. Astrid explains her own personal experience with this barrier:

“And ethnically wise is just like barriers around, like finding certain foods because they [traditional supermarkets] don't have them. But then like, on the alternative side, like going to Latin stores, there's very few of them. I guess you consider that a barrier and the prices because they're imported, they're like a lot higher.

The “alternative side” that Astrid is describing is a way that she is trying to navigate including her ethnic culture in her food practices, but also experiencing limitations through this other avenue. For the food that she would like to make, it’s either taking extra time and money to go to



a specific grocery store that supplies those ingredients, or simply not making that ethnic food.

Cate also describes a similar experience:

“Like an "ethnic aisle" and it's like three different, ‘main’ cultures from the aisle. Okay, I guess if I'm like really in a pinch, I could get it but it's usually really overpriced and just not the best in terms of, the sizes or just...the brands. It's like, if I'm really in a pinch, like, I need soy sauce, I guess I'll go to the store and grab it.”

From Cate’s perspective, even going to a traditional supermarket is not ideal, as the ingredients that she would need are expensive. This creates a ‘lose-lose’ situation for people trying to engage with their ethnic culture through food; either way it is more expensive , the non-preferred brand or type, and is not convenient to participate. And post-college participants have very similar sentiments; however, these participants did feel that the foods that are a part of their ethnic culture were more readily accessible to them, unlike some of the college participants interviewed:

Interviewer: “So if I’m understanding correctly, those like holidays and family gatherings where the foods are from the traditional black culture, if they were not accessible to you that might hinder you partaking in your ethnic identity?”

Tracey Turnip: Yes. I'm gonna say yes to that question.”

Sasha Strawberry: “I don't feel like I see a lot of Middle Eastern influenced foods in a traditional grocery store. I mean, chickpeas in a can? Sure. I think we could do a better job of representing that population. But at the same time, I think if they did have the foods that I would want at a Publix or a Target, they probably would be so marked up, I end up going to the ethnic grocery store anyway.”

Noting that these ethnic foods are unnecessarily expensive universally, this feeling of accessibility for the post-college participants could come from more transportation access, more time, etc., which many college participants did not have.

Food access is a necessary pathway for being able to engage with one's ethnic culture through food. The ethnic aisle is seen by participants as lacking and expensive. Therefore, participants will look for other options like an ethnic grocery store, which are few and far between depending on where one lives. These barriers can be more easily navigated by the post-college participants, who could have more financial resources to spend on these items.

### *Cultural Acquisition of Knowledge*

While financial accessibility, time, and food access are all external factors that influence people's engagement with their ethnic culture through food practices, there was another theme that came across that wasn't caused from extrinsic factors: the acquisition of knowledge to prepare these ethnic foods. Almost all participants, across both groups, described not knowing how to cook the foods that were a staple for them in their childhood. Sasha Strawberry sums up the experience well when she said:

“You know, and you're probably going to find this to be a very common thing with your friends that you're talking to or whoever you're talking to. These women, assuming a lot of them are women. They don't use recipes. They don't use measurements. It's a little bit of this and a little bit of that.”

This more free-flowing way of cooking by the head of the household was a continuous theme throughout many of the interviews, as shown below.

Priscilla Pear: “I've been wanting to learn how to make certain dishes, but not only certain dishes, but I've been wanting to learn to find flavors that I have never known like, what are the precise combinations? What am I missing? I've always tried to approximate and always the way that you know Oma [her mother] would cook is she was not a recipe person. So it was very hard to learn from her because she was so fast and loose and she kind of cooked by instinct and certain things that were so reflexive to her and part of her just memory bank. She didn't know if it was a pinch or an eighth of a teaspoon or a dash or sometimes she would leave it out you know, depending on how she was feeling.”

Remi Raccoon: “My mom didn't teach me how to cook. She kind of cooks by like throwing stuff and like she measures by heart and a lot of the things she does like tamales we can't replicate that. It's just how she feels. The dough, she just knows it's ready when she feels a dough. And we don't know what like the measurements of that so we can't really replicate it unless we look it up online. And when you look it up online, there's a lot of whitewashed recipes of it so it's not the same.”

These quotes showcase how it is challenging to acquire knowledge about ethnic food preparation and replicate it. The more free-flowing form of cooking can be difficult to learn, and in situations like Remi's, sometimes parents or guardians will not teach their children how to cook these recipes. Even if the food was readily accessible and inexpensive, lacking the knowledge to prepare severely limits how much a person can engage with their ethnic culture through food.

Yet, participants also explained ways they are trying to navigate and access knowledge about food preparation. For Priscilla Pear, that was being gifted a cookbook for Iraqi recipes:

“I was so pleased to get the Iraqi cookbook from [her niece]... now I feel like I have a record of kind of how to make things taste right. So that's been recent, but I feel like I've also been trying to try to accomplish that for like my whole cooking life like I've always tried to make the rice just right and make the chicken tastes just right and make the hummus and the baba ghanoush taste just right and I never get consistent results.”

For college participants, much of that navigation includes contacting the person who made those foods, most often their mother.

Astrid Flynn: “it tasted like it had the essence of what it was supposed to taste like I'm like I don't know what I did. So I called my mom...”

Abby Apple: “And sometimes Tom [her friend] and I would cook sometimes; I think we helped Bren Beet one time cook. One time Bren had to FaceTime his mom to figure out how to cook things.”

Cate Cane: “But when I was first getting started, I was definitely asking my mom, hey, so give me the exact steps of like what I need. Yeah, there were times I'd be like, Oh, I put like this and then it tastes a little bit weird. She's like why would you put that in? I was like Oh-”

These experiences showcase how people from both groups navigate reclaiming their ethnic culture through food when lacking the knowledge on its preparation. It's important to note that part of the acquisition of cultural knowledge comes from family, who are seen as a key part of one's in-group identity and a source of cultural knowledge. A reclamation of this knowledge could potentially encourage more engagement with their ethnic food, therefore strengthening their in-group identity. Despite many factors that limit how often participants could engage with

their ethnic culture through food, there was still an exploration of different options, such as going to ethnic grocery stores or contacting family members to achieve some form of cultural engagement.

### ***Encouraging Factors***

While participants described several factors that hindered their participation in their ethnic culture through food practices, they also stated a major factor that encouraged participation: family and community. Family played a huge role, both for post-college and college participants, in providing a space through which cultural engagement could occur. The importance of family as an encouraging factor for ethnic food engagement relates back to identity theory as described in the Literature Review. One's identity acts within various social structures, such as family and community, and helps "organize an individual's "place" during an interaction" (Stets and Serpe, 2013). As one interacts with their family, who are a part of that ethnic culture, their in-group identity is strengthened. Pam Plum discusses engaging with her ethnic food with her family more often: "Back home all the time. I mean, we would get all my meats there, my parents would get their meats there. All the soda chips. Anything besides vegetables, we would get at the Mexican store". Astrid also states an analogous experience: "So I'll just speak about [my grocery shopping practices] here [in Montreal] just because I think in Vancouver my parents usually do most of the grocery shopping". As seen from these quotes, for college students, family provided a relief from the college constraints they experience while living independently. The family also has more income collectively than the college student, which can allow for more purchasing power for foods within their ethnic culture. As stated in the acquisition of knowledge section, many college students also look to family members, especially

mothers, to help them navigate cultural recipes and to pass down knowledge on preparing cultural foods. When college students are with their family, these members could also be preparing these foods for the family on a more frequent basis, as they know how to make them. This then translates to the college student being able to engage more with their ethnic culture through food.

The post-college graduates interviewed all had children, and one of the interviewees had grandchildren. When asked if children played a role in how they try to engage with their ethnic culture through food, there was a mixed response.

Sasha Strawberry: “Probably not. And that's another you know, I feel guilty about that.

But I mean, anytime my mom brings food they try it whether they like it or not, they try it... So I have a strong desire to do it [learn and prepare these cultural foods]. I just need to sit down and try to figure out how to like, create these things.

Tracey Turnip: “I mean, I have carried on with some of the traditions like having fish on New Year's. So yes, they're used to me doing that. So they probably would do it too. But if it's something they say, Okay, I don't like this. There's not any pressure on them - So there's no pressure on that. But yes, there are certain times that will have certain things and I think that's cultural and they've grown up with that. So they may carry that on into their own lives.

For Sasha, while there was an emphasis on wanting to pass on knowledge to her kids, and to prepare ethnic food for them, but that desire has not necessarily translated over into action. When discussing further, she stated her mother, who knew many of the recipes she would like to make, lived about an hour and a half away, making it hard for her to access that knowledge. For Tracey,

she continues to prepare cultural foods for her children, but does not put any pressure on them to eat or engage with those foods should they not enjoy the taste, etc. Despite a mixed response, one space that consistently allowed for cultural engagement with food for both college and post-college participants was holidays and family gatherings. Almost all respondents described these events as spaces in which cultural foods were always present.

Cate Cane: “I would say honestly any big holiday meal with my extended family like Christmas or Thanksgivings. Last Christmas was the first time that I had been home because I didn't go home for Thanksgiving this year. But Christmas being home and just seeing like, all the good food that I was missing out on was so nice to see. It's the normal, I feel like Christmas-y food. And then we'd have like Chow Mein and somebody brought these baked pork buns. And somebody made the soup, but I was kind of scared of so I didn't have. It smells really good. And yeah, they were making these Chinese chicken wing things. That's like, I think it's so nice to see.

Through Cate's quote, one can see that these events are not only special for the family connection, but also because they are times set aside to prepare and enjoy more time- and money-intensive foods that are from one's ethnic culture. Ethnic foods that cannot normally be prepared in a typical day or week could be prepared during these times, offering both college and post-college participants an opportunity to engage with their ethnic culture through food.

## *Emergent Themes*

### *The Idea of Health and the Colonization of Food*

Throughout many of the participants' interviews, the idea of physical health, and food choices being surrounded by what is deemed healthy was an interesting theme that emerged throughout the research. Many people described making food choices based on what they consider healthy. However, the idea of health was an interesting concept to be discussed - many participants described a harmful or negative mindset around food and around the idea of what is considered healthy. Priscilla Pear, for example, described how she views the current view of food on a societal scale:

“And also the mentality which is sort of I don't know, I feel like American food culture labels things a lot. Demonizes certain foods, it's very into kind of trends and fads and everything seems geared towards diet culture, and I don't like that at all. I don't feel like connected to that at all. I really credit my parents with having what I think is a very healthy and meaningful and intentional relationship to foods and flavors, which is like you eat and you enjoy it and you move on with your life and it was not like an obsessive or restrictive environment to grow up in. And I do associate that with more of like the European and Middle Eastern style of eating than the American style of eating.”

While not attributing this idea of healthy food to American culture, Remi Raccoon also describes these ideals and experiences with food: “And then I think with food there's, like body image issues as well...But some people have problems, like eating food and thinking about weight and all that sort of thing.” This demonization of food, and the overall negative mentality described could be a theme because a majority of participants were women or female-identifying; only one



interviewee was male-identifying. Gender is important to note in these experiences, as they provide context for why body image could be an emerging theme in the research. According to the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "women are more likely than men to have a negative body image. This may be because many women in the US feel pressured to measure up to strict and unrealistic social and cultural beauty ideals, which can lead to a negative body image" (*Body Image | Office on Women's Health*, n.d.).

This demonization of food did occur in one interview; the participant described specifically cultural foods she was eating as "bad". For example, she stated that the soup that was a part of her culture was "... too easy [to make]. And I think that's the bad habit that I'm getting into...". In addition, she described her mother sending her a specific type of meat "that I have just been eating with rice like a lot and it's really bad". From an outsider's perspective, the soup and meat she was describing sounded relatively healthy, but it is interesting to note that these foods that are unique to her ethnic culture she labelled as bad. This particular demonization of ethnic foods was something that was not expected to show up in these discussions. However, Dr. Somdev Banik theorizes that this food stigma for ethnic foods is because "ethnicity is perceived mostly in opposition to the national or the universal, where the ethnic identity is always the inferior other" (Banik, 2013). Therefore, ethnic food would be labelled as inferior in contrast to dominant food tastes, which are based in white nationalism. There has been a push in recent years to 'decolonize the diet', as the current global food system is based in colonialism and white supremacy (Bodirsky & Johnson, 2008). Decolonization could include the eradication of the 'ethnic aisle' in traditional supermarkets as described earlier, and a larger, macro-scale revision of the global food system to be more culturally diverse. Overall, it was interesting to see this moralization of food take place.

### ***Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research***

Because this was an undergraduate research study, one of the main limitations is sample size; the sample size was only 10 people. However, if these are the trends and experiences of only 10 people, further research could explore those experiences on a larger scale. The sample size of this research study it does not take away from quality of the data. Another limitation is the gender bias within the research; while the interviewees were not intentionally chosen because they were female, a majority of the participants were female. This could explain the emerging theme of body image and an overall negative mentality around food. Again, this limitation is not seen to diminish the quality or accuracy of the research in any way. Another limitation is geographic region; the interviewees were from three major locations: Oregon, Alabama and parts of Canada. This could cause potential bias as these spaces are not as culturally diverse as California or other states. This limitation again is not seen to diminish the quality of the data, as the goal of the research was merely exploratory and not intentionally trying to view the difference in the relationship between food, ethnic culture and identity in a more culturally diverse area.

One suggestion for further research would be an investigation into the gendered aspect of cultural identity and food practices; since the data was from a majority female audience it would be interesting to discover if the same sentiment was shared across a variety of other genders. Another suggestion for further research could be potential avenues for encouraging ethnic food participation that does not include family or internal navigation. What could be potential policies or institutional avenues that would allow for more engagement in one's ethnic culture through food?

## *Conclusion*

Food is an integral part in how one views their own personal identity. Spaces in which one can participate in cultural practices strengthens their in-group identity; many of these spaces include cultural food, making it a key part in that ethnic engagement. Across both college and post-college demographics, family and holidays where community could come together were key factors that encouraged one's participation in their ethnic identity through food. Opposingly, limiting factors and the degree with which they impacted these demographics varied. College students stated financial accessibility, time, food access, and acquisition of knowledge to be the main limiting factors in their participation. Despite these limiting factors, college students tried to navigate their participation by contacting loved ones with cultural knowledge or went out of their way to spend more time and money to engage with cultural foods. Post-college participants described time being a limiting factor; however, they overall have more resources and flexibility to engage with their ethnic culture through food practices. Discussions of body image and the moralization of ethnic foods was an emergent theme in the research, and can be traced back to the majority female gender in the study, as well as macro-level factors at play like colonization and white supremacy.

Food, culture, and identity are intertwined in a complex web, which is influenced by one's ethnicity and socioeconomic status. While there is research conducted on how culture and food practices are connected, and how identity and culture are connected, there is little research that connects food, culture, and identity. This research hopes to create a more holistic and dimensional approach between these three topics, while exploring the nuances and individual experiences of the participants.

Potential implications could be increased support to minority and BIPOC groups for issues such as food insecurity, while keeping in mind culture and ethnicity in their services.

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