

“Today Indian Food”
Perspectives of Aboriginal peoples on the foods in their
contemporary diets

by

Lise Rosalia Andrea Luppens

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Abstract

Much of the academic literature and many health promotion materials related to Aboriginal peoples and food reflect and propagate a problematic view of authentic Aboriginal cultures: that they are frozen in time and are in need of protection. This prevailing view ignores the reality that all cultures, and their cuisines, evolve and adapt through creativity and resilience. Most food research focusing on Aboriginal peoples centers around narrowly defined “traditional foods,” and little attention has been paid to what they themselves consider to be “traditional foods,” or the socio-cultural significance of contemporary food patterns. Because others have often paternalistically assumed to know what is in their best interests, Aboriginal peoples’ perspectives have seldomly been heard on such matters. The purpose of this project was to hear the voices of Aboriginal peoples about the meanings and values of foods in their contemporary diets. Participants, who self-identified as being Aboriginal persons, living in or near Terrace, British Columbia, were asked to take pictures of everyday foods, which were used in open-ended, semi-structured, photo-elucidated interviews. Themes identified in preliminary analysis were further discussed in a group interview. Analysis of these interviews showed support for some key issues documented in the academic literature, such as barriers that exist in accessing and using locally gathered foods. However, participants also contested some of the assumptions implicit in research and health promotion materials, such as the dichotomization of gathered foods as “healthy” and store-bought foods as “unhealthy.” Analysis showed that the meanings participants ascribe to food are context dependant; for example, different participants might consider a particular food a luxury, staple or “poor food,” depending on their backgrounds. Analysis also revealed that there are debates about what foods are considered to be “traditional.” The findings of this research urge us to reconsider some of the assumptions that inform research and health promotion activities targetting Aboriginal peoples.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Problem statement

In recent years, the diets of Aboriginal peoples in Canada have come under increasing scrutiny because of the disproportionately high rates of diabetes and other food-related health conditions in these populations. Much research and health promotion related to Aboriginal peoples and food focuses on “traditional” foods, generally defined as those foods constituting Aboriginal diets prior to contact with Europeans (Health Canada, 1995; Kuhnlein & Turner, 1991; Powers & Powers, 1984; Receveur, Boulay & Kuhnlein, 1997). These foods are generally presented as being healthier than store-bought alternatives (Foley, 2005; Health Canada, 1995; Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Receveur et al, 1997; Nabhan, 1998; Power, 2007; Willows, 2004). Academics and health promoters speak of the “loss” or “abandonment” of traditional foods, the increasing “westernization,” “acculturation” or “modernization” of Aboriginal diets, and the need for Aboriginal peoples to increase their consumption of traditional foods to preserve their health (Health Canada, 2000; Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Kuhnlein & Turner, 1991; Miewald, 2002; Receveur, et al., 1997; Willows, 2004). Some also acknowledge that these foods continue to have socio-cultural meanings and value (Feduik & Thom, 2003; Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Miewald, 2002; Powers & Powers, 1984; Willows, 2005).

While centered on the goal of improving the health of Aboriginal populations, unfortunately this dominant health discourse unintentionally risks supporting and propagating a problematic view of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Specifically, narrow views of food traditions serve to freeze cultures in time, ignoring that cultures, and cuisines, are dynamic. As a result, Aboriginal peoples today confront racist ideas of how they should or should not eat (and

face neo-colonial power relations of “experts” who try to “fix” the “problem” of Aboriginal diets.) Recommendations to return to traditional foods and lifestyles, especially those appealing to “thrifty genotypes” or perceived genetic differences between Aboriginal peoples and those of European descent, smack of the idea of “primitiveness” and the notion that Aboriginal peoples are not evolved enough to handle “modern” diets and lifestyles (Knight, 2005). In these ways, the literature reflects and propagates problematic views of Aboriginal peoples and cultures.

What are the views of Aboriginal peoples on the foods that comprise their contemporary diets? Do they share the same concerns as researchers and academics, or are their views different? What value do “newer” foods have in their lives? In contrast to the immense effort that has gone into quantifying the characteristics and uses of pre-contact, “traditional foods,” I found very little published qualitative research that focused on the meanings and socio-cultural significance of contemporary food patterns in Aboriginal communities in Canada. The paucity of research in this area may itself be a manifestation of the discourse which continually situates Aboriginal cultures in the past. Yet, given that values and meanings people ascribe to foods affects what they eat, the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples need to be explored in order to build a better understanding of their contemporary food realities. These perspectives may also challenge problematic discourses that inform health promotion practices and policies.

1.2 Purpose of study

The purpose of this project was to explore Aboriginal peoples’ perspectives on foods they eat today. The resulting “snapshot” of stories and perspectives helps address some of the gaps in socio-cultural research regarding Aboriginal peoples and food, and helps to increase understanding about the significance and meanings of contemporary food patterns of Aboriginal peoples living in northwestern British Columbia (BC). My goal is to help to destabilize some of the problematic perceptions of Aboriginal peoples and foods, and to inform

the development of food-related health promotion policies and programs that will be more appropriate and meaningful for these populations.

1.3 Research question

What are the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples, living in and around Terrace, BC, regarding the foods in their contemporary diets?

1.4 What brought me to this project

This research question stemmed from observations I made when working as a dietitian in Terrace and Kitimat, BC. I realized that, prior to moving to northwestern BC, Aboriginal peoples were largely invisible to me, and what little I “knew” of them was based upon popular stereotypes, in which they were either romanticized or vilified. As I started to work and live alongside Aboriginal peoples, I gained a lot of respect for my Aboriginal clients and colleagues, and I could no longer tolerate the racist stereotypes and undertones I observed in my work and personal life. I also became increasingly uncomfortable with how Aboriginal peoples were represented in discussions of health, food and nutrition. Through my graduate studies, I chose to explore these types of discourses and representations within the context of learning about the socio-cultural aspects of food and eating. One of my main goals was to understand how Aboriginal peoples construct their ideas of food and eating, as compared to how these ideas have been constructed *about* them. I chose to privilege their perspectives in the hope of contributing to more critical and informed health-promotion activities for Aboriginal peoples.

1.5 A word on words

Language constrains the ways we can view the world and our experiences within it. Some words are especially awkward and problematic, and therefore I don’t always feel that I can articulate what I am actually trying to say. As DeVault (1991) explains, such “insufficiencies of language” are symptoms of greater problems, namely a gulf between certain experiences and “the forms of thought available for understanding experience” (p. 5). It is likely that the terms

we use reflect the experiences and understandings of dominant groups. On this note, feminists have argued that vocabulary is often rooted in men's experiences (DeVault, 1991), and others have argued that "history," literally "his-story" (Smith, 1999), reflects only the views of particular groups (Furniss, 1998; Smith, 1999). Indeed, it is this notion that led me to this project in the first place, knowing that the image of Aboriginal peoples has more often been constructed by non-Aboriginal peoples than by Aboriginal peoples themselves. However, being aware of these realities still does not solve a very real problem: words are limiting, and yet we must use them. I explain my rationale and struggles with certain words below.

1.5.1 Aboriginal peoples:

I chose to use the term "Aboriginal peoples" in this research project, as opposed to "Native peoples," "Indigenous peoples," or other possible synonyms, simply because it appears to be an acceptable term commonly used in Canada at this time. In Canada, "Aboriginal peoples" is understood to include three groups of peoples: First Nations, Inuit and Métis (INAC, 2009). In this project, participants also used the term "Indian," which will be reflected in their comments, but which I have otherwise not used because, while some people may not mind, other Aboriginal peoples may object to this label (Francis, 1993).

Additionally, "the final 's' in ["Aboriginal peoples"] has been argued for quite vigorously by indigenous activists because of the right of peoples to self-determination. It is also used as a way of recognizing that there are real differences between different indigenous peoples" (Smith, 1999, p. 7). Terms such as these also have allowed different Aboriginal groups to come together, in their shared experiences of colonialism, to "learn, share, plan, organize and struggle collectively for self-determination" (Smith, 1999, p.7). However, while collective organization under the umbrella of "Aboriginal peoples" can create louder voices, such terms seemingly homogenizing the different groups that are subsumed under this label. In this project, I chose to

include the voices of peoples belonging to different Aboriginal groups, instead of only one group, because this reflects the diversity of Aboriginal peoples living in northwestern BC.

1.5.2 Non-aboriginal peoples:

While I am confident in my choice to use the term “Aboriginal peoples,” the term to describe those who are not Aboriginal is less eloquent. As Francis (1993) stated, “white is the convenient opposite of Indian but has obvious limitations. So, in this age of multiculturalism, does Euro-Canadian, an awkward term anyway” (p.9). Therefore, while also awkward, I chose to use the term “non-Aboriginal peoples” to denote those not included in the term “Aboriginal peoples.” I acknowledge that this distinction is difficult, given that “insiders” and “outsiders” to a particular social group are often difficult to define, especially given increasingly mobile populations, “mixed” relationships, and the constraints people face in their choice (or lack thereof) of identities (Fitzgerald, 2007).

1.5.3 Traditional foods:

In research and health promotion materials, “traditional foods” are generally defined in a very limited and limiting way, and are understood to be only those foods that were part of the diets of Aboriginal peoples prior to contact with European peoples. As I explore further in chapter 2, this problematic way of viewing Aboriginal cuisines and cultures presents cultures as static entities, where any change is viewed simply as erosion or “loss” of culture. I also feel that it is also problematic for a researcher to designate what is, or is not, traditional to the social group in question, especially if the researcher is an “outsider” to this group. Based on this thinking, in this project I avoided the use of this term, with the exception of seeking to explore participants’ meanings of the term and the foods they associate with it.

1.5.4 Gathered foods:

I borrowed the term “gathered food” from one of my participants and use it in this project to refer to those foods that are hunted, fished, gathered or otherwise harvested locally. This may

include items such as moose, fish, seafood, seaweed, berries, etc., and while they may be shared, traded or bought (generally from other Aboriginal peoples in the region), they are distinguished from commercially-prepared foods available for purchase in grocery stores. While perhaps not an entirely unproblematic term in itself, the distinction between “gathered foods” and “store bought foods” ultimately refers to the *source* of such foods, as opposed to its perceived *value* or *importance*, which “traditional food” implies. Therefore, I chose to use the term “gathered food” instead of “traditional food” because I approached this project with the assumption, based on my previous observations, that foods other than locally gathered foods could also be culturally significant for Aboriginal peoples. By choosing the term “gathered food” instead of “traditional food” I challenged the idea that *only* gathered foods can be considered authentically traditional to Aboriginal peoples and cultures, while I also created space to explore the different ways in which the term “traditional foods” might be used.

1.5.5 Store-bought foods:

I struggled with this term and its synonyms (“market foods” or “commercial foods”) because I feel that it reinforces a binary so often present in the literature: “store-bought food” versus “traditional food.” However, it was *because* I wished to explore participants’ views in relation to this binary that I occasionally asked questions specifically about foods available for purchase at local grocery stores. While my use of the term “gathered food” helped to address some of the connotations implied in the binary, its opposition to store-bought foods remains problematic in that it shifts the binary to have only a slightly different meaning. I take issue with such binaries because it is one of the ways that Aboriginal peoples and food are constructed, and is not necessarily the way that participants themselves view food. Yet, I find it difficult to *challenge* a binary without reproducing it to some extent. My struggles with these words and others emphasize the ways that language constrains our worldviews.

1.6 Layout of thesis

In chapter 2, I review the literature on Aboriginal peoples and food and illustrate how the dominant discourse of food reflects and propagates problematic representations of Aboriginal peoples. In chapters 3 and 4, I describe the research methodology I employed in this study and provide some detail about the context in which the research took place. In chapter 5, I explore the themes that arose from my discussions with participants. This chapter is divided into three thematic sections: perspectives on food and health, contextualized meanings of food, and views on traditions and cultural change. In between these three sections, I place “case studies” of specific foods to show how multiple themes intersect around individual foods. These case studies focus on seaweed; rice and potatoes; bologna and wieners; and chowmein. Finally, in chapter 6, I discuss the implications of these research findings, namely that researchers, health professionals and others working with Aboriginal individuals and communities need to consider that cultures, and their cuisines, continually change and one cannot make assumptions about the meanings of foods for Aboriginal peoples. I also outline possible areas for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In order to contextualize this research project, I first explore some of the problematic discourses¹ that exist about Aboriginal peoples. Next, I review some of the research and literature focusing on food specifically, showing how these works often reflect, support and propagate a problematic view of Aboriginal cultures.

2.1 Discourses of Aboriginal peoples and cultures

Stereotypes and representations of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and elsewhere are, for the most part, overwhelmingly negative. These negative stereotypes and representations are also persistent across time. Harding's (2006) review of British Columbian newspaper articles from the 1860s and 1990s reveals that, despite the passage of time, Aboriginal peoples continue to be represented in similarly negative ways, although recent articles are less overtly racist. He identifies that in these articles Aboriginal peoples are represented as inferior, primitive, and childlike, in need of protection, guidance and education (Harding, 2006). They are also described as being uncivilized, savage, emotional, greedy, wasteful, morally corrupt, lacking in impulse control, susceptible to corruption and an obstacle to progress (Harding, 2006). Claxton-Oldfield and Keefe's (1999) literature review similarly describes the Aboriginal image in popular thinking as lazy, dirty, drunk, poor and uneducated.

However, there are also several less dominant, but seemingly positive, representations of Aboriginal peoples, most often seen in films and advertising. These include the ideas of the "Earth Mother," the "Indian Princess," and the "Noble Savage," which present Aboriginal peoples as selfless, wise, nurturing and mystical (Dennis, 2008). These dramatically different

¹ "Discourse" in this context is simply taken to mean a way of talking and thinking about a topic (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2000).

representations of Aboriginal peoples can be reconciled when we understand that stereotypes and representations say little about the peoples supposedly being represented. Doxtator (1992) and Dennis (2008) argued that representations and stereotypes have less to do with Aboriginal peoples themselves and have more to do with the self-image and interests of those groups who create and propagate such racist ideas. Representations of Aboriginal peoples as inferior, childlike, and uncivilized reflect the dominant culture's view of itself as superior, rational and civilized, and has justified government policies and actions, such as the taking of Aboriginal lands and the creation of the Aboriginal residential school system (Harding, 2006). On the other hand, representations of Aboriginal peoples as wise, selfless, nurturing and mystical, speak to what non-Aboriginal peoples feel their own capitalist-consumer cultures lack, and thereby project onto Aboriginal peoples (Wall, 2005). Hence the appeal of "getting back to your roots" by "going native," that others have argued to be part of the appeal of New Age spirituality (Doxtator, 1992; Knight, 2005), and "playing Indian" at children's summer camps (Wall, 2005).

Despite the reality that stereotypes have little to do with the peoples or cultures in question, the effects of these attitudes are very real and shape the way others perceive and treat Aboriginal peoples. While past representations of Aboriginal people were responsible for overtly racist practices and policies, such as the forced assimilation strategies of the residential school system, the effects of harmful stereotypes continue today. Therefore, it is useful to gain some familiarity with the extant discourses about Aboriginal peoples. To that end, in the following section, I explore several closely related and overlapping representations of Aboriginal peoples and cultures: as primitive and child-like, as "real Indians," as static and unchanging, and as disappearing.

2.1.1 Representations of Aboriginal peoples as primitive and child-like

Aboriginal peoples have long been described as being "primitive" (Ramos, 1998). In this way, they have been presented as being at an early stage of evolutionary development (Ramos,

1998), “remnants of primitive hunter-gatherer groups from human prehistory” (Knight, 2005, n.p). People who hold these racist views likely believe themselves to be superior, more evolved, and more intelligent than Aboriginal peoples (Harding, 2006). This attitude relates to views of Aboriginal peoples as being “childlike” and “uncivilized” (Harding, 2006): “The Indians are children...their arts, wars, treaties, alliances, habitations, crafts, properties, commerce, comforts, all belong to the very lowest and rudest of human existence” (Greeley, 1859, in King, 2003, p. 84). Presented as child-like, they have been described as being emotional, lacking in impulse control, and susceptible to corruption (Harding, 2006). Additionally, being “primitive,” these children were, by definition, thought to be static and unchanging (Knight, 2005), “in a permanent state of ignorance, in need of learning from civilized teachers” (Ramos, 1998, p. 23). Deemed incapable of growing up on their own or managing their own affairs, Canadian governments, among others, rationalized treating their “Aboriginal children” as wards of the state (Ramos, 1998).

2.1.2 Representations of “real Indians”

Ideas of “Aboriginality” or “Indianness,” or what is considered to be authentic to Aboriginal cultures, are often based on how they were thought to have existed hundreds of years ago. “Whites picture the ‘real Indian’ as the one before contact or during the early period of that contact” (Berkhofer, 1978, in Harding, 2006, p. 227). The idea of “the Indian” has little to do with any one Aboriginal culture or tradition in particular, but is based on a jumbled blending of symbols of “Indianness” (Doxtator, 1992; King, 2003; Wall, 2005). This image might include peace-pipes, feather headdresses, face paint, teepees *and* totem poles, tomahawks, fringes, and four-strand-bone chokers (Doxtator, 1992; King, 2003; Wall, 2005). This exotic, romanticized, mythical figure, set in the past, is often taken by others to be what a “real Indian” is (Doxtator, 1992): “Stereotypes of Native Americans...lead [others] to believe either that Indians don’t exist anymore, or that Indians are very exotic people who wear feathers and live in ways vastly

different from their own” (Reese, 1998, n.p). Also, because of these ideas, Aboriginal peoples have sometimes been charged, even by judges and academics, with “not being ‘really Indian’” (Doxtator, 1992, p. 13). Because of these representations, Deloria (1969) argued that, Aboriginal peoples “begin to feel that they are merely shadows of a mythical super-Indian” (in St. Denis, 2004, p. 42).

2.1.3 Representations of Aboriginal cultures as static

These discourses paint Aboriginal cultures as being frozen in time. St. Denis (2004) wrote of the “construction of Aboriginality as a timeless, unchanging essence” (p. 41), which limits views of “authentic” Aboriginal practices to those which existed prior to European contact.

“Real Indianness” was represented in museums as all those traditions and technologies that anthropologists deemed to be existed before the coming of the European. To see change, or European influence, in the construction of an object, was to see loss of culture – acculturation. As a result, exhibits about native cultures were invariably labeled in the past tense” (Doxtator, 1998, in Frank, 2000, p. 164-5).

Similarly, Wall (2005) remarked that cultural change and adaptation are read as decay (p. 531). These ideas ignore that all cultures are always changing and adapting to new contexts: “‘Native culture’ is often seen...as being some monolith, non-changing thing, immutable and permanent. This is ridiculous. All cultures change and adapt. This [quality] is what makes them ‘culture’ and not ‘history:’ they live” (Pechawis, in Claxton, Townsend, & Loft, 2005). Because of this “loss of culture,” or “abandonment of traditions,” Aboriginal cultures have long been perceived to be disappearing.

2.1.4 Representations of “disappearing Indians”

Views of Aboriginal cultures as being static result in a negative view of change. We more often read about “loss,” “abandonment” or “erosion” of Aboriginal traditions and culture, rather than adaptation, creativity, or resilience. This language reflects and supports the idea that Aboriginal cultures are disappearing. This notion has several variations, including that of

extinction due to perceived physical incompatibility with “modern” living (King, 2003) and that of assimilation through education: “through education the Indians should disappear” (Ramos, 1998, p. 46). Regardless of the cause, this possibility of disappearance has prompted artists, intellectuals, “salvage anthropologists,” and other social scientists to document Aboriginal peoples and their ways of life before their “inevitable” extinction (King, 2003; Wall, 2005). Edward Curtis was one of these individuals, who spent the early part of the 20th century travelling North America, determined to photograph Aboriginal peoples before they “vanished” (King, 2003). However, instead of photographing his subjects as he met them, Curtis would carry with him collections of clothes, wigs and props with which to dress up his subjects if he found them not looking “Indian” enough (King, 2003, p. 36).

These views disregard the reality that cultures are dynamic and always adapting to the contexts in which they find themselves through a combination of outsider influences and insider creativity (Heldke, 2003). Certainly change is not always desirable, and Canada’s violent past of genocide, assimilationist policies, and dispossession has forced change upon Aboriginal cultures in brutal ways. But Aboriginal peoples are not simply powerless victims in this history. Their agency, resilience and creativity allows them to adapt to changing circumstances, technologies and ways of living, and to make choices about how they wish to live and eat. Aboriginal cultures continue to live, change and redefine themselves (Smith, 1999). To view Aboriginal peoples simply as victims of “westernization,” ignores the historical and socio-cultural influences that have led to adaptation and change.

2.2 Discourses of Aboriginal peoples and food

Researchers, health professionals and government agencies are not immune to supporting and propagating problematic discourses of Aboriginal peoples. Academic literature and health promotion materials concerning Aboriginal peoples and foods reveal some of the same problematic views explored above. This tendency is evidenced by the narrow definition of

Aboriginal food traditions and concerns regarding the “loss” of these traditions, as well as in recommendations to increase traditional food use.

In the academic and health promotion literature focused on Aboriginal peoples and food, one of the most striking observations I have made is regarding the tendency for “traditional foods” to be defined in very narrow terms. Academics generally define “traditional foods” as those foods from the local environment that were part of Aboriginal diets prior to contact with European explorers, traders, settlers and missionaries (Kuhnlein & Turner, 1991; Powers & Powers, 1984; Receveur, et al., 1997; Willows, 2005). These foods are frequently described as “local,” “natural” and “wild.” The juxtaposition of traditional foods with store-bought or “market foods,” as seen in the works of Fediuk and Thom (2003), Receveur et al. (1997), and Willows (2005), implies that traditional foods cannot be store-bought foods, and, likewise, that store-bought foods cannot be traditional foods for Aboriginal peoples. This idea is also evident in the backgrounder for Canada’s Aboriginal food guide, one of the national food guides developed by Health Canada, in which traditional and store-bought foods were again juxtaposed (Health Canada, 2007a). (See appendix A for a copy of this food guide.)

In contrast to this widespread use and understanding of the term “traditional foods” in nutrition research and education, I have seen how the term might be used in much more flexible ways. In my experience working as a dietitian in northwestern BC, occasionally First Nations colleagues or clients described foods such as fry-bread, chow-mein, pork and beans, fritters, China Lily soy sauce, and fried chicken to be traditional foods or “our foods.” Several academic articles also identified that foods introduced after contact with Europeans have been considered to be traditional by members of Aboriginal communities. In their research in the United States, Miewald (2002) and Powers and Powers (1984) noted that numerous foods introduced to Aboriginal peoples by Europeans are now considered to be traditional, including stews, rice, lard, baking powder, sugar, wheat flour, and bacon. In the Australian context, Foley (2005), observed that “there is a shift in how some Aboriginal community members refer to traditional

foods...colonial foods are sometimes considered to be traditional as they are the foods of several previous generations” (p. 32). (However, despite her observation, the author continued to use the term “traditional” exclusively for pre-contact foods.)

The variety of uses of the term “traditional,” as described above, raises the question: What does it mean to describe a food as being traditional? To better understand this word’s use, I turn to Humphrey’s (1989) exploration of the meanings that are associated with this term. While she acknowledged that there is little consensus about the definition of “traditional,” she observed that recipes are often deemed as such if they have been handed down through families, are used for holidays or special occasions, or symbolically represent a social group (Humphrey, 1989). Sometimes the reasons recipes are considered to be “traditional” are less clear, but she did state that the application of the word “traditional” to a recipe gives that food more power, more status and more meaning: “traditional recipes reveal values which create and reinforce a sense of identity with both past and present family and friends” (Humphrey, 1989, p. 168). The newer food traditions of Aboriginal peoples can be assumed to similarly reflect such meanings and values. Indeed, Foley (2005) pointed out that the resistance of some Aboriginal peoples to change from their “colonial” diets is understood as a resistance to break with family traditions and the more recent past.

Humphrey’s work suggests that we may view food traditions more flexibly, that they are open to interpretation and may change over time. How then do we understand the tendency for academics, health professionals and government agencies to continually define Aboriginal food traditions narrowly, focusing almost exclusively on foods that were part of Aboriginal diets hundreds of years ago? I argue that these limited definitions of food traditions reflect the views of Aboriginal cultures as dying, static entities, frozen in time. When what is considered to be traditional or authentic Aboriginal food is *only* that which was consumed prior to European contact, all other foods not meeting this criteria are described as “western,” “market” or “store-bought.” This perspective does not allow for an evolution in what foods might be considered to

be traditional, and therefore places strict parameters around foods that are viewed to be authentic to Aboriginal cultures.

The view of Aboriginal cultures as having static, unchanging essences leaves very little flexibility for understanding cultural change. It leaves only two options for interpreting dietary and cultural practices: pre-contact (“traditional”) or assimilated (“western”). Thus, change is often viewed as a process of “westernization,” assimilation and loss of culture. The incorporation of store-bought foods or restaurant foods is described as acculturation or “westernization” of the diet (Miewald, 2002) and the movement away from hunted, fished and gathered foods, towards store-bought foods, is often described as a “loss” or “abandonment” of food traditions (Health Canada, 2000; Miewald, 2002; Receveur, et al., 1997). In this way of thinking, Aboriginal people are presented as victims of the seductive forces of modern conveniences, and as irresponsible caretakers of their cultural traditions (St. Denis, 2004).

The limited “pre-contact” view of Aboriginal food traditions obscures the complexities of dietary change and further propagates the discourse of Aboriginal cultures as eroding and dying, rather than adapting and progressing. What if we looked at things differently? The reality is that all cultures, including Aboriginal cultures, are always changing and adapting (Heldke, 2003; Ross, 1994). Instead of speaking only about the “erosion of culture”, Heldke (2003) proposed shifting thinking to also consider a culture’s “autonomy, creativity and capacity for self-definition” (p. 186). She pointed to situations where colonized groups have creatively appropriated the foods of the colonizer, blending them with existing cuisines, thereby creating new food traditions. Although dietary change may not always occur in ideal ways, at any given time, cuisines may reflect numerous influences and traditions (Heldke, 2003). In her writing about Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia, Kelm (1998) supported this idea in her observations: “the land and sea were rich and the First Nations adaptive...new foods and new opportunities presented themselves...” (p.19).

Despite the reality that Aboriginal cuisines, like all others, are dynamic, the focus of much research and recommendations for Aboriginal peoples remains on narrowly defined “pre-contact” traditional foods. Researchers have worked to identify traditional food sources, to determine their nutritional composition, and to measure their current use (Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Miewald, 2002; Powers & Powers, 1984; Receveur, et al., 1997; Willows, 2004). Others have explored the barriers to accessing these traditional foods (Fediuk & Thom, 2003). Numerous publications discuss the relationship between traditional food use and health (Health Canada, 1995; Kuhnlein & Turner, 1991; Nabhan, 1998; Receveur, et al., 1997; Willows, 2004). This relationship is emphasized so heavily that in an article by Willows (2005) entitled, “Determinants of healthy eating in Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: The current state of knowledge and research gaps,” “determinants of healthy eating” is conflated with “determinants of traditional food use” (p. S33). This document implies that there is little or no role for store-bought foods in healthy eating for Aboriginal peoples. The conflation of traditional food with healthfulness is not uncommon, and frequently is the basis for the widespread recommendation that Aboriginal peoples increase their intake of traditional foods.

Recommendations for a return to traditional diets are especially problematic when they are rationalized by drawing upon the “thrifty gene” and other controversial evolutionary theories. These theories propose that Aboriginal peoples are prone to obesity and diabetes because they are ill-suited to the “western” lifestyle as a result of their evolution with “feast and famine” cycles (Health Canada, 2000; Nabhan, 1998; Knight, 2005). Knight (2005) argued that such theories and recommendations are racist, as they reinforce the idea that Aboriginal peoples are “primitive”. She also argued that these theories detract from adequate explorations of the social determinants of health affecting Aboriginal peoples, such as ongoing poverty and marginalization, and a history of dislocation, residential school experiences and systemic discrimination (Knight, 2005). These theories also create a sense of fatalism among health

workers and their Aboriginal clients which has meant that, at least in Australia, basic diabetes care protocols have not always been put into place for Aboriginal clients (Knight, 2006).

The suggestion that Aboriginal peoples should return to traditional diets is problematic for reasons other than Eurocentric evolutionary theories. While many individuals may wish to consume greater amounts of locally gathered foods, research shows that use of these foods is low, even in northern and on-reserve communities (Fediuk & Thom, 2003; Willows, 2004). Aboriginal peoples have identified numerous barriers to harvesting such foods: government licenses and quotas, poverty, environmental contamination, low stocks, privatization of lands, personal factors (i.e. time) and loss of knowledge (Fediuk & Thom, 2003). Despite these realities and challenges, low consumption of “pre-contact” traditional foods has had the effect of challenging the perceived authenticity of Aboriginal peoples and cultures: in Australia, “questions of indigenous identity continue to be raised because people don’t consume bush tucker all the time” (Foley, 2005, p. 27). The identity of Aboriginal peoples is called into question when they don’t behave in ways perceived to be authentically “Aboriginal,” such as eating these narrowly defined “traditional foods.” Knight (2005) also argued that the “preservationist” idea of returning to “some authentic, pure culture, untainted by European influence,” while unrealistic, is also problematic in similar ways as those suggestions that Aboriginal peoples should simply assimilate into dominant culture: “surely [they] can make up their own minds!” (p. 53).

2.3 Discourse and research: Changing perceptions

How much does the idea of “real Indians” inform the research that is carried out regarding Aboriginal peoples and food? Does the idea of “disappearing Indians” motivate those who seek to document “traditional foods,” their characteristics and uses? This is implied in Kuhnlein and Turner’s (1991) text on traditional plant foods: “Collective wisdom of resource use in natural environments known to Indigenous Peoples is disappearing in the face of

“modernization” and “technological development” (p.5). Is the push for a return to ancient, traditional ways an effort to save “the dying race?” Certainly, I am not suggesting that all research, literature and recommendations centered on Aboriginal peoples and foods are without merit or that a focus on locally gathered food systems is unwarranted. Rather, despite potential positive impacts, it is clear that these works often reflect, support and propagate problematic discourses of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. In contrast, this research project aimed to destabilize some of these discourses by inviting Aboriginal peoples to voice their own thoughts, concerns and stories about the range of foods they eat today.

Additionally, this project aimed to address a significant gap in the literature. While the majority of research focusing on Aboriginal peoples and food is quantitative in design, researchers have also acknowledged the sociocultural meanings and importance of “pre-contact” traditional foods. Willows (2004) stated:

traditional food is not only about nutrition, but forms the basis of social activity and of the maintenance of social bonds...[it] is an important indicator of cultural expression, an anchor to culture and personal well-being, an essential agent to promote holistic health and culture, and, is the direct link between the environment and health (p. 23).

Ross (1994) similarly stated that foods were important for exchange and for ceremonies and large gatherings. Others also stated that traditional foods reinforce Aboriginal identities and connections to family and ancestors (Miewald, 2002; Powers & Powers, 1984). However, given that traditions change over time, why assume that only pre-contact foods have sociocultural significance for Aboriginal peoples? Do contemporary foods not also play a major role in social activity, social bonds, culture, families and health? My review of the literature suggests that the meanings and stories attached to more recent food traditions and contemporary food patterns remains largely unexplored, although they may be of as much, or greater, significance to Aboriginal peoples today than centuries-old “pre-contact” food traditions. I found no published literature on this topic, and similarly, upon reviewing Canadian databases for Master’s theses and doctoral dissertations, I found only one qualitative thesis that explored the meanings of

food. This study was conducted with Anishnawbe women, but focused largely on health (Giuliana, 1995), which is only one of many ways of understanding food. In contrast, I designed my project to be broader, to explore the multiplicity of meanings that Aboriginal participants associate with contemporary, everyday foods. I discuss this research design in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Orientation and Research Methods

In this chapter, I outline some of my perspectives on carrying out research involving Aboriginal peoples, explaining how this informed my project. Then I provide descriptions and rationales for the research methodology I employed. First, however, I detail my orientation as a researcher, and explain some of the views and assumptions I held while carrying out this research.

3.1 Theoretical orientation

As all researchers do, I came to my research holding certain views and assumptions. One of the most important of these assumptions is the belief in the constructed nature of our realities: our life experiences can be viewed in many different ways and are likely to change over time. This view fits within a constructionist orientation, which holds that people interpret and construct their social realities (Patton, 2002, p.96). The ways in which we construct our experiences is understood to be shaped by many different factors, such as education, social class, gender, and racialization, and is therefore liable to vary from one social group to another. However, the views and understandings of all people are not necessarily given equal weight; indeed, it is the ideologies of particular fractions of society that are often imposed upon others and are presented as “the truth” (Smith, 1999). The constructions that more powerful groups create and propagate about others have very real consequences for marginalized groups such as Aboriginal peoples.

In this sense, I position my research within a critical paradigm, because my research was motivated by the observation that only particular constructions of Aboriginal peoples and food are present in mainstream and official discourse. Critical research is inherently political because

it acknowledges issues of power, critiques the status quo, and aims to create change (Patton, 2002). As discussed, I felt that constructions of Aboriginal peoples reflected and propagated problematic ideas of Aboriginal peoples and cultures, and I was interested in challenging this established mode of thought by examining the ways in which a sample of Aboriginal persons constructed their own food and eating practices. I was not interested in merely being a “fault finding cultural critic” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000); instead, I wished to contribute to a discussion in which the perspectives of Aboriginal persons on food and eating might be prioritized, and given at least equal weight, in comparison to “expert” or official discourses.

Like other critical qualitative researchers, I was faced with a significant interpretive problem. As Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) explained, there are several reasons why empirical data should not be regarded as the “whole truth” or simply taken at face value. These reasons include that “only limited aspects of a phenomenon lend themselves to being illuminated in a particular study” and that “social conditions, ideologies and communicative processes [operate] behind the back of the subjects, in their subconscious... which means that the results of interviews and questionnaires are ambiguous” (p. 134). Thus, participants’ words must be interpreted; their meanings are not always self-evident. In my research, although I was interested in exploring the constructions and ideologies that my participants hold, I realized that most people are not pondering these abstract ideas in their day-to-day lives. I did not expect that most individuals could easily articulate their perspectives on such matters, because their actions have more meaning than they know (Williams, 1995, p.582). As such, I chose to investigate what individuals had to *say* about their day-to-day experiences with food and eating, and explored their words for what meaning I was able to interpret from them.

3.2 Reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument (Patton, 2002), requiring the researcher to be reflexive about their ways of knowing. Patton (2002) defined “being

reflexive” as continually examining “what I know” and “how I know it” (p. 64). I have attempted to be reflexive throughout the research process and have found this practice to be useful in understanding my own position in relation to the research and the participants. In particular, I am a European-born, white, middle-class health professional. This identity immediately suggests possible power differentials, including being a nutritional or food “expert” with fixed ideas about healthy eating. For this reason, I generally presented myself to research participants, and potential participants, in the more humble role of a student, and not as a dietitian. However, through my training and life experiences, I have been exposed to particular ways of knowing about food, which center primarily on biomedical understandings of food and nutrition. I had to be aware of this orientation while collecting and analyzing data to ensure that I could also “hear” other views. Also, I came to this project with a particular purpose: to explore Aboriginal peoples’ constructions of food and eating. Through this exploration, my goal was to destabilize some of the problematic discourse that I have observed in my training and dietetic practice. My challenge, then, was to also hear and document views that I felt supported the dominant discourse. I addressed this by continuing to ask open-ended questions in my interviews, and by using prompts to encourage participants to share their views, even when I didn’t “like” what I was hearing. I also explored these challenges in my field notes.

However, I feel that in some ways my own background as a Belgian immigrant and dietitian also positively affected my ability to “hear” multiple perspectives. In particular, I grew up being aware that the way my family ate was different from other Canadian families, and was subjected to friends’ declarations that some of the foods I ate were “weird.” Later, I came to understand that there was no “one truth” about the meanings of food; foods could hold different meanings for different people. This view was strengthened through my work as a dietitian, as I was exposed to countless eating patterns and views about food. This work also positioned me well to understand how individuals think about food on a day-to-day basis and made me aware

that the meanings people associate with food are not always obvious. By putting food “under the lens,” I knew that I would be asking participants to think somewhat differently about the food in their everyday lives, and thereby had to interpret their words cautiously. In turn, this research has also made me much more aware of my personal views about food, as well as the perspectives that are put forth in nutrition education and professional training.

3.3 Reflections and considerations on research involving Aboriginal peoples

In addition to being aware of my position as a researcher, I had other issues to consider. Aboriginal peoples, in Canada and elsewhere, are a heavily researched group (Smith, 1999), and I recently heard an Aboriginal colleague say, “We have been researched to death.” Research involving Aboriginal peoples has a long and ugly history of being tied to colonial projects, the dehumanization of Aboriginal peoples and cultures, and the theft of artifacts and traditional knowledges (First Nations Centre, 2005; Smith, 1999). I have read and heard about research activities that were of no use to the populations being studied or, worse, that misrepresent those peoples and cultures that were “put under the lens” (Smith 1999). As a result of this history, steps continue to be taken to ensure that research involving Aboriginal peoples is respectful and reflects the needs of those being researched (Smylie, 2005). This is reflected in the recent proliferation of documents and books containing recommendations and guidelines for research involving these populations, such as those put forth by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the National Aboriginal Health Organization (CIHR, 2007; NAHO, 2008). From the inception of this project, I struggled with fact that I am a non-Aboriginal person carrying out research with Aboriginal participants. My position in relation to this marginalized population, and the challenges this presents, were the basis for much reflection, journaling, reading and discussion. I came to the point where I was comfortable with my decision to carry out a research project with this group, although I understandably expect to continue to face valid questions or

concerns from others regarding my intentions and approaches. Here, I outline some of my thinking in this area.

As I previously outlined, this project stemmed from my critical observations of how Aboriginal peoples and food are represented in the literature. Because I wanted to explore the perceptions of Aboriginal peoples on their own food-related practices, I was presented with the challenge of obtaining community support and input for the exploration of a topic that is relatively abstract, and where the benefits of such research may not be immediate or tangible. A study exploring constructions of food and eating practices is different from, for example, a health promotion project which aims to contribute to nutrition education programming, or a toxicological project which measures levels of environmental contaminants in locally gathered foods, where the health benefits may seem more tangible. The benefits are not so obvious with basic sociological research, and such research may raise more questions than answers. While I recognize that there may not be direct or immediate benefits for those individuals who chose to participate, ultimately, my goal is to build understanding and to encourage a more critical approach in health promotion activities targeting Aboriginal peoples. This project is built on the premise that constructions of Aboriginal peoples and food are important because these constructions frame how people think, what types of questions are asked, and whose voices are heard. In other words, ideas and constructions can reproduce, or challenge, power relations.

Because of the sociological and exploratory nature of this project, I had difficulty in explaining this project in order to obtain feedback from community members regarding its design. I did not want to proceed without discussion, input and guidance, but was presented with another challenge. From my review of the literature, it appeared that constructions about Aboriginal peoples exist about this large and varied “group” as a whole. For this reason, I was interested in hearing what a variety of Aboriginal peoples in Terrace had to say, regardless of their background, as opposed to exploring the views and perspectives of members of only one First Nation band. However, this meant that I could not simply approach a local band council

into order to obtain input and/or permission; I could not ask one group of leaders to speak for the variety of Aboriginal peoples in the Terrace area. Therefore, I chose to discuss my interests and ideas with Arlene Roberts and Nicole Bingham, two women whose work with the local Friendship Center and regional health authority pertained to Aboriginal peoples more broadly. From our discussions, it was clear that they were interested in this project and saw value in it (see appendixes B and C for their letters of support). Their interest and feedback encouraged me, and I set forth under their guidance. These women also helped me to connect with other people who also provided input on the project, and they continued to provide suggestions throughout the data collection process. As such, the “community consultation” for this project was a fluid, ongoing process. Therefore, while it was not the “community” that identified the need for the project and designed it accordingly, I was affirmed and encouraged by my interactions with these community advisors, the project’s participants and other individuals. As requested, I will be providing the local friendship center and the band offices of Kitsumkalum and Kitselas with copies of my final thesis.

Last, but certainly not least, I am not an Aboriginal person myself. I therefore may be viewed as an “outsider” researcher, raising issues about the assumptions and worldviews I hold, in comparison to those of the participants. Here, some academics would advocate for participatory action research (PAR) or community based research (CBR), whereby “insiders” are involved at every step of the research, from the identification of the research problem/question, project design, data collection, analysis and dissemination and/or application of results (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006; Strand, Marullo, Cutforth et al., 2003). While I support this type of research in theory, given the exploratory socio-cultural question behind this project, as well as the time and financial constraints inherent in a Masters level research project, I did not feel that this would be a feasible approach. Having decided against PAR and CBR, I was faced with concerns that, because I am not an Aboriginal person, I am not in a position where I am able to talk about issues involving Aboriginal peoples, or able to adequately

interpret what participants have shared with me. However, here I am motivated by the words of one of my professors at Queen's University, Dr. Katharine McKittrick (WMNS 340, Fall 2007), who said something along the lines of: "If we decide not to talk about certain issues because we do not feel comfortable about our positions in relation to those issues, then ultimately there are fewer people discussing and exploring important issues that pertain to marginalized groups." From her comment, I take that I might have something useful to add to conversations about issues involving Aboriginal peoples, even though I am not an Aboriginal person myself.

For all the reasons discussed above, I am careful in how I position this research. Specifically, I do not position my work as "post-colonial," because, as Smith (1999) argued, colonialism *continues* to frame the indigenous experience, so the modifier of "post" is not meaningful. She also quoted Aboriginal activist Bobbi Sykes who, in speaking at a conference on post-colonialism, said, "What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?" (Smith, 1999, p.24). Similarly, while my research *aims* to be "anti-colonial," I recognize that this term is also contested and therefore I am hesitant to declare my work as such. I am aware that the very fact that I am in a position to carry out this research project stems, in part, from the fact that I am supported by the types of institutions that have long been linked with colonial interests and projects. Politically speaking, funding agencies and research institutions ensure that money, space and support are provided for research involving Aboriginal peoples, especially health-related research. These organizations enabled me to carry out this project. However, the actions of these powerful social structures may also be based on certain constructions of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Therefore, despite my intentions, I am faced with the question: how does one determine if their work is truly "anti-colonial?" While I have yet to explore this question more fully, at this point I take Trinh T. Minh-ha's (n.d) criticism seriously: "...once more *they* [academics, anthropologists in particular] spoke. *They* decide who is 'racism-free or anti-colonial,' and they seriously think they can go on formulating criteria for us" (in Smith, 1999, p.

73). For reasons such as these, I label my work as “critical,” while hoping that it can be seen to contribute to anti-colonial scholarship and activism.

3.4 Research methodology

The majority of food-related studies involving Aboriginal peoples focuses on health and nutrition, and makes use of quantitative research designs, thereby generating numerical data and answering specific types of questions. In this project, I asked a different type of question, and thereby required a different methodological approach. In particular, qualitative approaches are particularly appropriate for exploring topics about which little is known (Patton, 2002), and in this case, in order to begin addressing the research gap I identified in the literature, I felt that such an exploratory study was necessary. Therefore, I based this study on open-ended individual interviews to allow participants to raise any number of relevant themes and concepts. This approach was approved by the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board. The details of the methodology I employed are described below.

3.4.1 Location: Why Terrace, British Columbia?

Terrace is my home. I have lived in this area for almost five years, studying and working, and through that time have built relationships with Aboriginal individuals and organizations. I plan to remain in the area indefinitely, which is ideal for continuity and accountability to participants. This factor may have been an important consideration for participants in this project, given the history of research involving Aboriginal peoples. My physical proximity also facilitated contact with participants, and allowed me to easily accommodate their schedules for face-to-face contact.

In addition to being my home, Terrace was also an interesting location for this research project because it is neither a small isolated community, nor a large urban center. This means that participants had varying levels of access to foods from the local environment, in addition to a wide variety of foods available at local grocery stores and restaurants. Therefore, I believe this

choice of location allowed for a richer exploration of participant perspectives on food and eating than if access to either locally gathered foods or store-bought foods were limited. Given that roughly half of Aboriginal peoples in Canada live in urban centers (INAC, 2009), and not in small, isolated communities, participants' views may also be relevant to issues that affect those living in more urbanized environments.

Finally, Terrace is home to Aboriginal peoples from numerous nations. According to the 2006 census, the Greater Terrace Area has a population of 18,450 people, 3780 of whom are Aboriginal persons (Statistics Canada, 2008). While it is the Tsimshian First Nation that is most often recognized in this area, because the City of Terrace exists within its traditional territories, individuals from many other Aboriginal communities reside here as well. As a case in point, the local Friendship Center carried out a small survey on National Aboriginal Day, 2008, in which a significant proportion of respondents were from the nearby Gitksan, Nisga'a, Tahltan, Haisla and Kitsoo Nations, First Nations that are based in northwestern BC (Kermode Friendship Center, 2008). However, there were also participants who identified as being Métis, or as belonging to the Carrier, Cherokee, and Squamish Nations, nations whose traditional territories lie further afield. For this project, I wanted to speak with Aboriginal peoples from a variety of backgrounds, not just those from only one band or nation, and so Terrace also offered this opportunity.

3.4.2 Community input

As previously discussed, two local Aboriginal women acted as community advisors to this project. Prior to my final research proposal submission, one of these advisors helped me to organize a small luncheon in order to obtain more input. Some of the suggestions that came from this meeting included recruiting participants from a variety of age groups, and including some individuals who were living with diabetes and/or heart disease. At the suggestion of this advisor, I also introduced myself and the project via a letter of introduction, which was emailed

to the band councils of two local First Nations bands, as well as to the staff at the local Friendship Center (see Appendix D). In this letter, I also encouraged individuals to contact me should they have any questions, suggestions or concerns about my project. Unfortunately, this particular strategy did not yield any further input. However, I did stay in contact with my community advisors throughout the duration of my project, and continued to seek their input and advice as needed.

3.4.3 Recruitment

I recruited participants who lived in or near Terrace, British Columbia, who self-identified as being Aboriginal persons. Given the contested nature of Aboriginal identity (Lawrence, 2004), concerns regarding status, non-status, “mixed” ancestry, or origins were not considerations here; individual self-identification as being an Aboriginal person was sufficient for participation in this project. I also did not specify to what nation or band participants needed to belong, nor did I have requirements regarding income, employment, gender, etc. Inclusion criteria were limited to local Aboriginal participants over the age of 18 with the ability to converse in English.

Initially, I recruited participants in an “open” manner, and over the course of my data collection moved towards more purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). In this way I was able to recruit participants from a variety of age groups, including several individuals who had been diagnosed with diabetes, as had been suggested by community members. I began by approaching individuals I already had connections with, and proceeded with “chain sampling” or “snowball sampling,” in which potential participants were identified by those participants already interviewed (Patton, 2002, p. 243). I chose this approach, as opposed to seeking participants through flyers or newspapers, as I felt that it would enhance the motivation and comfort of those choosing to become involved (Standing, 1998). Also, two other individuals volunteered to participate when one of my community advisors spontaneously introduced me

and my project at a workshop that we both attended. Of these two people, only one ultimately participated in the project; the other did not return my telephone calls after our initial meeting. All other individuals who were recruited completed one individual interview. Of the 10 people successfully recruited, I knew three prior to initiating my research project. Three others were individuals that I knew to some extent but their recruitment was greatly facilitated by other participants, and four were recruited directly through other participants.

3.4.4 Participants

From early October 2008 to mid January 2009, I completed 10 interviews with a total of 11 participants. (An additional participant unexpectedly joined the project by sitting in on their spouse's interview and contributing significantly to the conversation. Because her words were also audio-recorded, I asked for her consent to participate in the project after the interview was completed.) Nine women (W) and two men (M) participated, and are categorized into three age groups:

- Four participants between 25 and 40 years old: 27W, 31W, 36W, 38W
- Four participants between 50 and 60 years old: 52W, 53W, 58M, 58W
- Three participants over 70 years old: 72W, 73M, 77W

Numerous Aboriginal groups were represented among this small group of participants: six of the participants primarily identified with the Tsimshian nation, one with the Haisla nation, and one with the Nisga'a nation. Three others had connections to more distant Aboriginal groups – Cree, Cherokee and Inuit. I have listed only the primary group with which participants identified, but many are of mixed ancestry, with parents or grandparents of other Aboriginal and/or non-Aboriginal ancestry as well. All participants had lived in or near Terrace for many years, with the exception of one woman who was working in Terrace at the time of her interview, but who usually resided in Prince Rupert (147 km West of Terrace). I collected additional demographic information from participants, including their household membership,

marriage status, number of children (if applicable), educational experience and current and/or previous occupation(s) (see appendix G). I collected this information primarily to guide my questions during their individual interviews.

3.4.5 Data collection

This project involved 10 individual photo-elucidated interviews and one follow-up group interview. This combination of data collection strategies allowed for the collection of richer data than would have been possible from using only individual interviews or group interviews. The use of photographs allowed participants to have a more active role in the project and additionally, because it drew attention to a physical object, away from the participants, they may have perceived the interview as less intimidating than the more usual “question and answer” type of interview (Power, 2003).

Because little information was available on the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples on contemporary food and eating patterns, I took an exploratory approach in this project. I began with semi-structured pilot interviews, using primarily open-ended questioning, which allowed me to become familiar with the issues of concern and the language participants were using before proceeding with additional individual interviews and the group interview. This approach also allowed participants to speak to what they thought was important, relevant and meaningful. This style of interviewing contrasts with structured interviews or questionnaires, where the researcher presumes to know what topics and issues might be of importance and places participant responses within pre-formed categories, thereby constraining participants’ responses and limiting the exploratory aspects of the research (Patton, 2002). Also, given that some individuals tend to dominate group interviews, starting with individual interviews ensured that all participants had the opportunity to share their perspectives. However, group interviews also have their advantages and were used here to further explore specific topics and themes emerging from individual interviews (Morrow, 2005). Strengths of group interviews include

that the interaction between group participants may reveal types of information not revealed in individual interviews. A sense of camaraderie and “safety in numbers” may make it easier for participants to articulate common sentiments that may otherwise be difficult to express in individual interviews (Patton, 2002). At the same time, however, participants may not feel unanimously about an issue and the focus group can provide an opportunity for participants to explore why there might be a diversity of perspectives, a process that may yield much rich data (Kitzinger, 1994). In these ways, individual and group interviews can reveal different material and can be seen as complementary data collection methods (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I organized one follow-up group interview after the completion of the 10 individual interviews.

3.4.6 Pre-interview

I met with each participant at least once prior to their individual interview. At this initial meeting, I reviewed with them the letter of information about the project and the instructions for taking photographs (see appendixes E and F). In addition to these documents, the participant kept one of the two copies of their reviewed and signed consent forms (see appendix G). I also chose to collect demographic information at this time (see appendix H), because I wanted to separate these closed-ended questions from the open-ended interviews. Also, when needed, I provided the participant with a disposable camera during these meetings – other participants used their own digital cameras. After this initial meeting, I was in telephone contact with each participant to organize interview dates and times, to arrange for camera pick-up, if needed, and to remind participants to take the requested photographs. I collected the disposable cameras, brought them to be developed and had those pictures placed onto compact discs. The photos on these discs, as well as those on participants’ camera memory cards, were then viewed on the personal laptop computer I brought with me to each interview. Participants photographed an average of 11 different food items or meals in preparation for their interviews, ranging between six and 19 items/meals. However, a greater number of photos were prepared for and viewed at

each interview (between six and 31, averaging 15), because in most cases participants photographed individual foods more than once.

3.4.7 Interviews

Participants and I arranged interviews at a time and location of their choosing. One interview was held in my home, one was at the local public library, four were at participants' places of employment, and four were in participants' homes. The average length of the interviews was one hour 45 minutes, and they ranged between one hour 30 minutes and two hours 20 minutes. All participants had given their signed consent for our discussions to be recorded, and thus each interview was recorded with an audio-recorder. I also took some notes while participants were speaking, so that, without interrupting their train of thought, I could record topics they raised about which I wanted to ask further questions. We began the interviews by reviewing and discussing the foods in each of their photographs. After discussing these foods, and others that arose in the conversation, I then asked an additional set of questions to encourage participants to share their perspectives on several other topics (see *interview guide*, below). At the completion of the interview, participants signed a photo release form in which they detailed how and which of their photographs I might use for further purposes (see appendix D). Finally, I provided participants with a \$20 gift certificate to the grocery store of their choice as a small token of appreciation for their time and efforts.

3.4.8 Interview guide

I used an interview guide to assist me during the interviews. My aim was to have participants speak freely about the foods they had photographed or otherwise mentioned in our discussions. I designed the questions and prompts to encourage participants to share stories, sentiments and thoughts about the foods they were discussing. In addition to these open-ended questions and prompts, I also asked questions about several specific topics. As such, the

interviews had essentially two parts: in the first, we reviewed and discussed the foods they had photographed and, in the second, I asked them a set of specific questions.

I viewed the interview guide as a flexible tool and proceeded with the expectation that my questions would change over the course of the project. I modified the guide as I became more familiar with the language my participants were using and the issues that were important to them. While I did not do a formal piloting of my interview guide, I quickly learned which questions were confusing or poorly structured and either rephrased or removed them. I also added new questions, and adjusted the order in which I asked them so that participant responses were less likely to be affected by the topics of preceding questions (see appendixes K and L for initial and final interview guides, respectively). For example, a few participants used the term “Indian food” and so I subsequently asked other participants about their understandings of this term. In another case, at the suggestion of one of my community advisors, I added a question about residential school experiences and their effects on food and eating. However, despite this interview guide, and the modifications I made to it, I tried to “go with the flow” and make the interviews feel like natural conversations. As a result, each interview evolved somewhat differently.

3.4.9 Post-interview

After the completion of each interview, I wrote field notes, in which I documented my reflections, interpretations and questions about the interviews and other aspects of the research process. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim using Express Scribe transcription software (©NCH software, 2008). After each pause in the participants’ speech, I started a new line of text, as I felt that this would best retain the “feel” of their words in the transcripts. For the same reason, I choose keep extraneous words and sounds in the transcripts, such as “um,” “ah,” “like,” and “you know.” Once I completed transcribing each interview, I provided a copy of the transcript to those participants who indicated they wished to receive one. Although these

participants had the opportunity to review, add to or modify their statements, I did not hear back from anyone about their transcripts. I also printed off each transcript, reviewed it and created a post-interview summary, highlighting the main topics and themes that were raised by the participant (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These summaries allowed me to view participants' comments "in context," and as with the field notes, assisted me in identifying questions or strategies to consider in later interviews (Patton, 2002). Finally, using Atlas.ti, version 5.5.9 (© 1993-2008 ATLAS.ti GmbH, Berlin), a qualitative data management software program, I proceeded with open coding of the transcripts. As such, I carried out preliminary data analysis concurrently with data collection, an approach that allowed me to be responsive to the emerging data by adapting questions in subsequent interviews as needed.

3.4.10 Group interview

I arranged a follow-up group interview after I completed the individual interviews. During their initial meetings with me, participants had given their signed permission to be contacted regarding this group session, and I attempted to invite them all through telephone or e-mail contact. Of the 11 original participants, seven attended. (Of the four who did not participate, one had moved, two had other commitments and one did not return my calls.) I had several purposes in arranging this group session: to thank participants for their involvement in the project by getting them together for a meal, to share with them some of the themes and topics that had arisen in the individual interviews, and to provide them with the opportunity to contribute further to these topics. I used the participant summaries I had created to prepare four topic summaries for this session. Participants touched on many themes and topics in their individual interviews, but I limited these summaries to four topics that I thought were socio-culturally relevant and that I thought would be of interest to the participants: bologna and wieners, gathered foods, traditional foods and traditional food recommendation (see Appendixes M, N, O and P for topic summaries).

This group interview was held in early February 2009 at the local Friendship Center. All participants signed consent forms before participating and gave their permission for the session to be audio-recorded. After eating lunch together, I provided participants with copies of the topic summaries. I read each summary out loud to the group, and then facilitated a discussion about the topic, encouraging input from all participants and asking questions for clarification as necessary. The topics were covered in just under two hours, and this sharing and discussion was audio-recorded. Participants received a \$10 gift certificate as a small token of appreciation for their time and contributions. I then transcribed the group interview and created an interview summary in which I contextualized participants' comments by organizing them by participant and by topic.

3.4.11 Data analysis

I began data analysis after the first interview and continued with this analysis throughout the data collection process. While I made use of photographs in this project, they were primarily intended as a tool to facilitate the interview process, and therefore I did not analyze the photographs themselves. Instead, this preliminary analysis included both the interview summaries and line-by-line open coding of the interview transcripts (Charmaz, 2006). To assist with the coding, I used Atlas.ti qualitative data management software. As I moved deeper into analysis, I modified the coding scheme and added, revised, combined and deleted codes as needed, and then re-visited the transcripts using a final list of about 90 codes. I then moved from descriptive coding to more conceptual coding by using these codes, and additional software functions, to assist in the identification of categories and themes (Morse, 2004). Given that the purpose of this project was to explore Aboriginal peoples' own constructions of food and eating, as opposed to how it has been constructed *for* them, analysis also focused on the identification and exploration of such constructions.

3.4.12 Participants' quotes

In this thesis, I use participant quotes as much as possible. I feel that presenting the findings in this manner adds to the richness of the text, and the credibility of my interpretations. However, I did need to consider how I presented participants' words. As Standing (1998) pointed out, people (researchers included) do not speak in grammatically correct ways, and when spoken words are translated to written text, the result is often less than eloquent. She argued that there are gaps between the spoken word and the written word, as well as "between the spoken word and the academic representation of the spoken word" (Standing, 1998, p. 190). In these ways, researchers' representations of participants' voices reinforce "hierarchies of knowledge and power" (Standing, 1998, p.190). I indicated above that I retained many extraneous words and sounds (ums, ahs, etc) in the transcripts, as I felt that this best captured the essence of participants' comments for use in analysis. However, I did not wish to include such unedited comments in this thesis, as I felt that this would poorly represent the participants. For this reason, and for ease of reading, I "tidied up" the quotes by removing some of these sounds and words. Some comments may still sound somewhat awkward, which I would argue is primarily the product of translating the spoken word into written text, and not necessarily participants' understandings about the subjects they are discussing.

In my writing, I use quotes from the individual interviews and the group interview. To help the reader contextualize these comments, I identify those quotes that were derived from the group interview, either preceding or following the quotes (i.e. "Bridget, 36, group interview"). Most quotes, however, are not indicated in this manner, as they are from the individual interviews.

3.4.13 Confidentiality

I employed a number of strategies to ensure the confidentiality of the participants and the information they shared in their interviews. For example, I did not use participants' names, or

other names, in their transcripts, participant summaries and topic summaries; I used codes as needed. These documents were kept on a password protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet, separate from the signed consent forms and demographic questionnaires. In the writing of this thesis, I assigned each participant a pseudonym, and kept personal information by which others could identify them to a minimum. After the completion and defense of this thesis, audio-recordings will be burned onto compact disc, kept in a locked filing cabinet, and destroyed after five years.

For several reasons, I was not able to guarantee complete confidentiality of participants in this project. Because of the recruitment strategies I employed, even in early stages of data collection participants could have been aware of the identity of one or more of the other participants. Additionally, the seven participants who took part in the group interview obviously were introduced to each other, and would have been privy to the comments they shared in that setting. I asked that they not divulge what was shared by other participants in that group interview but I cannot guarantee that they fulfilled this request. I made participants aware of this risk in the letter of information I gave them about the project, which we reviewed again prior to signing the consent forms for the group interview. Also, I had originally planned on including brief biographies for each participant in an appendix, but decided against this because I felt it would compromise their confidentiality. Because some participants belong to relatively small communities, a local person reading this thesis may easily be able to identify participants by their age, gender, band membership and background information.

3.4.14 Quality/trustworthiness

I employed strategies to ensure quality (trustworthiness) throughout the research process. These approaches included the development and modification of the interview guide, through which I posed primarily open-ended, non-leading questions, to ensure that I minimally influenced participants' responses. With the use of Atlas.ti software, I systematically reviewed

and coded each interview transcript, and once I had devised the final coding scheme, re-coded each transcript. The participant summaries I created helped to ensure that I continued to view participants' comments "in context," an important consideration in qualitative research in particular (Patton, 2002, p.566). Additionally, I wrote "memos" into the Atlas.ti file, and kept field notes in which, among other things, I documented my observations and reflections during the coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In these field notes, I also asked questions of the data, cross-checked my interpretations to ensure they were well supported, and explored "negative cases" (Patton, 2002, p.554). The memos and field notes added to the transparency and validity of my findings, by documenting the links that I made as I moved from textual to conceptual analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As well, in writing this thesis, I frequently highlighted contrasting perspectives, in order to show "multiple truths" (Patton, p.575).

I was able to "check back" with participants in several ways. First, as requested, I provided some participants with transcripts of their individual interviews, but as I previously indicated, no one contacted me with any concerns about the content of these transcripts. However, the group interview, in which I presented some of my preliminary analysis, served as a useful means for further discussion. I noticed that in this interview participants spoke with the same "voice," and shared similar views, as they had in their individual interviews. This tendency, and the fact that they did not raise any conflicting or "new" views at the group interview, added to the validity of the findings. I also received additional feedback from one participant, who reviewed an earlier draft of this thesis and felt it accurately reflected her views and those of other participants who participated in the group interview. All these processes added to trustworthiness of this research (Patton, 2002).

Chapter 4

Contextual Background

So that the reader understands the specificity of the research, here I present some additional information about the context in which the research was conducted. In this section, I describe the geographic location of the research project, and the different communities to which participants were connected. Additionally, another research project involving food and First Nations people was being carried out in the area at the same time as my own project, therefore I briefly discuss that project and the possible impacts it had on my research. I also introduce two participants in particular, as their “voices” differed somewhat from those of the other participants.

4.1 Geographical context



Figure 1: Location of Terrace in North America and BC

(maps reproduced with permission from Travel BC and Kermoder Tourism)

Terrace is a community in northwestern BC alongside the Skeena River. The Greater Terrace Area, which includes the neighbouring communities of Thornhill, Jack Pine Flats, New Remo and others, is home to about 18,500 inhabitants (Statistics Canada, 2008). It lies 147 km east of the west coast and the port city of Prince Rupert, 60 km north of the Douglas channel and the port city of Kitimat, and 577 km west of Prince George (Kermode tourism, 2009). Vancouver lies south, 1355 km by road (via Prince George), or 692 km as the crow flies (Map Crow, 2009), requiring about two hours flying time with the commercial airlines servicing the area. Terrace has three major grocery stores, several convenience stores, and some specialty food shops, as well as over 50 restaurants, cafes and fast food outlets (Northern Health, 2009). There is also a farmer's market that runs from May to October, where among crafts, baked goods and preserves, one can purchase local produce, eggs, meat and seafood. Some residents may also obtain food by fishing in the ocean or nearby rivers and tributaries; hunting for moose, deer, bear, and other wildlife; and gathering berries, herbs and other edible plants.

While most participants had lived in or near Terrace for many years, in their interviews many made reference to other communities to which they were connected. For the benefit of readers not familiar with northwestern BC, a map of the area and brief descriptions of specific First Nations communities follows.

Port Essington (“Spokeshute”) was a cannery town on the south side of the Skeena River, 97 km southwest of Terrace, between Terrace and Prince Rupert. In the late 19th and early 20th century, First Nations peoples, especially Tsimshian people, lived and worked there alongside Japanese-Canadians and European-Canadians. Six participants had either lived there in their childhoods, or family members had lived there, prior to moving to other communities in the northwest in around the 1950s. Port Essington is now a ghost town.

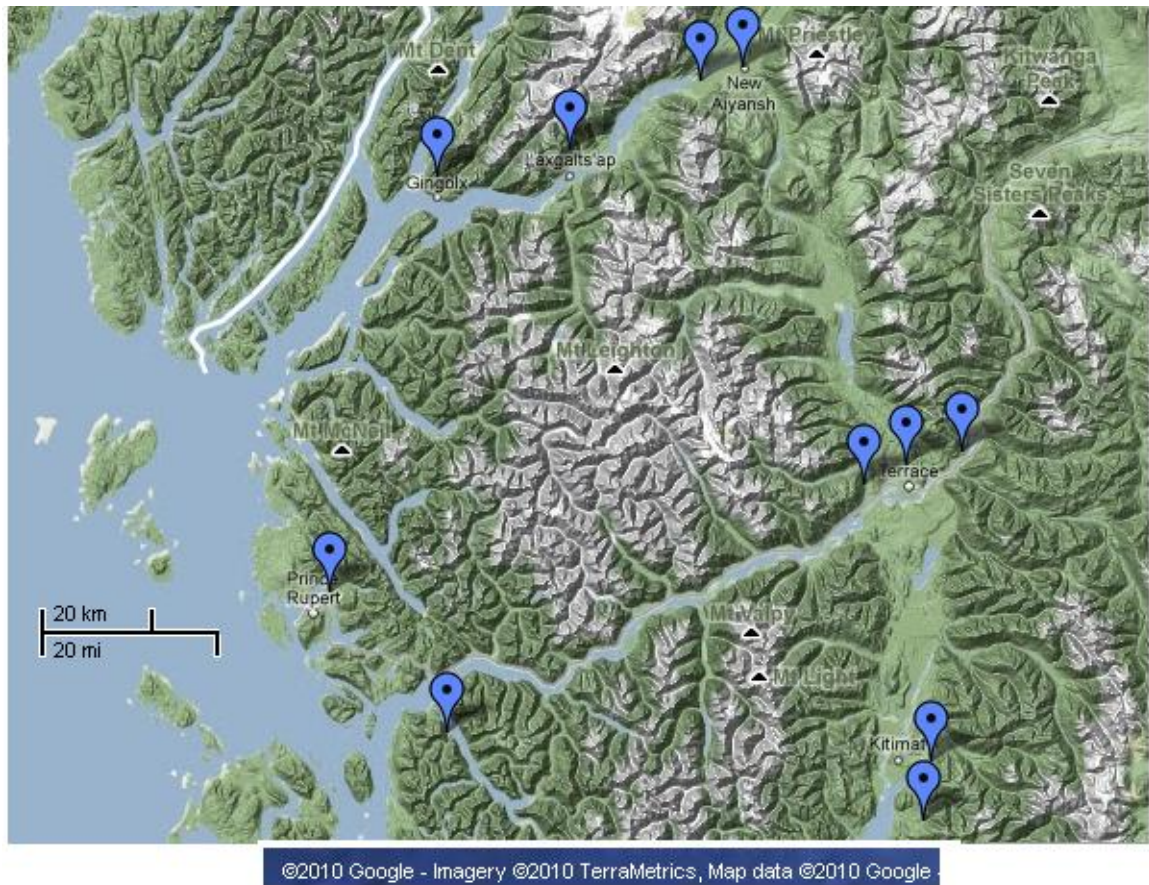


Figure 2: Communities in northwestern BC of significance to this project

Kitsumkalum (“Kit-sum-kay-lum”) is a First Nations village that lies about 5 km West of Terrace on Highway 16. It is home to approximately 250 people of the Kitsumkalum band of the Tsimshian nation (Statistics Canada, 2008). Seven participants that took part in this project lived in this community at the time of their interviews.

Gitaus (“Git-ows”) is a reserve of the Kitselas band of the Tsimshian nation, situated about 20 km East of Terrace (Kermode Tourism, 2009). It is home to just under 200 inhabitants (Statistics Canada, 2008). One participant lived in Gitaus for many years, prior to moving into

the Terrace's neighbouring municipality, Thornhill (which is included within the Greater Terrace Area).

The Nisga'a Valley ("Nisga'a Lisims" or the Nass valley) lies about 100 km North of Terrace and is home to about 6000 members of the Nisga'a First Nation. Here, the residents live in four communities along the Nass River: Kincolith, Greenville, Canyon City, and New Aiyansh, also respectively known as Gingolx, Laxgalts'ap, Gitwinksihlkw, and Gitlakdamix (Nisga'a Lisims Government, 2009). Kincolith is a coastal village, 168 km from Terrace, with a population of about 500 people (Kermode Tourism, 2009; Nisga'a Lisims Government, 2009). It was only accessible by boat or seaplane until a road was built to Greenville in 2002, thereby connecting it to other villages in the Nisga'a valley and other communities in northwest BC. One participant spent some of her childhood years in Kincolith, while another, whose wife was originally from Greenville, married into the Nisga'a nation and lived in the valley for many years. A third participant was previously married to a Nisga'a man.

Kitamaat Village ("Tsee-Motsa") is home to about 700 members of the Haisla First Nation and is located at the head of the Douglas Channel (Haisla Nation, 2009), about 20 minutes by road from Kitimat. Kitimat is a city of about 9,000 people (Statistics Canada, 2008), which lies 60 km South of Terrace and is home to one of the world's largest smelters and a pulp and paper mill. One participant grew up with her grandmother in Kitamaat village.

4.2 Temporal context

At the time that I was recruiting participants and doing interviews, another food-related study involving Aboriginal peoples was being carried out in the area. Kitsumkalum was the first community to be selected to be invited to take part in the First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study (FNFNES), a 10-year, cross-Canada study that will eventually involve over 100 First Nations communities. This study is primarily focused on "traditional foods," as

defined by the researcher as “foods harvested from the wild and not store-bought foods” (FNFNES, 2008, p.11). FNFNES researchers investigate how often such foods are consumed, through food frequency questionnaires and 24-hour diet recalls, and analyze these foods for levels of environmental contamination. (In this way, FNFNES and my own project might serve as quantitative and qualitative complements to each other, as FNFNES documented the “what?” and “how often?” of contemporary food consumption, whereas I explored the meanings and “so what?” of contemporary food consumption. In the future, it may be interesting to juxtapose my findings with those of the FNFNES for Kitsumkalum). The individuals from Kitsumkalum who participated in my project would likely have been aware of FNFNES, either through information sessions, from other community members or from their own participation in the study. The awareness of the FNFNES project and its objectives, as well as of other projects focusing on “traditional foods,” likely affected these and other participants’ perceptions of my project.

Although I clearly stated that my project was focusing on “contemporary foods” (whatever that might mean), I got the impression that some of my participants expected to be questioned primarily on “traditional foods,” simply because the project was seeking Aboriginal participants. One of my community advisors had warned me that if I was not explicit about the goals of my project, participants would just provide me with pictures of dried fish, because that’s what they would expect that I would want. These expectations might explain some of the comments I heard during recruitment and early in some interviews. When I invited Fiona, 27, to participate, she quickly said something along the lines of not eating many traditional First Nations foods. Ruth, 77, started her interview by telling me about a meal of fish, “I had that and I didn't get the picture. That's the traditional foods, eh,” and, in showing me her first picture, a pancake breakfast, she said, “what do I tell you? That's not traditional.” Similarly, Garnet, 58, chose to take his first picture of “mulligan,” a salmon stew: “I thought what a way to start ...this project... was using this because, like I said, this is a traditional [meal]...” In all these

instances, I had not used the term “traditional” with these participants, and yet their comments suggested to me that they expected that I was primarily interested in a particular selection of foods. Other research projects, such as FNFNES, may have informed these expectations. Fortunately, as the interviews progressed, most participants seemed to move past these expectations and explored a wide variety of foods that they consumed on a day-to-day basis.

4.3 Participants

Eight of the 11 participants identified as being Tsimshian, Nisga’a or Haisla, First Nations whose traditional territories are situated in the northwest region. While some of these eight had lived their entire lives in the region, others had also lived for some time in larger cities in British Columbia, Alberta and the United States. However, these eight all had ongoing connections to the First Nations communities into which they were born, as exemplified by living on reserve and/or maintaining connections with family “back home.” The remaining three participants identified themselves with Aboriginal groups whose territories lie further afield: Cree, Cherokee and Inuit. While these three had lived the majority of their lives in northwest, they differed from other participants in that, from what I gathered, they did not have opportunities to spend much time living among the specific Aboriginal groups with which they identified. Of these participants, I would like to introduce two individuals in particular: Garnet, 58, and Lorna, 57. I present them specifically because it struck me that their perspectives differed somewhat from those of other participants. I will discuss this further in later chapters, but I do feel that it is important to provide some detail about them now as it will help the reader to contextualize their comments. While it took me some time to realize *why* these participants were occasional talking in a different manner than their “peers,” I have concluded that the reasons for this may lie in their life stories.

Both Garnet, 58, and Lorna, 57, spoke of experiencing significant identity shifts in their adult lives. While other participants grew up in, or had strong connections with, First Nations

communities, where their identities as Aboriginal peoples were probably taken for granted, the situation for Garnet and Lorna was different. Garnet, 58, described growing up in the foster care system, and in his words, he did not “acknowledge [his] Indianness” until he was a young adult. He explained that, at that stage in his life, he developed an interest in Aboriginal peoples and cultures, became involved in several Aboriginal organizations, and actively learned about Aboriginal peoples, cultures and histories through a variety of processes. In particular, he described his experiences at a conference about North American Aboriginal spirituality, and described a major identity shift that occurred as a result: “I went from being non-native to be native, if you will.”

Lorna, 57, did not speak about an identity shift as explicitly as Garnet did, but rather hinted at it when she shared her demographic information with me. She described that she was born to Cherokee parents who had to that point lived their entire lives in California and described that they were “fully urbanized and absorbed into California culture.” As a girl, she had an interest in “Indians” (which she pointed out was a misnomer), and she learned about them by reading books. Regarding the Cherokee people specifically, she learned a bit about the culture and language from her grandmother. Later, as a teenager, she moved with her family to northern BC, and eventually lived as far West as the coastal islands, where she lived among the local First Nation peoples for several decades before moving to the Terrace area. Her identity shift was implied through her comment about becoming “Nisga’a-ized” through her previous marriage to a Nisga’a man.

In her book, *Beyond White Ethnicity: Developing a Sociological Understanding of Native American Identity Reclamation*, Fitzgerald (2007) explained that Aboriginal identities in North American have often been suppressed, denied or even forgotten as a consequence of racist policies, intermarriage and other processes. However, in recent years, there has been a shift in patterns of racial/ethnic identification, and many individuals have been learning about, embracing and celebrating their Aboriginal heritage and identities. Fitzgerald (2007) referred to

this process as “Native American identity reclamation,” and named the people who undergo this process “reclaimers.” She used this term “to signify anyone who has recently learned of their Native American ancestry or is recently identifying with this aspect of their heritage” (p.4). I draw from her work to understand Garnet and Lorna’s experiences and to contextualize their voices, in contrast to other participants who Fitzgerald (2007) might call “non-reclaiming, life-time Indians” (p.226). I recognize that this distinction is awkward, and that Lorna, 57, and Garnet, 58, have not *recently* reclaimed their Aboriginal identities, but have now lived with them for decades. However, the process through which they constructed their identities as Aboriginal people likely differed substantially from other participants in this project, who were raised with closer ties to their Aboriginal families and communities. (Myra, 31, was an exception because she was raised mainly in the Terrace area, although her mother was originally from Baffin Island. However, I did not hear her speak of the types of identity shifts Garnet and Lorna experienced.) I will explore Garnet and Lorna’s comments more closely in chapters 5 and 6. Specifically, I will consider that they offer a different perspective on contemporary food and eating patterns than other participants, which may be due to the different process by which their identities as Aboriginal persons were shaped.

Chapter 5

Participants' Perspectives on Contemporary Foods: Case Studies and Themes

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the major findings from this project. I have organized participants' views and quotes into three major sections, which I review in turn: perspectives on food and health; contextualized food meanings; and views on traditions and cultural change. Each of these sections is divided into subsections with appropriate headings, and finishes with a discussion of the findings. I have also included four food case studies, which offer a closer look at participants' perspectives on specific foods: seaweed; potatoes and rice; bologna and wieners; and chowmein. These case studies aptly demonstrate how various themes intersect around specific foods, and reveal the diversity of views that participants hold about these foods. They also provide the reader with a "pause" from the main text, as I have placed them between each of the three thematic sections in this chapter. (Therefore, they are also italicized, in order to visually set them apart from the rest of the chapter as well.)

I begin with a case study of seaweed, a food that all participants spontaneously discussed, that is undeniably associated with Aboriginal peoples in northwestern BC. In the dominant health and nutrition discourse, seaweed is a "traditional food" that is promoted for its health benefits (Health Canada, 1995). However, participants showed how seaweed has been creatively incorporated into a variety of meals, illustrating the flexibility of cultural adaptation, and the difficulty of classifying *meals* (as opposed to foods) as "traditional," or not. Additionally, the problems they described in accessing seaweed are similar to the challenges that they have in obtaining other locally gathered foods, and thus the difficulty they might have following nutrition advice to eat more "traditional foods," even when they might want to.

5.2 Case Study #1: Seaweed

The Aboriginal peoples in northwestern BC have a long-standing practice of gathering seaweed that is so significant that, in the local Sm'algyax language, the month of May is known as Ha'lilaxsila'ask,, which is translated as "the time for picking seaweed" (Na Aksa Gyla Kyew Learning Center, 2008). Like oolichan grease, this food is eaten almost exclusively by Aboriginal residents, and seldom by non-Aboriginal peoples in the Terrace area. Indeed, many participants spoke of seaweed in the context of discussing "Indian food" or "traditional food."



Figure 3: Seaweed and rice

"That's fresh frozen seaweed. I fried some bacon and onions, and some clams, frozen clams... and then I just cooked the seaweed in there, with some rice...." (Ruth, 77)

Seaweed is a popular food for participants. Ruth, 77, provided evidence of this popularity when she talked about having prepared food for a feast and said, "I cooked a pot of rice and a pot of seaweed. That really went." Fiona, 27, simply stated: "I love it...." while Garnet, 58, echoed this sentiment and added, "...my wife and I both eat it like popcorn." Participants explained that seaweed is popular on its own or added to other dishes. Marcie, 38, stated, "it's...very versatile. You can put it on soup - fish soup - or eat it on its own. Some people like

to fry it, and I have to admit I like eating it that way sometimes.” Participants also described adding seaweed to clam chowder (Lorna, 57), mixing it in with herring eggs (Marcie, 38), having it with salmon, potatoes and “stink eggs” (fermented fish roe) (Ruth, 77) or salmon, rice and vegetables (Myra, 31). Indeed, some of these combinations are so established as to have proper names; during the group interview, when I said something about “fish, rice and seaweed,” Bridget, 36, corrected me, saying: “You got that backwards. Seaweed, fish and rice.” She also had mentioned that “seaweed and oolichan grease and China Lily [soya sauce] is a dish.” It is also clear that this food is paired with more than just seafood. Ruth, 77 shared that she has seen chowmein prepared with seaweed, and Fiona, 27, offered, “I like it on popcorn.” Lorna, 57, described how her husband sometimes prepares it: “He makes a specialty seaweed dish... with chopped bacon,” which appears similar to Ruth’s description of her photo, above. Clearly, seaweed is a popular and versatile food for these participants and their families.

In addition to emphasizing its versatility, participants discussed other virtues of seaweed as well. Five of the 11 participants spoke about its nutritional properties and health benefits. Both Fiona, 27, and Garnet, 58, spoke of its iodine content, while Myra, 31, stated more broadly, “... it has trace minerals in it that are good for us.” Rona, 53, discussed her wish to see a regional Aboriginal food guide for the northwest coastal peoples, and gave seaweed as an example of an item she would like to see listed and explained in such a document. And lastly, while Irene, 72, viewed seaweed as being healthful overall, she also identified a use for it in the management of specific health conditions; “It’s always good for your health. A lot of vitamins in the seaweed... like my daughter, when she went through cancer treatment; it’s good for her blood.” However, while roughly half the participants briefly touched on health benefits of seaweed, it was not the main focus of their discussions about this food.

Instead, one of the strongest themes that emerged were issues regarding access. Despite its popularity, participants’ comments suggested that many of them do not eat it as often as they

would like to. While seaweed may be served at feasts and community gatherings, Marcie, 38, admitted that this is not something she often eats at home. Things have also changed for Fiona, 27, since she moved away from her gran's home in Kitamaat village: "...this is my little zip lock bag my mom gave me. It was bigger then, it was like full. Now...well, you see it's almost empty....That's the first time I've had it in almost years." While Bridget's situation is different, as she does live on reserve, her access to seaweed is also limited: "I've been out of seaweed for two months. Until the guys from Metlakatla drive through with it, with a thing of seaweed, I'm hooped for seaweed." She also stated that in Kitsumkalum access is largely dependent on having the time and resources that are required to harvest such foods: "... you see who's got a boat and you can tell who's gonna be seaweed picking and who isn't...."

While many of the participants do not gather seaweed themselves, some are able to obtain it through their personal connections. Ruth, 77, explained where she got hers: "My son gave me that bag of ... fresh seaweed and I just stuck it in the freezer...." Similarly, Myra, 31, described that she received fresh seaweed from a friend: "...she gives us like a bag of seaweed when it's still wet and then we dry it ourselves..." However, it appears that the only way many of the other participants obtain seaweed is by buying it. "Now if we want seaweed we have to find someone to buy it from. It's not that easy to find" (Barb, 58). Garnet, 58, explained that First Nations people come to Terrace from villages on the central coast, such as Bella Bella, Bella Coola and Hartley Bay, to trade or sell seaweed: "there's a lot of people from down there ... that actually come up here to the northwest and they'll park at the mall or they'll start advertising ... or just talking to people and say 'hey, we've got some seaweed'...." While he spoke of trading oolichans or oolichan grease for seaweed in the past, "in the Nisga'a way," he admits that more recently there is a lot of purchasing of seaweed. "You can get a big gallon bag for fifty bucks, which isn't bad, but it's a little expensive." Because Terrace and Kitsumkalum lie inland from the ocean, seaweed cannot be picked locally, and for this reason, Louie, 73,

rationalized the cost of buying it at a local shop in Kitsumkalum: “20 dollars for a big square ... it’s cheap because that’s a lot of money in gas to run your boat.”

Terrace’s distance from the ocean presents additional challenges for accessing seaweed. Irene, 72, commented that nowadays not as many people are “putting up their own food,” but wonders if this trend may be, in part, due to a lack of education and exposure: “Maybe they’re not taught how to preserve it, and a lot of them, born and raised here, they haven’t gone out to where we get our seafood.” In contrast, she described that in her childhood she went out to gather seaweed with her uncle and grandma, and in some detail, outlined the process of harvesting and drying it. However, she pointed out that her experience growing up was different than that of the youth of today: “I was born and raised in Port Essington, and it’s closer to where we get all our seafood.” Supporting this perspective, during the group interview Bridget, 36, presented her views as a younger participant, one of the “forties and youngers:”

I don't know where to go for any of this stuff. I wouldn't even know how to pick seaweed or what kind of seaweed to pick. You know, I'm sure my mother must have known because she grew up on a boat with my Ya'ez [grandfather], but she worked, and we didn't live here....

She is concerned that, in addition to the other barriers that exist in terms of gathering food, that the knowledge needed for the harvesting and processing of seaweed and other foods is not being passed down from the older to the younger generations. Lorna, 57, Louie, 73 and Irene, 72, recognized the need for education as well, and spoke about the seaweed gathering excursion that students at the ‘Na Aksa Gila Kyew learning center took part of in May 2008. They viewed this excursion positively: “that’s an example of what they’ve been doing lately. They’re getting more pro-active” (Lorna, 57).

Participants’ comments about seaweed reinforce that it is a long-standing food tradition for coastal First Nations, and that it is a food that continues to be popular in local Aboriginal families and communities. Participants described that it is a versatile food, with health benefits, but illustrated that many individuals have difficulty accessing it because of its cost, their

distance from the ocean, and their limited knowledge and experience with gathering and processing this food. Therefore, while many individuals may wish to include this food more often in their diets, they described significant barriers that prevent them from doing so. Participants' comments suggest that similar barriers apply to obtaining many other locally gathered foods as well. I will touch on this theme again, later in this chapter, but will first explore another topic that most participants discussed in some detail: food and health.

5.3 SECTION 1: Perspectives on food and health

One of the clearest themes that emerged from this research project was the strong link that participants identified between food and physical health. Participants differed in how much they emphasized this relationship, but each person talked about food and health in some way. This pattern is striking because I did not ask any questions directly about health, with the exception of prompting participants to clarify or elaborate when they raised the subject. While the goals of this project were not necessarily to explore participants' understandings of nutrition and health, an exploration of their comments on this subject is warranted because it was such a strong theme. Indeed, participants discussed food and health in a variety of ways. They identified foods as being "healthy" or "unhealthy," discussed their nutritional properties and raised the possibility that they contained undesirable "chemicals." Some talked about the strategies they employed for healthy eating, including dietary modifications to manage or prevent specific health conditions. Additionally, because the literature often presents gathered foods as healthy, and store-bought foods as unhealthy, I also explore what participants had to say about these two categories of foods. (I should also note that in this section, I am exploring how participants spoke of food and *physical* health specifically; other aspects of health will be briefly touched upon in later sections.)

5.3.1 Healthy and unhealthy foods

In their individual interviews, participants labeled numerous foods as being either healthy or unhealthy. Some of the foods that were labeled as being healthy included fruits and berries, fruit juice, vegetables, brown rice, whole wheat bread, oatmeal, milk, yogurt, cheese, peanut butter, eggs, beans, chili, lean meats (chicken breast, lean ground meat, moose), salmon, oolichan grease, olive oil, flax, and garlic. Fresh, free range, wild and organic foods were occasionally alluded to being healthier than other options as well, although this was not a strong theme. At times, participants also mentioned specific nutrients in foods: iodine in seaweed, “roughage” in salads, zinc in oolichans, potassium in bananas, protein in eggs, etc. For example, Garnet, 58, described some of the nutritional aspects of “mulligan,” a salmon soup/stew:

...you get the fat from fish, but it's not like meat fat, whatever they call that, saturated or unsaturated, I'm not sure how it which way it goes. So it's actually a healthy food, you know, 'cause you're getting all your proteins in there ... everything you need.

Ruth, 77, described increasing the nutritional value of toast when she said, “I try to put something nutritional on, cheese or peanut butter....” She also talked about milk, and said, “I try to drink it, because I know I need to drink milk ... for my bones ... feed my bones.” Such comments about the health benefits of foods were prevalent in many of the interviews.

Conversely, participants also described many foods as being unhealthy. These foods included pop, candy, chips, chocolate, cookies, ice cream, popcorn, processed foods (i.e. chicken noodle soup, chicken pot pie, powdered eggs), fast foods, bologna, wieners, hamburger, pork, salt, sugar, lard, butter and salad dressings. Foods that were considered unhealthy were often described in terms of their fat or calorie content, or as being starchy, sugary, salty or “not fresh.” For example, Marcie, 38, described her pancake and bacon breakfast as “unhealthy,” and when I asked her to elaborate, said, “...pancakes have starch, syrup. The bacon - salt - even though the bacon is actually 50 percent less salt. It's still a high calorie meal.” Barb, 58, talked about raising her children, and said, “I tried to make sure that the kids ate all healthy food, not junk all the time... they rarely had like junk food, like chips and pop and candy” Junk foods

were described by Bridget, 36, as, “food that ... doesn't really get rid of your hunger or make you healthy or benefit you in any way. Empty calories, sugar, salt, fat.” Again, such comments about unhealthy foods were common in the interviews.

Concerns were not limited to fat, salt, sugar, calories or other nutritional properties: numerous participants also indicated that they were concerned about chemicals that may be present in foods. They mentioned pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, hormones, preservatives, additives, environmental contaminants, molds, nitrosamines, nitrates, MSG, chlorine, and other “junk.” Some participants avoided foods which might contain these substances, as Barb, 58, described with farmed salmon: “they get fungus so then you have to treat them with different chemicals...so farmed fish I won't bother trying to eat.” Likewise, Myra, 31 spoke about making ice cream at home with an ice cream maker, and said, “I feel a little better about eating it because it doesn't have as many additives....” Therefore, some participants considered both nutritional composition and “chemicals” in their assessment of the healthfulness of foods.

5.3.2 Strategies for healthy eating

Most of the participants spoke about dietary approaches to eat more healthfully, including food preparation methods, food choices and portion sizes. Garnet, 58, spoke at length about lower fat preparation methods, such as removing fat from meats through broiling. When he discussed what foods he would choose if he wasn't constrained by his budget, he implied that fat content was especially important for him: “we'd probably go for more fish. I'd go for more lean type foods ...I'd like to go for turkey breasts or chicken breast...because those are basically non-fat.” Others, like Barb, 58, focused on their fruit and vegetable intake: “I try every day to have a salad ... because I don't eat that much cooked vegetables.” She also compensated for foods she didn't eat: “I like a whole mixture of cheeses and I make sure to eat them because I don't drink milk.” In addition to these food choices, some participants also emphasized the importance of portion sizes. For example, Barb, 58, stated, “I do make sure that I'm not eating

excessive amounts of anything so that I don't gain weight," while Marcie, 38, mentioned that she no longer eats seconds. Here, both the type and quantity of food were considered to be important.

Also evident in participants' comments were ideas of balance, variety, and moderation. Marcie, 38, described a meal of "Shake'n Bake" chicken, Rice-a-Roni and corn as "pretty good" because "you get your protein, you get your veggies and a bit of rice." She also appreciated her partner's balanced approach to cooking: "he makes a lot of healthy things ... like you're supposed to fill half your plate actually with vegetables and your meat the size of your hand. Well, that's what I like is that he's conscious about all of that." In regards to variety, Fiona, 27, said, "I wanted the variety of fruitbecause you know how the different colours have different vitamin contents to it..." She and other participants also discussed moderation, in the sense of only having some foods "once in a while," "occasionally," or "not every day." For example, Fiona, 27, said about bologna and wieners, "in moderate servings I guess it's okay, just not like an everyday diet sort of a thing." Similarly, Myra, 31, described ice cream as "...an occasional thing. It isn't like 'oh, I wanna have it every day' because I know it's got a lot of fat and a lot of sort of empty calories that don't have much nutrients..." She acknowledged that her approach to eating has changed over the years: "I'm more conscious of the food choices I'm making. Instead of eating just for the sake of pleasure, it's more like providing my body what it needs to stay healthy." This health-conscious approach to eating was voiced in different ways by many participants.

5.3.3 Dietary management for disease prevention and management

While participants often spoke about the relationship between food and health in general, some participants also highlighted dietary strategies they employed for the management or prevention of specific health conditions. Garnet, 58, said, "...my wife and I are trying to watch our diet because we're both getting heavy and we're getting older.... We don't want any...

diabetes or heart problems in the future....” While he focused on prevention, others were managing chronic health conditions. Four participants mentioned that they or their spouses were diagnosed with diabetes and described some of the resulting changes they made to their diets. These included having smaller portions, eating less salt, potatoes, starch and fried foods, and choosing whole wheat options. Irene, 72, talked about the way they ate since her husband was diagnosed with diabetes: “make sure that it's lean, and little bit of potatoes and, you know, starchy food. And you gotta eat more vegetables, so I try to do whatever I could to make sure that he has the vegetables.” Barb, 58, also made numerous diet changes to help in the management of her arthritic knee.

I changed my whole diet when they thought I had arthritis in my knee. I switched everything. Josie [a naturopath] gave me a list a mile long: ...no caffeine, no sugar, no alcohol, no red meat, no white anything - white potatoes, white flour, white sugar - ...nothing like that. No citrus fruit, and I love oranges, and I had to give them up. And I can't remember everything else on the list but then I had it written down at one time, but then now I just know what I can eat ... and what I like....

Participants made links between food and the prevention and management of other specific health conditions, such as cinnamon for cholesterol and blood pressure, berries for cataracts, salmon cartilage for arthritis, oranges for cholesterol, and fruit and fluids for flues. These strategies, for disease prevention or management, were mentioned by older and younger participants alike.

5.3.4 Healthfulness of gathered foods and store-bought foods

In their discussions of the health aspects of foods, participants spoke about a wide variety of foods, including those that might be gathered locally and those that are available for purchase in grocery stores. In the literature, I have noticed connotations with “traditional foods” and health, and store-bought foods and disease. Therefore, I was interested to see whether or not participants also made such distinctions. While I had not questioned them directly about these matters, I examined relevant comments that arose in their interviews. I explore, in turn,

participants' perspectives on both the positive and negative health effects of gathered foods and store-bought foods.

Health benefits of gathered foods

When participants spoke of the health benefits of gathered foods, they often did so in ways where they contrasted them with store-bought options. Therefore, it was difficult to separate the perceived benefits of gathered foods from the perceived drawbacks of store-bought foods. This is seen in the case of wild meat, such as moose and deer. A few participants contrasted these foods with store-bought meats, and shared their concerns about fat content, hormones, and bacterial contamination. Louie, 73, stated that, "wild animal meat is more healthy than store meat. It's more - you feel more safe. You don't know what's in the store meat you buy, the way they treat the cows...." Garnet, 58, seemed to share these views and, in presenting a photo of the ingredients he used to make meatloaf, said, "this is beef burger. I'd much rather have moose or something because it's a lot more lean - not as many chemicals and not as much fat." Later, he added, "a lot of the beef that they raised nowadays, let's face it, they raise them on fertilizers and they give them ... particularly commercial beef ... they use a lot of hormones and things like that in there...." Lorna, 57, also had concerns about beef, but presented a slightly different perspective:

I don't trust beef very much since mad cow to begin with and then ground beef is like a double whammy because you've got the bacteria possibility there, the E-coli, and that can be very deadly on young children and elders. It can damage your kidneys for life if you're poisoned by it. So it's just – pfff - why take the chance?

In these cases, participants emphasized the healthfulness of gathered foods by highlighting what they *didn't* contain and how they might differ from store-bought foods.

Some participants also presented gathered foods as being effective in the prevention and management of chronic disease. Ruth, 77, shared a story about her friend: "She got diabetes, and she just changed her diet. She's just eating wild, wild meat, fish, oolichan grease - takes two

tablespoons a day - and she doesn't have to go on any kinds of pills” (group interview). Irene, 72, had a similar story about the management of her husband’s diabetes, although she emphasized that low-fat preparation methods were also important:

All our food is all not as rich as what you buy in the store, and...every time he goes for a checkup, they said ‘whatever you're eating and you're doing with your food,’ he said, ‘just keep it up and keep your sugar down’ ...I know all our Indian food is good, if you know how to prepare it...like meat...make sure you don't fry it all the time because...it'd be too fat for you to eat and it's no good for your health....

Likewise, Rona, 53, felt that the health benefits of gathered foods are becoming increasingly well known:

the more our people die of the diseases that are associated with food, the more our young people, in your generation, [are] realizing the sickness that's associated with them and so the hungrier our kids and our grandkids are getting for Indian food.

These comments show how participants link gathered foods with health and the prevention and management of chronic diseases.

Concerns about gathered foods

While some participants emphasized the health benefits of gathered foods, many also voiced concerns about possible environmental contamination of these foods. These concerns applied to seafood, wildlife and berries. In the group interview, Fiona, 27, stated, “last week I was able to enjoy moose meat but, even while I was eating it, I was still kind of scared just 'cause where it came from and ...if it was in good health....” (group interview). She felt ambivalent: “kind of in a way you really don't want to question whoever's offering you something that's so rare” (group interview). Cancer was identified as a specific health concern:

...among our people, particularly the West coast, if you look at all the people dying from cancer ... there's a lot of seafood from rock bottom, seafoods upwards, that have been found with contaminations and growths and deformities, that the government doesn't reveal to us....”(Garnet, 58, group interview).

Ruth, 77, concurred: “it's scary to eat so much seafood too. We notice a lot of the coastal people has cancer. We figure it's from the seafood 'cause ... they got all kinds of stuff that comes from boats” (group interview). She explained:

Everything's contaminated ... They dump waste in the ocean – oil- and big ships that come that clean their bilges out. And there's a lot of boats with flush toilets now. There's one guy that said in the anchors where the herring are, and where the herring spawn, he said he saw a herring swimming round with toilet tissue on its head...So, nothing's safe.

Several participants were also concerned that wild berries, especially those grown in forest cut-blocks and along roads and railway lines, might be exposed to herbicidal treatments. These comments suggest that, because of concerns related to pollution, industrial activity and herbicide treatments, many participants are concerned about the risks of eating locally gathered foods.

Concerns about store-bought foods

Just as participants are suspicious of environmental contamination of gathered foods, so too are they concerned about certain store-bought foods. As previously mentioned, some of these concerns related to the nutritional composition of meats and their potential chemical and bacterial contamination. However, participants also spoke of other store-bought foods: “All the food they sell in the store are treated. That's why there's so many people being allergic to things...” (Ruth, 77). Lorna, 57, expressed concern about the effect of store-bought foods on her husband's blood sugar levels: “...the store bought food that we have in our diet these days...the sugars and the white flour products, they are things that have contributed to the diabetic problem...” She was cautious about many of the foods in the stores: “...they tend to put [his] blood sugar up, and there's sugar in a lot of things and there's MSG in a lot of things.” Similarly, Irene, 72, spoke about fast foods and pre-prepared foods and said, “...I know a lot of fast food, whatever they put in there, all different kind of chemicals ...I try to keep away from the ready-made food and that you buy in the store and I'll do my own. That way I know what's in there.” It

is this idea, of what may or may not be in store-bought foods, which had some participants concerned.

Health benefits of store-bought foods

Despite the concerns that were articulated about some store-bought foods, many participants described that other such foods contributed to their health. Irene, 72, said, “I think it’s a good thing about the stores too, you can get all your fresh ...vegetables and your fresh fruit. It’s good for you.” She had said about fresh vegetables and fruits, “you need to have them ... yeah, hm-hm, you need to have them.” Bridget, 36, also shared her appreciation for the choices that grocery stores offered:

I like the fact that I can get my kids milk and fruit every day ... I think it contributes to my children's health to have that choice, which contributes to their brain development and ... their overall development and their abilities.

Other participants voiced that they were able to choose whole wheat bread, leaner meats, and lower fat cheeses: “...now that you have choices I'll pick lite so that I don't end up fat” (Barb, 58). Participants appreciated the option of making such choices. Lorna, 57, who had previously mentioned her concerns about sugar and MSG in many store-bought foods, implied that stores did also offer healthy options, even for her diabetic husband:

We get the organic produce, and we buy...some nice honey in the bulk department, which is the complex carbohydrate. [He] does like a little sweetener now and then. We put that over berries sometimes or ...pancakes... And we buy eggs, and yogurt for the beneficial bacteria in yogurt, 'cause a good efficient digestive system is important for a diabetic person, or anybody.

Similarly, Garnet, 58, who had expressed that he viewed gathered foods to be healthier than store-bought foods, agreed that other foods might also be healthful. He spoke about seeing beef, noodles and breads at feasts and gatherings, and said, “there's nothing wrong with them, a lot of them are still healthy....” Therefore, while some participants stated that they viewed store-bought foods to be less healthy than gathered foods, their comments also revealed that they considered a number of store-bought foods to be important components of a healthy diet.

5.3.5 Discussion of participants' perspectives on food and health

Participants presented their views on healthy and unhealthy foods, and discussed some of the eating strategies they employed for good health and the prevention and management of specific health conditions. They also pointed out some of the potential health benefits, and risks, of both locally gathered and store-bought foods. As a dietitian, I am not surprised to hear individuals making links between food and health. However, in this research project, I was not focusing on these links in particular and therefore did not ask any questions about health specifically. Because of this, I had not anticipated that that health would be such a dominant theme, but clearly participants felt that this was important. Looking back now, perhaps I shouldn't have been surprised, as there may be several explanations for this phenomenon. One is that approximately half of the participants would have known me to have the professional designation as a dietitian and may have consequently placed a greater emphasis on health in their interviews. However, other participants would only have known me to be a student, and yet nutrition and health still dominated our discussions. This tendency might be explained by the fact that several participants were themselves employed in health-related fields, and others were involved in their own, or their family member's, dietary management of health conditions (i.e., diabetes).

It may also be that the discourse of nutrition is now so prevalent that it is difficult to speak of food *without* discussing its relationship to physical health. Indeed, Scrinis (2008) refers to this phenomenon as “nutritionism” and argues that this view “has come to dominate, to undermine, and to replace other ways of engaging with food and of contextualizing the relationship between food and the body” (p.39). Nutrition information is certainly prevalent, and is propagated through public health agencies, food advertisers, teachers, health professionals, personal contacts, the internet and other media (Marquis, Dubeau & Thibault, 2005). Many Canadians are exposed to such messages on a daily basis.

While these myriad and potentially conflicting sources of information are liable to cause “nutrition confusion” (Nestle, 2000, vii), based on my previous dietetics training and experience, I feel that participants’ comments primarily reflected current public health nutrition messages. These messages ranged from simple concepts (i.e. fruits and vegetables are essential to good health; calcium is important for bone health) to complex ones. The latter include the messages of balance, variety and moderation that have long been espoused in Canada’s Food Guides (Health Canada, 2007b), but that are not simple guidelines to understand or to apply to one’s diet. While “alternative” beliefs about food and health were voiced by a few participants (i.e. the dietary approach for arthritis management), participants primarily shared views that were in line with “official” recommendations, a tendency that has been reported in other studies as well (Chapman & Beagan, 2003; Risovski-Slijepcevic, Chapman & Beagan, 2008). These observations suggest that, in general, participants have a good understanding of the current nutrition recommendations that have been promoted through various nutrition education campaigns.

While participants demonstrated that the majority of their perspectives on food and health were in line with dominant nutrition discourse, their views differed in regards to some dominant views about Aboriginal peoples and food specifically. An idea that participants rarely expressed, but which is often found in the literature, is the idea that Aboriginal bodies are “different” from other bodies and thereby need unique dietary approaches in order to be healthy. This view is what is implied when academics, researchers, health professionals and governments agencies reference the “thrifty gene theory” or other genetic theories in order to explain the high rates of some chronic diseases in many Aboriginal populations (Health Canada, 2000; Miewald, 2002; Nabhan, 1998). However, when participants discussed food and health, it appeared that they spoke about foods or food practices as being healthy or unhealthy *in general*, as opposed to being healthy or unhealthy for Aboriginal peoples specifically. There were a few

exceptions however. Lorna, 57, described that Aboriginal bodies differed from European bodies:

Native people...are traditionally not used to flour and sugar for thousands of years. You know, Danish people and that, they can eat stuff like that, but for us Native people flour and sugar is just not built into our genetics.

Similarly, because wheat and dairy are “introduced” foods, Myra, 31, wondered if Aboriginal peoples experienced more wheat and dairy intolerances than other groups. It appeared that Garnet, 58, also presented a view that Aboriginal bodies were different from other bodies, but emphasized that these differences would be based on regional differences in geography and climate (i.e. Inuit peoples would need a high fat diet for their climate and lifestyle). However, such comments were rare, and the majority of participants’ discussions about food and health related to the nutritional characteristics of particular foods or the healthfulness of certain eating practices, as opposed to characteristics of Aboriginal peoples *per se*. Instead, as a group, participants reinforced messages that were in line with healthy eating recommendations for all Canadians (i.e. Canada’s Food Guide).

I also observed that another notion was notably absent in participants’ comments. In the literature, many authors emphasize that gathered foods are healthier than store-bought foods (Foley, 2005; Kuhnlein & Turner, 1991; Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Nabhan, 1998; Power, 2007; Receveur et al, 1997). Indeed, a not-so-subtle dichotomy is often present, which equates locally gathered foods with health, and store-bought foods with disease (Health Canada, 2000; Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Kuhnlein & Turner, 1991; Receveur et al., 1997; Willows, 2004). However, participants did not see store-bought foods and locally gathered foods in such simplistic terms. They presented much more sophisticated and complex ideas about food and health, and discussed the risks and benefits of both store-bought and locally gathered foods. For example, when they talked about foods from the grocery store, they emphasized the need for healthy choices, portion sizes and preparation methods. And while Irene, 72, Ruth, 77, and Rona, 53, did suggest that “going back to old ways” could be healthful, especially in the

management of chronic diseases, they did not suggest that healthful eating would necessarily need to exclude “healthy” store-bought foods. Indeed, these same participants emphasized that they viewed fruits, vegetables, milk and other foods to be crucial for good health. In these ways, participants’ comments challenged what the literature implies, as they do not necessarily see the existence of stores or availability of store-bought foods as threats to their health.

In conclusion, through their many comments on food and physical health, participants illustrated that this was one of the dominant meanings they ascribed to the foods in their contemporary diets. In many ways their comments reflected and supported the dominant nutrition discourse, of which they seemed to have a good understanding. However, their comments also challenged some of the discourse about Aboriginal peoples and food in particular, in regards to the healthfulness of foods for Aboriginal peoples specifically, and the dichotomization in healthfulness of “traditional” and store-bought foods. Therefore, it appears that participants found the nutritional discourse to be more relevant to their understandings of food and health.

In the following case study, I explore participants’ comments about rice and potatoes, foods which, like seaweed, all participants spontaneously discussed in their interviews. Their comments illustrate how “introduced” foods are now staple, everyday foods. Because of the incorporation of such foods into local diets, this case study highlights the difficulty inherent in the dichotomization of “traditional foods” and store-bought foods. While this dichotomy is often present in the literature about Aboriginal peoples, participants suggest that foods are not so easily classified.

5.4 Case Study #2: Rice and potatoes



Figure 4: Participants' photos of meals including rice and potatoes

Participants seemed to view rice and potatoes as relatively uninteresting foods, unworthy of too much attention, likely because they are readily available and are unquestioningly viewed as being dietary staples. It is precisely because these foods seem so common and mundane that I am choosing to explore them in some detail, as we might have something to learn by more closely examining the mundane and the ordinary (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997).

Participants rarely discussed rice and potatoes in and of themselves. Rather, they implied that these foods played a supporting role to fish, meats and other dishes, and described many possible combinations with these foods. In the case of rice, they described pairing it with chili, chicken cacciatore, salmon, seaweed, fish, curried bologna, seaweed, deer mulligan, salmon patties, clam fritters, stir-fries, and moose ribs. In some cases, participants explicitly described rice as being part of a “dish:” “you have the rice, the jarred fish, dried seaweed... a tablespoon of oolichan grease, and flavour it with some China Lily [soya sauce]” (Bridget, 36). Similarly, participants listed a number of foods they frequently paired with potatoes: turkey, herring eggs, fish, pork chops, meatloaf, roasts, and other meats. Some also described flavouring their potatoes with oolichan grease, or adding them into common dishes, such as fish soup, moose soup, and salmon patties. Through these descriptions, participants implied that rice and potatoes are common, every-day foods.

The manner in which participants discussed rice and potatoes also supports the idea that these are ordinary and long-standing foods. Fiona, 27, talked about the foods she cooked on a day-to-day basis: "...just regular, potatoes and pork chops and stuff like that...." Likewise, Garnet, 58, and Bridget, 36, both described rice as a "staple," and Bridget implied that this had long been the case in her family:

...we grew up poor, right, my family, so sometimes we didn't have a loaf of bread but we always had China Lily [soya sauce] for our rice ... it was just one of those things. It was like the big bag of rice, the big bag of flour, the big bag of sugar and the bottle of China Lily, and then the big bucket of lard in the fridge and then with some salt...as long as you had those staples you weren't hungry, you weren't poor and you weren't out of food.

Older participants also implied that rice and potatoes were staple foods in their younger years as well. Irene, 72, who grew up in Port Essington, laughed when she said, "...we always get teased, saying we're Chinese people because we live on rice...." She also mentioned that her mom grew potatoes in their garden, and said, "we have to eat what mom grows - is potatoes - so everybody lived on that ... it's always potatoes, it's always rice." Similarly, Ruth, 77, talked about her childhood, and stated, "...in Port Essington we learned to get things that'll keep. We had potatoes but rice will keep, so we used a lot of rice. ... Potatoes went in soups and stews, and baked for when we have dried fish." From their comments, I interpret that rice and potatoes are staples for both the younger and older participants.

When I reviewed participants' comments in relation to the term "traditional food," these "mundane" foods got decidedly more interesting. Because Irene, 72, had described having foods such as rice, potatoes and homemade bread since her childhood, I asked for her perspective: "Are those traditional foods?" She responded by saying, "probably some people will say yes, because you [were] raised on it." However, Rona, 53, had a different view. In the following quote, she appeared to say that potatoes have been a long-standing part of local Aboriginal diets, but then she seemed to catch herself.

Potatoes have always been a part of ours- but we call it, in our language, we call it "skoossee." Yeah, because we never had the seed, right. We never had the potato seeds until the Irish came ... gosh, in, I think in my great grandparents' time, maybe even a

generation before that, when the Irish started coming to the Nass and to the Tsimshian country. And so we never had potatoes, and so ... since that generation that have potatoes growing in the basement, like they'd fix up a place and you'd grow potatoes there, so you'd grow up eating potatoes ... it's just a thing that you had with your fish.

When I asked her directly about potatoes, she responded with another comment about Irish influence and followed with, "it's not traditional ... the fish is traditional. Moose isn't even tradition." Later, she spoke about the foods in her current diet and said, "we have all the vegetables, lettuce, potatoes, that are new to us ... rice, that's new to us." While she acknowledged the culinary changes that have occurred over time among the local Aboriginal peoples, and that she herself has long consumed many of these "new" foods, in this context she seemed to be working with a strict, "pre-contact" definition of traditional foods.

However, her take on potatoes was challenged in the group interview. Garnet, 58, seemed to object to the idea that potatoes were not traditional: "Potatoes didn't come from Ireland 'cause they did come here too. The ones we used to pick were really small and little, and we used to take them, and used to have to really dig hard for them...." (group interview). Garnet had also spoken about rice and potatoes in his individual interview with me, and in describing the traditional diet on the prairies, he listed a variety of animals and followed with, "...so all those types of food, plus all the roots and the wild potatoes and rice we used to pick...." While he acknowledged that today's potatoes and rice might be different from what Aboriginal peoples harvested in the past, he still seemed to view them as being "basically quite traditional." Therefore, while only a few participants' commented on whether potatoes and rice could be viewed as being traditional foods, perspectives were clearly mixed: "probably," "yes" and "no."

While my direct questioning yielded conflicting answers, I think participants' off-hand comments also need to be considered, as they are potentially more revealing. Indeed, on a number of occasions, participants included rice and potatoes in descriptions of meals that they labeled as being traditional. Ruth, 77, started off her interview by telling me about a meal she

wished she had taken a photograph of: “I baked potatoes and that burned fish, fried fish - you burn it over a fire ... that’s the traditional foods, eh.” Similarly, Garnet, 58, described a fish stew made with potatoes, onions and, if available, seaweed and oolichan grease: “...this is what we call mulligan ... it's like a traditional [meal] ... the West coast people have been eating this kind of food for years.” Similarly, Fiona, 27, included rice in a comment about food traditions, “... I grew up with our food traditions, and I would always have [seaweed] in salmon soup, and seaweed and rice” In these comments, participants implied that rice and potatoes could be viewed as being traditional foods or, at the very least, that they have a welcome place alongside many of the more indisputable “Indian” foods.

Participants’ comments about rice and potatoes imply that they did not view these foods to be exciting in any way. They are mundane. However, it is precisely because they are mundane that they shed light on our understandings of food, culture and tradition. We have seen here that many participants viewed rice and potatoes to be staples in their diets, and they described that this was also the case for preceding generations. While there was some debate about whether or not these foods could be considered to be “traditional foods,” this case study shows how cultures adapt “new” foods into their everyday eating patterns. Today, rice and potatoes are just ordinary, every-day foods, but they have an important role to play. Just as a meal of seaweed and fish might not seem complete without rice, mulligan just wouldn’t be the same without potatoes. I explore these types of food meanings in greater detail in the next section.

5.5 SECTION 2: Contextualized meanings of food

In the previous section, I explored the connections participants made between food and health. While those links were often explicitly stated, participants also hinted at other meanings

they associated with foods, including meanings they ascribed based on how foods were procured and processed. In this section, I explore what participants had to say about locally gathered foods, store-bought foods, and homemade foods. I also investigate the idea of “treats” or “luxury items,” labels that were applied, in part, due to the limited accessibility of some foods. Finally, I examine a subtle, but crucial, theme that was present in the data: the importance of variety and choice.

5.5.1 Store-bought foods and locally gathered foods

A number of participants implied that they would rather harvest certain foods themselves, or receive them from friends and family, than buy them at the grocery store. For some, this was related to financial cost. For example, when I asked Louie, 73, and Lorna, 57, if they would buy fish from the store, they both quickly said, “no.” Louie talked about how expensive this would be and said, “cost you a whole arm.” Fiona, 27, felt the same about seafood in general: “...they have it in the grocery stores, like halibut steaks and stuff like that, but it's still pretty much out of my range ... I just don't really buy from there. I know it's there, I just wouldn't get it” Similarly, Ruth, 77, mentioned that she found it hard to pay for food in stores when, in the past, she harvested her own locally. For Barb, 58, the difficulty in purchasing fish was also tied to her expectations of receiving certain foods from her family:

I would buy a wild fish in the store if I couldn't get it anywhere else... I would probably curse ... just because of the prices, and then I'd be upset with my family for not having any, or if they had some and not give it to me, I would be even more upset.

These expectations, about having access to gathered foods, were also expressed by Lorna, 57: “...we're Native people. We still get to have things from the sea ... as long as there's halibut out there to catch we want to enjoy eating it.” These comments imply that, while high costs are certainly one of the issues related to buying fish and seafood from stores, it's not the whole story.

A few participants described how they felt about buying foods from the grocery store, as opposed to harvesting it themselves. Bridget, 36, presented her views on buying food:

I think it makes us lazy, and I think it makes us lack respect for the amount of effort food takes. Food is so easy. I mean, earning the money to go buy the food isn't all that easy, but it is so easy that anything easy becomes wasteful. .. You know, if you think that 'oh, if ... this food goes bad, mom will just go to the store and get more,' versus 'oh, if this food goes bad we may not have this for several more, you know, *months*, until the snow melts and the, you know, apples grow again', and maybe you have a little more respect for your food....

She spoke about having gone fishing and hunting, and gaining an appreciation of the amount time and effort that goes into gathering food:

...so *I* know that [it's hard to get fish], so fish doesn't go bad in this house, but... do my kids know that? You can go down to Safeway and for five bucks buy a little chunk of salmon and say you had salmon for dinner. Is that the same salmon I busted my ass for? I don't think so.

When she talked about obtaining food through hunting or fishing, she said:

I have a lot more respect for it ... I don't know if I can express that properly. I have a lot more respect for myself for being able to get it that way, than just going and buying it. Like, it's an accomplishment and I have pride in it....

Irene, 72, succinctly concurred with Bridget's views on this matter: "before, you used to get it yourself and enjoy it more." Therefore, not only is harvesting food a source of pride for some participants, foods obtained through hunting, fishing and gathering might be seen as being more valuable than store-bought alternatives.

Just as hunting, fishing and gathering "adds value" to foods, purchasing them at grocery stores can *decrease* their value. For example, Barb, 58, spoke about making her own jam, and while she described picking some of the berries she needed, she said, "I cheat and ... buy my strawberries." This suggests that she views berry picking as integral to the "proper" way of making jam. Bridget, 36, shared a similar view about bread when she compared a feast in the Nisga'a valley to the ones she is used to in Kitsumkalum: "...they had store bought buns. Like, somebody didn't even make the buns, they were store bought. I found that a little different." She described the practice in Kitsumkalum:

If it's just a quick family thing or like a quick community dinner - not a feast - it's usually buns... at a feast it would be very different... until the very end if they ran out, I don't think you would see store bought buns.

These examples suggest that store-bought foods are not always valued in the same way as gathered or homemade foods.

At other times, however, it appears that store-bought foods are acceptable substitutes for gathered foods. One example is blueberries. Fiona, 27, stated that she “loves” blueberries and that she used to eat them with oolichan grease. She described that her grandmother would either buy them at the grocery store or from people who had picked them locally, but didn't imply that she valued one more than the other. This was similar to Lorna's views, who described buying a lot of blueberries at the grocery store and who seemed more concerned about their quality than their source. When I asked Louie, 73, how he felt about eating store-bought berries as compared to those he picked himself, he said, “you can hardly tell the difference.” Similarly, Myra, 31, talked about “feeling the same” about wild salmon from the store versus that which she had obtained through personal connections. In these ways, some store-bought foods might be “on par” with locally gathered foods, and can be interchanged as needed.

In their comments, participants also spoke about some of the advantages offered by grocery stores, such as the access to a greater variety of foods. This was true even generations ago. Several participants described that, in addition to the berries and fruits that were harvested locally, their mothers or grandmothers purchased cases of fruit from grocery stores for canning and preserving.

My mother and my grandmother...the end of the fishing season they'll make it so we all go to Prince Rupert, and they'll get all kinds of fruits that they preserve. They did a lot of that. Besides the salmon berries, blueberries and salal berries, cranberries and a lot of crabapples, they still went to get their peaches, apricots and pears...at the Jack McCray store. That's Overwaitea. (Ruth, 77)

Ruth's story shows how the stores added to the variety of fruits her family was able to preserve.

Irene, 72, also described that, in Port Essington, they had access to only a limited selection of store-bought fruits, but that things are different now:

I think in my childhood we have to go quite a ways for food, and that's the only time you have fresh food. But now...you just go to the store. You could get all kinds of fresh food you want and all kinds of stuff in the store.

Barb, 58, commented frequently about enjoying “variety,” and added, “I’m an...impulsive shopper...if I see it and I’m in the mood, then I’ll grab it and I’ll have to have it for dinner at night...” Most participants implied that they appreciated the variety of foods available to them at the stores.

Participants also highlighted that grocery stores offered consistent access to foods.

Bridget, 36, stated, “I like the fact that I can get my kids milk and fruit, everyday. I like that if I - like right now - I don’t have a hunter, so I have to go buy, right?” She liked that the stores are a source of foods that she feels are important for the health of her children, and that they make available alternatives to foods she doesn’t consistently have access to, like moose meat. This “back-up” was also alluded to by Lorna, 57, in regards to blueberries: “...last year...well, we picked berries, we didn’t find any very good ones, so I was glad that I could just buy some in the market.” Similarly, Fiona, 27, spoke about her limited access to local seafood, and while she would prefer to have more of those foods, she said, “it's not always available so I'm pretty much always shopping from the grocery store.” In these ways, grocery stores provide alternatives when access to gathered foods is limited. They also provide options when time is limited as well. Marcie, 38, spoke about her partner picking up a meal of chicken, taters and coleslaw from the deli at SaveOnMore foods: “there was no time to cook supper, so that’s why [he] picked that up.” In this way, grocery stores provided “back-up” in a different sense, where readily available foods can help busy parents feed their families when schedules are tight. Participants viewed this, as well as the variety and consistent access to foods, as positive aspects of grocery stores.

5.5.2 Homemade foods

Another category of foods was evident in participants’ comments: homemade foods.

While store-bought foods and locally gathered foods can be distinguished based on procurement

methods, homemade foods are not mutually exclusive of these categories. Instead, homemade foods relate to how foods are prepared and/or preserved rather than how they are procured. As such, these foods might include jams and preserves made from gathered or store-bought fruit, pancakes made “from scratch,” fish or meat canned at home, etc. While the raw foods may have been obtained from any number of sources, it is the processing or preparation that is done at home, or in the homes of friends and family, that gives it its value. In these ways, homemade foods are generally contrasted with commercially prepared foods. For example, Barb, 58, described her mom’s Christmas dinner: “...lots of turkey and gravy and potatoes and cranberry sauce and dressing. Mom always made her own dressing... she never bought the packaged stuff. She always made her own....” Participants appeared to esteem these foods for several reasons: the effort that goes into them, the knowledge of how the food was prepared and the links between these foods and ideas of food self-sufficiency. I explore each of these ideas below.

Participants implied that they value the effort that goes into homemade foods, as Lorna, 57, implied when she emphasized that her and her husband’s mothers had prepared foods “just from scratch.” Rona, 53, also demonstrated this clearly when she described her mother’s breaded chicken dinner:

I thought it was really good because she worked really hard at it - it was love that went into it, yeah, more so than it was the actual chicken. She could have done the same thing with moose bones, and I would have thought, ‘yummy, what a nice thing to do.’ I mean, she spent hours cooking.... she just spent ... hours preparing this chicken dinner for us.

This “love” and effort elevates the status of foods, making them more appropriate for special occasions and formal events, such as feasts. Bridget, 36, had previously mentioned that homemade bread, and not store-bought buns, would be served at a feast, and said, “individuals spend a lot more time preparing the foods, so it’s almost our version of higher end cuisine.” Perhaps this time and effort is especially appreciated in today’s food climate, where quick, pre-prepared options are readily available and homemade foods are no longer the norm.

While the effort that goes into homemade foods certainly seems to be appreciated, participants also emphasized feeling more secure with these foods. Specifically, several participants spoke about knowing how their food was prepared and what went into it. For these reasons, Barb, 58, said she didn't buy fry bread at bake sales: "It's gotta be somebody that I know that made it ... because then you know how they make their bread. You know what they use. You know if their kitchen was clean, and if their grease was fresh...." She also spoke about her plans to buy a juicer, so that she could make her own juice, "... because then I'll know it's fresh and I'll know what's in it and I'll know I did it myself" Similarly, Irene, 72 spoke about making her own Chinese food, as opposed to buying it:

I'll do my own, 'cause it's pretty hard when you don't know the cooks uptown... I'm worried about what they put in there. At least when [I] do [my] own cooking, then I know what I put in there, no MSG or whatever.

In these ways, participants implied that they view homemade foods as being more trustworthy than other options.

In addition to this, some participants also linked homemade foods with ideas of self-sufficiency. Irene, 72, emphasized this when she described her home-canned salmon: "...when you have your own food ... it shows that you'll never be without food." She elaborated on how important it was to know how to preserve foods:

It's a good thing my mom, my grandparents, used to teach us how to put a lot of our own food up. So I do the same thing and I get my daughter to do the same thing now. At least they know what to eat. They'll never be stuck. My husband's got a garden outside

Similarly, Rona, 53, also froze and canned a lot of foods, and spoke about how, in her childhood, her mom had done this and how it had sheltered them from poverty:

... everything that came in that was seasonal she always bottled. Like you could go down to our basement when we were kids ... and it would just be walls of deer meat and fruits and vegetables everywhere ... We were never really in want growing up ... even during the really, really hardest times. Well, it was hard times for them but it didn't seem like anything changed for us.

Ruth, 77, shared a similar experience: "Somebody asked, 'how did you manage during the hungry thirties?' I don't know. I was never hungry. We always had food because we always moved from

camp to camp....” (group interview). It is notable that only the older women raised these ideas of food self-sufficiency. These women viewed having the knowledge and skills to harvest, process and preserve foods as being protective in times of uncertainty.

I observed that some participants ascribed similar meanings to gathered foods and homemade foods. Specifically, their comments suggest that these two “groups” of food overlap under the guise of food self-sufficiency, given that in both cases knowledge and skills are required in order to obtain or prepare such foods. Therefore, while gathered foods may be esteemed for the reasons explored above, homemade foods, including those made from store-bought ingredients, might also be valued in similar ways. Just as individuals need knowledge and skills in order to fish or identify edible plants, so too do they need knowledge and skills in order to bake bread or can fish, meats, fruits and vegetables. Perhaps it is because of these similarities, and the long-standing practice of preserving food, that participants often spoke about homemade foods in the context of discussing cultural food traditions. This was evident when Lorna, 57, spoke about traditional foods, and mentioned raising chickens and canning fish, but lamented that younger people are not learning these skills: “they’re not interested in the traditions.” After discussing the need for children to learn about Aboriginal cultures in schools, Louie, 73, said that he felt that children should also be taught by their mothers how to prepare and can food. Lorna, in turn, advocated that the men in the community could also have an important role to play in this knowledge transfer: “Men can hunt, fish and cook. Some men are bakers around here too, they bake bread, set bread, bake it, and that can be passed on.” Here it is the skills and knowledge that were deemed important, and perhaps even seen to be traditional, whether they related to the harvesting and preserving of gathered foods or the processing store-bought ingredients. In these ways, both gathered foods and homemade foods are similar in the sense that they might sometimes be subsumed under “tradition,” and thereby carry the value and links with the past that this term implies. (I discuss food traditions more thoroughly in section 5.7.)

5.5.3 Effects of access

I have explored some of the meanings that participants associated with foods based on how they were procured and processed. However, it appears that the accessibility of particular foods, or lack thereof, has an even greater effect on their value. Participants described that special foods were a break from regular fare, and labeled these foods as “treats,” “luxury items,” and “indulgences.” These items are not eaten often because they are either not readily available, are expensive, are associated with special occasions, or are perceived to be unhealthy. Here, I am particularly interested in exploring those foods labeled as treats due to their relative inaccessibility. Participants’ comments reveal how availability can shift the meanings that are ascribed to foods, whether those foods are now less available, increasingly accessible, or as common as before. I explore these scenarios in turn.

Some foods are treats because they not often available or are relatively expensive. To illustrate this point, I explore some of the stories that older participants shared about foods that they regarded as treats in the past. In many cases, these were foods that could only be obtained in stores or restaurants. Rona, 53, described how, in her childhood, peanut butter became a luxury after her father was severely injured: “then we were really poor...because of all the hospital hospitalization costs...so then peanut butter became a luxury.” She also described Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) in this way:

That would be a luxury item, because when we were growing up...when you don't have it or you can't get it because it's just not around or you can't get out of out of the village...then...anybody who was going to Prince Rupert, when KFC used to be there...they would be on a KFC run. So they'd bring like a couple boxes of KFC back...It's a luxury item.

In this example and others, she made it clear that the meanings that were associated with specific foods depended on whether or not people regularly had access to them. She also spoke about the Nisga’a and Tsimshian practice of gifting fruit at feasts:

... it depends on who is giving it and why they're giving it, what kind of feast it is, how inland you are... Kincolith, Prince Rupert, Ketchikan - we're all coast. We're just right on the water and so we I think we had ... easier access to incoming fruits ...

She suggested that fruit would have been even more valued in areas where access was further restricted, showing how its value or meaning is dependent on the context in which it is found. Indeed, Irene, 72, and Barb, 58, both described fresh fruit as a “treat” when they lived in Port Essington.

However, with increasing availability, the meanings ascribed to foods shift. Barb, 58, explained how she used to view fresh fruit in her childhood:

Especially when we lived in Port Essington, we rarely got any fresh fruit, and ... I can still remember dad doling out the fruit to us and it being like a big surprise - like Christmas almost - because we were having fresh fruit ... like apples, oranges...

Now, her situation is different. She described fresh fruit as “just an everyday thing” and explained how her perspectives have shifted: “it's so readily available now and we buy it in abundance and when we were growing up it was rare, it was a treasure, it was a treat.” Bridget, 36, told a similar story about mandarin oranges, and described that in her childhood her family would get one or two boxes of mandarins for the whole holiday season. Now that her household can go through one or two boxes per *day*, because of increased access, her views on this fruit have changed:

They're not as big a treat anymore. Whereas I grew up and they were a rare treat, right, that we appreciated. And we had little games like if you could peel it all in one piece, then you got a wish, and my mom's rule was you could not eat a mandarin orange unless you shared it with somebody. You had to share a piece of it with somebody or your wish would not come true, and stuff like that so...yeah, it's just not like that anymore.

While Barb and Bridget's stories show how treats can become “everyday things,” Rona, 53, described how those foods can retain some of their appeal as today's “comfort foods:” “We used to pick raspberries when we were kids ... it was always ... [a] really nice treat in the winter time to have homemade jam. So, [now] it's a daily comfort food.” She said the same thing about KFC: “it's just a luxury ... so to have it all the time, which is what's happening with all our fast foods, right, to have it all the time is, I guess, like a comfort food. Something like

that.” These participants described that, with increasing availability, foods previously viewed as special can become normal, everyday foods.

Today, participants described other foods as being special. While access to peanut butter, jam, KFC and fresh fruit have increased, access to some gathered foods is more limited than before. For some people, this is based, in part, on their physical distance from the ocean, as Lorna, 57, explained, “...we miss clams ... when we used to live near the ocean, we had clams all the time, fresh. We dug it ourselves.” Now she views clams, cockles and other seafood as “precious items,” and described that she and her husband served those foods to guests when they hosted a seafood feast over the Christmas holidays. Similarly, Irene, 72, described preparing moose for special dinners, like birthdays or when guests came to visit. However, for Fiona, 27, Marcie, 38, and Bridget, 36, community dinners and feasts are the main occasions where they have access to a variety of gathered foods, and they looked forward to having items such as herring eggs, moose, and whipped soapberries. Rona, 53, figured that this limited access to gathered foods was a reality for many Aboriginal peoples in Terrace: “for about 40% of them, it's a luxury. Yeah, it's actually...the true definition of a feast...when they can get our Indian food...because of accessibility.” Because of limited accessibility, the value of many locally gathered foods appears to have increased such that they are sometimes only eaten during special occasions.

The value of store-bought foods can also increase with limited accessibility. Bridget, 36, told me about China Lily soya sauce, how it has been popular in her family for generations, and pairs nicely with chowmein, fish and rice, herring eggs, and other seafood. However, she shared a story which illustrates how the status of this seemingly ordinary condiment changed when it was no longer possible to buy it in local grocery stores:

A few years ago when China Lily was off the shelves for some reason, my cousin...got married...For a wedding present, they were given two bottles of China Lily, and everybody at the wedding wanted China Lily for their herring eggs but there was only the two bottles...That was like the best wedding present that they got!

This example shows how seemingly mundane, everyday foods can acquire special status when their availability is limited.

In comparison, when the availability of mundane, everyday foods remained constant, those foods maintained a relatively unexciting, but important, supporting role in participants' diets. Such foods were often described as "basics" or "staples," like potatoes and rice, as described in case study # 2. Ruth, 77, described the seasonal hunting, fishing and gathering she was involved in when she lived in Port Essington, and stated that her family didn't rely too heavily on the stores: "just the basic things we'd buy." Presumably by this she meant flour, baking powder, salt, rice, etc. Similarly, Lorna, 57, speculated about her husband's diet when he was growing up, and also provided some insight on these "basics:" "... wouldn't have a lot of store bought stuff there, just basic stuff like ... dried beans, sugar, coffee, flour ... tea ... a slab of bacon" Bridget, 36, also talked about the staples that were in her parents' house, regardless of their financial situation, and listed rice, flour, sugar, China Lily soya sauce, lard, and salt. That some foods were described as "basic," suggests that they are viewed as being relatively uninteresting; they are standard fare. Many of the "basic" foods described by participants continue to be part of their diets today, and they spoke of them with less passion than other foods. Only Bridget's story of the China Lily soya sauce wedding gift showed how staple items might become more interesting.

5.5.4 Variety and choice

Another subtle, yet important, theme that was apparent in the data was the appreciation of variety and choice. This was explicitly expressed by Barb, 58, "there's so much variety out there. There's no sense eating the same thing over and over and over... I like choices." Likewise, Garnet, 58, and Fiona, 27, indicated that they liked to experiment instead of always cooking the same way, whereas for Myra, 31, this opportunity mainly existed in eating out and trying "ethnic dishes." She spoke about liking a local East Indian restaurant "because it it's got

flavours that I wouldn't normally make at home.” Some participants appeared to emphasize variety and choice because it had been limited in their childhoods. Barb, 58, gave an example of this when she said, “we grew up with white bread. That’s all we ever had was white bread, white bread, white bread. There was no variety back then.” She described that when she moved out of her parents’ home she made a point of buying a lot of the foods she rarely had as a child: “Cheese was another thing that was very rare, so it was like having a treat and then when I got married and got my own place, cheese was on my list.” Garnet, 58, who was raised by foster parents, also appreciated the control he later gained over his food choices: “I’m glad I’m now grown up and able to...live my own life and eat the way I want” Clearly, participants appreciated having variety and choice in their diets.

When variety and choice were limited, this has strong effects on the perceptions participants had of their foods. The most striking example of this effect was described by Marcie, 38, in the associations she made with eating fish and being poor:

We practically ate fish five times a week and so now that I'm on my own...I choose not to because I guess I associate those feelings of being broke and we were poor...so I don't have good feelings with that....

This struck me because other participants, like Garnet, 58, and Fiona, 27, voiced that they wished they could have *more* fish. For Marcie, 38, however, there were too many negative associations:

...you spend a lot of time preparing and cooking it and smoking it and not going away on summer holidays because you're in the smoke house...so all those things...I don't do that myself. I don't can or smoke fish.

She described going to school and seeing the variety of foods other people were eating, and later, as an adult, she incorporated that variety into her diet as well. She said her parents still enjoy a lot of fish: “they love it...that's what they choose...” but for herself, “it's my choice and I choose not to....” This scenario depicts how variety and choice, or lack thereof, can affect how a person feels about a particular food.

Lack of choice can also affect how participants view other aspects of their life. For example, while Bridget, 36, had spoken positively about some aspects of grocery stores, she was clearly discouraged by her inability to obtain her food elsewhere. She explained, “I consider myself a Safeway Indian. I have no hunter, I have no choice. A Safeway Indian is an urbanized Aboriginal person that’s diet is, I would say, mainly out of the grocery store” What I take from her comments is not that she dislikes purchasing foods at the grocery stores *per se*, but that she is displeased by her lack of choice in the matter. Her next comment, a continuation on “Safeway Indians,” is most revealing:

I’m guessing [that] would describe 90% of Aboriginal people today, except for those that actually live in isolated communities like Kwadacha, and that, you know, they have no choice but to still live their traditional lifestyles.

In this case, living a traditional lifestyle is not necessarily presented as a positive thing, not when it is due to a lack of choice. In Bridget’s comments, the importance of having choice is very clear, and not having choice, regardless of the issue at hand, is seen as unfavorable.

5.5.5 Discussion of the contextualized meanings of food

In this section, I explored a variety of factors that influenced the meanings participants attributed to the foods in their diets. In some cases, the method of procurement (i.e., locally gathered versus store-bought foods) affected the perceived value of foods, as did whether or not they were homemade. While store-bought foods didn’t always have the same value as homemade or gathered foods, it is clear that the participants appreciated the availability and variety that grocery stores offered. Indeed, they also described that availability strongly affected how they viewed foods, where, with decreased access, the value of any number of foods could increase significantly. The story of the China Lily wedding gift is a particularly poignant example of this phenomenon, but unfortunately, this limited access is also increasingly the reality for many people in regards to locally gathered foods. Finally, participants greatly valued

having access to a variety of foods and being able to choose from those foods, and in cases of limited variety and choice, they sometimes associated particular foods with being poor.

Participants' comments about the meanings they ascribed to foods based on procurement, preparation, access, variety and choice resonate with other sociological literature on food and eating. For example, in regards to the values associated with store-bought and homemade foods, the research of Morley (personal communication, 2009) and others such as Julier (2005) show a "hierarchy of values," such that homemade baked goods are associated with "being a good parent," while store-bought foods are equated with inadequate care and nurturing. In terms of access, Wilk (1999) provided examples from his research in Belize, illustrating that lobster was once considered by the middle class to be a "poor food," because it was cheap and readily available to the lower class. In contrast, imported foods, like canned corned beef and white bread, were less accessible and therefore esteemed. Overall, the meanings that participants related to foods based on procurement, preparation, access, variety and choice appear to be congruent with the findings of other food research carried out in non-Aboriginal contexts: Food does not necessarily have inherent meaning or value; rather the meanings ascribed to food depend on the contexts in which it is found.

Participants' comments provided a different perspective than what is presented in the dominant discourse about Aboriginal peoples and food specifically. In particular, I feel it is important to relate their comments about store-bought foods and gathered foods to what is present in the literature. As previously discussed in the previous section on food and health, participants hold more complex views on the healthfulness of foods than simply viewing gathered foods as healthy, and store-bought food as unhealthy. Although, in many cases, they would like to have greater access to locally gathered foods, they did not necessarily see store-bought foods as a threat to their health. However, despite the links that are made in the literature between gathered food and health, much more is implied. Specifically, at times, authors suggest

that Aboriginal peoples *should* be eating more gathered foods because those are the foods that are associated with their cultures and ancestors. By extension, they *shouldn't* eat as much store-bought food. However, participants have shown that, in addition to valuing locally gathered foods, they also valued the wide range of foods they have access to through the grocery stores. Perhaps more importantly than simply the source of their foods, participants desired and appreciated having the choice to obtain the foods they preferred, whether that be chicken breast, salmon, moose, low-fat yogurt, cheesecake or any other number of foods. Again, they value variety and choice.

The literature, as well as some participants, suggest that Aboriginal peoples *should* have the knowledge and skills to harvest, process and prepare locally gathered foods. In the literature, there is an implicit view that Aboriginal people are somehow being irresponsible or lesser “Indians” if they don't live their lives as their ancestors did (Francis, 1993), and instead live their lives in similar ways as other Canadians who rely heavily on a globalized commercial food system (Power, 2007). For example, one of my friends, born to an Aboriginal father and non-Aboriginal mother, said that he is more “Indian” than his father, because he fishes more often than his dad does. These ideas relate to “the image of the Indian” as being a hunter and gatherer, who lives “closer to the land” (Francis, 1993). This image is likely what Bridget, 36, was alluding to in her comment about being a “Safeway Indian,” a term that plays on the notion that “Indians” *shouldn't* be shopping in grocery stores, but should be obtaining their sustenance elsewhere. This notion is also evident in the following quote, from an Aboriginal participant in an Australian research project:

I remember a student asked me once...”What do Aboriginals eat? Where do they get their food from? ... I said, ‘I’ll have to give it a bit of thought’. She said, ‘Where, where, where?’ She was all excited too! And I said, ‘From Woolworths and Coles [stores].’ And she laughed and laughed and laughed (Foley, 2005).

The “image of the Indian” suggests that there is something inherently wrong or incongruent about Aboriginal peoples obtaining their food in grocery stores. It implies that Aboriginal

peoples *should* be hunting and gathering. While some participants suggested that they might want to obtain more of their food in these ways, participants did not generally suggest that they viewed shopping in grocery stores to be incongruent with their identities as Aboriginal peoples. This was merely presented as a reality of their day-to-day lives.

In the literature, authors emphasize the psychosocial significance of traditional food, highlighting the emotional, spiritual and social meanings these foods might have for Aboriginal peoples (Foley, 2005; Miewald, 2002; Nabhan, 1998; Power, 2007; Powers & Powers, 1984; Willows, 2004). Certainly, Bridget, 36, described that she had pride in gathering her own foods, and Rona, 53, described locally gathered foods as “soul food.” However, authors are generally using the “pre-contact” definition of the term “traditional food,” thereby implying that *only* locally gathered foods might have significant value for Aboriginal peoples. This definition ignores that foods obtained through other means (i.e., grocery stores) might also have personal or socio-cultural significance for Aboriginal peoples. Indeed, participants described other foods to be significant as well, especially those that are staples, treats, or homemade foods. Also, Marcie, 38, described that negative associations with locally gathered food are possible, as she associated fish with poverty and lack of choice. Given that the meanings of food are personal and context dependant, this urges us to reconsider assumptions about which foods may, or may not, be meaningful to Aboriginal peoples. (I further exploration participants’ views on traditions in section 5.7)

My analysis of participants’ stories reinforces that foods do not have inherent value in and of themselves. Rather, the meanings participants ascribe to foods depend on factors such as individual experiences, environments, knowledge, skills, personal connections and financial situations. These context-dependant meanings have important implications for those individuals and organizations who are working with Aboriginal clients and communities on food-related issues. Efforts to encourage, say, increased fish consumption in Aboriginal communities need to consider that, depending on the individual circumstances, fish may be considered a luxury, a

staple or “poor food.” Again, in the case of the latter, individuals may actively resist such recommendations because of the associations they make with fish, as has been documented elsewhere with “poor food” (Wilk, 1999). Likewise, efforts to discourage consumption of certain store-bought foods need to consider that these too may be considered to be luxuries, staples or “poor foods.” Therefore, one cannot assume that foods made from store-bought ingredients do not have personal or cultural significance for Aboriginal peoples. Ultimately, because of the disparities and variety of circumstances that may exist within even small communities, specific foods can hold different meanings for different individuals.

The following case study describes this reality in detail. While the majority of the participants discussed bologna and/or wieners to varying extents, they presented a wide range of opinions and perspectives on these foods. For the older participants, these foods were once an exciting luxury: “rich man’s food.” In contrast, many of the younger participants considered these to be unhealthy foods, of low quality, and associated them with poverty. However, many participants also described that these “new” foods are now undeniably associated with Aboriginal peoples, thereby powerfully illustrating the complex meanings food takes on.

5.6 Case Study #3: Bologna and wieners

I was struck by how many participants spontaneously discussed bologna and/or wieners in their individual interviews with me. I was surprised by this, likely because of my own pre-conceived ideas of local food habits. Therefore, eager for a more thorough exploration of participants’ views on these foods, I shared a summary of their perspectives at the group interview (see appendix L) and invited further comments. The discussion that ensued added to the richness of the data. However, it is also significant that, while bologna or wieners were

mentioned in eight out of ten individual interviews, not one participant took a picture of either of these foods. The reasons for this might become clearer towards the end of this case study.

The oldest group of participants described that bologna was a popular food, especially in their younger years. The three participants in their 70s each talked about how much they liked bologna, and the youngest participant (Fiona, 27) talked about how much her grandmother liked it. In these cases, they described bologna or wieners as a treat, a “luxury” and a break from the everyday. Ruth, 77, spoke about living in Port Essington: “When we used to eat...all the fish, the clams, the seafood, getting wieners was really special to me... that used to be my favourite food.” She described moving from camp to camp to gather different foods throughout the year: “then we move back to Essington, then we’ll have a big treat – bologna” (group interview). Louie, 73, also spent his younger years in Port Essington and shared a similar story, “...years ago in Essington, we don't have a deep freeze or a fridge bologna and wieners... it's a real treat once in a while ... and I used to love eating that” (group interview). Bologna was so popular in this generation that Irene, 72, described that her uncle would buy three or four bologna whenever there was a feast: “Every time there's a feast, he makes sure there's bologna.” These participants’ comments depict that when they were growing up in Port Essington, bologna and wieners were relatively rare foods, exceptions to the daily fare. However, this was also true for the youngest participant, Fiona, 27, who talked about growing up with her grandmother in Kitamaat village; “I always used to like to have it besides always having fish every day....”(group interview).

In the past, bologna and wieners were considered a treat because they were not always readily available. This unavailability was due, in part, to financial and geographical barriers. Rona, 53, spoke about her experience living in the coastal village of Kincolith, where for years they only had access to larger centers by boat.

We never had roads. Like, Kincolith just got roads ... what, five years ago? So that was ... the other luxury thing ... Hopefully the bologna would make it or there would be bologna or you'd have enough money to have bologna.

Similarly, Ruth, 77, described how bologna was perceived in Port Essington: "... that was rich man's food, bologna. It was the only thing we could buy" (group interview). Further south, in Kitamaat village, Fiona, 27, talked about how her grandmother thought bologna and wieners became increasingly expensive over time, but described a time where they were less financially constrained:

My uncle, he used to do really well because he's was a carver and for the time I grew up there he was making a lot of money so he'd would be able to make the bologna a little bit thicker. ... Gran thought that was pretty fortunate for us to have really big bologna steaks (group interview).

In these ways, participants described that bologna and wieners were a luxury in large part because of the financial and geographical barriers involved in accessing these foods.

On a different note, several participants spoke about bologna in relation to residential school experiences. Rona, 53, told a story of her husband giving a speech at a feast attended primarily by residential school survivors:

"he was listing off all the food that that they brought and they were gonna serve and everything and then he said, 'and fried bologna,' and everyone was like cheering like crazy ... yeah, they were all excited about having fried bologna and curried bologna."

She described that it was "definitely uncommon" for First Nations students to have had bologna in residential schools, an observation which was supported by Irene, 72. When she spoke about her year at a residential school, she mentioned that the high school students could cook for themselves on the weekend: "We could eat what we want, what we used to eat at home. Everybody hollered for bologna and rice and corn." These comments suggest that, for residential school survivors like Irene, bologna was a food that was associated with home, which they did not often have access to at the schools.

The nostalgic views held by some of the older participants were not unanimous. While those in their 70s had at one time considered bologna to have been a luxury, some of the younger participants associated it with being poor. At the group session, I spoke about the dish

of bologna, rice and corn, to which Bridget, 36, reacted: "I really thought until I just read this that my mom had made that up because we were poor. I didn't really realize other people ate that too." She also added, "I noticed at school that there was things like ham, salami... I noticed rich kids had ham and salami with lettuce and stuff on their sandwiches ... and I got bologna and bread." Her comments resonated with Garnet, 58, who said: "I've always related bologna ... with the poor side of town too ... I always thought ... bologna being from not being able to afford good kinds of meats and stuff. Good red meat" (group interview). That he viewed bologna to be a substandard food was also evident in a comment he made about growing up in foster homes, where he was sometimes treated differently from the "regular kids:" "the family's having a roast or something... They fed me stuff like bologna and macaroni...." These comments show a shift in views of bologna; for older participants it was once a luxury, but to younger participants it is a "poor food."

Participants discussed other negative associations with bologna and wieners as well. One participant stated that while she used to eat bologna and wieners, now she thinks about "how much isn't really meat" (Myra, 31). Fiona, 27, seemed to share these views. She talked about learning at a Food Safe course that "bologna and wieners are just stuff that's considered like a mystery tube." As a result, she was "unsure of it" and stated "if I was able to afford a meat I wouldn't purchase it. I would just buy a smaller quantity of something that's a little bit fresher and not mechanically separated." Similarly, while Louie, 73, had previously described bologna as being a favourite food, since meeting his wife of several years, he no longer eats it because of "all the junk they put in there." Lorna, 57, pointed out that it contains additives, and is concerned that "you're getting nitrosamines produced in your stomach, which is a cancer causing chemical." Whether participants may have previously associated bologna and wieners with being rich or being poor, it appears that over time, they have become increasingly concerned with the quality of these products and their effects on physical health.

Despite the shifting meanings of bologna and wieners, participants' comments suggest that these are foods that are associated with Aboriginal peoples and their communities. This association is exemplified by the language some participants used; several described bologna as "Indian steak" or "Indian round steak." Bridget, 36, used this language when she shared the story of when she moved to Terrace:

I didn't grow up around here ... I came here and everybody was talking about Indian round steak ... I didn't know what that was going to be and it sounded good, but it was bologna ... I felt ripped off ... Here I thought we were moving here so I could learn about what it meant to be from my mother's family and it was more bologna! (group interview).

Rona, 53, also described bologna as "today Indian food," and provided some insight on why she felt it remains common among Aboriginal families: "...there's no alternative...when you can pay three dollars for some bologna, but you've gotta pay 50 dollars at the butchers for a piece of moose meat, which one are you gonna to get?" However, there may be more to bologna than it's relatively low cost and accessibility. After a hearty discussion about bologna and wieners in the group interview, Bridget, 36, shared some thoughts which suggest that bologna may also provide links to family and ancestors:

Well, I feel like I was being raised more traditional than I thought. I had no idea. I really thought, you know, that I was the only one being subjected to bologna, rice and corn. Now, I feel almost privileged that my mom did share that. I feel bad for all the times I snubbed my nose at it and criticized her for feeding it to us. Here she thought she was giving us something from her home, from her past.

Fiona, 27, also used the term "traditional" in speaking about how her gran prepared bologna: "She would always like it fried with rice and creamed corn. That was pretty much a traditional side-dish...." (group interview). Her comment, and those of other participants, suggests that bologna is a long-standing food item in their families and communities.

This examination of participants' views on bologna and wieners exemplifies how the meanings of food are context dependent. For the older participants, these foods were once rare treats, luxuries, but today they are more likely to be associated with poverty and poor health. Bologna's denigrated status may explain why in this project, although most participants

discussed bologna or wieners, not one person took a picture of these foods. Also, despite this and the self-deprecating humour implied in the term “Indian steak,” it appears that there remains something “Indian” about bologna especially. Consider, for example, the menu for Kitsumkalum’s community Chinese New Year dinner, “Indian Style,” (see Appendix Q), where “curried bologna suey” is offered alongside other “fusion” dishes like herring egg chop suey and seaweed chop suey. In this case, the bologna, much like the clam fritters, is an example of the “Indian” contribution to this celebratory meal. This menu, and participants’ comments about bologna, makes a case for the “indigenization” of bologna into local diets, a concept which will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.7 SECTION 3: Views on food traditions, culture and dietary change

In the previous sections, I explored themes that arose in the open-ended participant interviews. Specifically, in section 1, I explored participants’ views on food and health, and in section 2, I examined how the meanings participants’ ascribed to food related to accessibility, procurement, and processing. However, given the problematic representations of Aboriginal peoples and cultures evident in the literature, in this study I was particularly interested in exploring what participants had to say about food in relation to traditions, culture and social change. While the bulk of each individual interview was open-ended, I did include several specific questions in order to explore participants’ views on these matters (see Appendix K for final interview guide). For example, I asked “traditional foods – what does that mean to you?”, “What foods would you consider to be traditional foods?” and “What are your thoughts on the recommendation that Aboriginal peoples should eat more of their traditional foods?” In response to these questions and others, participants shared their perspectives on food traditions, social change, culture, and cultural sensitivity. I explore these topics in turn.

5.7.1 Traditional foods

As previously outlined in Chapter 3, after completing 10 individual interviews, I summarized participants' comments about traditional foods and shared this as one of four topic summaries during the group interview (see appendix N). During this group session, participants discussed this topic and provided additional perspectives. Below, I provide an expanded summary of their comments. First, however, I quickly discuss some of the observations I made regarding how frequently participants used the terms "tradition," "traditional" or "traditional foods."

The majority of participants rarely spoke of traditions, traditional ways or traditional foods until late in their interviews, generally after I introduced questions involving these terms. Ruth, 77, provided an exception to this trend, as she had started her interview with two comments describing particular foods as being, or not being, traditional. Again, as discussed in Chapter 4, I suspect that the influence of previous and concurrent research projects, such as FNFNES, affected her expectations of my project. Another exception was Bridget, 36, who, early in her interview, described China Lily soya sauce as "one of the most traditional foods" she knew, following a conversation we had previously had about this food. Otherwise, the majority of the participants only used the term "traditional food" less than twice in an unprompted manner, and some did not use it at all. In many cases, I introduced the term towards the end of the interviews with the questions I described above. The infrequency with which most participants used these terms suggests to me that, in their day to day lives, participants do not tend to think of foods in terms of categories of "traditional foods" and "other foods." Rather, food is food. Characteristics like taste, cost, versatility and healthfulness were at the forefront of participants' discussions, instead of the more abstract ideas of tradition and culture.

When participants did spontaneously discuss traditions, traditional ways or traditional foods, they seemed to do so in a casual manner. Fiona, 27, for example, used these terms several

times to describe foods that she associated with her grandmother or her past. Ruth, 77, simply mentioned that it was hard to access traditional foods. Bridget, 36, used the term when she made a distinction between feasts and other community dinners, describing feasts as being “way more traditional,” because there would be more gathered foods and homemade foods, and less store-bought foods, than at less formal events. In these ways, describing foods or practices as traditional primarily served to link them with the past. Related to this connection, Rona, 53, hinted that traditions can foster a sense of belonging, and she described that she sees value in them being taught and passed on: “...I think that's why it's so important to have places like Kermode [Friendship Center], you know, so that we can we can learn tradition, hang on to what we got, so when we do go home it's not foreign.” While these comments suggest that participants attach value and meaning to traditions, most participants only briefly touched on these ideas, if at all.

In contrast, Garnet, 58 spoke about traditions, traditional ways and traditional foods in manners that were strikingly different from other participants. In particular, he used these words very frequently, stating them over 25 times over the course of his individual interview, only three instances of which were prompted by my questioning. Also, the way in which he used these terms implied that he saw value in traditional practices primarily *because they were seen to be traditional*. For example, he talked about liking cornmeal when he was growing up, but gaining a greater appreciation for it after finding out that it was considered to be a traditional food for some Aboriginal peoples. He also described salmon as a food that was significant to him, in part, because “it’s traditional.” He explained this symbolic value later in his interview after describing traditional foods as being physically and emotionally healthier than other foods: “if ...you're eating your own traditional foods...you gotta have some sort of pride about that because...you're still maintaining a traditional lifestyle...” In this way, Garnet’s emphasis on traditions, especially “pre-contact” practices, can be interpreted as a form of resistance to assimilation to “European,” “North American,” “western” or “white” ways. The manner in

which Lorna, 57, used the terms “tradition,” “traditional” and “traditional foods” suggests that she espouses similar views as Garnet, but because she was part of a “double interview,” she did not have as much “space” to speak about these matters and only used these terms slightly more frequently than the other participants.

Despite participants’ varying emphasis on traditions, I asked each participant for their perspectives on traditional foods. What foods do they view to be traditional? When asked to give examples of such foods, many participants included fish, seafood, wild meat, seaweed and berries. For example, Fiona, 27, listed, “salmon...seafood, halibut, cockles, clams, herring eggs....” Some described that these are the foods that are hunted, fished and gathered, “from the land and the water,” or that they were eaten before European contact: “so-called traditional foods that they would eat prior to contact with Caucasians...” (Myra, 31). However, it doesn’t appear to be that simple. Beyond these initial responses, there seemed to be some debate as to what food could or couldn’t be considered to be traditional.

Some people acknowledged that traditional foods varied regionally, and that they would be different for Aboriginal people living in northern Canada, the interior of BC, on the Plains or on the West coast. For Garnet, 58, this variety of foods could all be considered to be traditional, including corn, potatoes and rice, because they were eaten by Aboriginal peoples in North America prior to European contact. However, Rona, 53, made the argument that potatoes and moose could *not* be considered traditional for Aboriginal peoples in northwest BC, and pointed out that potatoes were introduced by the Irish and that moose moved into the region only decades ago. As well, Ruth, 77, said that scallops were not “Indian foods” to her, but that they might be for other people who “used to get it and grew up on it.” Therefore, some participants considered the regional history of foods when labeling foods as being traditional.

Besides these regional differences, there were other ways to look at traditional foods as well. Many participants talked about traditional foods being the ones that were eaten by previous generations and that they were taught to eat by their parents or grandparents: “foods

that were taught from my granny to me how to prepare” (Fiona, 27). Bridget, 36, described that soapberries were traditional “because our people have been eating it for generations.” She also explained that, “I consider traditional food one that my mother and my grandmother used that I still use,” and because of this, described China Lily soya sauce as being a traditional food also. Additionally, during the group interview, when she found out that other participants had also been raised eating bologna, rice and corn, she said, “I feel like I was being raised more traditional than I thought.” These comments show that foods that participants were raised on, especially those associated with previous generations, can be viewed as being traditional foods.

However, because all the participants described growing up on a variety of foods, not just those that were gathered locally, I asked for opinions on this. Irene, 72, acknowledged that some people might describe foods such as rice, potatoes, oatmeal, and homemade bread as being traditional because these are foods that they were “raised on,” were never without and have “been around” for a long time. Therefore, even though Rona, 53, said potatoes *weren’t* traditional, others included potatoes and rice in meals that were considered to be traditional, such as salmon stew with potato and onions (Garnet, 58) and fish, rice and seaweed (Bridget, 36). Additionally, Lorna, 57, described that certain foods, such as fry bread, turkey and ham, have “become traditional foods.” Her view was supported by Barb’s description of a traditional Tsimshian feast, which includes two soups and fry bread. Therefore it is clear that some participants might consider more than just “pre-contact” or locally gathered foods to be traditional.

In addition to “traditional foods,” participants also occasionally used terms such as “Indian foods,” “First Nations foods,” and “Native food.” These terms were used in similar ways as “traditional foods;” and some participants explained that, to them, they meant the same thing. However, there was ambiguity in these terms as well. For example, while Bridget, 36, used the term “Indian food” to refer to “pre-contact” foods, Rona, 53, also used the term “today Indian food” to refer to bologna, peanut butter and other foods that she perceives to be

commonly eaten by local Aboriginal peoples today. Like “traditional food,” it appears that these other terms are similarly used in a multiplicity of ways.

Clearly, there is a lack of consensus on the meaning of the term “traditional” and its synonyms. Bridget, 36, acknowledged this ambiguity when she said of “traditional foods,” “it’s a muddy word.” Similarly, Lorna, 57, stated, “it depends on how far back you wanna go.” Bridget, 36, also pointed out that traditional to her might not be traditional to someone else, and a few of the other participants felt that it is difficult to differentiate between family food traditions and cultural food traditions. During the group interview, participants elaborated on the difficulty of this term. Ruth, 77, even asked, “what does traditional mean??” (My question exactly!) In reaction to these difficulties, a few participants sought to introduce an alternate term. Ruth, 77, said, “cultural is... what I call Indian food.” Garnet, 58, liked her choice of the word “cultural,” and gave examples of how the diets of different Aboriginal cultures vary from region to region. Ruth, 77, in turn, agreed, “it’s different cultures.” Bridget, 36, also liked this term, and elaborated on how it might be distinguished from traditions by saying to Ruth, “I like the way you said your cultural foods are the gathered foods... and traditional foods you’ve eaten in your family.” She shared her own perspective:

Me and my kids have different traditions in our family than I had in my mother’s home, right. So, traditions can change with generations, whereas culture is supposed to be consistent throughout the generations, although it becomes adaptive ... for survival purposes.... (group interview).

These comments show that, while some participants view food traditions in regionally specific, “pre-contact” terms, others understand traditions to change over time and place. As a result, what might be subsumed under the term “traditional foods” might vary from person to person, and as Myra, 31, stated, “it’s open to interpretation.”

5.7.2 Perspectives on culture and social change

Through their comments on food traditions and other topics, participants shared some of their perspectives about Aboriginal cultures. Sometimes they spoke about culture explicitly, but

more often it was subtly embedded in their comments. In these comments, participants shared two contrasting views about Aboriginal cultures: as fixed and unchanging, or as fluid and evolving.

When participants spoke explicitly about Aboriginal cultures, they sometimes presented culture as a static entity, as something that can be lost, taken away, eroded, “brought back,” learned or remembered. Garnet, 58, presented this view when he said, “when the residential school era came into play, it took our culture away.” He shared a similar perspective about the reserve system:

They were forced to accept the reserves, and when they had to accept the reserves they had to accept the white man's foods too. So...that changed their whole lives and ... they lost their direction, their culture, their whole everything just changed. Their whole lives changed. ... It weakened them in terms of they weren't able to -I'm not sure what word, I don't want to use the word 'fight' – but survive, I guess, culturally.

From these comments, I interpret that “surviving culturally” might mean maintaining pre-contact cultural and dietary practices. Lorna, 57, also presented a similar view of culture, but emphasized that it can be taught and learned, in this case, in the local public school system:

...trying to bring back the culture and they're starting to put it in the schools, teaching Sm'algyax, teaching Native crafts and traditions right in the schools, teaching the stories. And the kids, when they start learning it at a young age like that and it's more universal that way taught in the schools, they develop an interest at a young age....They're not always gonna get it at home but if you can teach them something at school about it then later on they'll keep an interest going, hopefully, maybe, and look into it when they can read books.

Bridget, 36, also spoke about culture as something that can be learned and remembered: “...in Kalum we have so few elders that have this knowledge, that can speak our language, that remember our culture. Like Ruth just named off an entire year of culture like it was nothing” (group interview). She described that, because many people participate in the workforce, knowledge is not being transferred from older to younger generations. Additionally, she implied that this lack of knowledge is linked with her identity as an Aboriginal person; as a result of being unable to answer her son’s questions for a school project on Aboriginal peoples, she felt

“...very, very small...I was feeling very...white” (group interview). In these ways, some participants spoke about culture as a specific set of practices and knowledge which can be retained or eroded, and which are linked with identities. In this view of culture, social change is often understood as “loss” or cultural decay: “Since the European have come here ... our traditions and our culture started dying” (Garnet, 58, group interview). This view of Aboriginal cultures presents a rather bleak and hopeless view of social change.

However, other participants presented a more optimistic view of social change. When participants spoke about cultural change and redefinition, they suggested that culture might be seen in more flexible ways. For example, when she worried about the effects of urban life on young Aboriginal people, Rona, 53, also spoke about survival:

The next generation that's coming up is struggling ... Like, how do you do it being so alone? ... We're not used to being this alone, we're not used to being in little cubbies...and not even knowing who your neighbour is... This is new to us. So yeah, this is a process that that we still need to get used to, to integrate, to survive.

Here, she implied that adaptation to new contexts is integral to survival. She also explicitly acknowledged cultural change as a reality: “the cultural aspects...changed.” Bridget, 36, also recognized such change, and in discussing China Lily soya sauce, said:

It may not be something that people would consider traditional if you're strictly looking at...our culture, say, a hundred fifty years ago, but that's looking at culture in a more stagnated way. I believe that culture evolves and grows and changes with peoples' environments, so I consider traditional food one that my mother and my grandmother used that I still use. So if I go back two, maybe even three, generations, China Lily was there....

Later, she wondered if perhaps China Lily and chowmein were primarily family food traditions, but also said, “to our culture overall, I'd say that we're evolving more in that direction than, say, we were a hundred and fifty years ago....” However, it was Myra, 31, one of the youngest participants, who most poignantly summed up a view of Aboriginal cultures as fluid and evolving: “Aboriginal isn't just about what was before - it's what's happening now.” These comments suggest that what is deemed to be culturally relevant needs not be limited to that

which existed prior to European contact, but can also include those Aboriginal practices and traditions that have evolved in response to changing circumstances.

5.7.3 Changes in food practices

Participants' views on traditions and cultures shape how they view and understand dietary change. In their conversations with me, many of the participants discussed social changes that have affected their diets or the diets of their ancestors. In this section, I explore some of the different perspectives participants presented about these dietary changes. I start by briefly exploring a view put forth by two participants, who present dietary change largely as a one-way process influenced by external forces. Other participants painted a more complex picture of dietary change. In particular, some participants discussed changes in food preservation methods, an increased reliance on money and other factors that have affected their diets. I discuss these changes in turn and then follow with an exploration of participants' comments about the dietary impact of residential school experiences. Their comments help illustrate that dietary change is not necessarily a simple or negative process, but that it is a complex, multifaceted phenomena.

Two participants, Garnet, 58, and Lorna, 57, expressed strong views about the nature of dietary changes for Aboriginal peoples. This tendency was especially strong for Garnet, who spoke at length about this topic. He saw one main reason for these changes: "since the European have come here, they have taken a lot of our traditional foods away from us" (group interview).

He elaborated on this view:

How the times have changed, and the European have changed us, and have forced us into eating their foods by sending us to residential schools and stuff... there was a lot forced on us that made us change... Our younger people today, look at them, most of them are going to McYuks, Kentucky Fried Chicken, A+W, you know and they're eating all these chemicalized foods and everything. They don't even think about traditional foods (group interview).

He had expressed a similar view in his individual interview with me, "...you very seldom see young people today, native people, eating traditional food. They're all, if you will, North

Americanized or whatever.” Through these and other comments, he expressed an unequivocally negative view of dietary change, and described that it was imposed upon Aboriginal peoples by “the European” through numerous colonial practices. Lorna, 57, also presented a similar view, and held “white influence” and “modern world” responsible for the changes she sees in the diets, and lives, of younger Aboriginal peoples: “it's just a totally white influence on all our young people ... it's just a modern world taking over the minds and hearts of our children and grandchildren, and it's really hard to fight.” In these ways, Garnet and Lorna view dietary change as a unidirectional process resulting from influences originating outside of Aboriginal peoples and communities.

Other participants paint a more complex picture of dietary change, and one of the myriad influences participants described is the change in available food preservation technologies. For example, Ruth, 77, described how, before her family acquired a deep freezer, they were only able to access certain foods once per year: “we start eating it fresh, and then we eat the half dried and then we eat the smoked, and we eat it until it's gone” (group interview). Participants described that, with freezers, canners and vacuum sealers, they can eat gathered foods long after their harvesting time has passed. Related to this, they also hinted that local Aboriginal peoples now use certain technologies, such as smoke houses, less than before, presumably because newer preservation methods have decreased the need for smoking and drying food. This change has resulted in certain foods being less available. Ruth, 77, described that a smoke house, going “day and night,” is required in order to make “stink eggs,” a dish of fermented fish roe. Because the required equipment is not readily available, she said she had not eaten this dish in decades. Similarly, Louie, 73, mentioned that he does not eat smoked fish very often, in part because he doesn't have a smoke house. Thus, participants described how the adoption of certain technologies has enabled them to have access to a greater variety of foods year round, but has also limited their access to some foods that need to be processed in specific ways.

Several participants also described how their increased participation in the cash economy has influenced their diets. These realities have affected how participants acquire foods, what food-related knowledge and skills they have and what strategies they use to feed their families. Irene, 72, described a change from the time where her family primarily acquired food through gathering and trade:

when I was growing up ... the family that live in Kitselas used to come to Essington with all kinds of fruit that they grew here – cherries, apples and I think there was pears. Used to trade with all the seafood they never get up here ... instead of buying them now like we do, and used to just trade, back and forth... but nowadays you gotta have money. Yeah, it's all getting different.

Ruth, 77, also talked about purchasing locally gathered foods from other First Nations people: "...we buy it just like we have to buy things that's in the store. They can't give it away, because they have to pay for it." She drew a comparison to grocery stores, "they have to pay the farmers for their food. The farmers can't just give it away because they have to pay for their supplies, their equipment, their gas and so you can't get it for nothing." Many participants described paying for locally gathered foods and emphasized that these foods are relatively expensive to obtain. Marcie, 38, said, "I think that a lot of people don't really eat a lot of traditional foods as much as they used to, for the same reasons or another: it's not as available and expensive." In these ways, financial cost has become a major barrier in accessing locally gathered foods.

A few participants also hinted at how working outside their homes has affected their diets. Bridget, 36, spoke at length about having to work, and that because of this she is unable to take the time that is required to harvest and preserve locally gathered foods: "if someone were to pay my bills for those three months out of the year, I'd find a way." She also shared that because of this need to work, she has very little knowledge about harvesting and processing foods and added, "elders with the knowledge aren't going to be able to pass that on because that entire layer, between them and me, has been spent their lives in the workforce...." (group interview). Participating in the workforce has had other effects as well. Ruth, 77, observed:

...nowadays the kids say 'oh I don't like this' and they won't eat it. It turns out you have to cook three different dishes for three different kids...I don't like it, but then they weren't trained to sit down and eat.

When I asked her what she felt led to this change, she replied, "Working. Working parents. And then they get home they have to do things in a hurry." As if to illustrate Ruth's point, Marcie, 38, described that, for her and her partner, "we get home both about the same time, five, five thirty, so there's not a whole bunch preparation that goes into supper sometimes." She described a scenario where "there was no time to cook supper," so her partner picked up a ready-to-eat meal from the grocery store. Therefore, participants described that their participation in the workforce has had numerous impacts on their diets.

Above, participants described that, as a result of changing food preservation technologies and increased participation the workforce, their diets today may be different from how they were before, or are different from those of previous generations. A few offered other explanations for dietary change as well. For example, Bridget, 36, provided her perspective on why chowmein is so popular in her community today:

This is the way that I understand it...when they lived in Port Essington...our grandparents and parents, they were divided up into what they called the Japanese village, the Indian village, and... the white village. And so, the connection between the Japanese and the Indian village was very close and so that's where a lot of our elders learned about cooking Asian foods. And then that just kind of evolved...

She figured that "the way we use rice in everything" also stemmed from this connection. Ruth, 77, provided support for Bridget's views: "My dad, he used to be friends with the Japanese, and...he learned to cook their way, with [soya] sauce..." In addition to this Japanese influence, Ruth also described that some foods were adopted for practical reasons: "in Port Essington we learned to get things that'll keep. We had potatoes but rice will keep, so we used a lot of rice." She also described how, when her children started going to school, she adapted to the norms of that context: "we never really had sandwiches before...that's the only thing they could take to school for lunch...they never took anything but sandwiches..." In these ways, participants described some additional influences on their contemporary diets: by learning to cook in "new"

ways, by incorporating useful and practical ingredients, and by adapting to new routines and environments. Therefore, in contrast to dominant views about Aboriginal diets, the majority of participants did not talk about dietary change in terms of “loss” or “erosion;” rather, they presented a much more complex and pragmatic view of the evolution of dietary patterns.

5.7.4 Dietary impacts of residential schools

On the topic of dietary change, one of my community advisors suggested that I ask participants what effects residential school experiences had on the ways they eat today. Fortunately for them, most participants had not attended residential school and so they could not comment on this topic. Of the four people who did comment, Rona and Irene did attend a residential school, as did Fiona’s gran, but Garnet did not. Overall, these participants painted a bleak picture of the foods that were eaten by students at these schools. Rona, 53, described that the food at school was “awful,” while Irene, 72, described it was “tasteless.” Garnet, 58, viewed it as “degrading” because students weren’t able to eat their “own” foods and because the foods that were served were of inferior quality. He discussed oatmeal as an example:

They had to eat food ... that the average European wouldn't've ate. Because, I mean, traditionally you eat porridge with milk...or sugar...and you can mix it. In the residential schools they didn't give them the milk, they didn't give them sugar.

Interestingly, the other three participants also talked about oatmeal. Rona, 53, described that they would have sour milk in it, while Irene, 72, said they only had milk powder. Both Irene, 72, and Fiona, 27, stated it was something students were “always” fed, sometimes even for supper. Through comments such as these, I perceived that these participants viewed the food served at residential schools to be substandard and undesirable.

As might be expected, these school experiences had lasting impacts on the diets of former students. Garnet, 58, explained that this is why some Aboriginal peoples eat few gathered foods: “through...the residential school and their habits having been changed for them so many of our people...don't like eating traditional foods.” While this did not appear to be the situation for

Rona, 53, who continued to eat many gathered foods, she similarly described that in residential schools students were “brainwashed” into not appreciating the tastes of fish and other seafoods. To illustrate this, she shared a story about an older residential school survivor who, to this day, is repulsed by the smell of fish. These examples show one way in which tastes for foods might have been altered through residential school experiences.

Participants’ stories also show that students reacted to the foods eaten at residential schools in a variety of ways. In some cases, these schools exposed students to foods they may not have eaten at home, thereby introducing them to some “new” foods. Fiona, 27, described that her gran learned to eat some of her favourite foods at school, including carrots, cabbage, turnips, kidney beans and bacon. These foods continue to be favourites for both Fiona and her gran. However, participants also gave examples of foods they no longer ate *because* they were associated with these schools. For example, Fiona, 27, described that although her gran knows oatmeal is good for her cholesterol, she no longer eats it because it was something she had to eat every day in residential school. Similarly, Irene, 72, explained that she had to eat peanut butter sandwiches every day, “so nowadays I don't really go crazy for peanut butter.” (She does, however, keep a jar at home for her grandchildren.) In these ways, some of today’s food aversions are related to foods that were eaten at residential schools. From these stories it seems that the effects of these school experiences on today’s diets are varied and individual. While in some cases students developed tastes for the foods eaten at school at the expense of locally gathered foods, in other cases students developed strong dislikes for foods eaten at school and yearned for the foods of home. Therefore, while residential school experiences likely affected the diets of former students and their families, the four participants who commented on this topic described that they had a variety of possible impacts.

5.7.5 Perspectives on recommendations to eat “traditionally:”

Many authors comment on the myriad social and dietary changes experienced by Aboriginal peoples over generations (Health Canada, 2000a), as well as the disproportionately high rates of health problems experienced by Aboriginal peoples as compared to other Canadians (Health Canada, 2000b). As a result, researchers, academics and health professionals often imply (or explicitly recommend) that Aboriginal peoples should “go back” towards their traditional diets and lifestyles. I wondered how participants felt about this advice and asked for their thoughts on the recommendation that “Aboriginal peoples should eat more of their traditional foods.” Participants responded a variety of ways to this question.

A number of participants agreed with the recommendation and emphasized the health benefits of eating gathered foods. “Their health will be better,” said Irene, 72. Others also described additional benefits to increasing consumption of locally gathered foods. Garnet, 58, stated that in addition to being healthier “nutritionally,” he felt these foods were also a healthier “emotionally:” “because if you're eating your own traditional foods...you gotta have some sort of pride about that because...you're still maintaining a traditional lifestyle by eating your own foods.” Rona, 53, felt that such traditions were not only important for Aboriginal peoples, but that they were going to “save the world.” Based on these comments, there seems to be some support for the idea of returning to “the old ways.”

However, while some participants emphasized the health benefits of traditional foods, many pointed out the difficulties they have in accessing such foods. Here, Bridget, 36, was most vocal:

They can blow it out their rear end. If they want me to eat more of my traditional food, then they better start supplying it, because I don't have a hunter. I don't have a fisher. Whatever traditional Indian foods I have, I have to beg borrow and plead for ... I don't have access to them. I simply don't. I have to work.

Later she explained the challenge for many Aboriginal peoples today: “how do you balance? You have to have a job to make the money to pay for the fuel and everything else that you need,

and then you're gonna need the time off in order to do it.” She summed up her view on the recommendation, “it makes me crabby,” and elaborated,

You'd think with all the research that they do on us they'd figure it out, that I don't have access. I don't have access. I don't have the skills and I don't have the knowledge and I don't have the history. And nowadays I ... half the time, don't even have the gathering area.

Other participants similarly acknowledged the difficulty in accessing many gathered foods today, and Rona, 53, even stated that for many local Aboriginal peoples, obtaining such foods would be “a luxury.”

There were other concerns raised about the recommendation that Aboriginal peoples should increase their traditional food consumption. A number of participants expressed concerns over levels of environmental contaminants in locally gathered foods, and were therefore concerned about the health implications of eating such foods. Also, Myra, 31, specifically felt that the recommendation was not very useful to her because she is the product of a “mixed marriage,” and she does not have access to, nor has ever tried, many of the foods gathered in her mother’s Inuit territory. She also pointed out that, “it doesn't really say what to do with all the other foods,” and expressed her view on the recommendation in general:

It's a little bit like a band-aid recommendation. ‘Oh, eat more traditional foods.’ It's a way of sort of addressing the problem without really doing much about it. Because if the people are in a situation where they're eating one way, and they don't know how to eat another, they need to learn....

Fiona, 27, had a similar view, and stated that because of the difficulties people have in obtaining gathered foods, “education with other foods would probably be the best way to go.” While she would prefer to eat more locally gathered foods, she described that, “I kind of have to adjust and find other ways to...to get my nutrition.” While these participants appear to enjoy gathered foods, they feel that effective nutrition recommendations need to consider the contemporary realities faced by Aboriginal peoples.

5.7.6 Cultural sensitivity

Participants' comments about traditions, culture, dietary change and the above recommendation raised a final important point: the idea of cultural sensitivity. This notion was another reason why Bridget, 36, took issue with the recommendation that Aboriginal people should eat more traditional foods:

I just think that's a joke. You know, that's something they just throw out there to say that they're being culturally appropriate ... because if they were really being culturally sensitive they would realize that it's not available to the majority of us....

In the group interview, Myra, 31, also spoke about cultural sensitivity, although this time in relation to the term "traditional foods:"

We don't want to appear culturally insensitive so we'll have a nice term to wrap it up, and we don't really know what it means and nobody else can define what it means, but it sounds good enough and no one's gonna ask us any more questions.... (group interview).

She firmly stated, "sounds like brown washing" (group interview). I had not previously heard this term and asked the group for clarification. Bridget, 36, replied by giving an example:

Health Canada saying tobacco is sacred...in our area it wasn't...part of our cultural practices, whereas according to Health Canada, *every* Aboriginal population held tobacco sacred. *Every* Aboriginal population used tobacco in sacred ceremonies and stuff. That's brown washing. (group interview)

From this, I interpreted "brown washing" to mean the generalization of particular practices to all Aboriginal peoples in Canada or North America. Participants offered other examples including ideas that all Aboriginal peoples smudge with sweet grass, participate in sweat lodges and "run around with eagle feathers in our hair" (Bridget, 36, group interview). Rona, 53, had not used such a term explicitly in her interview, but expressed a similar sentiment about Health Canada's Aboriginal Food Guide:

I think this is disgusting...because some of the stuff on there isn't applicable to us here on the coast ...how often do you see rabbits?...I think it's...a good indicator of what Health Canada thinks of our First Nations people...If they did a food guide for ethnic, they would have one for East Indian, Slovakian, Italian...it would be really specific to their foods...but the fact that they think we're just one big melting pot

Bridget, 36, had also made a comment about this nutrition education tool: “Health Canada's guide... sorry, I'm not about to eat a bunch of buffalo because I don't have one in my backyard, thank you very much” (group interview). In these ways, participants highlighted that some programs targeting Aboriginal peoples risk being culturally *inappropriate* because they fail to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the many Aboriginal cultures within Canada.

While participants suggested that true cultural sensitivity would recognize the contemporary realities faced by Aboriginal peoples, and would acknowledge the unique characteristics of individual Aboriginal cultures, Marcie, 38, offered additional food for thought. She seemed to object to the idea that Aboriginal peoples should be limited to, or even associated with, a particular set of foods and suggested that this is why some Aboriginal clients would choose to use the general Canada's Food Guide over the Aboriginal Food Guide: “not surprising really ... they don't want to be lumped into - it says Aboriginal and this is the way you eat. Like a lot of natives, I think, eat a lot of ‘regular’ foods.” She found the recommendation described above, “kind of surprising ... we don't tell anybody else what they should eat. East Indians they should only eat their East Indian food. I mean, I like variety. I like East Indian food too, and Chinese food.” She emphasized that she likes variety and choice, and said, “it's my choice and I choose not to have it as much as people think that we should.” She made it clear to me that she felt she shouldn't have to focus on a particular selection of foods simply because of her culture/ethnicity. Her comments, and those of other participants explored above, shed light on the difficulties associated with culturally specific health promotion materials and recommendations.

5.7.7 Discussion on views of food traditions, culture and dietary change

In this section, I explored participants' views on food traditions, culture and dietary change, and the recommendation that Aboriginal peoples should eat more of their traditional foods. In general, most participants did not emphasize traditions when they discussed the foods

they ate on a day-to-day basis; rather, they tended to focus on less abstract notions such as taste, health, and cost. However, when I questioned them directly about traditional foods, it became apparent that there was some debate and ambiguity regarding what foods could, or could not, be considered to be traditional. This debate related to participants' views on culture and the nature of dietary change, and whether such changes were viewed as "loss" of traditions or as part of ongoing cultural change and adaptation. Participants' views were mixed, even regarding the influence of residential school experiences on their diets. A variety of perspectives were also evident in regards to the recommendation to eat more traditional foods; some participants responded by reinforcing themes that previously emerged in this project, such as health, and barriers to accessing locally gathered foods, while others raised concerns regarding the cultural sensitivity of such recommendations.

How do participants' comments compare to literature on Aboriginal peoples and food? In the literature, many authors use the term "traditional food" to denote those foods that were part of the diets of Aboriginal peoples prior to contact with Europeans. This appears to be the dominant way in which this term is used. However, it is significant that among the participants there was no consensus or easy definition of "traditional foods." Instead, they illustrated that there was ambiguity and debate about which foods could, or could not, be considered to be traditional, and some provided support for more liberal views of Aboriginal food traditions. However, some participants' also pointed out other difficulties, such distinguishing between family food traditions and cultural food traditions. These difficulties have been noted in the literature as well. For example, Miewald (2002) stated that "...the identification of a 'traditional Omaha diet' is replete with contradictions. Both Omaha history and archeology point to a variety of "traditions" that were *adapted* to fit changing circumstances" (p. 111, emphasis added). Similarly, participants described how their diets, and those of their ancestors, have changed in response to changing circumstances. Some participants considered foods such as potatoes, rice, oatmeal, turkey, moose, and fry bread to be traditional, because they are

longstanding components of their diets, and were linked with the past and previous generations. Similarly, Foley (2005) pointed out that Aboriginal Australians sometimes considered “colonial foods” to be traditional, again because they were the foods eaten by previous generations. These observations support the notion that traditional foods might include a broader range of foods than only “pre-contact” foods.

The “pre-contact” definition of Aboriginal food traditions relates to ideas of authenticity in Aboriginal cultures. Specifically, those foods and practices that are viewed to be authentic are often limited to those which are perceived to have existed prior to European contact (Kuhnlein & Turner, 1991; Powers & Powers, 1984; Receveur, et al., 1997; Willows, 2005). However, this view propagates the problematic idea that Aboriginal cultures are static, and results in change being viewed as “loss” (St. Denis, 2004). Smith (1999) elaborated on this idea:

At the heart of such a view of authenticity is a belief that indigenous cultures cannot change, cannot recreate themselves and still claim to be indigenous. Nor can they be complicated, internally diverse or contradictory. Only the West has that privilege” (p. 74).

While a couple of participants described certain foods (i.e. potatoes, moose) as *not* being traditional, or used the term “loss” to describe dietary and cultural change, these were the exceptions. It is not surprising that most participants did not appear to be concerned about ideas of authenticity, because ideas of authenticity are usually much more of a concern to cultural “outsiders” than “insiders” (Heldke, 2003; Smith, 1999). Similarly, Fitzgerald (2007) argued Aboriginal peoples who are exposed to their cultures in the “context of ongoing cultural change and adaptation” are less troubled by these cultural changes than others (p.226). Many participants spoke about dietary or cultural changes without expressing concern about the implications of these changes for Aboriginal cultures or identities.

Some participants explicitly acknowledged that their cultures and traditions are continually adapting and evolving, and thus presented change as an ever-present reality. Just as sociologists emphasize this inevitability of cultural change (Fitzgerald, 2007), Bridget and Rona

declared that change and adaptation are necessary to survive. Mauri scholar Smith (1999) stated: “I believe that our survival as peoples has come from our knowledge of our contexts, our environments... We had to know to survive” (p.12-13). I would extend her argument and argue that the contexts and environments she alludes to are ever shifting, and so survival depends also on the ability to act and react to these changes. Indeed, this thinking is supported by Morris (1996): “If this fundamental process of change is not honored, we limit our capacity to adapt and discover diverse solutions to the challenges of living...denying change is denying life.” In this view, change is viewed as part of living, and a hallmark of vibrant, lively cultures, rather than being viewed only as “loss.”

Participants’ comments suggested that the way Aboriginal peoples and cultures are viewed by others is not always congruent with the way they see themselves or understand their situations. In general, participants painted a much more complex picture of their realities and, I would argue, a much more positive view. For the most part, I did not hear them lamenting the “loss” or “erosion” of their cultures, rather, I heard about how they were using their knowledge and adaptability to feed themselves and their families in the ever-changing contexts in which they live. They do value traditions, but only so much as they are useful and meaningful in today’s contexts, and they do not view “new” foods or techniques as incongruent with tradition. Their comments have important implications for academics, researchers, health professionals, and organizations working with Aboriginal communities on food-related initiatives. As participants discussed, some health-related recommendations that target Aboriginal peoples may seem culturally appropriate to some, but can also be viewed as being restrictive, stereotyping and imposing. As they implied, recommendations, programs and policies need to acknowledge their contemporary contexts and the uniqueness of individual cultures, as well as their own views on food and culture.

The final case study depicts a popular food in the contemporary diets of many local Aboriginal peoples. Participants described that chowmein is a versatile meal that can be made with store-bought and locally gathered ingredients, showing how this dish has been creatively incorporated into the local cuisine. It is so much a part of the contemporary way of eating that, in addition to being a popular meal in participants' homes, it also often has a place at community dinners and feasts.

5.8 Case Study #4: Chowmein



Figure 5: Chowmein and China Lily soya sauce

“Chowmein's like a comfort food, you know, it's like something my mom made all the time...it's one of the foods that [my aunt] and my mom learned how to cook from my grandmother....”

(Bridget, 36).

Prior to initiating this research project, I had observed that chowmein is a common meal for many local Aboriginal families. Six participants confirmed this observation. Fiona, Bridget, and Marcie described that they often ate it at home, while Garnet, Irene and Ruth stated that it

was a popular meal with local Aboriginal families. Its popularity was emphasized by Irene, 72, who talked about making chowmein for fundraising events in Kitsumkalum and declared that it was one of their “number one sellers.” It is also a special food for Fiona, 27, who described that chowmein was a break from her daily fare of seafood when she lived with her gran in Kitamaat village:

Part of a it was like a treat, like, whenever we'd go to town we'd always go to a Chinese restaurant ... it has all [my favourite vegetables] in it and just a different flavour instead of having what I grew up on.

Now she regularly makes it at home, and said it was one of her favourite meals.

Participants described chowmein as economical, easy, quick and versatile. Ruth, 77, stated “chowmein is quick to make,” while Bridget, 36, also emphasized its low cost:

Chowmein's like a quick and easy one pot dish that my mom used to always make for us, and there's a lot of vegetables in it and it can feed large numbers of people. ... You can feed like fifteen people for like twelve bucks, right, so my mom used to make chowmein quite often, chowmein and rice, and then that would be our meal at least twice a week.

Later, she re-emphasized that “it's affordable. It's very affordable.” But for Bridget, 36, its appeal also lies in its versatility:

You can put whatever vegetables...that you have, right. It's a good use of vegetables...and whatever meat or seafood that you have goes well in chowmein. You can even make chowmein with herring eggs on kelp.

Garnet, 58, also talked about “herring egg chowmein,” and other participants described chowmein made with other locally gathered foods as well. Garnet mentioned that he also liked to make it with moose meat, while Ruth, 77, observed, “I seen where people put seaweed in, chopped seaweed, just mix it....” Clearly, for these participants, chowmein is a popular meal that can be prepared in many different ways.

The popularity of chowmein is also evident by its regular appearance at feasts and other community dinners. Bridget, 36, mentioned “at a feast or community gatherings, potlucks, people will bring it.” Later, she listed foods that are commonly served at such events, and includes chowmein again, “Herring eggs. China Lily. Chowmein is always there. Somebody

fries up fish, lots of different kinds of fried fish. Oolichans, spaghetti, KFC, mixed berries....” Garnet’s comments support her observations; he mentioned that in addition to fish and seafood, “you see a lot of roast beef, chowmeins - different types of chowmeins.” I asked what he thought of seeing such foods at feasts and community dinners, to which he replied, “today it’s sort of normal.” Based on these comments, it appears that chowmein is a normal part of both family meals and community dinners.

Participants illustrated that chowmein is a popular, economical and versatile dish that is frequently consumed by local Aboriginal families. While it has only recently be part of Fiona’s family’s repertoire, others families, like Bridget’s, have been eating it for generations. Because of its widespread popularity in Kitsumkalum especially, but potentially in other northwest Aboriginal communities as well, I would argue that this dish has been incorporated into local Aboriginal cuisine. This notion is supported by the fact that participants described making it with locally gathered ingredients, such as herring eggs on kelp, seaweed and moose. Also, based on my work as a dietitian in Terrace and Kitimat, I would say that, in general, local non-Aboriginal families do not tend to consume this dish as frequently. Therefore, it might be possible to consider chowmein, like bologna, to be a food that has been “indigenized” in local Aboriginal cuisines. (This concept will be discussed further in the following chapter).

Chapter 6

Concluding Remarks

6.1 Summary and discussion

In this study, I set out to hear the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples, living in or near Terrace, BC, about the foods they eat today. This study stemmed from my discomfort with the dominant discourse about Aboriginal peoples' diets, a discourse which focuses primarily on "loss" and cultural erosion. I sought to explore the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples themselves, thinking that they might emphasize instead their agency, creativity and resilience in adapting to the opportunities and challenges of contemporary living and eating. This qualitative research project about the meanings of food for Aboriginal peoples also started to address a significant gap in the literature, as most food research involving Aboriginal peoples focuses on quantifying the characteristics and uses of narrowly defined, pre-contact "traditional foods." By using open-ended, semi-structured photo-elucidated interviews, I encouraged participants to speak about food-related topics and issues that *they*, not the researcher, deemed relevant, and I have interpreted their perspectives to come to an understanding of the meanings of the foods in their contemporary diets.

In some ways, participants reinforced issues that have already been addressed in the literature about Aboriginal people and food. This was especially true for gathered foods. For example, like the participants, researchers have described the effects of changing technologies, work patterns and other influences on contemporary diets (Health Canada, 1995; Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996). They have also documented the barriers that many Aboriginal peoples face in accessing and using locally gathered foods (Fediuk & Thom, 2003; Health Canada, 1995; Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Power, 2007). These barriers include the high cost of many locally

gathered foods; limited access and distance from hunting and fishing areas; limited experience, knowledge and skills for gathering, processing and preparing foods; and concerns about environmental contamination (Fediuk & Thom, 2003; Foley, 2005; Health Canada, 1995; Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Kuhnlein & Turner, 1991; Power, 2007; Receveur et al, 1997). Others have also documented that some Aboriginal peoples only eat locally gathered “traditional foods” at Aboriginal celebrations (Foley, 2005). Finally, they also acknowledge that food practices and choices mark belonging to cultural group, and have symbolic and spiritual value (Foley, 2005; Miewald, 2002; Nabhan, 1998; Power, 2007; Receveur et al, 1997). In this research project, participants’ comments revealed that these issues are relevant to their lives too, reinforcing that they have important values and concerns associated with locally gathered foods.

While participants provided support for certain issues that have been documented in the literature, their words also urge us to reconsider some of the assumptions that are implicit in nutrition research, academic literature and health promotion materials. For example, their comments about food and health suggest that they do not necessarily see gathered foods as unequivocally healthy, or store-bought foods as unequivocally unhealthy. Rather, they presented more complex understandings about the effects of food on health, reflecting current public health nutrition recommendations for all Canadians. Their stories also emphasized that the meanings given to food are individual and context dependant; for example, a specific food might be viewed as a luxury, a staple or a “poor food” by different members of the same community. Therefore, one cannot make assumptions about the significance of particular foods for individual Aboriginal persons. Participants also shed light on the difficulties surrounding the term “traditional food,” and most provided support for the idea that Aboriginal cultures, and their traditions, are continually evolving and adapting. Finally, they raised concerns about “brown-washing” (the stereotyping or generalizing of Aboriginal cultures and practices) and questioned the supposed “cultural sensitivity” of certain nutrition recommendations and

education materials. Ultimately, they suggested that food-related initiatives need to consider the uniqueness of different Aboriginal groups, as well as the contemporary circumstances in which they live. In these ways, participants' challenged some of the dominant discourse about Aboriginal peoples which suggests that only pre-contact "traditional foods" have value to Aboriginal peoples, which presents change as "loss," and which often over-generalizes the experiences of different Aboriginal groups.

Interestingly, two participants stood out because some of their views were not voiced by the others. When discussing the foods in their day-to-day lives, Garnet, 58, and Lorna, 57, presented perspectives that were similar to those of other participants. However, unlike other participants, who spoke primarily about their own experiences and views, Garnet and Lorna also sometimes spoke about Aboriginal peoples in general, and in so doing, spoke in ways that often reflected the dominant discourse. For example, as discussed in chapter 5, section 1, they made comments which supported the view that Aboriginal bodies are different from other bodies, and thereby have specific nutritional requirements or intolerances. In chapter 5, section 3, I mentioned that they also placed more emphasis on traditions than other participants did, and they suggested that "traditional foods" are valuable primarily *because* they are seen to be traditional to Aboriginal cultures. In addition to these observations, I also noted they also spoke somewhat differently than other participants. For example, I often heard them speak about cultural and dietary change among Aboriginal peoples using terms such as "the European," "the white man," "white influence," and the "modern world," language which other participants did not use. In these ways, Garnet and Lorna occasionally spoke with a different "voice" than other participants.

How can we understand the distinct "voice" of these two participants? As I suggested in chapter 4, I feel that the answer lies in the personal histories of these two individuals, given that they "reclaimed" their Aboriginal identities in their early adult years. Because more and more

individuals in North America are reclaiming a previously denied, forgotten or suppressed Aboriginal identity (Fitzgerald, 2007), and many have not have been raised within Aboriginal communities, these two participants offered an important perspective in this project. This perspective is not any less “true” than that of other participants, but is merely different, likely because of their backgrounds. Garnet and Lorna came to their identities as Aboriginal persons in different ways than the majority of the other participants, who grew up with closer ties to their Aboriginal communities and likely took this part of their identity for granted. Therefore, they would have learned more, at least initially, from sources other than their own lived experiences. In this process, they may have been exposed to more of the dominant discourse and histories about Aboriginal peoples, which primarily presents Aboriginal peoples as helpless victims of European exploitation and “westernization.” This exposure would have shaped their views about Aboriginal peoples and cultures, and may explain their tendency to speak about “the European,” “white influence,” etc. It may also explain why they emphasized traditions more than other participants, because these are practices they view to be authentic to Aboriginal cultures. Also, because Garnet and Lorna lived with, and learned about, several different Aboriginal communities, they might more easily speak to what they perceive to be common experiences of different Aboriginal peoples in Canada, or North America more generally. Therefore, because their life experiences differed from most of the other participants, their views about Aboriginal cultures and food traditions also differed.

The different perspectives that Garnet and Lorna offered point to one of the major themes that emerged from this project: the meanings individuals ascribe to foods, and other matters, are shaped by their life experiences. As participants discussed in the group interview, Aboriginal peoples in North America are often treated as though they belong to one monolith group, as opposed to a multitude of different cultures and ethnicities. However, the reality is that, even within specific regions, Nations, or communities, individuals often have very different life

experiences and face different circumstances in their day-to-day lives. These varying experiences lead them to hold different views and perspectives on the foods in their diets, pointing to the constructed nature of the meaning of food.

Along this line of thought, it is possible to think about the adoption of new foods and preparation techniques in ways other than “cultural loss.” For example, some academics promote the idea of “indigenization,” or “nativization,” of food. In relation to Philippine food, Fernandez (2003) defined “indigenization” as “that [process] by which...foreign food is made compatible with the native cuisine” (p. 65). In this process, cultures borrow and adapt foods, making meals that “in time become so entrenched in the native cuisine and lifestyle that [their] origins are practically forgotten” (Fernandez, 2003, p. 62). Similarly, Powers and Powers (1984) wrote about foods that they argued have become “nativized” into the Oglala Native American way of eating (p. 63). They described that “‘nativization’ is contrary to most acculturation theory which sees Native Americans as exclusive recipients of Euro-American culture. In this theory, it is implied that the process of acculturation is one sided....” (p.93). Rather than passively accepting foods from colonizing or dominant groups, “indigenization,” or “nativization,” implies that cultures actively incorporate useful ingredients, processes and technologies into their cuisines. In this project, participants described a number of “Indian” dishes that were made with a mixture of locally gathered and store-bought foods, such as mulligan (salmon and potato stew); seaweed, fish and rice; and herring eggs with China Lily soya sauce. Because these foods show how “foreign” ingredients have been “made compatible” with locally gathered foods, I would argue that these foods have been “indigenized” into the local Aboriginal cuisine. As I previously described in the chapter 5 case studies, I would make the same argument for bologna and chowmein, foods that appear to be especially popular with many Aboriginal peoples in the Terrace area. (See appendix P for the menu of a recent community dinner in Kitsumkalum.) Therefore, as opposed to the idea of “westernization,” in

which Aboriginal peoples are viewed as the passive recipients of “western” culture, the concept of “indigenization” allows for a different perspective and emphasizes the agency, creativity, and adaptability of Aboriginal peoples.

Given that it is possible to view Aboriginal peoples in more empowering ways, it is important to ask why this is *not* the dominant view of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Who gains from the idea that Aboriginal cultures are eroding, dying, or vanishing? What benefits are there to viewing change as “loss?” As I argued in Chapter 2, I believe that the answers to these questions lie with the ideas of “Indianness.” If Aboriginal peoples are compared to romanticized images of the “noble savage,” then their contemporary existence pales in comparison to ideas of what they *should* be. Similarly, vilifying popular stereotypes present Aboriginal peoples as incapable of managing their own affairs, in need of protection, education and management. These romanticized or vilified ideas have been used in the past to justify paternalistic actions by governments and other organizations. As discussed in Chapter 2, I worry that these ideas have also informed food-related initiatives with Aboriginal individuals and populations.

Instead of viewing cultures are eroding, and change as “loss,” what advantages are there to emphasizing that cultures change and their members adapt? I would argue that this allows Aboriginal peoples to be seen, and to see themselves and their ancestors, as creative and resilient human beings who adapt to the ever-changing contexts in which they live. Like other peoples, they draw from the past to deal with the present and the future. This is a more hopeful view of Aboriginal peoples and cultures, one that is in line with goals of self-determination, because it considers that they know what is best for themselves and are capable of shaping their own futures. This needs to be respected in research and health promotion activities targeting Aboriginal peoples. In fact, the implications for working with Aboriginal peoples are no different than when working with any other group: one needs to know about their specific needs

and concerns before acting. Their priorities, and their agency, creativity and resilience, must inform all endeavors that aim to address the food and health-related issues they face.

6.2 Limitations of research project

This exploratory research project involved a small number of Aboriginal peoples living in or near Terrace, BC. With such a small project, it is not possible to correlate the findings with age, gender, or other demographic factors, nor is it possible to generalize the findings to other Aboriginal peoples in Canada. However, these are often the realities of qualitative research. I recognize that other Aboriginal peoples, in the region or elsewhere, might express views and discuss topics other than what was shared in this project. Additionally, because the investigator is the instrument in qualitative research (Patton, 2002), other researchers may have different experiences and theoretical orientations, and may therefore interpret participants' comments differently. Therefore, in my writing, I have attempted to provide adequate contextual information so that readers may consider my interpretations carefully, and apply what they find useful and relevant to their own purposes.

Another limitation is that, because this project was based on a broad research question, I was not able to explore specific topics or themes in depth. However, this project was an appropriate starting point to begin addressing the research gap I identified in the literature. Because of the exploratory nature of this project, and the likelihood that this thesis raised more questions than answers for the reader, it provides a useful "jumping off point" for other possible research endeavours.

6.3 Recommendations for future research

Future research could further explore any of the major themes that emerged here, depending on what is of interest to particular communities, organizations or researchers. For example, in light of participants' comments about cultural sensitivity, I feel that it would be worthwhile to further explore Aboriginal peoples' views on health promotion materials that are

created specifically for use with Aboriginal individuals or communities. Alternatively, given Marcie's view of fish as a "poor food," and the unfortunate reality that many Aboriginal families are food insecure (Power, 2008), it may be useful to further explore the effects of poverty and food insecurity on the meanings they ascribe to the foods available to them. How do these meanings differ for people living in urban centers, as compared to those who live in more isolated communities? Additionally, given the emphasis that many communities and organizations are placing on understanding the multi-generational impacts of the residential school system, there may be interest in more fully exploring the impact of these school experiences on the food attitudes of survivors and their descendants. These are just a few examples of possible research projects that could build upon what emerged in this project.

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Appendix A

Canada's Food Guide: First Nations, Inuit and Métis



Health Canada Santé Canada

Your health and safety... our priority.

Votre santé et votre sécurité... notre priorité.

Eating Well with **Canada's Food Guide** First Nations, Inuit and Métis



Canada

How to use Canada's Food Guide
 The Food Guide shows how many servings to choose from each food group every day and how much food makes a serving.

Food Group	Recommended Number of Food Guide Servings per day			
	Children 2-9 years old	Children 4-13 years old	Teens and Adults (Female)	Teens and Adults (Male)
Vegetables and Fruit (Fresh, frozen and canned)	4	5-6	7-8	7-10
Grain Products	3	4-6	6-7	7-8
Milk and Alternatives	2	2-4	3-4 (Teens) 4 (Adults) 2 (Seniors)	3-4 (Teens) 4 (Adults) 2 (Seniors)
Meat and Alternatives	1	1-2	2	3

1. Find your age and sex group in the chart below.
2. Follow down the column to the number of servings you need for each of the four food groups every day.
3. Look at the examples of the amount of food that counts as one serving. For instance, 125 mL (1/2 cup) of carrots is one serving in the Vegetables and Fruit food group.

Eating Well Every Day
 Canada's Food Guide describes healthy eating for Canadians two years of age or older. Choosing the amount and type of food recommended in Canada's Food Guide will help:

- children and teens grow and thrive
- meet your needs for vitamins, minerals and other nutrients
- lower your risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, certain types of cancer and osteoporosis (weak and brittle bones)

Eat at least one dark green and one orange vegetable each day. Choose vegetables and fruit prepared with little or no added fat, sugar or salt. Have vegetables and fruit more often than juice.

Dark green and orange vegetables: 125 mL (1/2 cup)
 Other vegetables: 125 mL (1/2 cup)
 Leafy vegetables and wild plants: raw 250 mL (1 cup)
 Berries: 125 mL (1/2 cup)
 Fruit: 1 fruit or 125 mL (1/2 cup)
 100% juice: 125 mL (1/2 cup)

Make at least half of your grain products whole grain each day. Choose grain products that are lower in fat, sugar or salt.

Bread: 1 slice (25 g)
 Bran: 35 g (1/2 x 1/7)
 Oat cereal: 30 g (100 kcal package)
 Hot cereal: 175 mL (3/4 cup)
 Cooked pasta: 125 mL (1/2 cup)
 White, brown, wild rice: 125 mL (1/2 cup)
 Cooked rice: 125 mL (1/2 cup)

Drink 500 mL (2 cups) of skim, 1% or 2% milk each day. Select lower fat milk alternatives. Drink fortified soy beverages if you do not drink milk.

Milk: 250 mL (1 cup)
 Milk: 250 mL (1 cup)
 Fortified soy beverage: 250 mL (1 cup)
 Canned milk (evaporated): 125 mL (1/2 cup)
 Yogurt: 175 g (3/4 cup)
 Cheese: 50 g (1/2 oz.)

Have meat alternatives such as beans, lentils and tofu often. Eat at least two Food Guide servings of fish each week. Select lean meat and alternatives prepared with little or no added fat or salt.

Tofu, fish and seafood: 75 g cooked (1/2 oz/225 mL (1/2 cup))
 Fish and seafood: 75 g cooked (1/2 oz/225 mL (1/2 cup))
 Lentils and beans: 75 g cooked (1/2 oz/225 mL (1/2 cup))
 Eggs: 2 eggs
 Beans, canned: 175 mL (3/4 cup)
 Peanut butter: 30 mL (2 tbsp)

When cooking or adding fat to food:

- Most of the time, use vegetable oils with unsaturated fats. These include canola, olive and soybean oils.
- Add only a small amount (2 or 3 teaspoons or about 30-45 mL) of oil to recipes or use it for cooking, salad dressings, margarine and mayonnaise.

Traditional fats that are liquid at room temperature, such as seal and whale oil, or rosin grease, also contain unsaturated fats. They are recommended per day.

- Choose soft margarines that are low in saturated and trans fats.
- Use butter, hard margarine, lard, shortening and bacon fat.

*Health Canada provides advice for limiting exposure to mercury from certain types of fish. Refer to www.healthcanada.ca for the latest information. Consult local, provincial or territorial governments for information about eating locally caught fish.

Respect your body... Your choices matter

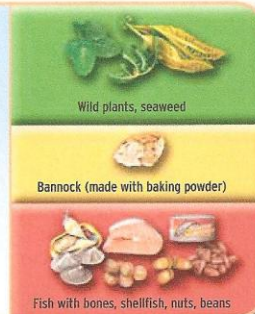
Following Canada's Food Guide and limiting foods and drinks which contain a lot of calories, fat, sugar or salt are important ways to respect your body. Examples of foods and drinks to limit are:

- pop
- fruit flavoured drinks
- sweet drinks made from crystals
- sports and energy drinks
- candy and chocolate
- cakes, pastries, doughnuts and muffins
- granola bars and cookies
- ice cream and frozen desserts
- potato chips
- nachos and other salty snacks
- french fries
- alcohol

People who do not eat or drink milk products must plan carefully to make sure they get enough nutrients.

The traditional foods pictured here are examples of how people got, and continue to get, nutrients found in milk products. Since traditional foods are not eaten as much as in the past, people may not get these nutrients in the amounts needed for health.

People who do not eat or drink milk products need more individual advice from a health care provider.



Women of childbearing age

All women who could become pregnant, and pregnant and breastfeeding women, need a multivitamin with folic acid every day. Pregnant women should make sure that their multivitamin also contains iron. A health care provider can help you find the multivitamin that is right for you.

When pregnant and breastfeeding, women need to eat a little more. They should include an extra 2 to 3 Food Guide Servings from any of the food groups each day.

For example:

- have dry meat or fish and a small piece of bannock for a snack, or
- have an extra slice of toast at breakfast and an extra piece of cheese at lunch.

Women and men over the age of 50

The need for vitamin D increases after the age of 50.

In addition to following Canada's Food Guide, men and women over the age of 50 should take a daily vitamin D supplement of 10 µg (400 IU).

For strong body, mind and spirit, be active every day.



This guide is based on *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.

For more information, interactive tools or additional copies visit Canada's Food Guide at: www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

or contact: Publications • Health Canada • Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9 • E-Mail: publications@hc-sc.gc.ca • Tel: 1-866-225-0709 • TTY: 1-800-267-1245 • Fax: (613) 941-5366

Également disponible en français sous le titre : Bien manger avec le Guide alimentaire canadien – Premières Nations, Inuit et Métis

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Appendix B
Letter of support from community advisor



Kermode Friendship Society

Registered with Revenue Canada as a "charitable organization"

3313 Kalum Street, Terrace, B.C. V8G 2N7

Phone: 635-4906

Fax: 635-3013

Elaine Power
Josie Birchall
School of Kinesiology and Health Studies
69 Union St.
PEC 223
Queen's University
Kingston Ontario K7L3N6

Re: Letter of Support: Lise Luppens' thesis research project

The Kermode Friendship Society is a firmly established Friendship Centre housing 14 programs and projects, one of which include the "Soup / Breakfast" Kitchen. Last fiscal year, the 'Kitchen' served 7,979 individuals, 40% were non-First Nations, 30% were youth/children. This fiscal year we are focusing on 'healthy' foods and 'traditional' foods.

Understanding foods and nutrition is a focus for our programs and projects, and we strongly support Ms. Luppens' thesis research project. We have supportive and referral services that we will make available to Ms. Luppens and her participants, as well, offer any additional assistance she may need.

We look forward to this project and appreciate Ms. Luppens' enthusiasm, professionalism and kindness.

Please contact me at 1.250.635.4906 ext. 24 if you need additional information and/or comments.

Respectfully,

Arlene Roberts

Arlene Roberts
Acting Executive Director
KFS Health Coordinator

Appendix C

Letter of support from community advisor

5730 Gyiik Road
Terrace, BC V8G 0C8
August 5th, 2008

Attention: Josie Birchall

Re: Letter of support, Lise Lupens, “What’s “sup” now?”

My name is Nicole Bingham and I am a member of the Tsimshian Nation, I belong to the Raven Clan of Kitsumkalum and reside on my home reserve near Terrace, BC.

I have known Lise Luppens since the spring of 2007 when we worked together facilitating health-related presentations in several First Nations villages in northwestern BC. At that time Lise shared with me that she was planning to pursue a master’s degree, and was interested in carrying out a research project involving food in First Nations communities. Since then, we have had ongoing face-to-face, phone and email contact regarding her research project.

I feel that Lise’s project, while small, is an important step towards respectful, collaborative research with First Nations communities. Therefore, in July 2008, I helped her to organize a small luncheon with 7 members of my community to discuss and receive input on her project. At the table were an elder, two younger women, a community nurse, several representatives from the treaty office and myself. Based on this meeting, it seemed to me that they were interested and supportive of her project. Additionally, they offered suggestions to which Lise was receptive.

Personally, I support the project because it is an opportunity for First Nations community members to tell the individual stories regarding food and culture. I also feel that information gathered in this project will be useful in the future, to explore and understand the dynamic nature of First Nations culture as our cultures evolve and adapt to the pressures of mainstream culture. I feel that this project is important because it is an opportunity to document current and contemporary practices surrounding food availability and stereotypes.

I have offered to continue to help Lise by connecting her with community members and answering her questions, as needed.

If I you have any questions regarding my support for or role in this research project, please feel free to contact me at 250-615-0123 or at Nicole.Bingham@northernhealth.ca.

Sincerely,

Nicole Bingham

Appendix D

Letter of introduction

September 10, 2008

Attention: Kitselas Band Council
 Kitsumkalum Band Council
 Arlene Roberts, Kermode Friendship Society

My name is Lise Luppens and I have lived in Terrace for almost 4 years now. Currently, I am a university student working towards a Master's degree through Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. My focus is socio-cultural studies of food and eating, and I am interested in exploring and learning about what food means to people.

I am writing this letter to tell you about a small research project I will be conducting as a requirement of my degree. It will be a small project, involving only about 10 – 12 individuals who self-identify as being Aboriginal persons. Participants will be asked to take pictures of foods relevant to their lives, and then will meet with me to discuss those pictures. Once I have met with each participant individually, I plan to organize several group meetings to discuss and explore the themes that have emerged from the project.

The project is currently named "*What's 'sup' now?*": *Picturing today's First Nations' foods*. The purpose of this project is not to explore *what* participants are eating, but to have participants share their stories, thoughts and concerns about foods eaten today. The results of this projects may have implications for food related projects and programs involving First Nations peoples.

I am fortunate to have the support of several local First Nations women: Nicole Bingham and Arlene Roberts. They have given me much guidance in the development of this project. Additionally, with their assistance, I have been able to meet with other community members, and have included their suggestions as well. I am open to further suggestions about how this project might be carried out and how the information shared by participants might benefit the community. So far, the people I have talked to have shared with me that they think it will be interesting to hear what participants have to say about foods today, and think that this information will be useful now and in the future. Arlene Roberts feels that this project will complement some of the food-related initiatives being undertaken at the Kermode Friendship Centre.

I am very excited about this project, which will likely begin towards the end of September 2008. If you have any questions or concerns about anything related to this project, please feel free to email me at liseluppens@yahoo.ca, or call me at 250-635-1475.

Sincerely, Lise Luppens

Appendix E

Letter of information



Title of Research Project: “What’s ‘sup’ now?”: Picturing today’s Aboriginal foods

Investigator(s):

Principal Investigator: **Lise Luppens**
MA Student, School of Kinesiology and Health
Studies
Queen’s University
(250) 635-1475

MA Supervisor: **Dr. Elaine Power**
School of Kinesiology and Health Studies
Queen’s University
(613)533-6000 ext. 74690

Introduction:

You are being invited to participate in this project. Before you consent to be part of this project, please take the time to carefully read and consider the following information.

Purpose of the Project:

In this project, we will explore your thoughts on the foods you eat today. This project will help to increase understanding and awareness about the current food traditions and practices of First Nations peoples living in and around Terrace, BC.

Description of the Project:

This project has two parts. In the first part, 10 to 12 participants will be taking pictures of food and discussing them individually with me. In the second part, two groups of four to six people each will meet for further discussions. You may participate in one or both parts of the project.

If participating in the first part of this project, you will be taking photographs of foods in your life and speak with me about those photographs. I will give you suggestions for what kinds of photos to take, provide you with a disposable camera (if needed), and arrange for your photos to be developed. These

photos will be returned to you so you can look them over before your sharing session with me, which will be arranged for a time and place of your preference. This sharing session should take between 60 and 90 minutes. I will ask you questions like: “Tell me about the food in this picture” and “what memories or feelings are associated with this food?” With your consent, this sharing session will be audiotaped so that I have an accurate record of the thoughts you share with me (see consent form). If you are not comfortable with this, I will only keep written notes from our discussion.

You are also invited to participate in one group session, which will be held after individual sharing sessions have been completed. In the group session, we will discuss some of the themes that have emerged from individual sessions, as well as other topics related to the project. To protect those people participating in group sessions, you will be asked to keep information or opinions others have shared in these sessions confidential.

I will transcribe the recordings of individual and group sessions, assigning a code or a false name to protect your identity, and keep them in a password protected computer file. Paper copies of transcripts and notes will also be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Your name will be recorded only on the consent form and on a master list that links your name to the code or false name assigned to you. These will be stored separately from transcripts and notes.

Potential Risks:

There are few known harms or injuries associated with your participation in this project. It is possible that information you shared in a group session may be unintentionally repeated by others. However, you do not have to share any information or thoughts that you would feel uncomfortable with. If a session causes you stress or anxiety, or raises emotions that you wish to explore, we can arrange for you to speak with a counselor, at no cost to you, by referral through the Kermode Friendship Centre.

Potential Benefits:

You may not benefit directly from this project, but I hope that it will be a fun and positive experience for you. You may learn more about the meanings of different foods in your life through your participation. Your participation in this study will help to increase understanding of First Nations people’s thoughts and concerns about current food practices. This may help in developing health promotion strategies and programs related to food, as well as challenging misconceptions that exist about First Nations peoples and food.

If you wish, the results of this project will be made available to you.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential throughout the project. My supervisor, Elaine Power, and I are the only people who will have access to the information collected in this project. I will not include any identifying information when reporting findings, such as in my thesis dissertation or other publications which may come out of this project. Summaries of these reports will be made available to you if you wish (see consent form).

If you choose to participate in one or more group sessions, you will be asked to keep what is shared in those sessions confidential. In this case, I cannot guarantee confidentiality because of the number of other participants involved in these sessions. However, you never have to answer a question or provide information that you are uncomfortable with. Should you disclose information regarding child abuse or criminal activity, I may be required by law to report this information to the police or other agencies.

Honorarium:

For each session that you take part in you will be provided with a \$15 gift certificate to the grocery store of your choice, as a small token of appreciation for your time and efforts. I will be covering all costs related to the cameras and photo finishing, and of course you may keep copies of the photos you have taken.

Participation:

Your participation in this project is voluntary, meaning you are not being forced to participate. You do not need to answer any questions that you don't want to or that make you uncomfortable. If you wish, you can leave the project at any time. Should this be the case, I will ask you if you would like any information you have provided up to that point to be included or omitted from the project.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Please let me know if you have any questions or comments about participating in this project. I can be reached at (250) 635-1475 or at liseluppens@yahoo.ca. Should you have questions, concerns or complaints about this project you may also contact Dr. Elaine Power at (613)533-6000 ext. 74690 or at power@queensu.ca, or the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board at (613) 533-6081 or at chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

Sincerely,

Lise Luppens

(liseluppens@yahoo.ca, 250-635-1475)

Appendix F

Directions for taking pictures



“What’s ‘sup’ now?”: Picturing today’s First Nations’ foods

Researcher: Lise Luppens (liseluppens@yahoo.ca, 250-635-1475)

Please avoid taking pictures of people. I’d like you to take pictures of a variety of foods. The following are examples of foods you could take pictures of:

- your favourite food or drink
- a food you don’t like
- your specialty dish or a meal you prepare often
- food you tend to eat when you go out to eat
- a food you have mixed feelings about
- something you would eat more often if you could
- a food that is new to you
- a typical food that you eat with your family
- food that is your family’s favourite
- food your family doesn’t like
- a food that is served on special occasions with your family and friends (i.e. holidays, birthdays...)
- a food that is part of a family tradition
- a food that has lots of memories attached to it
- a food that reminds you of your childhood
- a recipe you learned to make from a family member
- a food that tends to be served at feasts and gatherings
- a food that is popular in your community
- a food that is traditional to your community
- a food that is really valuable in your community (has status)

General Directions for Using the Camera (if using a disposable camera)

1. Try to avoid taking pictures of people.
2. To take a picture, look through the viewfinder, press the button on the top of the camera on the right side.
3. Before you take the next picture, wind the button with the rough edges on right side on the back of the camera until it stops. The counter on the top of the camera should have decreased by one. The number on the counter at the top of the camera tells you how many photos are left to be taken.
4. This type of camera does not take close-up photographs. Make sure the object you are photographing is at least 1 meter (3 feet) away.
5. If using the camera indoors, turn on the flash first. After you take the picture, turn the flash off until you take the next picture.

Appendix G

Consent form for one-on-one sharing session



Consent Form for One-on-One Sharing Session

“What’s ‘sup’ now?”: Picturing today’s First Nations’ foods

Researcher: Lise Luppens (liseluppens@yahoo.ca, 250-635-1475)

I, _____, have read and kept a copy of the letter of information for the “*What’s ‘sup’ now?*”: *Picturing today’s First Nations’ foods* project and my questions about participating in this project have been answered.

I understand that the purpose of this project is to explore what First Nations people, living in and around Terrace, BC, think about foods eaten today. In participating in this project, I will be taking pictures of food and discussing them with Lise Luppens. This discussion may be recorded with an audio recorder.

I understand that my pictures will not be used for other purposes without my written consent, and my identity will be kept confidential in any reports or papers that are written about this project.

I also understand that my participation in this project is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any time without any negative effects. I do not need to answer any questions that I don’t want to answer. I am aware that I may contact Dr. Elaine Power or the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board with any questions, complaints or concerns that I have about this project.

I hereby consent to participate.

Name of Participant

Name of person who obtained consent

Signature of Participant

Signature

Date

Date

Consent form continued...

_____ By initialing this statement, I am granting permission for Lise Luppens to use a tape recorder or audio recorder.

_____ By initialing this statement, I agree to be contacted again by Lise Luppens in regards to questions she may have from our sharing session.

_____ By initialing this statement, I agree to be contacted by Lise Luppens to discuss participating in a group session.

I wish to receive a copy of my interview transcript: Yes No

I wish to receive a summary of the findings of this project: Yes No

Please send the transcript and/or project summary to the following email or postal mail address:

Appendix H

Demographic questionnaire



Demographic Questionnaire

What's 'sup' now?: Picturing today's First Nations' foods

Researcher: Lise Luppens (liseluppens@yahoo.ca, 250-635-1475)

Name: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Nation/band membership: _____

Household membership: _____

Occupation: _____

Appendix I

Photo release form



Permission to Use Photographs

What's 'sup' now?": Picturing today's First Nations' foods

Researcher: Lise Luppens (liseluppens@yahoo.ca, 250-635-1475)

In addition to allowing Lise Luppens to view my photographs during our one-on-one sharing session, by initialing the following statements, I also give her permission to use my photographs for:

___ group discussions that are part of this project

___ her Master's thesis

___ papers published based on this project

___ presentations based on this project

OR ___ DO NOT use my photographs for anything other than the sharing sessions

OR ___ I give Lise Luppens permission to use my all my photographs EXCEPT for:

1. _____

4. _____

2. _____

5. _____

3. _____

6. _____

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I am free to withdraw my permission for other uses of my pictures at any time, and that Lise Luppens will take steps to protect my privacy at all times.

Name of participant

Name of person who obtained consent

Signature of participant

Signature of person who obtained consent

Date

Date

Appendix J
Consent form for group interview



Consent Form for Group Interview

“What’s ‘sup’ now?”: Picturing today’s Aboriginal foods”

Researcher: Lise Luppens (liseluppens@yahoo.ca, 250-635-1475)

I, _____, have read the letter of information for the “*What’s ‘sup’ now?’: Picturing today’s Aboriginal foods*” project and my questions about participating in this project have been answered.

I understand that the purpose of this project is to explore what Aboriginal people, living in and around Terrace, BC, think about the foods they eat. By participating in a group discussion I understand that I will be asked to offer my thoughts and opinions on topics and themes that have arisen out of earlier parts of this project. This discussion will be recorded with an audio recorder.

I also understand that my participation in this project is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any time without any negative effects. I do not need to answer any questions that I don’t want to answer or share any information that would make me feel uncomfortable. My identity will be kept confidential in any reports or papers that are written about this project.

I hereby consent to participate.

Name of Participant

Name of person who obtained consent

Signature of Participant

Signature

Date

Date

____ By initialing this statement, I am granting permission for Lise Luppens to use an audio recorder.

Appendix K

Initial interview guide

- How did you find the process of taking the pictures?
- What picture would you like to start with? Tell me about why you would like to start with that one.
- Tell me about the food in this picture.
- For you, what memories or feelings are associated with this food?
- How does your family feel about this food?
- Tell me a story about this food.
- How did you get to be familiar with this food?
- How would you describe this food to someone who was not familiar with it?
- In what situations are you most likely to eat this food?
- Lately, have you been eating more or less of this food than in previous years? Tell me about that.
- How does this food relate to you as an First Nations person? Your community?
- Would you consider this to be a traditional or cultural food? Why or why not?
- Some people recommend that First Nations people eat more of their traditional foods. What are your thoughts on this?

Appendix L

Final interview guide

- How did you find the process of taking the pictures? How did you decide?
- What picture would you like to start with?

- Tell me about this food. What are your thoughts on _____?
- In a couple words, what thoughts or feelings do you attach to this food?
- How were you introduced to this food?
- In what situations are you most likely to eat this food?
- Lately, have you been eating more or less of this food than before? Why?
- Scenario: how would you feel if you could no longer eat food? (i.e. availability, allergy)
- What else can you tell me about this food?

- Which of the foods we've discussed today are special to you? Explain.
- What foods do you dislike or avoid?
- If you could get whatever food you wanted, what would you get?
- How does the way you eat today compare to: your childhood? Your partner? Your children?
Your parents? Your community?
- Tell me about a family food tradition.
- How has your way of eating changed throughout your life?

- How do the foods you've discussed today relate to you as an Aboriginal person?
- What's the connection between these foods and Aboriginal people today?
- Thoughts on foods at feasts or gatherings? How does this compare to your daily eating?
- Residential school –how has this affected the way you or your family eat?

- “Indian food” – what does that mean to you?
- Recommendation: that Aboriginal people eat more of their traditional foods. Thoughts?
How does that recommendations apply to you?
- Traditional foods” – what does that mean to you?
- What foods that you discussed today would you consider to be traditional foods?
- Purpose of project: what else would you like to say about food and Aboriginal people today?

Appendix M

Group interview topic summary: Bologna and wieners

Although I didn't ask any questions about it, 8 out of 10 participants talked about bologna and/or wieners. I thought I would share it as a food "case study," because some interesting things were shared. An interesting thing about the bologna is its popularity with the older adults. 3 participants are in the 70s, and each talked about how much they liked bologna. Another participant talked about how much her grandmother liked it, and another talked about how popular it was with residential school survivors.

- "When we used to eat...all the fish, the clams, the seafood, getting wieners was really special to me... that used to be my favourite food." She described that it was a treat. Though now she doesn't have it at home, she looks forward to having it when going to someone's house for dinner, where it's usually made for the kids.
- Another participant also describes it as a favourite, and although he "loved to have some fried up," he don't eat it anymore because of "all the junk they put in there."
- A younger participant talked about her grandmother, who told her that it was something she ate when she grew up. It was "something besides seafood," and they would fry it and have it with canned corn and rice.
- Similarly, another participant talked about her residential school experience, and that the high school students could cook for themselves on the weekend: "we could eat what we want, what we used to eat at home. Everybody hollered for bologna and rice and corn." She describes that her mom cooked bologna and wieners for them when they lived in Port Essington. She also talked about her uncle and said, "every time we were gonna have a feast he'd always make sure he'd buy about 3 or 4 of those big bologna. We have to cook

it, and then he was happy to see how everybody'd just go for it ... Every time there's a feast, he makes sure there's bologna."

- One participant describes bologna as a "luxury" for residential school survivors because it was uncommon for them to have it there. She tells the story of her husband announcing at a feast in Kalum that they were going to serve "fried bologna and everyone was like cheering like crazy." "Oh yeah they were all cheering... yeah they were all excited about having fried bologna and curried bologna." She also talked about it having been a luxury for people living in Kincolith before the road was built. Today she figures her husband could eat bologna and wieners every day, but although she does like fried bologna "now and then," she has to be "in the mood" to eat it.

While many of the older participants seemed to be quite fond of bologna and wieners, other participants shared different thoughts and experiences:

- A younger participant associated bologna with her family being poor when she was younger, but she still likes to eat it today.
- A few participants pointed out that bologna is often called "Indian steak," and one points out that it's accessible: "when you can pay 3 dollars for some bologna, but you've gotta pay 50 dollars at the butchers for a piece of moose meat, which one are you gonna get?"
- Another younger participant says that if she could afford to buy meat, she wouldn't buy bologna. She says she is "unsure of it," and calls it a "mystery tube."
- Another young participant said that she used to eat bologna and wieners before, but now she thinks about "how much isn't really meat."
- "Additives" and "nitrates" in bologna were a concern for someone else.

- One participant talked about his experiences in foster homes, and that sometimes he was treated differently from the “regular kids”: “the family's having a roast or something ...They fed me stuff like bologna and macaroni....”

Appendix N

Group interview topic summary: Gathered foods

The interviews varied a lot, but everybody ended up talking at least somewhat about foods that might be hunted, fished or gathered in the region. For the purposes of this project, I am calling these foods “gathered foods.”

A lot of people talked about liking gathered foods, and many people described foods such as clams, cockles and herring eggs as special, and wishing to have them more often. Not all gathered foods were equally popular though. Some participants mentioned that they or others didn't like foods such as seal cucumber, sea lion, stink eggs, moose, oolichan grease, seal or soapberries. “Seal looks like beef, and then you put it in your mouth and it tastes like fish, and that to me is just wrong.” One participant talked about learning to like some gathered foods:

- “First Nations foods, it took me some time to acquire a taste for it. Like for instance sea lion - I didn't like sea lion at first, it just didn't appeal to me. But having lived in the Nass for so many years... my taste buds started changing and I started liking it. Oolichan grease it took me a while to acquire the taste for oolichan grease. Now I can't stop eating oolichan grease.”

Participants talked about how they might acquire gathered foods. Some people talked about their experiences fishing, hunting for moose or deer, gathering seaweed and picking berries and other plants. The seasonal aspects of gathered foods were mentioned a few times, and a number of participants talked about processing these foods (smoking, drying, canning, and freezing) so that they have enough to last through the winter. Most people talked about their major sources of gathered foods being from families and friends, or buying it from people in the region who sell it. Some are also able to trade if they have something someone else wants (i.e. canned salmon for moose meat).

While some people are able to access gathered foods and have it canned or in their freezers, others talked about not having as much as they'd like. For some, the only times they regularly

see these foods, or some items at least, were at feasts, dinners and community gatherings. A variety of barriers to accessing gathered foods were mentioned:

- Cost - for purchasing or for fuel, boats, equipment, etc : “you can buy [seaweed] but then it’s quite expensive.”
- Not having personal connections to people who gather foods: “I don’t have a hunter.”
- Time – can’t take months off work to fish, hunt, pick berries, and preserve foods: “I don’t have time. I worked all summer.”
- Location – not being near sources for gathered foods: “it’s different when you live up here. Where’s the ocean? Where can you dig for clams? Cockles?”
- Knowledge – for harvesting, processing and preserving
- Risks – tides, weather, nets
- Regulations - fishing, butchering
- Declining stocks: “because the oolichan didn’t run through they weren’t able to make oolichan grease”
- Access to land (i.e. berry picking spots)

However, concerns were raised about gathered foods including declining stocks, overfishing, sea lice, and contamination. Several of the participants 50 years and older expressed concern that younger people aren’t learning how to gather these foods, that they aren’t developing a taste for them and that they don’t know how to process and preserve them.

A number of participants felt that gathered foods were healthier and more desirable than many alternatives available in grocery stores. However, numerous participants also appreciated that they could buy foods when others weren’t ideal or available (i.e. meat, berries). Some simply appreciated the variety of foods that they can get because of groceries stores: ““there’s no sense eating the same thing over and over and over.” Finally, some felt that this access contributed to good health (fruit, vegetables, milk, etc.): “it contributes to my children’s health to have that choice.”

Appendix O

Group interview topic summary: Traditional foods

When asked to give examples of foods that they considered to be traditional most participants listed fish, seafood, wild meat, seaweed and berries:

- “Salmon...seafood, halibut, cockles, clams, herring eggs...”
- “Fish. Canned fish, smoked fish, dried fish. Fish prepared two hundred and fifty ways.”
- “Seaweed,... cod, herring eggs, seaweed...”
- “It'd be like deer or rabbit, fish, ... wild game, wild seafoods...”“Seafood...wildlife.”

Some described that they are the foods that are hunted, fished and gathered, “From the land and the water,” and that they were eaten before Aboriginal peoples had contact with Europeans: “so-called traditional foods that they would eat prior to contact with Caucasians...”

However, it doesn't appear to be that simple. Beyond this, there seem to be some debate as to what food are or aren't considered to be traditional. Some people acknowledged that traditional foods varied regionally, and that they would be different for Aboriginal people living in the North, the Interior of BC, on the Plains or on the West Coast. To one person the variety of these foods could still be considered to be traditional, including foods like corn, potatoes and rice, because they were eaten by Aboriginal people in North America prior to European contact. However, someone else made the argument that potatoes and moose could not be considered traditional here because potatoes were introduced by the Irish, and the moose moved into the region only decades ago. Another participant said that scallops were not traditional to her, but that they could be “for people ...that used to get it and grew up on it.”

Besides regional differences in what may or may not be considered traditional food, there were other ways to look at traditional foods as well. Many participants talked about traditional foods being the ones that were eaten by previous generations and that they were taught to eat by their parents or grandparents:

- “It's foods that were taught from my granny to me how to prepare.”
- Another person talked about soapberries being traditional “because our people have been eating it for generations”

- “I consider traditional food one that my mother and my grandmother used that I still use.”

Because everybody described growing up on a variety of foods, not just those that are hunted, fished and gathered, I asked for opinions on this. One person acknowledged that some people might describe foods such as rice, potatoes, mush, and homemade bread as being traditional because these are foods that they “raised on,” were never without and have been around a long time. However, not everyone agreed with this; one participant said that although her great-grandparents grew potatoes, she did not consider potatoes to be traditional.

Discussions revealed other foods to be considered traditional:

- Salmon stew with potatoes and onions (mulligan), and fish, rice and seaweed were described as traditional meals
- Another talked about a traditional Tsimshian feast having two soups and fry bread.
- China Lily was described as a traditional soy sauce because it has been used in that participant’s family for generations.
- Another person talked about fry bread, and turkey and ham at Christmas and Thanksgiving, saying “they’ve become traditional foods.”
- So what’s the verdict? How do we define traditional foods?
- One person stated, “It’s a muddy word.”
- Someone else said its “open to interpretation.”
- Another says, “It depends on how far back you wanna go.”
- One participant points out that traditional to her might not be traditional to someone else
- A few participants suggested that it’s not always easy to differentiate between family food traditions and cultural food traditions.

Appendix P

Group interview topic summary: Traditional food recommendation

Some people recommend that Aboriginal people eat more of their traditional foods. I asked the participants what they thought of this recommendation. Some participants agreed with the recommendation and emphasized potential health benefits:

- “Their health will be better,” said one person, and gave the example of a relative who was diagnosed with diabetes who went back to “eating our way.”
- Another person said, “Definitely ... Before ... white man's foods came in, diabetes wasn't a problem. Obesity wasn't a big problem with Native people... Heart disease wasn't a big problem ... All these things came from the wrong diet, it came from the imported food, the new food.”
- Similarly, one younger participant is “for it” because she feels a lot of sickness with FN people is due to a lack of traditional foods.
- Another agreed and felt that “what's gonna save lives is our traditions.”
- “Absolutely. ... It's a whole lot healthier nutritionally, I think even emotionally... it's a lot healthier emotionally.”

Not everybody had the same opinion here though. One initially responded by saying “it'll be good because all the food they sell in the store are treated, that's why there's so many people being allergic to things, because of what they add into it ...” (i.e. growth hormone). But when I asked if she thought it was a good recommendation, she said, “no. Everything's contaminated... So, nothing's safe.”

When asked to comment on the recommendation, many participants talked about access issues:

- “I think it's a good idea, but not everybody has access to it. Because if more Aboriginal people are living within urban centers their connection to the land and accessibility to get their own food, it sort of decreases unless they have family members that give it to them.”
- “First Nations that live on reserve definitely eat more, like seafood and fish all the time, but then like for somebody like me... I live off reserve and so it depends on availability.”

- “I'm unable to get it, [to] get my diet like the way I've grown up....”
- “If they want me to eat more of my traditional food, then they better start supplying it, because I don't have a hunter. I don't have a fisher. Whatever traditional Indian foods I have, I have to beg borrow and plead for.”
- “I'd say that's good for them if they can get it, if they like it, but that's difficult and expensive and time consuming.”
- “Nowadays you gotta have money.”
- “People gotta know what they're talking about. There's just no way to get them. There's no way, it's not that we don't want them ... You know, if someone were to pay my bills for those 3 months out of the year, I'd find a way, right. But I still have to pay my bills, and the government of Canada doesn't take it too kindly when you say, ‘I'm sorry I have to go fishing this month therefore you do not get your cut.’”
- “I feel bad that it's...unavailable, you know, but there's nothing I can really do... I kind of have to adjust and find other ways to ...get my nutrition.”

Other concerns about this recommendation were raised:

- “That's a joke. You know, that's something they just throw out there to say that they're being culturally appropriate, ... because if they were really being culturally sensitive they would realize that it's not available to the majority of us.”
- One participant found the recommendation “kind of surprising” and when asked why, she said, “We don't tell anybody else what they should eat. East Indians they should only eat their East Indian food. I mean, I like variety, I like East Indian food too, and Chinese food.” She also added “it’s my choice and I choose not to have it as much as people think that we should.”
- “It'd be good to eat more traditional foods but it doesn't really say what to do with all the other foods” and “it doesn't really address eating in a balanced way.”
- “I don't really feel that it applies all that much to me, because since my parents was like a mixed marriage, and traditional to my dad or traditional to my mom?”
- “I sort of think it's a little bit ... like a band-aid recommendation – oh, eat more traditional foods - it's a way of sort of addressing the problem without really doing much about it because if the people are in a situation where they're eating one way, and they don't know how to eat another, they need to learn.”

A few participants had recommendations of their own, mostly centering on learning and education:

- “It’s in the marketing,” giving the opportunity to get experience with these foods: “having that experience, that's what I mean by accessibility - not just getting the food but actually learning, having the competence.”
- “There's so low sources or even ways to get our foods now. I think that if we were able to learn ...how to...cook other foods properly, like from the grocery store and stuff, and what has more nutritional value than others...at least we would still have our nutrition.” She talked about the need for programs that help people learn to shop and cook, as well as those “teachings on our own foods.”
- “We need to be able to interpret what the contemporary world food is.” (label reading)
- Another talked about the need for parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents to teach younger people about fishing, hunting, canning and preparing food.

Appendix Q

Flyer for “Chinese New Year Indian Style”

HEAR YE! HEAR YE! HEAR YE!

KITSUMKALUM



COMMUNITY CHINESE NEW YEAR DINNER

“INDIAN STYLE”

WHEN: FEBRUARY 12, 09/THURSDAY



WHERE: KITSUMKALUM COMMUNITY HALL

TIME: DOORS OPEN AT 5 P.M.

COME IN AND CHECK THIS OUT, SHARE A MEAL AND
SOCIALIZE WITH OTHERS FROM THE COMMUNITY

SEE YOU THERE!

MENU: GUDIM GABIN



FRIED SEAWEED CHOP SUEY - CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP



HERRING EGGS CHOP SUEY - BEEF & BROCCOLI

FISH LO MEIN - CURRIED BALOGNA SUEY

SHRIMP CHOWMEIN – WONTON SOUP

FRIED RICE, CHICKEN, BEEF – CLAM FRITTERS

RICE

SPONSORED BY KITSUMKALUM BAND COUNCIL & NNADAP WORKER.