

**SPAM AND RICE: TRADITIONAL FOODS, IDENTITY, AND HEALTH  
IN THE SAN DIEGO PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMUNITY**

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in

Anthropology

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by

Wendy Leicht

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**SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY**

The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

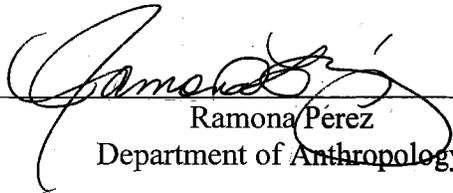
Thesis of Wendy Leicht:

Spam and Rice: Traditional Foods, Identity, and Health in the San Diego Pacific Islander  
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by

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mom for always being supportive of my adventures regardless of what corner of the globe and how far from home they may take me. It is also dedicated to Erika, Wendy, Trisha, and the rest of the Silva family for sharing your home, your island, and its culture with me. Without such inspiration and guidance my experience of the Pacific islands would be incomplete. Lastly, this is dedicated to Brian, Jillian, and Tabitha because your day-to-day support throughout the various phases of this project has meant the world to me. Thank you.

## **ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS**

Spam and Rice: Traditional Foods, Identity, and Health in the San  
Diego Pacific Islander Community

by

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Master of Arts in Anthropology

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This project explores connections between traditional foods, identity, and health among the Pacific Islander community in San Diego. It was motivated by the need to adapt dietary interventions developed in Hawai`i for Pacific Islanders living in San Diego, where available ingredients differ. Research for the thesis includes eighteen ethnographically-oriented interviews, a review of the history of food culture in the Pacific, and an examination of various forces that continue to affect Pacific Island food culture. Findings illuminate how the construction of identity and meaning making related to food and health is affected by historical, social, and cultural factors. In this case, the symbolic meanings of traditional foods, commensality, and shared group identity are in many ways more important than the recipe ingredients per se. As long as the meaning stays the same, Pacific Islanders in San Diego may be open to substituting healthier, locally and seasonally available ingredients into traditional recipes. The importance of community leaders in inspiring their community to eat healthier also is noted. Recommendations based on these findings can apply to lifestyle interventions focused on dietary solutions for Pacific Islanders living on the mainland US and also community-based health initiatives.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **BACKGROUND**

This thesis explores connections between traditional foods, identity, and health. It does so specifically within the Pacific Islander community in San Diego. To set the stage for my specific statement of purpose, this chapter first provides a view of population statistics for the Pacific Islanders population in San Diego. This chapter also reviews structural factors that affect the lived experience of Pacific Islanders in San Diego, like average household income and education attainment. It also presents a historical look at Pacific Islander migration to the US. The chapter then reviews issues related to diet and health, explaining why and what kind of research is needed to create locally relevant, Pacific Islander-focused interventions. The chapter ends with a description of the way this thesis is organized.

#### **POPULATION STATISTICS AND MIGRATION HISTORY**

More than 12,000 islands make up the Pacific Island region, spanning 18 million square miles of land and water (Haden 2009:x). The region is bounded to the north by the Hawaiian Islands, to the south by the Auckland islands (off the coast of New Zealand), to the west by Sumatra and to the east by Rapa Nui (Easter Island). There are over fourteen independent countries in this region, including Tonga and Fiji, and twenty-five dependant territories or states such as French Polynesia, Hawai`i, and Guam.

A number of different ethnic groups reside in the Pacific, ranging from peoples whose families can trace their roots back hundreds of years to the same island to immigrants transplanted in the Pacific due to economic booms, colonialism, and political ties (Haden 2009:xvi). In addition to the fourteen million people live in the Pacific Islands, Pacific Islander communities are found in cities across the mainland US. In 2008, the US Census Bureau reported over 1.1 million Pacific Islanders residing in the US. Within that group, 46,000 Pacific Islanders live in San Diego County (US Census Bureau 2008). That is, 46,000

people out of the San Diego population of 3,053,793 people (1.5% of the population) are from the Pacific Islands.

Significant waves of migration from the Pacific to the US began in the twentieth century, spurred by colonialism's far reach into the Pacific. John Connell notes, "migration is primarily a response to inequalities, both real and perceived, in socioeconomic opportunities that are themselves a result of dependant or uneven sectoral and regional development" (2002:74). The rise of migration from the Pacific to the US supports his statement, as neo-imperialism in the Pacific oppressed native peoples, caused the price of island living to go up, and limited economic opportunity for islanders. Additionally, the presence of foreign militaries in the Pacific, during and after World War II, had a major effect on lifestyle and culture.

For example, during World War II, American marines outnumbered the native Tutuilans living on the island (the largest island of American Samoa), impressing American military lifestyle and culture on the Tutuilan people. The priorities of Tutuilan people changed as modern conveniences like roads were built and prestige became associated with military involvement (Janes 2002:119). As the US annexed and officially took over various islands in the Pacific, international migration for economic and educational opportunities was promoted. Islanders gained easier access to the US because they were allowed to legally travel there as citizens (Spickard 2002:6-8). Today, Pacific Island immigrants and their families can be found all over the US. Census reports from 2011 state the largest population of Pacific Islanders living on the mainland reside in California (US Census Bureau 2011).

San Diego County is home to the second largest Pacific Islander community in California after Los Angeles County. Although San Diego's Pacific Islanders represent areas of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia, in San Diego specifically, the largest group of Pacific Islanders is of Chamorro/Guamanian descent. The ethnicities of the participants in this study are reflective of these demographics.

Pacific Islanders in San Diego either relocated here from the Pacific or are born here by parents who migrated. A report from the Asia Pacific America Legal Center notes that Pacific Islanders are one of the fastest growing minority populations in the US (Kwoh 2005:2-3). The report indicates the median household income of Pacific Islanders is \$46,040, a number that is comparable to most other ethnic groups, including whites.

However, on average there are more people in the household earning the total wages, which ultimately translates into having more people to support on the income. It is also reported that Pacific Islanders are less likely to graduate from high school when compared to other ethnic groups in San Diego and only 15% of the Pacific Islander community in San Diego hold bachelor's degrees (Kwoh 2005:9-10). These structural factors have a major affect on Pacific Islanders living in San Diego.

### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

Given the majority of Pacific Island Americans (and their families) live on the mainland US and there are more Pacific Islanders living in California than any other state (even Hawai'i) and they are among the fastest growing minorities, it is important to explore the ways that Pacific Islanders adapt their traditions and foods to life on the mainland to because both of these factors affect health and wellness. This is especially pertinent in light of the CDC's report of National Statistics that stated named Pacific Islanders are the most obese population in the US (CDC 2009).

To avoid making assumptions about Pacific Islander consumption patterns and diet and to design better health resources, it is crucial to study the interplay of food, culture, and traditions for Pacific Islanders on the mainland. Food remains an important part of Pacific Islander culture and food choices directly affect health. Moreover, although the Pacific Islander community struggles with weight-related health issues like high blood pressure, diabetes, and hypertension there is a dearth of well-defined health and wellness resources in California specifically tailored to the Pacific Islander community. Thus it is my hope that findings of this project can be used in the future as a "jumping-off point" for future health community-based research.

This project is inspired by several community-based organizations that put projects together in Hawai'i to address health disparities among Pacific Islanders primarily through the use of diets consisting of traditional foods. The most recent one, the Pili `Ohana project, creates partnerships between community-based organizations and health professionals to conduct research and provide health and wellness information to Pacific Islanders in Hawai'i. Another similar project, put together by a community-based group of doctors and health professionals, is the Wai`anae Diet Program. The success of this program lies in the

implementation of a diet based on foods available to Hawaiians before contact with Westerners, like taro, sweet potato, and fish (Shintani et al. 1994:136). Short-term results indicate an average of 6.4% weight loss over a period of three weeks and a longitudinal follow-up study (over the course of one to nine years later) reported that the weight stayed off and people continued to lose weight (Shintani et al. 1999:117) These results demonstrate the effectiveness of these projects especially because they utilize traditional knowledge, foods important to the Pacific Island diet before contact with Westerners, community-based resources, and a collaborative research approach to health disparities.

Unfortunately, extensive lifestyle intervention programs that incorporate community-based resources like this do not exist for Pacific Islanders in the same capacity here in San Diego. Further, there is very little research available on the health and food habits of the Pacific Islander community in the mainland US. Even the Office of Minority Affairs (a division of the US federal government's Department of Health and Human Services) notes that much of the health statistics on Pacific Islanders in the US stem from studies performed in Hawai'i or they are not 100 percent accurate because the studies include Asia/Pacific Islanders, not strictly people of Pacific Islander descent (Office of Minority Affairs 2010). Although there are current movements to bring applicable programs and awareness into fruition by businesses, community leaders, development agencies and even personal trainers, there is no major community-based organization focused specifically on health and wellness for the Pacific Islander community here in San Diego.

A major goal of this project, therefore, is to support future community-based efforts similar to the Wai`anae Diet Program and Pili `Ohana Project by pinpointing the many roles traditional foods can have for Pacific Islanders on the mainland and to also shed light on Pacific Islanders' relationships to traditional foods and health, because lifestyle, climate, food availability, and culture are quite different in the Pacific than in San Diego. By recognizing ways in which Pacific Islanders identify with certain foods, namely foods that Pacific Islanders hold in high esteem and deem traditional, future research, community-based health initiatives, and health advice from outside of the community can be better tailored to the San Diego Pacific Islander population.

This study describes the range of foods consumed by Pacific Islanders in San Diego that they consider to be 'traditional'. Individual, ethnographically-oriented interviews were

used to collect food narratives. Findings illuminate the ways traditional foods contribute to identity and concepts of health, stressing the importance of tradition, authenticity, and symbolism. This research seeks to provide a better understanding of consumption patterns and their relation to the lived experience of Pacific Islanders on the mainland.

Recommendations based on these findings can add to the literature in regard to the progression of food and health trends among Pacific Islanders.

An inquiry into identity is appropriate too, because in immigrant communities, foods reconnect people to cultural histories (Marte 2007:261). For any non-native ethnic group, the consumption of traditional foods is one way to connect cultural history with present-day identity (Locher et al. 2005:275). Such foods comfort, says Locher and colleagues (2005), because they connect people with memories that provide social, psychological, and emotional support (274). Food serves a number of symbolic functions in regard to identity-related processes. For example, cooking food in a specific manner is a way to display membership in a group or to connect with family members cross-generationally (Blend 2001:145). The sharing of meals or preference for specific foods within a community creates solidarity and strengthens ties in response to the social pressure of migration.

Pacific Island immigrants confront a complex issue when deciding what ingredients remind them of home because food availability and diet in the Pacific Islands underwent a major transition throughout the past three hundred years, spurred by imperialism and international commerce. Historic documents depict the Pacific Islands as a region dependent on horticulture, fishing, and the cultivation of root crops such as taro and yams, and it has been common to characterize 'traditional' Pacific Island foods based on these ingredients. Present-day, constituents of the diet in the Pacific Islands are changing in response to global factors like food aid, increased immigration into the Pacific by non-Pacific Islander ethnic groups with different food traditions, and technology like refrigerators and freezers that enhance food storage. Foods can be purchased from stores and families are not longer required to grow crops or maintain personal gardens. Not only is the availability of food changing, but food preferences, especially in regard to what foods are categorized as traditional, are undergoing a transition as well.

This shift in food culture in the Pacific affects the culture of Pacific Island immigrants in the US because long-held cultural features, like food preparation methods, traditional

foods, and feasting are being lost and new food preferences and traditions are emergent. Overall, the transition of Pacific Island foods from fresh, locally-grown to imported and processed, expresses cultural, social, and also nutritional change among island communities living both in the Pacific and in the US, as food plays a vital part in the construction of identity, tradition, and health. As culture and the availability of food change in the Pacific, so do habits in the US, and tensions arise regarding tradition and authenticity within this emergent food culture.

Health is also being affected, as noted above. The rate of obesity is higher among Pacific Islanders than any other group in the US. Although many feel they are simply larger people, the health of Pacific Islanders depends on factors that extend beyond genetics like food preference, choice of ingredients, and exercise levels. Researchers report that in immigrant communities, relocation often leads to dietary changes that compromise health such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension (Mellin-Olsen and Wandel 2005:312-313, Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1983:848). This and other challenges faced by San Diego's Pacific Islanders were explored in the research I undertook.

### **ORGANIZATION OF THESIS**

This research project references components of neo-imperial theories because the continual presence of foreign governments' power and politics found in the Pacific present-day affects Pacific Islanders both living in the islands and in the mainland US. The movement of people, technological advances, and power relations, among other such processes, create shifts among individuals and their communities that can stimulate major changes in consumption patterns. To gain an accurate picture of culture change, connections must be drawn between history, politics, and theory.

Chapter 2 provides a more in-depth review of community-based studies that utilized traditional foods as a major part of their solutions to weight management and healthy lifestyles. Chapter 3 details the methods that I utilize in this research study and the limitations to those methods. Chapter 4 presents my findings in regard to traditional foods and identity. Chapter 5 presents a historical background detailing the changes made to food culture across the Pacific by power relations over the past three hundred years. Chapter 6 presents my findings in regard to health. Chapter 7 examines the findings in light of the theoretical bases

and historical factors previously mentioned. Lastly, Chapter 8 provides a conclusion and recommends a number of possible ways forward based on the discussion and findings.

Throughout this document, the topics of traditional food and health are treated as separate entities because they address very different aspects of Pacific Islander identity. I want the reader to fully understand each topic on its own before drawing relationships between the two of them in the final chapters.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I review some of the underlying factors that affect the health of Pacific Islanders and explain why there is a need for more research on traditional foods and health for the Pacific Islander community on the mainland. I provide a cross-cultural look at body size to show how culture and social pressure translate into people's ideas of ideal body imagery. I also examine the causes of health disparities among the Pacific Island community and address some of the holes in current health research for Pacific Islanders in the US. Additionally, I review several of the community-based studies that utilized traditional foods as a major part of their solutions to weight management and healthy lifestyles in Hawai'i; the studies that inspired this project.

#### BODY SIZE

Historically, body size was a visual cue of wealth and prestige in the Pacific and the leaders and the ruling classes were typically larger than the rest of the population (Hughes 2003:7). Contemporary research reported similar beliefs among groups living in the Pacific. In Tonga, for example, results of a comparative research study of BMIs and measurements of body perceptions by a group of health professionals concluded there was a preference for larger bodies, as culturally, more weight represented higher-ranking individuals (Craig et al. 1999:1288). Mavoia and McCabe affirmed, "Tongans of chiefly rank are expected to be larger than *tua* (commoners), demonstrating their ready access to high-status foods and less physically active lifestyles" (2008:380).

Body size also expressed collective care from the community. As Becker notes in regard to modern-day Fiji, "body shape is an indicator not only of relevant personal abilities but also of one's connectedness to the social network and one's powers to nourish and esteem" (1995:58). As discussed in reference to traditional foods, social relationships were articulated through food exchange, especially among Pacific Islanders (Becker 1995:61).

One widely-deployed theoretical paradigm that supports the valorization of a larger body size, historically, among Pacific Islanders was that biologically, a larger body size meant the body could depend on its fat reserves if needed (Bindon and Baker 1997:209). The social symbolism described above may, therefore, have been reinforced or even initially generated by the advantages offered by a larger size because the isolation and unpredictable weather patterns of Pacific Islands had the capacity to limit or destroy the foods naturally growing in the islands, especially after major storms systems swept through the Pacific. Having a larger body, with fat reserves, could have been a genetic defense against starvation. This fits with general global trends--Popenoe noted that food security and the environment historically related to body image, "generally speaking, fat bodies are appreciated where food is hard to come by, and thin ones are admired in places where food is abundant" (2005:17).

Cross-culturally, body size remained an important indicator of wealth and prestige. In Nigeria, for example, desert Arab women wanted to weigh as much as possible, because weight symbolized femininity and beauty (Popenoe 2005:15). Evidence of this ideal can be seen through their great admiration of stretch marks, observations made by researchers that Nigerian Arabs put clothes on before being weighed on a scale, and a documented history of force-feeding female children dairy and grains to insure young girls have a plump body shape (Popenoe 2005:10-13).

In the West, it was common, historically, to find weight gain and larger bodies associated with prestige and power. White leaders such as Queen Anne, Winston Churchill, President Taft, to name a few, illustrated this notion. In contemporary times the opposite is true, because the dominant cultural norms, exemplified through the media and other venues, is one of thinness. However, even today, groups of people can be found arguing that bigger is better. One group of people who recently elevated the status of fatness in America and inspired a counter-culture movement around obesity were male hip-hop artists of the late 1990s. Chart-topping male rappers, like Big Pun, Fat Joe, and the Notorious B.I.G. exemplified the notion that bigger is not only better but also more powerful, richer, sexier, and ultimately a sign of supreme masculinity (Gross 2005:66). Fatness among the rapper community also embodied the opposite of the skinny, drug-related stereotype often bestowed upon on their urban, inner-city listeners. Additionally, large black male rappers' bodies were symbolic of the power wielded by this group as drug-dealers over the predominantly white

heroine chic “Grunge” culture who engaged in using the drugs controlled by the black community. These men promoted fatness through their music (songs like “Baby got Back”), their fashion (baggy pants and sweatshirts), and even through vernacular such as coining the word “phat” (Gross 2005:71). In the hip-hop world, these oversized men represented fame and affluence, while simultaneously identifying with life on the streets and urban poverty. Their bodies provided a visual cue that validated Western ideas of consumption and wealth, specifically through food.

## HEALTH

In the Pacific, the conversion from locally-grown foods to imported foods marked the turning point, in terms of rising levels of health problems, mainly linked to weight gain and obesity (Hughes and Marks 2009:1700). Through the use of seven-day nutrition surveys measuring intake, interviews, 24-hour recall surveys, historical documentation, and a variety of other methods, a report put together by Hughes (2003) for the World Health Organization (WHO) found, country-by- country, changes in weight gain across the Pacific Island region over the past sixty years. One notable example was a 60 percent increase in the consumption of animal fats in the Pacific between 1965 and 2000 (Hughes 2003:9-34). Imported foods were not simply replacing traditional foods, they added to the diet as a whole, resulting in more total calories consumed (Haden 2009:198). New commodities, such as mutton flaps and turkey tails, sent as food aid, have few (if any) nutritional benefits and were linked to serious health problems like heart disease and diabetes (Gewertz and Errington 2007:496). Less physical activity took place because of conveniences like cars and mass transportation and there was a decline in planting personal gardens because food can be bought easily at grocery stores. Issues related to urbanization and the increased presence of imported foods in the Pacific resulted in higher levels of obesity and non-communicable disease in the Pacific.

In the US, a similar trend occurred. The Office of Minority Affairs reported that, when compared to other minority groups in the US, Pacific Islanders had the highest rate of obesity (2010). Also, the CDC reported that Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders “experience poorer health than the American population as a whole” (CDC 2009). Heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes were four of the top five leading causes of death for the Pacific Islander population (CDC 2009).

In addition to their reports, the Office of Minority Affairs brought up an important point regarding the dissemination of health statistics for Pacific Islanders in the US. Not only were “few comprehensive data sets or analyses... available” for this group of people, the website also explained,

Much of the data on this web site are from the CDC, which generally aggregates data under the term ‘Asian/Pacific Islander’. OMH uses this term as it appears in the CDC data reports. Because of sample size issues, the CDC data reports typically footnote reported data on Native Hawaiians and Pacific populations as statistically unreliable, or do not report disaggregated data. To address Native Hawaiian health, OMH supplements federal government data with data from the State of Hawai`i. [Office of Minority Affairs 2010]

In other words, in large-scale government health profiles and research, Pacific Islanders are put in the same category as minorities from other areas of Asia and the Pacific even though genetically, culturally, and health-wise, these two groups differed greatly. The US census bureau split the “Asian/Pacific Islander” category into two categories “Asian” and “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” in the year 2000 yet research reported by US government agencies today continues to categorize the two ethnicities together (US Census Bureau 2008). Local Pacific Islander community development groups believe that this designation, separating Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders from the Asia-Pacific ethnic group, has made funding more accessible to Pacific Islanders. However, it remains difficult to find health statistics and information representative of Pacific Islanders on the mainland, even though the US census bureau revamped the designation over ten years ago.

An aggregate study, inspired by the artificial lumping together of Pacific Islanders and those of Asian descent, confirmed that major health inequalities exist between Pacific Islanders and those of Asian descent (Bitton et al. 2010:435). Based on self-reported health statistics collected during telephone interviews, Bitton and colleagues (2010) reported that Pacific Islanders had higher levels of diabetes, asthma, hypertension and arthritis than Asian-Americans (437).

The above study’s findings, coupled with admission from the US government regarding minimal, misleading research on the health of the Pacific Islander community across the United States accentuates the need for new, up-to-date research on mainland Pacific Islander health—research that does not lump in or include Asians. The research I conducted, although not reporting specific health statistics, will greatly contribute to the

literature for future health research for the Pacific Islander community here in the mainland US because I discuss health problems, needs, solutions, and resource availability from a mainland Pacific Islander point of view.

In contrast to the lack of research specifically on Pacific Islander health populations on the mainland US, multiple Pacific Islander studies in Hawai`i indicated that although health problems were widespread among Pacific Islanders, solutions do exist. Studies demonstrated that lifestyle intervention projects that were grounded in Pacific Islander culture, given community-based support, focused on families not individuals, and instituting diets that consisted primarily of traditional foods (categorized by this group as food available to islanders in the Pacific before contact with Westerners) were effective for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander weight loss and health improvement.

The Moloka`i Diet Study, conducted by the non-profit organization Na Pu`uwai, on Moloka`i, consisting of Native Hawaiians under the leadership of Dr. Noa Emmett Aluli and in collaboration with the University of Oregon, offered subjects three weeks of traditional-style meals consisting of foods like taro, fish, breadfruit, bananas, and a variety of fresh greens. At the end of the three-week period, participants experienced a remediation of cholesterol levels and triglyceride levels (fat/lipid found in the blood stream, high levels of triglycerides are linked to heart disease (Furubayashi and Look 2005:106).

Another successful application of a similar diet plan was the Wai`anae Diet Program. This program, overseen by Dr. Shintani and associate researchers (1994) at the Wai`anae Coast Comprehensive Health Center involved a diet comparable to the Moloka`i Diet Study, made up of foods that were available in Hawai`i before contact with Westerners (136-147). Participants were asked to implement the diet for three weeks and it was supplemented with education sessions consisting of “cultural teachings, nutrition education sessions, and motivational presentations... Participants were encouraged to be role-models and thus have an impact on others”(Shintani et al. 1994:136). Follow-up sessions were implemented after the initial three-week session. The study resulted in an average weight loss of 17.1 pounds, a decrease in cholesterol and triglyceride levels, lower blood pressure, and improved control over blood sugar-- reducing the amount of insulin needed on a daily basis for diabetic participants (Shintani et al. 1994:138). Follow-up studies evaluated these programs’ long-term effectiveness and aside from the participants keeping the weigh off, researchers

concluded, “these studies are appealing because they instill pride, build community capacity and incorporate Native Hawaiian values and traditions” (Furubayashi and Look 2005:108).

The Pili `Ohana Project was a more current community-based partnership that created an intervention program for weight management and the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle. It also combined traditional Hawaiian values, like eating together as a family, with exercise, and educational resources centered on a community-based support network (Pili `Ohana Project 2006).

These three examples suggest that culture and traditional values combined with community-based solutions can be a powerful strategy for combating obesity and making a difference in the diet, nutrition, and overall health of Pacific Islanders.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

#### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

I designed the research to include one 90-minute focus group and twenty ethnographically-oriented semi-structured interviews to collect descriptive, qualitative responses. I planned to use both of these methods because active discussion of the research questions through group interaction should generate a range of responses regarding the research topics and allow for exploratory hypotheses to be made that could have contributed to the framing of the interviews. The focus group was to provide a 'jumping off point' for the research. Twenty interviews was a feasible number to conduct because of the allotted time frame of the project and because the research objectives encompassed normative cultural rules that all members of this specific ethnic group could be expected to be able to recount. Also in keeping with my objectives, I would be able to use a non-probability, convenience sample of the population (Bernard 2006:186). All research was approved by SDSU's IRB board prior to the beginning of the research portion of the project and all informants consented to participate in advance with knowledge that the interviews and focus groups would audio recorded by me.

By conducting a focus group prior to the interviews, the research topics would be assessed for relevancy and the structure and content of the draft interview instrument could be changed accordingly. My focus group methods were based upon the model for conducting focus groups offered by Morgan (1988), who recommended setting up a focus group pool with no more than ten individuals because smaller groups were more conducive for obtaining an active discussion, leaving no out of the conversation and allowing everyone's response to be heard (43). I would serve as the moderator for the group and engage the participants in the discussion through a series of relevant questions that would address the topics of traditional foods, health, identity, and the connections between them. Also, a colleague, certified through SDSU's IRB protocol, would serve as the recorder to ensure not only that the recording equipment to be used is properly set up but also so that

proper notes would be taken. Written notes would be taken during the focus groups as a backup should the recording fail and to provide contextual information for interpretation of transcribed data.

When the project began I had to adjust my methods due to contingencies. At the beginning of the project I met with a major gatekeeper to the community. In anthropological research, the term gatekeeper refers to a key informant for the community, usually a community leader or a member of the group who holds a considerable amount of power or “control over the dissemination of messages” to the community (Parvanta et al. 2011:255). He helped me to organize the proposed focus group. I secured a location and printed out flyers (see Appendix). I networked with as many Pacific Islanders as I could find throughout the San Diego area, both through the gatekeeper’s referrals and through my own network of Pacific Islanders. I discussed my research goals and the purpose of the focus group with as many Pacific Islanders as I could find, (at least fifteen people), promoting my project at various restaurants, retail stores, through websites, SDSU, and among friends. As an incentive, I offered to raffle off several gift cards to a popular Hawaiian restaurant. Despite follow-up calls, emails, and the promises many people made to attend, the focus group I organized was unsuccessful.

In reflecting on why my attempt to convene a focus group failed, I considered many factors: the ‘politeness’ among Pacific Islanders, too little advance notice, and an unfamiliar location (People’s Market in Ocean Beach). In this process I learned a lot about working with people and their schedules. I learned how hard it is to get a specific group of people together at one time, without major incentives (the gift cards I offered to raffle off were only for \$15.00). I learned the importance of having multiple fallback plans. I also learned how quickly priorities can change and how important it is to be flexible.

Due to the time constraints of this project, and lessons learned regarding the difficulty of convening focus groups as an outsider, rather than attempt to put together another focus group I decided to try to conduct several pilot interviews. Pilot interviews would help me to hone my questions’ focus, as would have focus groups, but they would be easier to conduct because I would be reliant on one person only for each, and people might be more likely to follow through on a promise to participate if they knew it was for a private interview, from which an absence would be very much noticed. While focus groups might provide more

normative data, pilot interviews would be more conducive than a focus group in allowing me to better understand how individuals felt about traditional foods, because individuals could actually say what they mean instead of being swayed by more dominant or outspoken participants of a focus group.

## **RESEARCH**

As stated above, I decided to conduct two pilot interviews instead of a focus group to “try out” a range of research questions that would be compiled into the final research guide. I chose to only conduct two pilot interviews because the topic of the research was straightforward. Also the intent of the study was to collect qualitative information regarding traditional foods and health among Pacific Islanders, a topic that would expand with the more interviews I collected. Given the descriptive nature of the topics, I expected that the interview guide would be a changing, dynamic document, rather than a static, repetitive, interview guide spoken verbatim during every interview. Van Teijlingen and colleagues note,

Qualitative data collection and analysis is often progressive, in that a second or subsequent interview in a series should be 'better' than the previous one as the interviewer may have gained insights from previous interviews which are used to improve interview schedules and specific questions. [2001:3]

Therefore, the pilot interviews were conducted to obtain a more in depth understanding of participant positions on my questions and to test them out, as I already had an outline of the topics I wished to discuss. By utilizing pilot interviews instead of focus groups, I was able to fine-tune the questions to an individual, rather than for a group setting. Also, I could focus on the individual’s response and personal reaction to each question and use their responses to adjust the wording of the question as needed. I was also open to suggestions from the participants of the pilot interview regarding how to approach the topics and how to best word the questions. Overall, the pilot interviews provided me with a more personal platform in which to engage the speaker directly, rather than sifting through group responses to my questions, that could have been less personal and direct. Also, with focus groups, I ran the risk of having a participant’s answer influenced by the possibility of an outspoken focus group member. The pilot interviews resulted in a list of questions that could engage the participant in rich qualitative description along with several closed questions in regard to family origin and length of time living in the US.

From the two pilot interviews I settled on a list of topics and questions designed to identify qualitative features of traditional Pacific Island cuisine. A semi-structured format with open-ended questions allowed the participants to highlight the key features of the topic in question that they felt were important, educating the researcher, and allowing for comparative data analysis (Sobo 2009:200). See the Appendix for a copy of the final interview guide.

While the original research design called for 20 participants, in the end I recruited only 18 due to people cancelling interviews at the last minute and not rescheduling them with me by the end of the allotted timeframe for the research portion of this project. This number was less than originally planned, however, the range of responses among the eighteen participants seemed sufficient because many of the answers were overlapping and prescribed a standard data set.

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Participants were required to self-identify as being of Pacific Islander descent- either having migrated to the US themselves or be the descendant of a 2<sup>nd</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> generation immigrant from the Pacific. This designation tailored the project specifically to the experiences of an immigrant population and their descendants because immigration played a major role in how culture changed. Also, to apply this research specifically to the San Diego Pacific Island community all participants were to live in San Diego County. Because all members of this specific ethnic group were expected to be able to recount normative cultural food rules and ideals, a non-probability, convenience snowball sample of the population was used (Bernard 2006:186). Because the Pacific Islander community is very close knit, the snowball sampling method, which was essentially a sample system based on referrals from prior interviewees, greatly contributed to the interview scheduling process. Because I was being referred from friends and family to other friends and family members, people were open to participating in the interviews (since their friends did) and this helped me establish rapport across the Pacific Islander community.

Overall, the actual proportion of ethnicities (Polynesian, Micronesian, Melanesian) found in the participant group reflected closely the actual proportion of each ethnic group population in San Diego.

## DATA COLLECTION

The interviews took place in the homes of the participants and also in public spaces when interviewees desired it. Interviews were slated to last thirty minutes (see Letter of Introduction in Appendix). They actually lasted between twenty-one minutes and eighty-six minutes, with a thirty-eight-minute average length. Informed consent was obtained for all interview participants when initially scheduling the interviews.

The interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed myself within twenty-four hours after they took place using the following conventions: [ ] non-word linguistic features (e.g., [sighs], [laughs], [pauses]), - - speech interruptions, WL: moderator speaking, and ( ) overtalk. When using quotes from the transcription, I deleted unnecessary space fillers, like “umm” or “like”, and repeated phrases or stutters, in instances where meaning would not be affected.

An example of my editing can be seen in the following examples that showed a quote before and after editing when I deleted text. The following was the text from the original quote,

Oh yeah big time, lately I've been cutting back on the ingredients that I use, like I use lard to cook some things, I like that fatty, you know and umm it's just stuff like I grew up cooking like that with lard, making breakfast and stuff like that, like the fat part you know and I did not know how unhealthy it is it was and I collapsed, and I went to the hospital, this happened in April, this past April, so you know I changed up my diet. [Interview 5]

The following was the text after I edited it and deleted unnecessary space fillers:

Lately I've been cutting back on the ingredients that I use- like I use lard to cook some things. I like that fatty, you know and...it's just stuff... I grew up cooking...I did not know how unhealthy it was. And I collapsed. And I went to the hospital. This happened in...this past April. So you know I changed up my diet. [Interview 5]

Written notes were also taken during the interviews as a backup should the recording fail and to provide contextual information for interpretation of transcribed data.

Also, because the interviews were to remain anonymous and they were conducted over a period of three months, I simply labeled them numerically in this document, in chronological order. Interviews 1 and 2 were the pilot interviews.

## DATA ANALYSIS

I used principles of Grounded Theory to analyze my data while attending also to the major domains around which the research was structured (traditional foods, identity, and the associations between food and health in the Pacific Islander community). Grounded theory was an inductive approach to data analysis, created by Glaser and Strauss (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 24). Its key feature was the complimentary relationship between data collection, analysis, and theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990:23). Grounded theory allowed key themes to emerge from the research itself. Social scientists often used this method for qualitative approaches to data because it was a way to analyze subjective responses and link them together to generate a model of insider perspectives, eliminating the imposition of outside opinions and supporting an “emic” or the insider’s perspective.

Throughout the research process, with the use of my written notes, I kept track of major themes that I felt were emerging as I compared and contrasted individual responses. Because interview transcription was ongoing during the data collection phase, preliminary data analysis began (via iterative listening) prior to the close of data collection. Moreover, I was able to streamline and add interview questions to better budget time for future interviews and identify patterns in the data. Strauss and Corbin recommended this kind of adaptive response to alterations in the conceptual landscape as introduced by interviewees (1990:38). It ensured that participant concerns and not a researcher’s pre-conceived understandings were reflected in findings reported.

When the data collection ended, I went through the transcripts carefully and repeatedly, and referring back to my written notes for triangulation. In this fashion, I derived category labels or “codes” that related to the major conceptual domains of traditional foods, identity, and health. I then moved from “open” or non-discriminatory coding to “selective coding.” I used the principles of selective coding to generate models related to the major research domains (traditional foods, identity, and health). The domains emergent from these prior categories included more specific categories such as: what are traditional foods, the roles of traditional foods, ingredients, shifts in meaning, concepts of health, health resources, solutions, etc.

To further explore the relationships between codes, I used what is colloquially called the cutting and sorting method. According to Ryan and Bernard, “cutting and sorting

involves identifying quotes or expressions that seem somehow important and then arranging the quotes/expressions into piles of things that go together” (2003:94).

This method identifies a wide range of relationships that can eventually be narrowed down to a moderate but highly relevant list (Ryan and Bernard 2003:94-95). I chose to use this method because I can visually and tangibly create an order and arrangement for data. This type of coding helped me to creatively relate ideas and try out various arrangements and categories before deciding on a final designation. To ensure that I coded and analyzed the data systematically, I created a codebook in Microsoft Excel. The codebook served as my data dictionary; in it my data provided a visual reference that highlighted connections between codes and represented the major themes emergent from the research. Because codes and relations between them were derived during rather than before the analysis, the codebook should be thought of as a living or working document. See Appendix for a sample page of the codebook.

The culmination of the data collection process and analysis resulted in the identification of linkages that were used to form conclusions.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

One major limitation to this project was time. To conduct a research project like this one as originally proposed, with two focus groups and twenty individual interviews, I would have needed more time. Given the time line for this project and my graduate program, I did not have enough time to truly get to know the major stakeholders within the community well enough before beginning to set up the project. The Pacific Islander community in San Diego was small and close-knit. They are very private and do not readily let outsiders come in to conduct research projects. Therefore, I should have anticipated a longer timeline to build up rapport within the community.

Another limitation to this study was that the sample was not representative but rather constructed through the chain of relationships I built. This limited my sample because there could have been a subset of the population I did not reach because they were not affiliated with the people who I was interviewing. In future research design, I would remedy this by attempting to solicit a sample at specific venues where the Pacific Islander community congregates, such as churches or community centers.

Also, the definition of a Pacific Islander remained somewhat open. The requirements for participation indicated that participants be self-identified as a Pacific Islander - either having migrated to the US themselves or be the descendant of a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation immigrant from the Pacific. However, several people from outside of the Polynesian, Micronesian, and Melanesian regions self-identified as Pacific Islanders. These people were of Irish and Chinese descent who had grown up on the island of Oahu. Because this study was based on self-identification, not genetic testing, anyone claiming to be Pacific Islander could participate and data was collected from Pacific Islanders descending from all ethnic backgrounds since they self-identified as Pacific Islander.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS: TRADITIONAL FOODS AND IDENTITY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I will discuss the findings of my research in regard to traditional foods and identity. I begin with a brief description of the participants who volunteered in this project, followed by a look at Pacific Island traditions, as they relate to food. I then discuss and define what foods were considered to be traditional among the participants, review their qualifications for authenticity of traditional foods and discuss foods held in high esteem. I include peoples' attitudes toward Spam. Lastly, I look at the connections made between identity and traditional foods.

#### **PARTICIPANT PROFILE**

Table 1 describes major physical characteristics of the eighteen participants. Ethnicity was self-reported. Age designations were as follows- Young adult spanned ages 18-30, middle age spanned ages 30-60, elder spanned ages 60+. Health consciousness was both self-reported, and in those cases when the participant did not answer the question clearly, their health-consciousness was derived from other statements they made during the interviews that indicated whether or not they were aware of common health and nutrition principles. The use of n/a in any column indicated that the participant did not mention the specific answer of the question during the conversation.

#### **TRADITIONS**

Tradition, in this project, was defined as customs or rituals, either handed down from generation to generation, or reinvented, and practiced by the current generation, in an effort to preserve culture, retain values, and reify identity. When asked what traditions they practiced in San Diego Pacific Islanders described traditions such as customs long practiced

**Table 1. Participant Profile**

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Why did your family migrate here?</b>	<b>Health conscious</b>	<b>Spam Eater</b>
3	male	young adult	Hawaiian	n/a	yes	yes
4	male	middle age	Chinese, grew up in Hawai'i	to attend college	yes	yes
5	male	middle age	Samoa/Hawaiian	n/a	yes	yes
6	male	young adult	Hawaiian	n/a	yes	yes
7	female	elder	Hawaiian	better education	yes	n/a
8	female	young adult	Guamanian	n/a	yes	yes
9	female	young adult	Hawaiian	to attend college	yes	yes
10	female	elder	Hawaiian	to attend college	yes	yes
11	male	middle age	Samoa	religious reasons	yes	yes
12	male	middle age	Tongan	better life.	yes	no
13	male	middle age	Guamanian	military	yes	yes
14	male	middle age	Guamanian	military	yes	yes
15	female	middle age	Guamanian	job opportunity	yes	yes
16	male	young adult	Hawaiian	economics and better education	yes	no
17	female	elder	Hawaiian	economics and better education	yes	yes
18	male	young adult	Caucasian, grew up in Hawaii	island fever	yes	yes
19	male	middle age	Samoa	military & parents got divorced	yes	yes
20	female	middle age	Samoa	better opportunities	yes	yes

by their islander ancestors, spanning generations before colonialism entered the Pacific, like the practice of traditional hula dance or throwing feasts for important events.

Many participants also participated in learning their ancestral languages and honored a chief system. Other responses described religious traditions that were products of colonialism, such as attending a Christian church on Sunday or being present at other celebrations like christenings. When describing traditions, participants emphasized the major roles that family and food played in their culture.

### **Family**

Family get-togethers extended beyond the occasional wedding or funeral (although attendance at those events was very important as well). Most families convened at least once a month for events such as a game night, birthday, or a church function.

Several Samoans stated that they meet every Sunday with their family for the *to'onai*, a tradition practiced in Samoa that included a shared meal among family members usually after church. Family members would meet at an elders' house and everyone brought something to eat. Foods were either traditional Samoan foods or non-traditional items. One participant noted that the elders requested certain traditional foods to be there every week. For example it was her family's responsibility to bring the taro with the coconut milk. Participants said this weekly ritual was important because it helped keep their culture alive, provided a place for mutual support, created solidarity among family members, and instilled family values.

The preparation and consumption of food at family events reinforced strongly-held Pacific Islander cultural values of sharing, care for one another, respect, and responsibility to the family. One participant noted, "food is part of every piece of that...As a Samoan you have to play host to anyone you invite and even if you attend something you should come with either a gift or some food item to participate in the contribution for everyone else" (Interview 11). Thus food and family were closely related.

### **Food as a Symbolic Tool**

Food was used as a tool for social measurement as well. Participant 20, a middle-aged working mom noted,

You know if you go to an event... the event is a success dependent on the food. So if... you don't have enough food or you don't have enough variety of food then your event wasn't a success...The first thing that people say is 'oh my gosh the food was horrible or they don't have enough food, or the food was great oh

my gosh' they don't even care about the actual reason why the celebration was happening.

Food acted as a vehicle for the retention of cultural values that otherwise could have been lost by the move to America. Several Islanders commented that when their families migrated here, many cultural traditions were no longer practiced,

They wanted nothing to do with that [island traditions]. He [his Dad] just wanted to be identified as an equal... to be respected... He wanted nothing to do with his language or culture or anything... When it came to foods too he just cut all that stuff away- the only thing we ate was rice. But everything else was like American food... And the only time we ate other types of food was when we went to family parties. [Interview 14]

Another middle-aged male commented,

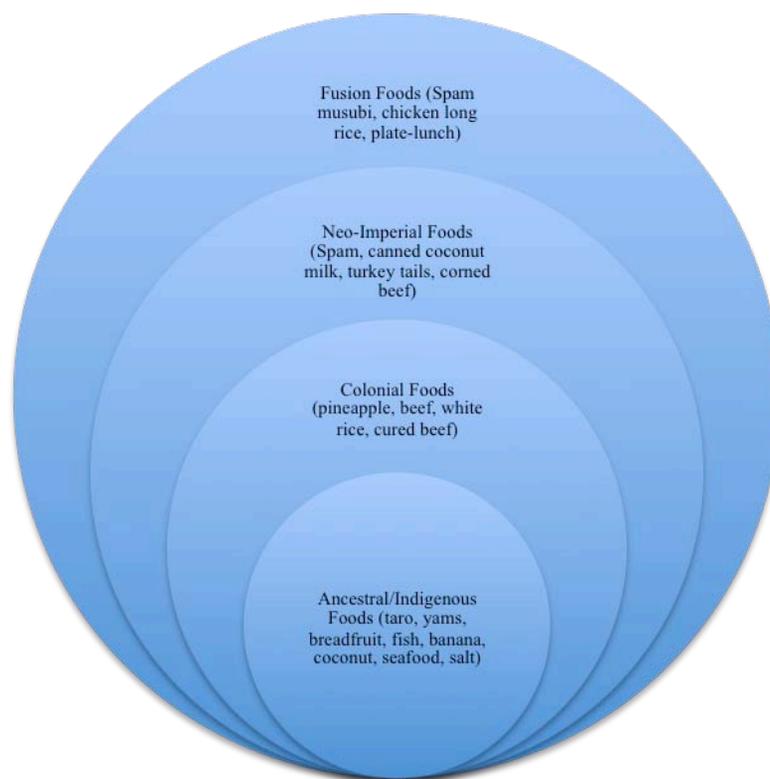
Yeah Americanized yeah. That's why they've [many Pacific Islanders in San Diego] lost it... how did we bring them back? Because I didn't want to lose our culture so I was always trying to remember things... plus my older sister she keeps the tradition going with certain things... you know I guess way of making food... If I needed to find a recipe I just call her up and she pass it on, tell me how to do this. [Interview 13]

Respondent 12 concurred, "food is still a big part of the traditions that we try to keep". The act of preparing traditional foods for cultural events was one way Pacific Islanders on the mainland US symbolically preserved their culture.

### **WHAT ARE TRADITIONAL FOODS?**

Defining the concept of tradition and traditional foods was complex because Pacific Islanders interviewed in this research project understood and utilized the designation 'traditional' to describe a range of different foods available in the Pacific. The definition of traditional foods totally depended on personal views of culture and neo-imperialism, life experience, and oftentimes place of birth (foreign born vs. American born). The following was the total list of food Pacific Islanders categorized under the designation traditional: pig (kalua pig, pig cooked in the ground), taro/poi, fish, raw fish (poke, lomi lomi salmon), Hawaiian salt, banana, breadfruit, coconut, coconut milk, opihi, vana, crab, squid, octopus, sweet potato, limpets, lau lau, kelaguen, palu sami, pineapple, plate lunch, loco moco, beef, Spam, white rice, red rice, corned beef, brisket, seaweed, ribs, lumpia, chicken long rice, cured beef, shrimp patties, beef jerky, haupia, raw liver, chicken katsu, manapua, pancit, finadeni, empanada, mac salad, and Spam musubi.

Aside from listing them, Pacific Islanders classified traditional foods through a range of categories. Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the spectrum of traditional foods. The series of circles represented by Figure 1 demonstrate the ways Pacific Islanders in this study categorized traditional foods and also shows levels of agreement and acceptance of different categories of traditional foods. For example, the category of foods most agreed upon by Pacific Islanders in this project to be traditional were put in the center and the category of foods least agreed by Pacific Islanders in this study to be traditional were put in the outer circle.



**Figure 1. Categories of traditional foods.**

Pacific Islanders in this project assigned the original foods that were available in the Pacific region prior to contact with any outside groups to the category of “ancestral” traditional foods. This definition included foods consumed by indigenous Pacific Islanders that were naturally occurring on and around the Pacific Islands (fruits from the trees, animals from the sea, etc.) This designation also entailed foodstuffs that the ancestral islanders migrated to the Pacific islands with, such as sweet potato and yams. These foods were seen

as the core staples of Pacific Island culture because they were the original foods consumed in the Pacific Islands by the ancestors of Pacific Islanders in this research project. Because there was blanket agreement within the Pacific Islander community interviewed that these foods should be labeled as traditional, they were put in the very center of Figure 1 to represent the most agreed upon categorization of traditional foods.

Building from that definition was a designation of foods added to the diet by the arrival of non-Pacific Islander peoples onto the islands. Two categories of people arrived in the islands affecting food consumption: those who held positions of power such as colonial administrations and missionaries, and those who did not hold positions of power but migrated to the Pacific for employment opportunities or other reasons, such as field workers, indentured servants, beachcombers and artists.

These groups of people brought with them new foods and recipes. Depending on the power held by the group, foods were introduced by force or habit. Given the strong colonial influence over the movement of goods, like food, in and out of the Pacific during that time period, it was applicable to designate these foods added to the Pacific diet at that time (e.g., Portuguese sausage, beef, soy, pineapple) as “colonial foods”. These foods continued to have a strong presence in the Pacific Islands and even though non-Pacific Islanders introduced them (or influenced their prevalence in the Pacific through the mass production of them), many of these foods were labeled as traditional or incorporated into traditional dishes. However, there was less agreement over whether or not these foods were considered to be traditional, than with the ancestral foods, among the Pacific Islanders interviewed so they were put outside of the ancestral foods circle of Figure 1.

Since the beginning of World War II, when Pacific Island nations became official extensions of other countries through political maneuvers like annexation and occupation, and the concurrent dissolution of many colonial regimes in the Pacific, a new category of “neo-imperial” traditional foods emerged. These foods were introduced in the form of government food aid, because of militarization, through increased importation and exportation of goods, development, tourism, and because of a growing number of grocery stores. Examples of foods introduced in neo-imperial times included Spam, canned coconut milk, turkey tails, and corned beef. Because Pacific Islanders incorporated these items into their diet when they or their relatives lived in the Pacific, many considered them to be

traditional because it was what they ate “back home”. Yet, there was less agreement over the designation of neo-imperial foods, than colonial foods, by Pacific Islanders in this research project so in Figure 1 they were placed outside of the prior category.

Pacific Islanders named a final category of traditional foods as “local foods”. These foods were often found in Pacific Island-themed restaurants. There was the most disagreement over whether or not to include these foods under the designation of traditional. Examples of foods from this category included a dish colloquially called “plate-lunch” (a plate filled with several scoops of rice, macaroni salad or green salad, and some form of protein- fish, kalua pork, ribs, etc.), loco-moco (hamburger patties smothered in gravy and served over rice with eggs), and Spam musubi (Spam on top of a block of rice wrapped in seaweed, also known as Spam sushi). The diversity of foods in this category exemplified the mixture of culture groups who came to the Pacific and have lived there over the past three hundred years. Many of these dishes in the local food category combined ingredients found both inside and outside of the Pacific Island region. The local foods category reflected the least amount of acceptance from the Pacific Islander community when categorizing these foods as traditional and because of this it was placed in the very outer ring of Figure 1.

As evident from the numerous categories derived by Pacific Islanders when asked how they categorize traditional foods, a multitude of factors defined the term traditional food for them.

As Figure 1 indicates and as discussed above, multiple layers of traditional food types emerged from the data and there were varying layers of agreement among Pacific Islanders when it came to claiming food as traditional.

Most people fully agreed that the smallest circle, entitled ancestral/indigenous foods, represented traditional foods. As the circles got bigger and the range of traditional foods grew, Pacific Islanders agreed less that the foods were traditional. The last circle, for example, that added fusion foods to the group, was the category of food least agreed upon by Pacific Islanders as being traditional.

### **AUTHENTICITY**

Categorizing foods as traditional was more complex than simply placing foods into the four categories described above because Pacific Islanders also invoked standards of

authenticity when classifying traditional foods. Authenticity was determined on the basis of a range of stipulations related to:

1. Who is doing the cooking
2. Ingredient choice
3. Preparation methods

### **Who is Cooking?**

Who cooked the food affected authenticity of traditional foods and Pacific Islanders noted that food their parents and other family members made was more traditional and authentic than traditional foods cooked by people outside of the family.

When asked who does the cooking of traditional foods in the household, findings indicated more of a male presence than female presence in the kitchen; for instance, as participant 5 stated: “I cook, my wife no cook. She does not cook. That's how I was raised, is that Samoan custom, the boys, the man are suppose to take care of wife, take care of family so we provide.” This statement reflected the traditional gender role of Samoan men, as the members of the family in charge of the majority of the cooking (Mead 1939:48).

In some families, cooking duties were split up based on location of the food preparation. For example, participant 15 explained that in Guam, the men took care of all food preparation that occurred outdoors and women prepared the foods cooked indoors. She said her family retained this tradition in San Diego, “My dad still is the one who does the barbeque and the guys get kicked out of the kitchen. Anything that has to do with the inside that can be prepared inside of the kitchen was generally left to women” (Participant 15).

A number of informants noted that cooking traditional foods was a group activity and it was not divided between gender lines. Everyone helped and did a little bit, depending on the day. For larger family gatherings, most family members contributed a dish or two. The description of cooking as a group activity by Pacific Islanders interviewed emphasized the key theme of family in contemporary Pacific Islander traditions and culture.

Who prepared the food mattered to Pacific Islanders when they went out to eat. Several informants remarked that they could taste the difference between cooks at Pacific Islander restaurants who were of Pacific Islander descent and those who were not. They stated that the flavors were not correct or the dish was not prepared properly when non-Pacific Islanders were cooking because Pacific Islanders had more knowledge and a better

identification with traditional Pacific Island foods, therefore, whether at a restaurant or at home, the food simply tasted better and was more authentic when a Pacific Islander was preparing it. “It’s tough to find anything truly authentic unless it’s someone who is like a grandmother who makes it at a house or a friend or something like that” (Interview 16).

Restaurant owners played a large part in this conversation too, as several informants noted that restaurants owned by Pacific Islanders had the most authentic cuisine. One middle-aged Chamorro man noted,

Like my favorite L&L ... I know the owners there are Hawaiian... I think it’s the people that are cooking it that are Pacific Islanders, they do a little something different. You know a good example is you go to a L&L that are run by Filipinos—their poke is different, they put soy sauce in it and they let it sit too long. But you buy it from a Hawaiian and they don’t. They don’t do that. [Interview 14]

A restaurant owner commented,

Hawaiian food is a gimmick you know in a sense. Some people want to jump on the bandwagon that know nothing about it... They’ve been to Hawai`i and they see businesses that are thriving and making money. You know, but it’s honestly, at the end of the day, it’s like-- it’s love. If you don’t have love for the food it’s not going to be the same. [Interview 3]

Overall, Pacific Islanders warned that not everyone could cook authentic Pacific Islander food because cultural knowledge and sentiment contributed to the overall experience, superseding recipes and culinary skills. Pacific Islanders appreciated foods cooked by fellow Pacific Islanders the most and stressed how cooking was often a family-wide activity. Also, they felt a closer identification and enjoyment of the food when the chef or restaurant owner was also of Pacific Island descent. This collective phenomenon reflected a strong group sentiment towards traditional foods that mandated the ones doing the cooking must identify with the values of the collective group consuming it or else authenticity, and to a large degree, enjoyment, was lost.

## **Ingredients**

From where ingredients derived was another facet that contributed to the authenticity of traditional Pacific Island foods.

Pacific Islanders reported that ingredients could be obtained from a number of stores in San Diego. Informants commented that you could get most of the ingredients from a grocery store like Ralph’s or Wholefoods. However, the majority of their foods were found

in the 'ethnic' section of the store. Pacific Islanders also shopped at specialty stores including the Asian markets Ranch 99 and Marupai, and Middle Eastern markets. Other participants interviewed bought their ingredients at Pacific Island specialty stores like Motu Hawai'i in Pacific Beach and Taste of Polynesia in Lemon Grove. Sam's Liquor was another popular store that catered to the needs of Pacific Islanders. Other Pacific Islanders interviewed obtained their ingredients directly from the islands via family friends who sent it to them or came to visit.

Pacific Islanders interviewed noted the difference in authenticity between buying food at a grocery store here in the US and where foods came from back in the islands. Participant 20, a middle-aged mom who migrated from Samoa to the US made the distinction,

I think that if the chicken was done in a way that we did it back home, where it was actually--where we actually raised them and killed them and ate them...Then I would consider it cultural. But...just getting it from the grocery store... I don't consider it cultural.

This dichotomy between the ways ingredients were grown or raised and acquired in Samoa versus the way food ingredients were grown or raised and acquired here in San Diego illustrated major cultural differences in food preparation methods. Her requirements for authenticity, such as raising and killing the chickens, would be extremely hard to execute here in San Diego because of city code violations regarding urban farming. However, there was a presence of butcher shops and farms in the San Diego area that sold freshly-killed chickens, but most were located in remote corners of northeast San Diego, like Ramona, at least an hour's drive round trip from most areas of San Diego. Thus availability, restrictions, and the inconvenient location of where foods could be acquired made authenticity harder to achieve here in San Diego.

Similarly, the significance of authentic ingredient acquisition was traded for more time-saving techniques. A middle-aged male community leader described how his family used to take the young men out to a pig farm and kill the pigs themselves as a rite of passage, "that was... a memorable moment too, just hearing the killing of the pig just the squealing and stabbing it in the right place where the blood flows out" (Interview 11). When asked whether his family still participated in that tradition he responded, "No...they actually sell whole pigs already cooked, so it's like cheating but you know in this world it's all about

convenience and time” (Interview 11). A contradiction can be drawn between the authentic, traditional ways of raising and killing your own food and the convenient time-saving replacement found in grocery stores already prepared.

### **Preparation Methods**

Methods of traditional food preparation have changed throughout the years, challenging notions of authenticity and tradition and negating some nutritional benefits. As explained in an earlier chapter, the primary method of cooking food in the Pacific Islands for centuries was in an umu, or underground oven, and foods were wrapped in leaves, which contributed to the overall nutritional content of the foods. Several participants told me that, every once in a while, family members would dig an umu in their backyard in San Diego to retain that practice and those family members were well-known for their delicious tasting foods. Yet others Pacific Islanders commented that because of space, time, and fire department regulations, San Diego was not a favorable place for having an umu in one’s yard,

You have to deal with the fire department because every time we do have one [an umu] the fire department comes out and talk about you know we need license for this and that, so you know I would say that’s one contributing factor to why folks don’t really want to have that, because you have to do the burning of the rocks and so on and fire departments or neighbors call so we have that culture clash, but they enjoy the food, but they don’t know what it takes to cook that kind of food. [Interview 11]

Another participant qualified the authenticity of foods cooked in an umu, “Now if we had made it...in the umu then... I could categorize it as Samoan” (Interview 20)

For many Pacific Islanders interviewed, eating traditional foods cooked in a kitchen was simply viewed as evolution and the meaning behind the foods remained the same, one man said, “the American version of our umu is the conventional oven” (Interview 19). Conversely, other participants noted that shifts in cooking style made meals less personal, removing part of the meaning and nostalgia behind the food,

When I remember participating in the Samoan community, the men cook, there was always a story of a folklore told with it, so it always gave special meaning to it you know, I’m sure it’s probably just a story but as far as preparing it, you’re almost like a little more in tune with it versus ‘oh I gotta slap something together real quick just got home from work. [Interview 11]

A young adult male of Hawaiian descent noted,

Yeah I think it's becoming less personal. Umm There's a lot less uhh big family time meetings for food and stuff like that umm cuz in the Hawaiian culture it's all about getting everyone together, like every generation, basically like the grandfathers, the fathers, the sons and all in between. But now it's because of the way it is in the mainland, it's just like eat when you can, everyone is so busy nowadays. [Interview 16]

Several participants commented on how ready-made ingredients, like coconut milk from a can, changed the integrity of traditional foods because, aside from the flavor being affected, people no longer need to know how to prepare them from scratch; formerly, making coconut milk was an important skill. One middle aged man who migrated to the US from Samoa worried his son would miss out on important cultural knowledge due to the easy availability of ready-made foods,

I like him to sit down and make real coconut milk. Not go to the store, you know? Actually husk the coconut, know which coconut to pick, you know, and grate the coconut, squeeze the coconut, make the real deal. Cook everything from scratch- because now days everybody goes to this Ralph's market, nobody know how to make things from scratch. [Interview 5]

Participant 20, a busy Samoan mom with six kids, talked about the differences between canned coconut milk and homemade coconut milk from back home,

The coconut milk, it tastes totally different [here] and when people come from Samoa to here, the main thing we ask them is for Palu Sami, which is the taro leaves with the real coconut milk cuz we like that ... it tastes totally different here.

A working middle-aged Chamorro mom commented on how shifts in food preparation also affected and was affected by the changing role of women,

For so many minorities across the board no matter what nationality, cooking connected other women to other women and connected family members to family members. So many of us are losing sit down meals...because again we're double income now. Our culture has changed and it is even the same in Guam, you know, where two people are working. You know the stay at home mom [in the US] is no longer the fashion and as a result we are losing our connection that we have with preparing food and cooking food. So I do believe it's taking on a different meaning now because you know it's almost as if you know, who really is guiding the culture? So we don't cook our traditional foods and we don't we don't cook unless it's a like an elaborate meal unless it's a some kind of an important event and that's uhh so yeah I think that these new foods that are coming that we are claiming is taking on a new meaning and a new identity umm and it's coming away from that connection that Pacific Islanders had with their traditional foods. You know I think that we're no longer placing our importance on our food like we don't want to necessarily claim it like it's not as important to claim our

food... We're going different directions you know. Women are no longer take pride in being the best cook or being able to cook a great meal or having this or that in the kitchen. They're taking pride in the professions that they are maintain and the houses that they own and the professions that they have and umm that's what I what I'm seeing and it's a little sad so yeah I think less of it is as important as it used to be. [Interview 15]

Overall, the evolution of food preparation methods made Pacific Islanders question authenticity of tradition because a number of factors such as the shifted gender roles when cooking, diminished nostalgia associated with cooking, and different ways the food tasted, threatened the retention of long-standing cultural features like cooking food in an umu and making coconut milk from scratch. Food nostalgia coupled with the invention of traditions greatly affected the traditional food culture of Pacific Islanders living in San Diego, resulting in four different categories of traditional foods and much disagreement among Pacific Islanders as to which foods should be considered traditional and why.

### **WHEN WERE TRADITIONAL FOODS CONSUMED?**

The Pacific Islanders who participated in this project ate traditional foods as frequently as every day and as infrequently as once every six months. There was no correlation between frequency of traditional food consumption and whether or not participants were born in the US or in the Pacific. Elderly participants reported eating traditional foods the most infrequently. One *kupuna* (honored elder) stated that she ate traditional foods sparingly because they were too rich for her. Male participants, with an age range spanning 18-30, reported eating traditional foods more frequently than anyone else. Middle-aged participants, with an age range spanning 31-60, said they have cut back on their traditional food consumption mainly because of health reasons.

Traditionally, among Pacific Islanders, the significance associated with food consumption was demonstrated through food events, like feasts that showed prestige and family functions or rituals that reinforced solidarity and community support. Historically to present day, food events conveyed information about wealth, established and maintained relationships, and celebrated unity. In the past, the wealth of a chief was indicated by the size and lavishness of the feast (Haden 2009:184). This approach carried over into contemporary times, as hosts were expected to prepare more food than is actually needed to feed the estimated number of guests. The guests, in turn, were supposed to overeat to display their

appreciation to the hosts as enjoyment of the food. Should a host fail to provide enough food for all invited guests, the community used gossip to censure the host for not being adequately prepared, usually also insinuating that they did not have the economic means to serve everyone (Jones 2009: 73).

Family get-togethers appeared to be the most common occasion when traditional foods were consumed for Pacific Islanders in San Diego. “You know it could be anything like you know game night and all that. But we’ll indulge and we’ll you know call my mom and say make the usual...which is red rice, kelaguen, spare ribs” (Interview 15). Getting together with friends from the islands was another occasion. Other participants waited for special occasions to eat traditional foods, like the Pacific Island festival or, in one retired, physically active, elderly Hawaiian woman’s case, when she harvested the taro leaves she had growing in her yard (Interview 10). The majority of Pacific Islanders consumed traditional foods in the company of family and friends exemplifying the long-standing cultural theme that Pacific Islanders rarely consumed (traditional Pacific Island) foods alone and usually ate them among family.

### **HIGH STATUS FOODS**

Certain foods--particularly those high in complex carbohydrates, naturally reproducing in abundance, and with long shelf- or storage lives—historically, held positions of prestige among Pacific Islanders. For example, in Marquesas Islands, breadfruit was considered to be sacred. Breadfruit is a starchy tree fruit that can bear up to four harvests in one year. Due to its prolific fruit-producing capacity and the fruit’s suitability for long-term storage, the breadfruit tree helped the population of the Marquesas withstand periods of drought, overpopulation, and the effects of warring neighboring tribes cutting down their other trees (Moulin 2001:78). Breadfruit harvests were celebrated with festivals. Customary tattooing undertaken to display accomplishment of rites of passage, like marriage or achieving a warrior’s status, was celebrated by eating prepared breadfruit paste. Indeed, islanders were not allowed to prepare the breadfruit paste used for celebrations unless they had been tattooed, symbolically elevating breadfruit from a simple foodstuff, to an item of ritual significance requiring the handler to possess distinctive qualities and be of a certain age (Handy 1922:5). Similarly, as Handy and Handy note, taro had an elevated status in Hawai`i,

characterized as the favorite food of the ruling class (1972:244). In New Guinea, yams were considered a high-status food, to the extent that islanders coordinated concepts of time around yam growing seasons (Scaglione 1999:221). Staples of the Pacific diet, like breadfruit, taro, and yam were held in high esteem because they provided calories during times of food scarcity and were an important part of cultural rituals.

The elevation of certain foods was no different for Pacific Islanders interviewed in San Diego, as a number of traditional foods were deemed important on a symbolic level. The most common foods held in high regard were pork (kalua pig) and raw fish (poke). Kalua pig, on the rare occasion it was cooked authentically—that is, by Pacific Islanders in an underground rock oven—resulted in a juicy, flavorful dish, where the taste reflected the long hours required for preparation and cooking. Raw foods, especially fish, were given an elevated status, because they required skillful hands when preparing them (to cut the fish correctly and without contamination), they were difficult and/or expensive to acquire, and they must be fresh when consumed, “raw stuff, you know, you have to know where it came from, it would have to be fresh, that would be poke and opihi and probably the raw liver”(Interview 10). Also, items that took a long time to prepare, such as kelaguen and red rice, were also held in high esteem. These foods, aside from being served on special occasions, also had a tendency to be considered as ‘comfort’ foods: “You know you get a kinda sense of comfort eating it and stuff, it reminds you of it's happy food”(Interview 4). Thus a number of conditions elevated the status of specific traditional foods.

### **SPAM**

Spam was a traditional food, introduced as a food ration for the US military during World War II, which was embraced by islanders across the Pacific and continued to have a major presence in traditional Pacific Island food consumption culture. Although Spam was not specifically named a traditional food by all Pacific Islanders interviewed, the majority of participants mentioned Spam in some capacity and all but two participants interviewed self-identified as Spam-Eaters. Pacific Islanders interviewed had an ambivalent relationship with Spam. When asked about their feelings regarding the food, more often than not, it was described to me as love, followed by apologetic discourse, as if the love affair was in fact

illicit. Most Pacific Islanders “love” Spam and many defended it vociferously. A male Samoan community leader said,

I love it! That shit is good! It’s got such a bad rap outside of the Asian and Pacific Islander communities but you know the hot dog has the same kinda of ugly parts too and it’s like America’s, it goes with baseball. So Spam goes with whatever we have. [Interview 11]

Likewise, a middle-aged Samoan mom who works at a local community center said, “I love Spam. Have to have Spam in our house. Spam we eat it for breakfast; we eat it for lunch we eat it for dinner” (Interview 20). Similarly, a Chamorro young adult who is actively involved in Pacific Islander youth programs and the Pacific Islander Festival Association exclaimed, “Girl I looove me some Spam” (Interview 8)! Amidst such affirmations, a number of participants reported that because they have become more health conscious they limited their Spam intake. Yet they do not cut it out entirely. A middle aged Samoan man noted that even though he was learning all about food from his personal trainer, he would still indulge in a little Spam here and there,

I’m a- I was a big huge fan of Spam but ever since I’ve been on this health drive- I did have a personal trainer so that’s why I know more about food, I’m more conscious about food...But uh yeah I like it why not? I love Spam no matter what [laughs]! [Interview 19]

A young male adult noted, “I love Spam. Spam is the best. Like honestly if I could eat Spam every day and it was good for me I would but it is just way too much sodium and I just can’t. [My personal trainer] would kill me” (Interview 18). Desire to indulge despite Spam’s health costs sometimes was justified not only by personal preference but by others’ tastes too,

It’s so bad for you and I could gain weight like it’s nobody’s business, I mean smell Spam and I gain 10 pounds. But my son, my baby loves Spam and so I’ve been cooking it and I love it. It’s unhealthy but my feelings are it’s unhealthy but with rice, vinegar, and umm Tabasco I don’t care. So I’ll do the extra couple miles in the gym to eat Spam. [Interview 15]

As described in the above statement, participants kept Spam in the house because the entire family, especially the children, love it. One mother noted that even though the price of it has gone up, she still buys it, “We have so many recipes for Spam so. It has gotten a lot more expensive than it was way back in the day but you know we still buy that”(Interview 20).

Despite its popularity among the majority of interviewees, I did interview two members of the opposition. One man, a middle-aged Tongan man said, “Spam. They should actually get rid of it. It’s the most unhealthiest food and yet it’s the most popular food in the islands. Umm I can only say get rid of it” (Interview 12). A young Hawaiian man guiltily admitted, “I’m not a fan of it. I feel like it’s against my heritage when I say that I don’t like Spam” (Interview 16).

It was worthy to note that even though participant 16 didn’t like it, he felt guilty admitting his disdain because it was so ingrained in him as part of Pacific Island culture. Conversely, even though the majority of those interviewed reported being health-conscious, they still admitted eating it. Participant 17, an elderly woman described her more moderate approach to Spam eating was health-related,

I eat Spam. It’s not something that I stock my grocery my shelves with but occasionally I will purchase a can and cook it... from a health point of view...there’s a lot of fat in the Spam so I don’t, I have a tendency not to serve it because of it.

Another woman stated that she loved Spam yet objected to the frequency of which her sister served it to her family, “I love spam...I grew up with it. But my sister feeds her kids Spam every day and I’m like no!” (Interview 8).

Regardless of the mixed reactions to the processed meat product, the majority reported that they do buy Spam once in a while to eat, especially with rice, an elderly woman explained,

The appeal for Spam is not for basically the Spam itself it’s for the rice that goes with it. Because I don’t think Hawaiians would eat the Spam if it wasn’t for the rice. When you put Spam and rice together it is ambrosia. [Interview 10]

Despite its introduction by foreigners and the admission that it was bad for you, all but two Pacific Islanders interviewed agreed that they loved Spam and held it in high regard. This love affair with Spam can be explained physically, as a result of sodium dependence. It can also be explained symbolically, as Spam served a number of important functions for Pacific Islanders since its introduction to the Pacific during World War II. For example, Pacific Islanders substituted it into traditional recipes when fish was not available. Unlike other foods, the preparation style of it had not been affected by a shift from umu to pot cooking because Spam was not a food traditionally cooked in an umu. Taste was not affected by migration or because the ingredients that made up Spam were no longer

available. Spam essentially stayed the same since it was introduced into the Pacific during World War II. In fact, more recipes and derivations of it have emerged throughout the years but the essential dietary components of Spam like, its saltiness and protein content, remained constant. These features contributed to its popularity among Pacific Islander food traditions and made it a food Pacific Islanders identify with even if they don't like it. The group consensus regarding Spam consumption highlighted important features of food culture and preference among Pacific Islanders. The examination of food culture among a group played into notions of identity. In addition to food culture and tradition, identity should also be discussed.

### **IDENTITY FINDINGS**

Cooper and Brubaker (2005), as per my literature review, have explained that there are multiple ways to understand identity, especially among neo-imperial populations, like Pacific Islanders and transplanted Pacific Islanders living in the mainland US (62).

Traditional foods discussed in this project related to identity because they represented the multitude of cultures and people interacting with each other and inhabiting the Pacific over the past few hundred years and provided a platform on which to examine identity because food consumption and the designation made when Pacific Islanders discussed traditional foods conveyed individual and group-related practices and beliefs. For example, one participant said that he ate rice everyday because he's Hawaiian and that's what he was raised on (Interview 3). This was an important distinction because even when the foods, like rice, originated from places other than Hawai'i, the food was still identified as a staple of Hawaiian culture, exemplifying the multi-cultural history of the island. Another participant talked about her mixed Hawaiian/Samoan identity and how certain traditional foods were essentially the same in both cultures but had one or two ingredients that differed, making each dish distinct depending on which preparation style was used,

So like in the Samoan culture we have `ota which is raw fish, we would have it with coconut milk but in Hawaiian culture it's called poke which is kinda just um seasoned with Hawaiian salt and different herbs and a little bit of soy sauce so not a lot of juice. So it's the same thing but it's prepared differently. But I could, you could, any pacific islander could tell that this is a Hawaiian dish and this is a Samoan dish by how it's prepared. [Interview 20]

This difference between Hawaiian and Samoan preparation styles of raw fish depicted how Pacific Island cultures could be distinguished from each other through the use of different ingredients reflecting cultural distinction.

In addition to separating cultural identities, food preparation methods connected islanders to their Pacific Islander identities on the mainland US because certain ways of cooking reminded them of home or time spent in the islands. “Food that we eat...the way we do things, we do it how it’s done in Hawai`i. You know so it keeps up connected to what’s out there” (Interview 6). Another participant said,

Oh especially when I’m going fishing, when they’re...filleting the fish right then and there and they cut it up into cubes, it definitely reminds me of the ahi poke that my grandma used to make. So just like any like fresh fish, or rice or barbeque reminds me of Hawai`i. [Interview 18]

Another woman commented on how all cultures had at least one food they identified with, for Chamorro people it was rice,

I mean rice is still big in my family, even for my kids. Even my husband doesn’t understand- straight up from Eastern Europe- doesn’t understand why we need to eat rice with everything. But we do we eat rice with everything and he eats potatoes with everything...Every Chamorro family has a rice cooker. Every traditional umm Chamorro has a rice cooker at home. [Interview 15]

Thus, ingredients and traditional foods represented multifaceted notions of cultural identity and played important roles in the lifestyle and culture of Pacific Islanders interviewed in San Diego.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **PACIFIC ISLAND FOOD CULTURE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The categorization of traditional foods into different groups by participants in this study reflected the influence of power in the Pacific Islands throughout history. Different groups of people, from the ancestral islanders to the numerous political entities with control over island nations in the Pacific present-day, influenced not only the politics in the region, but the food consumption choices and preferences too, affecting health and the food culture of Pacific Islanders across the world. In this chapter I provide a brief history of food in the Pacific Islands in order to illuminate the findings just reported and inform subsequent discussion of traditional foods and identity.

#### **ANCESTRAL PACIFIC ISLAND DIET**

Historically, foods consumed in the Pacific were very different from those found in the present day. The earliest inhabitants of the Pacific migrated from Southeast Asia to colonize Australia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and parts of Western Micronesia 30,000-60,000 years ago (Haden 2009:3, Hughes 2003:5). Archaeological evidence suggests that the migration of people and food occurred mostly from west to east (Haden 2009:4). Successful voyages to new settlements across the vast Pacific Ocean required skilled navigational techniques and knowledge of food and agriculture to insure survival. Explorers brought various species of taro, yams, banana, sugarcane, breadfruit, and pandanus, to provide them with sustenance during the journey and to experiment with planting at the final destination (Haden 2009:4).

Before contact with Westerners, the ancestral diet of Pacific Islanders consisted of the root crops mentioned above, which were high in nutrients such as fiber, Vitamin C and Vitamin E. The early inhabitants supplemented these cultivated crops with seafood and fruits like coconut that was brought over by the islands' earliest inhabitants (Hughes and Marks

2009:1700). Archaeological evidence suggests that Islanders were primarily vegetarian, consuming meatless meals of low-calorie, high-nutrient foods over eighty-five percent of the time (Hughes 2003:7). Hughes and Marks (2009) note that coconuts, seafood, root crops, and green leaves were the main staples of traditional Pacific Islander diets (1700). Rice was cultivated only in the Marianas islands and archaeological evidence indicates that it was eaten for ceremonial purposes (Hunter-Anderson et al. 1995:69).

Due to geographic and climatic differences between the islands, foods consumed consistently varied by location. For example, taro was better suited to northern environments, like the island chain of Hawai`i, whereas sweet potato thrived in the south, becoming a staple of New Zealand. Breadfruit, a tree that produces large, globe-shaped, starchy fruits, grew prolifically in the Marquesas Islands to the east. Sago, because of its propensity to grow in swamps, thrived in western areas like Papua New Guinea (Haden 2009:9).

Some Pacific Islander groups, like the Hawaiians, established major agricultural centers prior to contact with Europeans. Archaeological evidence indicates that crop cultivation was highly intense and the fields had complex irrigations systems as early as the 1650s (Kirch 2007:65). The Hawaiians built terraced ponds for the cultivation of taro and utilized swidden agricultural techniques to grow sweet potatoes, yams, and kava. Reports from Captain Cook's crew described extensive dryland field systems of consisting of crops, like bananas (Ziegler 2002:330-331). Fishponds were constructed to raise stocks of fish that were able to live in brackish waters. Overall, the ancestral Pacific Islander diet consisted of fruits and vegetation from the islands, foods from the sea, and a variety of plants from surrounding islands that were cultivated in personal gardens and/or large-scale agricultural endeavors.

## COLONIAL ADMINISTRATIONS

Contact with people from European and other nations stimulated a significant shift in Pacific Islander subsistence strategies and consumption patterns. Early reports from Magellan and Cook provided comparable accounts of muscular, well-fed island residents and lush natural environments. In his journals, Captain Cook described the natives of Tahiti as, "tall, stong-limb'd and well shaped" and the natives of New Zealand as "strong, rawboned,

well made, active people” (1936:91,218). David Samwell, Surgeon on Captain Cook’s voyage of the *Discovery*, wrote that the inhabitants of Tonga were “strong and exceedingly well made”(1967:1040).

The arrival of foreigners did not immediately cause major changes in food consumption. The first Westerners who established trade relations with Pacific Islanders were explorers and mariners involved in the whaling industry. Both groups primarily utilized the Pacific Islands to provision their ships (Haden 2009:19). Exchange was two-way, “islanders received various trade-able items like tools, but also Western food and drink...the primary need for food, on one side, fuelled by curiosity and covetousness, on the other, instigated exchanges and furthered relations between cultures” (Haden 2009:18). Structures guiding trade were informal and based on the resources islanders had readily available. Once trade in the Pacific became commoditized, powerful countries saw the financial potential in the Pacific and reciprocity of goods transitioned into an unequal relationship based on commerce. Economic benefits shifted to the West, favoring those who had guns, warships, diseases, and Christianity (Haden 2009:25). The presence of colonizers and missionaries invoked major changes to the components of the Pacific Island diet by affecting things like availability of traditional foods, methods of cooking, and food preferences.

Colonial administrations established new laws and brought new crops to the islands. For example, Fijian cassava became popular with the islanders due to its “reliable, rapidly maturing, low maintenance” qualities (Jones 2009:30-31). Pineapple, (although some say it was brought to Hawai`i by the indigenous Polynesians) was only documented growing in the Pacific in small quantities several years after contact with Westerners. The Hawaiian name for it, *hala kahiki*, which translates to “foreign pandanus”, suggested this as well (Okiihiro 2009: 111). The cultivation of cash crops became a lucrative industry in the Pacific for American and European colonizers. Agricultural methods underwent a transition from subsistence farming and personal gardening to large-scale monocropping. Across the Pacific, the shift to cash crop cultivation affected food supplies because foods were no longer simply grown for consumption but rather were primarily grown for sale and export.

The shift to a colonial-based, plantation economy across the Pacific was unfavorable for the native populations because the colonists subjugated the islanders by force,

intimidating them with cannon and guns. The colonial weapons were far superior to the materials islanders had available with which to retaliate. Lal and Fortune noted, “the recruiting process varied over time, from early years of forcible recruitment to later years when islanders enlisted voluntarily to obtain foreign goods, or to fulfill head-taxes imposed by colonial governments” (2000:204).

Indentured servants and islanders, kidnapped from other regions, supplied the island plantations with cheap labor, allowing foreign governments’ agricultural empires to expand. Colonial officials were also helped by local native leaders who received wealth and prestige among other island elites, in exchange for helping colonial administrations recruit islanders. Structures separated workers of the same ethnicity from living and working together, a strategy that minimized the chance of organized dissent due to language barriers and the lack of an inherent culturally-specific bond (Lal and Fortune 2000:204). Haden (2009) noted how the exploitation of islander bodies for economic gain reinforced images of the “savage” to those Westerners inside and outside of the region. As with most colonial interactions, the reaffirmation of the savage promoted the notion that racial difference was an acceptable way to categorize the “other” and take advantage of their body for personal gain (24).

Western diseases also aided in the conquest of native islanders, as populations were unable to fend off the ravages of new diseases and were rapidly diminished, leaving room for outside powers to influence island politics and economics. Colonial governments met less resistance to their ideas and institutions because there were fewer islanders overall. Between 1778, the year of Captain Cook’s first voyage to Hawai`i, and 1893, the year the Hawaiian monarchy was overturned by colonial officials and businessmen, the population of native Hawaiians went from 800,000 to 44,000, decimated by syphilis, gonorrhea, tuberculosis, typhoid, measles, influenza, whooping cough, dysentery, and smallpox (Stannard 1990:329-330). Given the greatly reduced population of native islanders, and mounting political and economic pressures stemming from British, American, and French colonizers, the Hawaiian monarchy began to talk of annexation to the US because it seemed like the lesser of the three evils. They gave in politically and “relied on means approved by the Western powers to negotiate settlements” because of the large and difficult to control presence of outsiders in Hawai`i (Lichenstein 2008:41). This trend of shifting power relations between Westerners

and Islanders occurred in similar ways across the Pacific because of the strong European, Japanese, and American presences.

### **MISSIONARIES**

Missionaries also gained power in the Pacific and concurrently reformed islanders, symbolically converting religious beliefs along with notions of civility. Religious groups were appalled by food-related practices, like the feasting that lasted for days, eating with hands instead of utensils, cooking in the ground (rather than in a pot), and cannibalism (Haden 2009:27-28). They used religious discourse to convert islanders to Christianity. Bhaba (1994) warns that all discourse must be read between the lines because those creating it are intentionally only casting parts of the truth (33). This is evident among the missionaries in the Pacific where it was clear that missionaries were attempting to advance notions of Christianity while paralleling the goals of the colonial administration in attempting to change and control the actions of the islanders. For example, in Hawai`i, historian Daws described tactics used by missionaries during the 1820s, to influence island leaders, prior to annexation, to further Christianity,

From the beginning they had planned to enlist the aid of the chiefs. The missionaries, as good American republicans, had no interest in propping up a savage despotism based on inherited rank, and as good Christians they certainly did not believe that the soul of a chief was worth more to God than the soul of a commoner. All the same there could be nothing wrong in trying to turn the influence of powerful men and women to good purposes, provided this could be done without undue interference in politics. [1968:66]

Convincing the native Hawaiians to believe in a Christian God was not always effective and many remained wary of the missionaries. However, Hawaiian religious dogma often commingled politics and religion so it was no surprise that the conversion of Hawaiians to Christianity also promoted the political goals of the colonists. Observations made by American Commissioner Gregg suggested, “Hawaiians’ conversion to Christianity became a useful tool in improving interactions with foreigners and legitimizing their position as an equal partner” (Lichenstein 2008:44). Missionaries gleaned political sway by the conversion of respected members of the Hawaiian elite, even when motives for conversion had nothing to do with the Christian god. Hawaiians associated foreigners’ immunity to the newly introduced diseases brought to the islands with power derived from the Christian church.

In addition to inducing the religious conversion of islanders, the decimation of islander populations by Western diseases caused colonial officials to enact laws banning important cultural customs involving food preparation and ritual foods, like kava chewing, that fulfilled important symbolic functions, because they felt such customs were unsanitary and the ultimate cause of islander death (Haden 2009:189). For example, a report compiled by European colonial officials documenting life in Fiji, documented how the chewing and spitting out of kava offended colonial officials. Colonial officials stated that kava ceremonies lacked proper sanitation and thus were the leading cause of islander illness and death, when in reality, native Fijians were dying from exposure to foreign sexually transmitted diseases (Thomas 1990:154). Colonial officials, worried their free labor source was in danger of decimation, used the sudden high rates of morbidity among islanders to enact laws that required more “civilized” behavior to improve sanitation; such as prohibiting the chewing of kava, the growth of food or kava within the village, and not allowing pigs to run free. They also required that all people utilize a kitchen for cooking (Thomas 1990:158-159). Colonial regulations created on the grounds of food and health led to the abolition of certain cultural traditions.

In addition to needlessly abolishing cultural traditions and inflicting disease on the islanders, missionaries also modified traditional food-related elements of island life, such as limiting feasts to major Christian holidays like Easter Sunday or Christmas. They also encouraged the shift from cooking food in an umu, or earth oven, outdoors, to cooking food inside a kitchen with pots. The change was more than technical. The customary Pacific Island method of cooking food by steaming food in an umu (on the islands of Hawai`i this is called an *imu*) consisted of many steps and usually several families participated in the construction of it, adding a social element to food preparation (Haden 2009:118-119).

Pacific Islanders constructed umus by digging a hole in the ground and lining it with large rocks, kindling, and wood. Then they then would light a fire to kindling creating a fire of wood inside the oven that would last for several hours, heating the rocks lining the pit to a very high temperature. When the oven and the rocks were hot enough, they filled the pit with layers of palm or banana leaves and layers of foods wrapped in leaves. They would then seal the umu with more layers of leaves and dirt piled on top. Umus used steam created by the hot rocks coming into contact with the leaves to cook the food; it was imperative that

the prepared foods were wrapped in palm leaves to facilitate the steaming process and to keep the food moist (Haden 2009:90-94). The leaves increased the nutritional content of the food by providing vegetable proteins (Haden 2009:69). Bailey (1992) noted how provitamin A and vitamin E were both derived from green leaves when foods were covered in them and steamed (14). Bailey goes on to say “the leaves also act as a protective buffer between the food and the fire or hot stones, thus helping to retain more heat-sensitive vitamins in an active state and protecting food from contaminants”(1992:14).

Aside from the nutritional benefits lost in the transition to cooking in pots, umu cooking allowed for more than one type of food to be cooked at once, as opposed to the confining design of pot cooking, where only one main dish can be cooked at a time. Pot cooking limited diversity in food choices and lowered the overall nutritional content of a meal. It also reduced the space for community interaction, as multiple families contributed to and benefited from the food cooked in the umu, whereas cooking with pots moved the activity indoors, usually into a single family’s space. By changing the way food was prepared, colonizers symbolically altered island social structures. Extended families no longer had to work together to have a meal. Also, the physical locality of cooking changed from a public space to a private sphere. The colonizer’s reluctance to consume readily available island ingredients and cook them in an umu negated long-held, practical customs, elevating food-related notions of colonial superiority and stripping the islanders from a traditional food pathway.

Both the missionaries and the colonizers changed island consumption patterns, yet the shift in food consumption practices that most negatively affected nutrition occurred much later in history.

## **FOOD AID**

As Pacific Islands became official extensions of European, Asian, and American countries through political action like annexation, protection agreements, and the overthrowing of local governments, so too did patterns of consumption change. Once a part of the larger empire (or at the very least under protection by foreigners), island nations were given aid, often in the form of food and discounted imported commodities. Aid was beneficial because it provided financial assistance to struggling islands whose diversity had

been lost through monocropping, but it also created dependency on foreign contributions and impacted food availability and preference.

### **Preference for Imported Foods**

Contemporary research in the Pacific Islands demonstrates, even within the past ten years, that the consumption of imported foods has become more prominent in the Pacific Island diet, and in many places Pacific Islanders choose imported foods over locally-grown foods. Data collected by Corsi and colleagues (2008), through thirty in-depth interviews, two focus groups, and seven-day food frequency questionnaires involving 293 women ranging in age from 15-64, in Pohnpei, Micronesia, examined why imported foods were preferred over local foods. The researchers found that Pacific Islanders favored imported foods, like rice or tinned meats for example, because they took less time and energy to cook than traditional foods, such as poi, which must be baked first and then pounded into pudding. UNICEF Pacific also reported, “people are now used to the convenience of quick and easy-to-prepare foods, and many will not or cannot return to traditional lifestyles” (2008:9). Buying foods from the market was seen as a status symbol. One resident of Pohnpei noted, “you want to be seen walking out of the store with a grocery bag”(Corsi et al. 2008:313). The WHO concurred with his statement arguing that, “promotion of traditional foods has fallen by the wayside. They are unable to compete with the glamour and flashiness of imported foods” (WHO 2010).

Personal taste also directly affected individuals’ consumption habits. Findings from Corsi and colleagues noted how, “Pohnpeian people love the taste of turkey tails” (2008:313). Gewertz and Errington reported that taste was a major factor in the local preference for the consumption of mutton flaps, “at meal’s end, there was nothing that better signaled his repletion than licking up the grease that oozed from the corners of his mouth” (2007:503). The influence of readily available imported foods was also addressed in Fiji’s Nutrition Country Profile produced by the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization. It stated, “wider exposure to foreign foods through mobility and marketing have led to changing preferences, such that more and more people prefer imported refined foods compared to indigenous foods” (Vatucawaqa and Marchesich 2003:14).

### **Loss of Cultural Traditions**

Due to the high status placed on imported foods, customary methods of cooking, such as the use of an umu, were not being passed on to future generations. Residents of Pohnpei reported that it was difficult to teach children how to prepare or grow traditional foods as the youth had little interest in locally grown foods. Children's preferences (at least as reported by the adults who care for them) were for imported commodities; as one resident of Pohnpei said, "I like local food, but my kids all prefer canned meat or imported food. I cannot get them to eat any local food. My children are not interested in learning how local food is grown...this information is being lost" (Corsi et al. 2008:313). Residents of Pohnpei also remarked that canned meat and rice have been substituted for local foods in community rituals, shifting the defining characteristics of traditional foods from locally-grown to imported.

Aside from changing the way foods were cooked traditionally and what foods were utilized for cultural traditions, the presence of food aid contributed to the decline of long-standing agricultural and culinary practices, like planting personal gardens and storing foods for times of food scarcity. Islanders, prior to receiving food aid from outside countries, cultivated foods for family consumption in personal gardens and preserved foods in case of emergencies or natural disasters. Contemporary research reports the absence of fresh, local produce in most backyards. Islanders said it was not necessary to grow food in personal gardens because foods were available for purchase in stores and imported foods substituted for local commodities (Corsi et al. 2008:313). If an emergency occurred, food aid was sent from foreign countries or international agencies like the United Nations. Yet, current news reports indicate that people living on atolls in Papua New Guinea, experienced severe food shortages because of failed crops, due to drought and rising sea levels, as they waited for aid to arrive. The presence of international aid diminished the necessity of possessing knowledge of traditional, subsistence practices.

### **Food Dependency**

Imported foods and food aid also affected the availability of foods and islander consumption patterns. This was seen through Evans et al. study (2003), consisting of 430 residents from Tonga, where he used a likert scale to rate perceptions, preferences, frequency

of consumption, and the perceived nutritional value of 36 different (imported and traditional) foods including things like yams, taro, octopus, donuts, rice, and tinned fish. Evans' findings demonstrated that Tongans "prefer healthier, traditional foods...in spite of this, the frequency of imported food consumption on the main islands is greater; this is likely due to the greater availability of imported foods" (Evans et al. 2003:172). This study indicated that even when populations preferred the healthier option, they did not necessarily have access to it.

A large proportion of family meals in the Pacific consisted of ingredients provided by imported food aid, bringing the quality of foods imported and consumed into question. One example of this was the School Lunch Program provided by the Compact of Free Association between the US and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). The Compact provided FSM with military and economic benefits, like food aid, and in exchange for US allowance to conduct defense operations from FSM. The primary foods provided by the US Department of Agriculture for consumption by children in this nation-wide program were and continue to be, white rice and canned meats. Cassels notes how "many suggest that this program increased food dependency on the US, shifted food tastes, and contributed to local, healthy foods being replaced with rice, refined carbohydrates, and tinned foods" (2006:1-4).

A similar situation existed in the Marshall Islands, where relocated islanders and those exposed to radiation by US atomic testing between 1946-1958, received food aid from the US, primarily in the form of rice, canned meat, and juice. Food commodities provided to dependent communities tend to make up the primary constituents of diet, especially when food aid is distributed to those of a lower socioeconomic status (Gittlesohn et al. 2003:310-314).

Errington and Gewertz (2008) spent several years interviewing island residents, members of the meat industry, and government officials in Fiji, Tonga, and Papua New Guinea regarding their opinion of commodities like lamb and mutton flaps. They discussed how international food aid efforts, such as the provision of mutton flaps and turkey tails, could be seen as a form of "food dumping" (Errington and Gewertz 2008:594). They explained that consumers in Australia, New Zealand, or the UK (the primary consumers of sheep meat) would not consume mutton flaps, because these cultures viewed the meats to be of low value due to the high fat content, and preferred instead leaner cuts of sheep. As noted earlier however, in places like Papua New Guinea, the reaction to mutton flaps was quite the

opposite. Residents adopted the flaps as a luxury food. Politicians, for example, provided mutton flaps to their supporters. Nonetheless, in 2000, the Fijian government banned the import of mutton flaps because they were affiliated with a number of associated health risks (Gewertz and Errington 2007:598). Practices labeled “food dumping”, such as the promotion of imported, low-quality foods into the Pacific demonstrate a lack of concern by international partners in food security operations for the well being of Pacific Island people. Social researchers also coined the phrase “dietary colonialism” to describe these changes in food consumption patterns caused by contact and colonialism (McGee 1975:2). Food dependency, stemming from a history of neo-imperialism in the Pacific, drastically affected consumption patterns for the worst in the Pacific region. The nutritional content of these foods, coupled with the islanders’ dependent status, created a vicious cycle of malnutrition often leading to obesity.

### **Biological Dependency**

Food preferences can also be studied physiologically. Some studies indicate that high consumption rates of salt and sugar create a physical dependence on these foods. As noted in a review the literature by Avena and colleagues (2008), there is a major potential for sugar to create a dependency or addiction. When sugar is consumed, it releases opioids and dopamine, brain chemicals triggering symptoms of addiction, like withdrawal, cravings, and bingeing (Avena et al. 2008:21). Thus studies suggest that the chemical reactions produced in the brain by sugar are similar to the chemical reactions produced by alcohol and other addictive substances, specifically within the brain reward systems (Benton 2010:293, Kenny 2011:673). A study by Cocores and Gold (2009) reports similar findings that links salt intake to biological dependency, and ultimately, weight gain and overeating (892).

This research is pertinent because many popular, imported foods to the Pacific Island contain large amounts of sugar and salt. Spam, for example, contains 790mg of sodium in one serving. This exceeds recommendations from the Center for Disease Control that states our bodies need to consume no more than 500mg of sodium daily. The long term over consumption of sugar and salt in the Pacific Islands has greatly detracted from healthy living in the past as it does today and it contributes to the emergence of high rates of non-communicable diseases like diabetes among islanders.

## CONCLUSION

The emergence of a preference in the Pacific Islands for imported foods was based on convenience, cost, taste, social status, and the possibility of a sugar or salt chemical dependency that was incorporated into cultural frames of food. The preference reflects desire based on social and personal factors such as economics, prestige, time-constraints, and personal choice. The preferential shift was also supported and even reinforced by the presence of food aid that was received because of natural disasters, or as part of public programs, like FSM's school lunch program, which determined what foods were available to islanders in need.

As noted throughout this chapter, foods found in the Pacific Islands today are very different from the foods consumed by the original inhabitants of the islands. The adoption of new food habits in colonial times historically remained a one-way exchange, from the colonizers to the islanders and a similar situation exists today in the form of food aid. Food consumption patterns were and continue to be influenced greatly by forces largely representative of Western culture, economic power, and control.

This history was reflected in the ways that Pacific Islanders in San Diego categorized traditional foods in this research. A look at the history of food in the Pacific also shed more light on some of the factors contributing to rising rates of health disparities among the Pacific Islanders, both in the Pacific and on the mainland US. The next section will present findings in regard to the connections Pacific Islanders in this study made between food and health, as well as, discuss and analyze the existing health resources for this demographic in San Diego.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **FINDINGS: HEALTH**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I discuss the findings of the research in regard to health. First I discuss culturally based perceptions of body size. After that, I report on the concerns Pacific Islanders in this study had with health and review their concepts of health. Then I discuss the connections Pacific Islanders in this study made between food and health and address reasons why the Pacific Islanders' (in this study) view the Pacific Islander community to be unhealthy. I conclude with a description of the available health resources in San Diego described to me by Pacific Islanders in this study and present their proposed solutions to help curb health disparities.

#### **BODY SIZE**

As noted earlier, until very recently, heavier bodies were associated with high-ranking individuals. When asked whether or not Pacific Islanders still believed Pacific Island cultural norms held bigger bodies in higher esteem, the majority of participants asserted this was true, although many people claimed that was not their own opinion on the topic, "I got another nephew that's probably 8 or 9 and he's getting up there... As for health-wise, they're not worried about it. They think the bigger the better" (Interview 13).

Participant 11 explained that body size often was a result of social pressures from family members. He also noted that the stereotype of being bigger was acceptable among Pacific Islanders because community leaders were larger,

A lot of that...is because of society-- because we'll be seen as the bouncer or the football player and... there are still comments that if the baby or child is thin or you know on the thin side, they'll [family members] say 'oh are you not feeding your child?' ...And some of that is thrown off because a lot of our chiefs today are bigger dudes. [Interview 11]

One mom explained how her son's football league perpetuated the stereotype onto kids that bigger was acceptable for Pacific Islanders because her son's team made exceptions for the higher weight of Pacific Islander kids,

Even in the football leagues that I put my 8 year old son, he's way bigger than, than a lot of the kids... They give a Samoan- they do this- they give a Samoan kid ten extra pounds off because naturally a Samoan kid is big, so they give em that leeway... I mean there is a stereotype that a Samoan is big. [Interview 20]

Participant 18, a male young adult on the other hand, noted that larger bodies were more accepted in the Pacific than they were in California "because that's how everyone is over there. While everyone here on the mainland... gotta be skinny, gotta be fit, eat the healthy stuff, while people in Hawai'i... don't really care, it's just food"(Interview 18).

Among the Pacific Islanders interviewed, there were varying opinions of whether or not bigger bodies were still held in high esteem. It seemed as though the traditional Pacific Islander value which favored larger bodies continue to be upheld today in San Diego, sometimes covertly through the bodies of community leaders, and in other situations, overtly, such as the increased weight allowance for Pacific Islander children on a football team.

### **CONCERN WITH HEALTH**

All Pacific Islanders interviewed were concerned with health. Several trends emerged from the data describing a range of responses.

To some Pacific Islanders, health was important, but it was not a priority. For example, participant 9, a female Hawaiian student at SDSU, stated that she didn't worry about her health very much because her family has always been healthy and active, therefore, she had always been able to eat whatever she wanted without concern for weight gain or health.

For other Pacific Islanders, health was not always an important focus in their life but their view had changed because of some life-changing stimulus, like a health diagnosis or the inability to walk up stairs without panting. One middle-aged man from Samoa stated, "I only walked...five--five stairs to get to the front door! I got tired when I got to the top...That was bad" (Interview 19).

To other Pacific Islanders, health was always important in their lives, whether or not they spent a lot of time thinking about it or not. Participant 17 noted that she always followed her doctor's advice and that kept her healthy throughout the years, so she doesn't worry so much about health because she was "heading in the right direction".

## CONCEPTS OF HEALTH

Health was described to me in various ways: to some, it was an attitude. Participant 4 expressed,

I think being healthy has a lot to do with being happy. I think you can eat health food all day and if you're miserable you're not doing yourself any favors you know, you can be fit and beautiful but if you are hungry you need to eat something.

To others, it was a result of eating right and being active. Participant 17, an elderly woman who works in education explained how her upbringing on a farm in Hawai`i was conducive to good health because there was always a variety of foods to eat, and chores to stay active with, two things affiliated with good health from a Western perspective, even though no one in her family ever talked about health,

We had cattle, so we had the meat to sustain us... We made our own bread...if we needed pork the men went hunting...we bartered a lot...if they needed cabbage...they gave us eggs and that kinda thing... We had a milking cows...during the springtime when apples were growing and in bloom, the peaches, and all the fruit trees...it was time to pick fruit... can fruit, bake fruit, do everything you can with fruit and then the same thing with canning vegetables... we had green onions, we had white onions, we had carrots, cabbage, and... celery. All the...necessities of good nutrition growing right in the garden... I grew knowing what good nutrition was although it was not part of the everyday discussion... but that doesn't say... we even discussed what diabetes was or heart problems, or anything of that nature.

Additionally, to other Pacific Islanders, health was a Western construct not necessarily to be trusted. A middle-aged mom expressed her concerned with the advice given by her mom's doctors,

Many doctors-and who knows if it's really true- many doctors are saying that a lot of our foods are unhealthy. Is it true? Who knows? But the doctor told my mom she can't eat... practically every fruit that grew on our island because it's unhealthy. He told her that Pacific Islander fruits are the worst fruits.

Overall, Pacific Islanders interviewed regarded health with both the mind (attitude) and body (eating right and exercise) in mind. Despite skepticism for Western doctors, Pacific Islanders defined health to me from a Western perspective that combined diet, exercise, and advice from their doctors- although it was mentioned that not enough health research was available in regard to the Pacific Islander community.

Overall the older generation, who grew up in the Pacific, described how the lifestyle they grew up with complemented Western concepts of health, without prior knowledge of

Western health or education. The middle-aged generation more frequently described changes they had made to their diet and life to be healthier and noted, more so than other age groups, that they did not grow up with innate information or education about health or wellness. This could be because many of them were second-generation immigrants, whose parents moved here from the Pacific and suddenly were faced with an entirely different and expanded set of food choices, and often economic barriers, to feed their kids. Also, with the move from the Pacific to the mainland, food preferences reflective of high status foods in the islands were more easily accessible, like fast food. Participant 19, a middle aged man who moved to the US from Samoa, described how fast food recently made its debut in Samoa, so restaurants like Mc Donald's and Carl's Junior were very popular in his homeland and to buy food from a fast food restaurant in Samoa equated high social status. His attitude differed once he lived in the mainland for a few years because fast food was so commonplace and because he learned that eating too much fast food was not healthy,

Coming to the United States is different from Samoa... I don't eat them [fast food] regularly especially you move out here to the United states, you're even more healthy, and more cautious about your weight and so...I try to stay away from a...lot of these fast food places.

The middle-aged group also questioned doctor's recommendations more, perhaps because they were seeing doctors more frequently due to health problems or because Western doctor's advice was communicated in ways that differed from the way they learned about health from their parents. The young adults were the age group most secure in their convictions about health and wellness. They seemed the most familiar with concepts of health and did not question Western doctors or notions of health. This could be explained because young adults who grew up in the mainland learned about health from classes in school and were also exposed to Western concepts of health from a very young age via the media- television, magazines, books, etc. Many of them claimed to lead active lifestyles and were aware of how diet and exercise were major components to health.

### **CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HEALTH AND FOOD**

The interviews were set up with the discussion of health coming after the discussion of food. I designed the interviews in this way because the topic of food consumption and traditional foods would segue into the connections people made between health and food consumption (in regard to both traditional and non-traditional foods); plus, I did not want to

bias the data regarding traditional foods by prematurely inviting comment on their health value. The major themes that emerged linking food and health together included:

1. Designations made between healthy or unhealthy in regard to: labels, the content of certain ingredients, and traditional foods
2. Changes made to the diet to be healthier
3. Reasons why unhealthy foods were preferred

### **Designation between Healthy and Unhealthy**

Pacific Islanders categorized certain characteristics of food, like sodium content and preparation style as either healthy or unhealthy. They said healthier foods included whole grains, less sodium, reduced sugar, or were served raw, like poke. Unhealthy foods were characterized as oily, greasy, stickier (like glutinous white rice), processed, and heavy in salt. Traditional foods came up in this discussion because people believed that many traditional foods, except the raw ones, were unhealthy. This designation also depended on the category of traditional foods. For example, ancestral foods were usually viewed as healthier than fusion foods, i.e. poke was healthier than Spam.

When deconstructing why people felt traditional foods were usually unhealthy, often their categorization had more to do with the preparation style of the foods than the actual ingredients themselves. For example, Participant 20 described taro as unhealthy. When I asked her why, she said it was because when she cooked taro it was usually drenched in coconut milk and her doctor told her too much coconut milk was unhealthy. It was important to understand how the preparation of foods contributed to people's designations of a food healthy and unhealthy. This was especially key when dietary change and the substitutions of ingredients were discussed. It will be an important part of the suggestions when discussing the way forward as well.

### **Changes Made to the Diet to be Healthier**

Pacific Islanders reported making different choices than they used to when it came to eating because they wanted to be healthier. They indicated that food choice was a major component of health. Eight of the 18 participants (5, 10, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, and 20) told me that they consciously changed their diet because they wanted or needed to be healthier because of health reasons. For example, Participant 20 was diagnosed with diabetes and that caused a shift in food consumption patterns. Participant 8 described to me how she had seen

many of her family members change their diet to become healthier because of negative health-related circumstances,

Most times, it's what brings them to...that epiphany...when they're in the hospital or somebody dies...or somebody needs heart surgery or somebody lost their temper and they got a stroke...Those are the true indicators that 'hey! Something's wrong, maybe I should change'.

The selection of healthier ingredients was the main change made to personal food consumption choices. An elderly woman from Hawai`i described ingredients she substituted,

I am really careful on the white stuff- the white rice, the white flour, the white sugar, and that I think makes me more sensitive about going out to eat and pushing you know the brown rice as well. I use Splenda for sugar and I use whole-wheat flour for baking... and I am still surviving and you know?  
[Interview 10]

Participant 20 discussed her conversion of ingredients, like the switch from white, rice to brown rice, "Brown rice not white- and I hate brown rice and I love white rice. Skim milk not whole...Stay away from... the carbs...No sugar or things like that. So I'm trying to watch what I eat and it's hard".

### **Reasons Why the Unhealthy Foods were Preferred**

Despite having knowledge of what foods were unhealthy and healthy, despite having knowledge of food-related health issues like higher rates of obesity and non-communicable disease within the Pacific Islander community, and despite some people being diagnosed with health problems, participants gave reasons for continuing to eat foods that were unhealthy. Participant 18 simply said, "We usually just eat on taste instead of what's better for us". Participant 15, a busy mom, talked about convenience and food costs,

I work a different schedule at all hours of the night and morning and my husband right now he's active duty navy he's currently deployed in Afghanistan so I can say all these things to make myself feel better then I am really feeding my kids crap...the quick foods. And so although I'm aware of it unfortunately I have fallen victim... it's really expensive to eat healthy and that's an unfortunate sad fact.

Participant 20, a woman recently diagnosed with diabetes, talked about the tradeoffs she made in her diet, yet she ultimately lacked self-control when it came to traditional foods,

I eat green salad but then I have... the mussels... drenched in coconut milk. Shhhh! So bad! But you know, I'm trying. It's a slow process- I can't just go cold turkey because without I'll die!

The connections Pacific Islanders made between food and health revealed multiple levels of personal choice and the processes of decision-making and resolve found in the community. Pacific Islanders were aware of why some foods were healthier than others, many people made changes to their diet, often because of the onset or diagnosis of health problems, yet others continued to put personal preferences, like taste, ahead of food-related health promotion.

These roadblocks to health like taste, convenience, economics, and limited self-control, explained why Pacific Islanders continued to eat foods that they knew or categorized as unhealthy in light of health problems. Findings illuminated how people negotiated with themselves in regard to food purchase and consumption in relation to personal values of health. This type of information can be used to better understand the personal motivations behind Pacific Islander food consumption to aid in the design of community-based solutions for health promotion that reference and build upon personal issues that were ultimately self-imposed barriers to health. One example of this would be to design recipes with low-cost ingredients that are convenient to cook.

The connections between food preferences and health knowledge provided insight into the reasons behind personal consumption choices. The community-wide perspective on health addressed in the next section, further tied understandings of Pacific Islander health and wellness to the role of foods.

### **PACIFIC ISLANDERS' VIEWS OF WHY THE PACIFIC ISLAND COMMUNITY WAS UNHEALTHY**

Every single participant said he or she had concerns about the health of the Pacific Islander community. The topics Pacific Islanders brought up in the discussion of health among of the Pacific Islander community as a whole illuminated the ways in which Pacific Islanders interviewed understood their community and health perspectives within the collective group. Several major themes emerged from the discussion including: Pacific Islanders were “stubborn” and set in their ways, Pacific Islanders were not conscious of, informed or educated on topics like health, and Pacific Islanders were “Americanized” and had since adopted a more sedentary lifestyle.

## Attitudes

Participant 12, a middle-aged male, discussed how certain attitudes among the Pacific Islander community in San Diego were essentially community-identified barriers to health,

The part about Polynesians is that we're really stubborn...I don't care how old you are and how young you are- you're stubborn- where you'll do what you want to do. If somebody tells you that you're getting bigger it just means that I'm going to eat a little bit more. We're very stubborn people. Back in the days, we can eat as much as we want because back at home we didn't have cars and we had to walk all over the place. It's not the same anymore.

Participant 5 concurred, "Typical Hawaiians...they don't care they just eat what we like, if we feel like eating this we going to no matter what".

Participant 19 associated stubbornness with age,

I just think people are just going to be set in their own ways. And I can honestly tell you Pacific Islanders, especially I would say, the generation above me, 40 and up, are really stuck in their ways. They feel that because the mentality of the Pacific Islanders is more once I reach an age like why should I care and food is not going to be a big factor in their lives.

Participant 15 stated, "You give a traditional Chamorro person some healthy whole grain brown rice and they will look at you like you gone crazy. It's white rice all the way!"

Participant 13, a middle-aged man, reinforced this notion of stubbornness,

I'm trying to be healthier-wise and I'm trying to eat a little healthier. I still eat it-- [traditional foods] doesn't stop me. But I try to watch certain things when, you know, I'm feel like I'm starting to get weak, then I might cut down, do a little bit healthier things. But that's not going to stop me from eating my traditional food or all the greasy food you know.

Comments by participant 19, who lost over 100 pounds on a diet and exercise program, indicated that he still gave in to traditional food cravings on occasion, yet his weight loss and knowledge of ingredient choice affected his consumption patterns proving that one can eat traditional foods in moderation,

I'm more conscious about what I eat now. I mean ask me, like I said, two years ago or a year ago, I would've gave you a different answer. But now, it's more like I know what type of ingredients are in it, so I know what to expect, what to eat. Because I already know I shouldn't be eating that because I know how much is in there. So maybe I'll just dabble on it...I mean I'll still eat it but I kinda make sure I watch what I eat and don't consume as much.

The comments made by the above participants demonstrated the spectrum of self-control Pacific Islanders claimed to possess and lack when it came to limiting traditional food

consumption. Rather than generalizing for the whole group, it was necessary to show the different attitudes, like levels of self-identified stubbornness and desire the Pacific Islander community possessed for traditional food consumption.

### **Lack of Education**

Pacific Islanders said that the lack of health information, resources, and knowledge of concepts of health, were other reasons why the Pacific Islander community was unhealthy. This disconnection between having knowledge of health nutrition concepts and not having knowledge of health nutrition concepts stemmed from being foreign-born (where education was not taught or prioritized) and also being born before health education/Western concepts of health were being taught in school.

Participant 10, an elderly woman, talked about how attitudes and information about health changed in her lifetime,

Well I think culturally, and most of us were raised sort of with the same cultural values...that health was never an issue in our culture because we were living off the land-- which was already healthy-- and we were eating the right food. So that it would have been a major change in our culture to all of a sudden bring up the health issue when our ancestors were living well off on what they were eating... However, we cannot be blind by the fact that...Westernization has changed a lot of that, so that we are now--similar to the Native Hawaiians-- not eating the right food. But eating probably more carbohydrates, which are easier to get to, much easier to fix, than doing fishing and hunting and farming.

Participant 19, who immigrated to the mainland from Samoa, coupled a lack of education with stubbornness,

I can honestly tell you that in my homeland, Samoa, they're not educated on health issues... The older folks are so stuck on cooking the way they do, that they don't know if it's healthier or not. I mean they might say 'here I made you a potato salad' but they threw in a grip [a lot] of uhh mayonnaise.

### **Americanized**

Lastly, Pacific Islanders described how the sedentary lifestyle promoted by American culture, or being "Americanized" contributed to the lack of health among the Pacific Islander community. Participant 11, a middle-aged Samoan man noted,

If you look back... the lifestyle kinda complimented the heavy starch, heavy fat, whereas now... we drive to the corner to drop off a video, instead of walking. So I think the eating and fat and carb intake is the same, maybe a little more, but...we're such a sedentary lifestyle.

Participant 12, a middle-aged Tongan man concurred,

In today's society, especially with the Polynesian community, we have a tendency to overstock ourselves, meaning that we overeat... And when we overeat, we sit around for a couple of hours and then we eat another big meal. But I guess that's the rest of America.

Pacific Islanders offered reasons why the health of the Pacific Islander community was suffering. With these roadblocks to the community's health in mind, a description of the current resources and suggestions for change were discussed to define what resources and inspiration for change existed in the community.

### **RESOURCES AND SOLUTIONS**

Over half of the participants interviewed were able to name at least one health resource in the San Diego area including: a personal trainer of Pacific Island descent, an Asia-Pacific Islander health forum, and events organized by local community groups such as the Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander youth and fitness day held at UCLA (but put together by community groups throughout Southern California).

Participants also specified that resources organized by groups or people outside of the community were not helpful for Pacific Islanders because the Pacific Islander community was not apt to go outside of the community for help and they were not trusting of people who were not Pacific Islander. Participant 8 explained, "I think that the community is so exclusive, that they are so stubborn to go outside and look for those resources, and they only rely on people who they know. They won't trust or feel connected to others." In support of this concept, Participant 20 said that for her Samoan community, the best vehicle for communicating information about health and wellness was by approaching church leaders with education and information,

"That's the main way to get to Samoan people... if I can convince the pastor, the congregation will follow. It's about respect...if the pastor says this is something I want you to listen then it's going to happen."

Participant 11 analyzed the willingness of Pacific Islanders to utilize available resources in the following manner,

With regards to the readiness of the community, we're still at the contemplation, maybe even pre-contemplation stage, as far as utilizing the services. Because the majority of the communities have migrated here for better opportunities, but then once we get here, sometimes we don't even utilize some of the resources that are

available. So I think the readiness to utilize the resources is something that has to be addressed. [Interview 11]

In addition to identifying resources and the need for a more community-based approach, Pacific Islanders offered some creative solutions in regard to communicating health discourse and the promotion of community-based resources regarding health.

### **Role Models**

The necessity and importance of role models within the community was a key theme emergent from the interviews. Participant 19 reflected on his own past leadership roles and stated that it was impossible for someone to talk about or promote health and wellness within the Pacific Islander community if their own lifestyle did not reflect healthy choices,

I can say, I've sat on the Samoan city council, in 2007, I was in office and I was big. And I wanted to raise the awareness of health issues, especially health oh my gosh...the thing that sucks is that as much as back in those days and as big as I was, I wanted to just push the issues of health! But why am I going to be that person to push the issues of health when I can't do it for myself? And that's the biggest thing for our people and our culture...We can be idealistic people but really we need to think realistically, but then realistically tells us that why am I going to push this when I can't do it myself?

Participant 14 agreed that community leaders needed to lead by example, because otherwise, "it doesn't paint a good picture because he's [a community leader] a big guy".

Participant 20 discussed how she was going to start learning about health education through various community resources and then promoting health education for Pacific Islanders, however, change must start within her household, "what will happen, in my family specifically, is that as I work with the health organization, I'll probably get more information and I'll be learning myself and then I'll be able to spread it out...starting with my family of course".

Participant 10 emphasized how she was using herself as an example to the community, to motivate other Pacific Islanders to make healthier choices when it came to food and to exercise more often,

I use Splenda for sugar and I use whole-wheat flour for baking... and I am still surviving and you know? People say 'well I can't do it, I can't do it without white rice'. I said, 'well do it half and half. Put brown rice in there'. I say that 'I bake with whole wheat flour' 'but there is no recipe that you could completely take out the white flour' most of them say that. If you are going to ease them in use half and half, so I start with that...I have lost weight, I walk six times a week

here for two and a half miles and I aquatic swim three times a week, so I am using myself as an example.

There was a small presence of highly respected role models, like those participants who lost weight and/or were working on health initiatives within the Pacific Islander community.

Ultimately, Pacific Islanders expressed the need for more role models, who practiced what they preached about health, within the community.

### **Approaches to Food and Ingredients**

Pacific Islanders discussed ways to make foods healthier. Advice important to keep in mind included: eating smaller portions, being more aware of sodium intake, and limiting the consumption of processed foods. Participant 10 and Participant 20 both talked about substituting ingredients like brown rice, whole-wheat flour, and skim milk for white rice, white flour, and whole milk.

### **RESEARCH AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES**

Participants noted that research specifically regarding Pacific Islander health was limited. They also said it was difficult to get accurate health information and they did not trust a lot of the resources from outside of the community.

Participant 8, a young adult Chamorro woman said,

There is nothing right now...focusing on calorie counts and Pacific Islander foods in a health conscious way. Because if you were to say, 'well these are all the foods that you are eating, and these are the all of the foods that you know you can do and can't do', and still like hold and maintain our traditional foods but in a healthy conscious way. And nobody has really done that yet, currently.

Participant 10, an elderly Hawaiian woman said,

I would like to see a native Hawaiian health fair or even a Pacific Islander health fair...As far as I'm concerned I have never seen one. It's usually a Kaiser health fare, a Sharp health fare, sort of a general population health fare... I think that would go because I've never been invited to one and I've never seen one here. I have seen them sort of in conjunction with Asians in Orange County and Los Angeles but specifically here, no.

Participants emphasized the importance of local resources because often community members had limited economic resources, "I know there are some people who don't have that access, so accessibility I think is an issue too when you talk about resources because a lot of them are lower income" (Interview 8).

A community leader noted that healthy changes should be focused on the holistic modification of one's lifestyle rather than specifically focusing on one's weight or health disparities, he says for example,

I think the approach were using is not changing the image but changing the lifestyle because it's a little less intrusive on the person itself to say you should look like this, versus why don't we try to do this instead? You know park at the first parking spot and walk, or you know you don't have to eat everything that is on the table. Little things like that... I think it's one of those things where it's going to take a combination of the intergeneration's, where it has to be supported from the top, which is the elders, to the bottom which is the young adults and the children. [Interview 11]

Ultimately, there was a call for more health resources, tailored specifically to Pacific Islanders and their cultural values. Role models should emerge from within the Pacific Islander community and demonstrate their understanding of health while advocating health-related practices within the community. Resources should be local, inexpensive, and organized or promoted by Pacific Islanders, because many warned that Pacific Islanders were stubborn and reluctant to trust information or people outside of their community. Overall, more community-based solutions were needed.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **THEORETICAL ISSUES AND SYNTHESIS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In this project, I examined the construction of culturally defined traditional foods. The link between food and identity kept reappearing as a theme in participant discourse. By examining the multiple layers of authenticity Pacific Islanders in this study required for something to be considered traditional, I reflect on how Pacific Islanders construct meaning in regard to shared, identity-related practices in the category of tradition and how this important aspect of their culture can then relate back to an expressed need for health and wellness resources. By discussing the range of conditions Pacific Islanders used to qualify authentic traditional foods, multiple modes of identity construction can be recognized that can then be applied to recommendations for the way forward.

In this section I review theoretical concepts such as the role of creolization, the invention of tradition, and the ways that commoditization and exoticization of culture, through a cross-cultural approach, to demonstrate how the manipulation of food culture by outsiders can lead to a fundamental misunderstanding of culture. Additionally, in this chapter I discuss concepts of identity, both as an individual and group construct. I then synthesize these theoretical components with the findings to illuminate how a multitude of factors shape identity and the definition of traditional, especially when it comes to health and food. Overall this chapter reviews how psycho-cultural, social, and political forces contribute to how people understand their culture and themselves.

Commonalities exist among people who have been colonized. For instance, the ways that food culture changed in the Pacific during colonization, militarization, and neo-imperialism were similar to the ways food culture changed in India during the British occupation of the subcontinent from 1613-1947 (Carlton 1992:30). In the following section I describe and compare the effects of the British colonial experience in India with effects of colonialism (primarily British) and neo-imperialism in the Pacific through various concepts

such as creolization, the invention of tradition, exoticization, and the commodification of culture.

These theoretical components are important to understand when discussing this research because colonialism and related imperial practices directly affected the living populations of the Pacific, changing culture, shaping practices, and ultimately contributing to how people viewed themselves and created meaning, resulting in cultural shifts and new traditions. Complex elements of history and power relations must be kept in mind when understanding and analyzing so-called tradition. A cross-cultural approach exemplifies the common patterns that emerge when structures of power are unequal.

### **CREOLIZATION**

Creolization has been defined as the process of

cross-fertilization between different cultures as they interact. When creolization occurs, participants select particular elements from incoming or inherited cultures, endow these with meanings different from those they possessed in the original cultures and then creatively merge these to create new varieties that supersede the prior forms. [Cohen 2007:2]

Viewed through the lens of creolization thus defined, the dominance of Western culture in India and in the Pacific led to new frames of thought related to food consumption in both regions. Creolization was a two-way process: for instance, the British contrived their own style of Indian cooking by inventing foods that combined their consumption preferences with ingredients available in India “to replicate consumption patterns of the wealthy at home” (Collingham 2006:112,120). The British creolization of Indian cuisine was reflected through British presentation and conceptual ideas regarding food that were not otherwise characteristic of Indian food culture, like serving several courses, eating dishes like stews, and soups, and throwing long dinner parties where participants were expected to wear formal clothing, despite the humid climate. These concepts, combined with British food staples they imported or found in India, like meat (in a primarily vegetarian culture), were cooked with Indian spices resulting in creolized dishes like Mulligatawny soup and curry (Collingham 2006:120).

Before the British occupation, dishes similar to curry were cultural features of Indian cuisine, but they were regionally-specific dishes, consisting of ingredients only found in that particular locale, and not given the name curry, but rather names reflective of their region of

origin. Collingham explained how nuanced regional Indian cooking was: “the distinctions in soil, water, and air from one locality to another are thought to produce subtle distinctions in the taste of the grains, vegetables, and grazing animals” (2006:116).

Local ingredients contributed to the originality and essence of cultural difference between different regions in India, but this nuance was lost on the British. The British essentially created the idea of a curry by picking and choosing the flavors they liked best from across the country, reduced the amount of spice usually found in the dish, and indiscriminately called the resulting food curry. Curry became “a generic term for any spicy dish” (Collingham 2006:115-118).

British mixing of original cultural features, like Indian spices, with imported foods like meat, represented a pattern of creolization also found in the Pacific. One example of this was the recipe for South Pacific pancakes, Figure 2, written by a Hawaiian pastor in Hawaii at the time of American annexation. This recipe, although described as “South Pacific”, did not reflect much of the South Pacific at all. Essentially, the pastor took a Western concept--pancakes, and combined it with few ingredients native to the Pacific and others, like cheese and flour, that were brought to the Pacific via colonialism. The recipe reflected more colonial influences than Pacific island influences.

The recipe’s title and analysis of ingredients exemplified how outsiders reinvented facets of Pacific Islander cuisine and how Hawaiians adopted the reinvention of Pacific Islander cuisine, like the pastor who wrote the cookbook. New foods labeled under the designation “Pacific Island” were not native to the islands but were introduced by foreign means. The categorizations of Pacific Island foods became misleading because of the sudden inclusion of foods introduced via colonialism. The inclusion of these new food into Pacific Islander life, and their subsequent association with the Pacific through names and labels put on them by foreigners, means that we must question authenticity and origin of foods invented or labeled as part of Pacific Island traditions.

### **INVENTION OF TRADITION**

The above culinary example demonstrated how tradition could be invented and perpetuated by people outside of the original culture.

### South Pacific Pancake

serves 2

- 1 cup pineapple tidbits and syrup
- 2 teaspoons fresh lime juice
- 1 teaspoon grated lime rind
- 2 tablespoons butter
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup sifted flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup grated sharp cheddar cheese

Drain pineapple, reserving syrup. Put in saucepan and stir in 1 tablespoon pineapple syrup, lime juice, and grated rind. Blend, and set aside. Put butter in 12-inch heavy skillet, and heat in 450 degree F oven. Remove from oven when butter is melted and skillet is heated through. Sift flour and salt together, set aside. Combine remaining pineapple syrup and lemon juice. Beat in eggs, and combine with dry ingredients until smooth. Pour batter into skillet. Bake, uncovered, at 450 degrees F 12 minutes, or until pancakes is delicately browned and edges draw away from sides of skillet.

While pancake is baking, heat pineapple mixture in saucepan. Sprinkle  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cheese evenly over pancake and roll carefully. Spoon pineapple mixture over pancake, and sprinkle remaining cheese over. Replace in skillet, and broil 3 inches from heat until cheese is melted. Serve from warm serving platter.

**Figure 2. South Pacific pancake recipe. Source: Bennett, Victor 1970 *The South Pacific Cookbook*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.**

As noted by Hobsbawm (1983), the process of inventing traditions occurs more frequently when society undergoes some rapid transformation, like the implementation of and neo-imperialism or the takeover of local governments by foreigners (4). New traditions provide social cohesion in light of the disruption, but also help to establish new authority and socialize or give new meaning to introduced beliefs (Hobsbawm 1983:9). For example, during colonial and neo-imperial times, inventing traditions was sometimes a form of social

engineering, put in place by the new, non-native governing body and usually in opposition to the indigenous population. This appeared to be the case in the Pacific, where foods newly introduced to the islands via colonialism and neo-imperialism were largely adopted without question and continued to be associated with Pacific Island culture. Hobsbawm warned,

The history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of nation, state, or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized, and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so. [1983:13]

The invention of tradition can lead to a fundamental misunderstanding of past facts because truth and history has been replaced through the workings of social memory.

One cross-cultural example of the invention of tradition was the British invention of Mulligatawny soup in India. This food emerged from British desires and customs that called for a soup to be served before dinner. This conflicted with traditional Indian food presentation, where all food was served at the same time. In fact, Indian cuisine did not have a concept of soup (probably because of the climate); instead it was customary to pour broths over rice or for broths to be used by Ayurvedic doctors for healing purposes. Puzzled by the British request to serve soup, Indian cooks combined Ayurvedic broth recipes with vegetable and rice, resulting in the popular peppery soup now closely associated by the British at least with Indian food culture, Mulligatawny soup (Collingham 2006:120).

### **SYMBOLIC CAPITAL REFLECTED THROUGH FOOD CONSUMPTION**

Aside from creolization and the invention of tradition, colonialism and neo-imperialism changed food culture because of what consumption symbolized. In India, the dissolution of the East India Trading Company in 1857 caused British attitudes toward India to focus on empire expansion and subsequently notions of superiority emerged from the colonial regime to insure the British remained in power as long as the Indians were perceived as not civilized. Facets of Indian culture previously enjoyed by the British occupiers, like hookah smoking with dinner and the consumption of curry, were no longer allowed because they symbolically put British officials on the same level as Indians (Collingham 2006:158). Victorian notions of prestige associated with civilized behavior was ingrained into colonial officials and they were not to have anything in common with the Indians or find enjoyment in

Indian culture because it was imperative to dominate the culture and perpetuate inequality in favor of empire expansion.

Given this shift in attitudes and goals, food culture for the British in India reverted back to a blander concept and British food preparation styles were adopted, along with an increase in use of imported British ingredients. Despite the foods available in India, the British colonial officials continued to eat “bottled peas, tough roasts, and slightly metallic pate de foie gras because it was a daily demonstration of their ability to remain civilized and uphold British standards” (Collingham 2006:168). Symbolic capital, Bourdieu’s concept (1977) that power differentials can be reflected through symbolic means like behavior, was reflected in the choices made by colonial officials in regard to food consumption (189). The eradication of Indian food traditions among the British, and changing attitudes towards food provided the colonial administration a symbolic platform from which to hover above the Indian population in their domination of the region.

This symbolic elevation of colonial prestige through food culture also occurred in the Pacific. As opposed to the Islanders, who were curious about Western foods and embraced imported commodities like bully beef (tinned corn beef), tobacco, and alcohol, colonizers rarely consumed traditional island foods and instead brought stocks of Western ingredients, including cattle, with them to the Pacific (Haden 2009:20-21). Thus, following the pattern of British behavior when empire expansion (rather than just trade) became the focus, adoption of new food culture in the Pacific during colonialism was essentially a one-way process, from the colonizers to the islanders. Despite the labor-intensive processes involved in raising cattle and crops from the northern hemisphere in tropical climates, Haden notes, “Westerners persisted in valuing their own traditional foods; a belief that helped them prevail”(2009:26). On the occasion colonizers embraced island ingredients, the dishes created and cooking styles were modified to more closely resemble Western cuisine, like the creolized examples of food discussed earlier in the chapter.

### **COMMODITIZATION AND EXOTICIZATION OF CULTURE**

Lastly, colonial and neo-imperial forces exoticized and commoditized the foreign cultures they dominated. Exoticization is the process of promoting or elevating features of a culture (or sometimes the whole concept of the culture itself) because they are foreign, or

unusual (Hawthorne 1989:621). Sometimes exoticized goods become a fetish, or something objectified and strongly desired because it is unusual or possibly holds special powers within its original cultural context.

Exoticization of Indian culture occurred before the dissolution of the East India Trading Company, when Indian culture was still somewhat new and different to the British colonial officials and before empire expansion became their primary goal. The promotion of the exoticness of Indian culture was exemplified through the recipes sent back to England for curries and other dishes, containing ingredients like cardamom, chilies, and coriander. These spicy, interesting ingredients and the recipes for curry and other Indian dishes were a major departure from the bland characteristics of English cuisine. The recipes for spicy foods were suddenly perceived as being in vogue because they were served at the dinner parties thrown by high society (Collingham 2006:133).

The commoditization of culture, or commercialized selling of aspects of culture, was popular among colonial administrations as well, often as a result of exotification. Commodities, as defined by Appadurai, are material “objects of economic value” (1986:3). So to commoditize something is to make it valuable materially, and in the capitalistic economy guiding colonialism neo-imperialism, that translated into the sale of consumer goods. Gould explained how consumer goods represented multicultural attributes because both the consumer and the place of origin affect the meaning behind the good’s consumption, “they are also imbued with symbolic and mythological meaning, have a history and biography, and may be studied as intercultural, artifactual objects embodying various marketing, sign, and cultural systems” (1998:31) Advertising and discourse guided commoditization of culture, often reifying incorrect understandings of tradition. It was easy for misunderstandings of tradition to be passed along both inside and outside of the culture. Those adopting the culture from afar did not know any better, because they had never been to the so-called exotic locales from where the commodities derived. Those within the culture were being controlled by outside groups and grew up amongst the dominant colonial and neo-imperial discourse, so they were used to it, even if their personal traditions provided a different account.

For example, before the dissolution of the East India Company, the British in India commoditized a false sense of Indian culture by selling curry powder in England. This spice

mixture was a poor substitute for the true essence of Indian cooking, because authentic Indian curries relied upon extensive knowledge of spices that could not be replicated in a generic powder (Collingham 2006:136). In authentic Indian cooking, for example, flavors were released by frying whole or ground Indian spices, and knowing when to add them to the cooking pot affected the flavor. Curry powder was a poor substitute for culinary knowledge and ingredient variety that made Indian cooking unique and authentic. The commoditization of curry powder brought a false representation of Indian tradition to England.

The findings and discussion will illuminate and deconstruct examples of exoticization and commoditization of Pacific Island foods. However, one non-food, contemporary example of this in Pacific Island culture, was the proliferation of tiki culture. Tikis were, traditionally, sacred Pacific Islander symbols of spirituality representing *mana* or power, often of ancestors. They were a major feature of indigenous religion. Ancient, carved tiki statues can be found on islands across the Pacific.

Conversely, tiki culture in the West became a popular interior design theme in the 1920s and 1930s with the openings of the Coconut Grove nightclub and “Donn the Beachcomber”, a restaurant in Los Angeles. These establishments decorated their interiors with fake palm trees, mini tiki figures, and other so-called Pacific Island motifs (Haden 2009:167). Ernest Gantt, proprietor of “Donn the Beachcomber”, combined elements of the sacred and the profane to market his restaurant.

The symbolic form of the tiki, remained a part of the new culture, but their indigenous meaning had been overridden as they were transformed by Western culture into a marketable commodity. Traditions associated with the invented tiki culture included the consumption of flaming rum drinks and the use of the tiki as a wall motif for decoration. This treatment of tiki culture contradicted traditional practices associated with tikis as spiritual objects. Islanders did not manufacture or drink rum and instead connected the stone and wood carved tikis with power and luck often related to creation and reproduction.

The invented application of tiki culture led to a fundamental misunderstanding of the Polynesian culture and tradition that might first be adopted by outsiders but could be internalized by Pacific Islanders as well. For example, in the Pacific today, many islanders carve products with tiki-motifs and sell them to visiting tourists, demonstrating a shifting of the sacred to the profane and in doing so, putting a price on their culture. Commoditization

of Pacific Island culture continues to be influenced by the emergent market of exotic fetish commodities, like tiki statues, Tahitian tiki tea, and a multitude of other exoticized consumer goods requested by tourists and people across the world. As Cooper and Brubaker (2005) note, modernization and globalization has brought the exotic to the mainstream, and concurrently, carried the mainstream to the exotic (97). This becomes problematic present-day, in places like the Marquesas Islands, because islanders ascribe both sacred and profane qualities to tikis, depending on origin.

For example, when archaeologist Barry Rollett unearthed four tiki heads during an excavation on the island of Vaitahu, in the community of Tahuata, in 1998, islanders reacted to the find with uncertainty, ultimately leading to the sudden disappearance of the sacred artifacts, just as quickly as they were unearthed (Donaldson 2004:351). As described by Donaldson (2004) and also told to me by island residents when I was there, tikis carved by the ancestors continued to hold power and there are few people in the Marquesas who know the old ways and how to diffuse them, thus finding such sacred objects could positively or negatively affect the community, depending on the original intention and mana of the artifacts (352, Personal communication, June 30, 2010). Because the “uncertainty and apprehension surrounding the ancient spiritual significance of objects” could cause bad luck, as well as good, and the community was “no longer properly equipped” to deal with the mana of the tikis, the tikis disappeared without a trace, symbolizing the ultimate power and threat these spiritual objects held (Donaldson 2004:351-363).

A contrasting example to the sacredness of ancient tikis was the contemporary design, sale, and treatment of tiki figures. In the town of Tahuata, in the Marquesas Islands, where I spent the summer of 2010, and in many other places across the Pacific, tikis were carved by artisans and sold to tourists as souvenirs. Tiki motifs could be found on all sorts of objects, including pipes for smoking, boxes of tea, and jewelry. The consumption of tiki-themed products worldwide, including nightclub culture in California, and the application of tikis onto products not native to the Pacific, like tea, ascribed new circumstances and meaning to the tiki figures. It can be argued that tikis were now associated with party behavior and flaming rum drinks. They have been removed from their sacred context and were placed into the category of an exoticized fetish commodity. Sacred history combined with worldwide

consumption of tikis on a profane level has changed the cultural significance of the tiki for people both inside and outside of the Pacific Island culture.

## **IDENTITY**

The theoretical constructs addressed in this chapter relate to this project because they affect identity and meaning making. Cooper and Brubaker explain that identity can be understood in a multitude of ways and is an analytical tool used by individuals to “make sense of themselves, their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from others” (2005:62). It is both an individual and group construct. They further explain, “identity denotes a fundamental and consequential sameness among members of a group or category” and also a “core aspect of selfhood” (Cooper and Brubaker 2005:65). The many ways that a person can identify with oneself, be identified by others, or qualify membership within a group are important social and cultural features. The manners through which people make sense of themselves are complicated because identity construction could be affected by factors beyond the individual or even the group.

Discourse, like newspapers or history books, is a primary method of communication that could misrepresent facts or impose outsiders’ opinions onto a population. In colonized and neo-imperial communities, this becomes even more of an issue because history has been written and re-written by people both inside and outside of the group and in various contexts. Thus tensions arise when history is reinvented or culture is commoditized or exoticized because strongly held beliefs can be misconstrued. Therefore, it is necessary to deconstruct the qualifications for identity-building, especially when it comes to shared traditions or personal understandings of history to grasp more clearly how people see themselves, their role within a group and what factors contribute to meaning.

The stimuli behind shifts in tradition, like the sudden popularity of tiki culture in LA in the 1920’s, are important to understand because they set up the foundation for why and how meanings within traditions changed. The spectrum of history behind cultural traditions, compared to their present-day application, reflects processes of meaning-making and fundamental misunderstandings of culture, based on creolization, the invention of tradition and commoditization and exoticization of culture, ultimately questioning and renegotiating notions of identity.

## SYNTHESIS

In this next section I argue that the invention of tradition, exemplified through the workings of social memory, contributes to fundamental conflicts regarding how tradition is defined. This is exemplified in the tensions that arose among the community interviewed when they were asked to negotiate how to classify the authenticity of tradition. **Factors that contributed to meaning making and ultimately the shaping of identity can be invoked** through a discussion of the findings of this research as they were linked to

1. **Historical power differentials and political forces** related to the categorization of traditional foods
2. **Tensions** that arose: (a) when discussing how to achieve authenticity when qualifications for authenticity were difficult to realize in the mainland US, (b) when the food was introduced by outsiders, like through and neo-imperialism, (c) when traditions were invented and ingrained through social memory, resulting in a fundamental misrepresentation and misunderstanding of culture for people both inside and outside of the group, affecting the construction of identity and the way people understand their culture.
3. The **symbolism** behind traditional foods and what they represent.

These factors must be understood when discussing health and ways to counteract the obesity epidemic among Pacific Islanders because the ways Pacific Islanders described traditions directly related to their cultural understandings of a shared group identity. These influences are imperative to recognize and understand for future researchers when responding to the expressed need for designing culturally relevant, effective health resources and recommendations that will appeal to the Pacific Islander community because, as seen in the research, traditional foods, health, and identity were closely linked.

### **The Categorization of Traditional Foods Based on the History of Power and Politics in the Pacific**

My findings in this research project illuminated several key themes regarding traditional foods, namely that food-related traditions were connected to both the retention of culture and the construction of identity. Tradition retention was important to participants and food prepared for and eaten with family provided a major vehicle for doing this. Food figured highly in social judgments regarding people's identities and it also helped people remember what were their traditional cultural values.

The content analysis from Pacific Islanders interviewed revealed four categories of traditional foods:

1. Ancestral foods
2. Colonial foods
3. Neo-Imperial foods
4. Local foods

Each of these categories reflected a different historical time period and a different philosophy of governance in the Pacific Islands. The ancestral foods were the foods originally consumed by the islanders before contact with Westerners. This category was the core group of foods that made up the categorization of traditional foods and were reflective of the original foods eaten by the participants' ancestors. The next group of foods, products of colonialism, included foods introduced by outsiders during colonial times. They were foods often grown as cash crops on large-scale plantations. Although they were mainly produced for export, these foods were associated with the Pacific because they were (and continue to be) grown there. Pacific Islanders adopted them into their diet because they became available to them. Neo-imperial foods were introduced when major wars began to be fought in the Pacific and as Pacific Island countries became official extensions of other outside countries because of political sway like annexation occupation. Food aid and imported foods, promoted through growing global trade networks brought new imported goods to the islanders. These new imported foods, like Spam and rice, were incorporated into the diet, often as low-cost, easy to cook substitutes for foods from the ancestral diet, like breadfruit, pig, and taro that required more preparation time. Often creolized versions of traditional dishes emerged with these new imported goods replacing foods that took more time to prepare or were harder to acquire, like fish that must be caught. The last category of local foods, also known as "island" or "fusion" foods consisted of the foods found at Pacific Island restaurants in the contemporary Pacific today. These foods were synonymous with Pacific Island cuisine even though the majority of their ingredients did not originally derive from the Pacific at all.

Examples of local foods were dishes like macadamia nut pancakes, the "loco moco", and other foods found at island establishments across the Pacific and in the mainland. Much of what was categorized as Hawaiian cuisine, that was served at Hawaiian restaurants (both

in Hawai`i and on the mainland US) reflected any number of ethnic groups, like Korean Kalbi ribs, Chinese noodle soup saimin, or the popular creolized concoction of Spam musubi. The designation of traditional Hawaiian foods has been recreated over and over again by people inside and outside of the culture, resulting in an ambiguous representation of Hawaiian food culture for Pacific Islander. Yet these foods, like the “loco-moco” (a dish usually consisting of beef burger, smothered in gravy, topped with eggs, served over rice) were now inevitably linked to Hawaiian cuisine because they have been adopted, embraced, replicated, and served at Pacific Island restaurants by Pacific Islanders in the Pacific and in the US.

A look at the origins of the ingredients in the loco moco revealed how creativity and history played into meaning making when it came to traditional foods. The egg was the only ingredient found in this dish native to ancestral islanders (with the exception of rice on Guam). Beef was brought over by the British. Rice was a popular imported food during the World War II militarization of the Pacific, as cheap starchy food. Examples like this forced Pacific Islanders to negotiate authenticity of tradition when foods that may have no tie whatsoever to the islands or their culture originally were suddenly adopted as a product of cultural evolution labeled, served, and reified as traditional. The ways that Pacific Islanders classified foods directly related to the various political and economic forces asserting power in the Pacific throughout the past three hundred years.

### **Tensions**

Participants in this research classified foods further with conditions for authenticity revealing influential contributions to meaning making and constructs of tradition. Factors affecting authenticity of traditional foods included stipulations like:

1. Who cooked the food
2. Choice of ingredients
3. Preparation methods

The participants interviewed said that Pacific Islanders made more authentic food than non-Pacific Islanders and they said they can tell the difference in the food if not made by a Pacific Islander. Also, they said that buying food from the grocery store and/or already prepared foods was less authentic than preparing foods in a traditional fashion, however, most people did not prepare foods in the traditional fashion because it was difficult to get the

ingredients, like freshly-killed chickens or fresh (not canned) coconut milk, and far more convenient and time-saving to buy food from the grocery store. Additionally, participants reported that umu cooking was more authentic than pot and stove cooking. However, once again, no one reported using an umu on a regular basis and local fire department regulations forbade cooking in the ground.

Although these conditions for authenticity were discussed, they rarely were met, with the exception of the first one—who does the cooking. The lack of authenticity because of availability of food and restrictions imposed by laws on the mainland invoked tensions regarding how cultural evolution played into the qualifications for authenticity. Essentially, it made people question for how long and why these qualifications for authenticity should continue to be held in high esteem when they were difficult to achieve and only occurred on special occasions?

In regard to preparation methods, Pacific Islanders in this study acknowledged that preparation methods changed over time and most Pacific Islanders accepted this shift in cooking style as evolution of culture, although some worried that elements of culture would be lost in the long-term.

In addition to the categorization of foods and a discussion of their qualifications for authenticity, Pacific Islanders in this study questioned whether or not to include foods that were adopted and influenced by colonialism and neo-imperialism under the designation of traditional foods. This discussion was further complicated by the fact that participants incorrectly understood the origin of certain traditional foods.

The next section, in response to what interviewees reported, will explain this paradox and discuss how the invention of tradition, solidified through the workings of social memory, caused reconfigurations of cultural history and complicated people's qualifications regarding traditional foods. I explore in more detail the history of rice to illuminate how the invention of tradition can occur despite familial accounts of food introduction and a long-standing history of rice as a traditional food, leading to tension regarding the history of tradition.

### **Invention of Tradition: Rice**

Pacific Islanders in this study named rice as a staple of islander life and said it had been since World War II. More than half of Pacific Islanders interviewed considered it (and its variations like the Chamorro red rice) a traditional food.

Rice became attractive to people living in the Pacific around World War II because it was a low-cost food that cooked relatively quickly, stored well in humid environments, provided a substantial source of carbohydrates, and could make the family feel full without spending a lot of money. The discourse of participants in the present project supported this notion.

The popularity of rice evolved in the Pacific Islands over two time periods between two very different groups of people. Archaeological evidence indicated the initial inhabitants of the Marianas Islands in Micronesia grew rice, and it was cultivated and used as feasting food for special occasions within the Guamanian (Chamorro) culture (Hunter-Anderson et al. 1995:69). This was confirmed by accounts from early explorers in the 1500s, which noted how Guamanians used rice both for ceremonial purposes and also as a trading good (Hunter-Anderson et al. 1995:75). The cultivation of rice expanded across the Pacific during World War II as a result of consumer and military demand. In Guam, this was heavily influenced by the Japanese occupation of Guam. Between the end of World War II and present-day, the cultivation of rice in Guam and across the Pacific died out, yet the popularity of rice increased across the Pacific. Today, rice remains one of the leading imported goods into the Pacific, both as food aid and for sale.

Tension arose among participants in this project when they discussed their beliefs about rice and whether or not it should be designated as a traditional food and why. Because the Marianas Islands were the only part of the Pacific to consume rice prior to colonialism, the majority of (non-Chamorro) Pacific Islanders associated rice with colonialism, neo-imperialism, and militarization. Even some Chamorro people believed that rice was introduced through the Japanese occupation of Guam. Contrary to the archaeological history, Participant 15 related a history of rice to me that she learned from her mother, “A lot of our foods are, like rice, you know...are brought over, according to my mom, by the Japanese... They [the Japanese] forced my grandparents to eat rice” (Interview 15). Yet even with this negative view of rice’s origin from her parents, she fed her kids rice and defended it as a

product of cultural evolution, “it’s kind of the way that our culture has continued to evolve...they [the Japanese] introduced rice into the diet and we have been eating rice”(Interview 15). To further her argument in regard to the acceptance of rice as part of culture change and the evolution of food, despite perceived colonial influences on food, Participant 15 also noted how the majority rules when it came to the evolution of food culture and that Chamorro food culture evolved and changed because the majority of Chamorro people adopted the new foods, like Portuguese sausage for example, into their diet and traditions.

A conflicting point was made by another Chamorro woman, “red rice is Chamorro but red rice is not really historically [Chamorro]... because it came over with Spanish” (Interview 8). (The Portuguese in fact introduced Achote, the ingredient that makes the rice red.) This woman’s designation conflicted with Participant 15’s notions of cultural evolution and historical origin. Participant 8 struggled to define authenticity of culture for herself because although she recognized these foods were considered by the majority of the Chamorro culture to be traditional, the colonial roots of the food (and historically inaccurate beliefs) affected her perception of authenticity.

Thus, the requirements that guided the authenticity or inauthenticity of rice as a traditional food reflected identity-related processes, like the desire and lack of desire to categorize traditions stemming from and neo-imperialism or militarization as authentic. These qualifications also showed how many different aspects of life, like stories told by one’s parents, inspired understanding of tradition. Also, the social memory of rice, like the belief that the Japanese introduced rice to the Chamorro culture during their occupation when in reality it was a food eaten by ancestral Chamorro groups superseded the truth regarding the origin of rice, especially among the Chamorro women I talked to in San Diego. Loss of traditional knowledge and the influences of outsiders affected the core principles guiding Pacific Island food culture and history, ultimately shifting how one negotiated with traditions and identity. This point was illuminated further by the fact that the Chamorro community continued to eat red rice at parties and categorized it as a traditional food.

This tension between invented histories and actual histories ultimately inspired the need for more education on the history of foods and a closer examination of discourse surrounding the origin of traditions and what those traditions symbolized.

## **SYMBOLISM**

Ultimately, the discussion of traditional foods translated into a discussion of how identity was constructed and imposed by the community through the examination of what the traditions reflected and symbolized. It posed the questions:

1. If major cultural features, like the traditional food red rice, were not originally derived from inside one's culture, but introduced or popularized by outsiders, (often oppressive outsiders) then why did cultures, like in the Chamorro example above, 'borrow' and adopt traditions when their origin did not lie with the group originally? What needs were fulfilled in the adoption of the tradition?
2. What effects did the adoption of new invented traditions have on culture and identity?

These questions of identity construction and authenticity of culture can be related to neo-imperial concepts of creolization, the invention of tradition, commoditization, and exoticization, because all of these processes fuel and affect meaning-making. The next section provides answers to the above questions while discussing a quintessential Pacific Islander food: Spam. Despite its low and even negative nutritive value, sixteen out of eighteen participants interviewed in this study identified themselves as Spam-eaters, and Spam certainly did not originate in the Pacific, yet it has been adopted by Pacific Islanders across the world because of what it symbolized.

### **The History of Spam in the Pacific**

Spam was 'invented' by Jay Hormel in 1937. He combined pork shoulder and ham to create what was originally called "Spiced Ham", and was now fondly known across the world as Spam (Armstrong and Black 2007:57-59). Spam was popular on the mainland US before World War II because of its suitability for long-term storage prior to the mainstream acquisition of refrigeration systems and other food storage technologies. Popularity was also a product of Hormel's widespread marketing campaign that even reached the back cover of Time magazine, making witty remarks like, "Supper at Six, Don't Be Late--- If You Mean Spam, It's a Date!" (Armstrong and Black 2007:116).

The tin containers were sent overseas as food rations, during World War II, as part of the US government's "Lend-Lease" program, which supplied food to Allied forces already engaged in the world (Armstrong and Black 2007:72). After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Spam was consumed by the US military as part of their rations and eventually proliferated in the islands for a number of reasons.

The major characteristics of the tinned meat product, like its ability to be stored without refrigeration, its low cost, and the fact that it was a readily available meat product made it popular among islanders. Sources of protein, like meat, were hard to come by in the islands at the time of Spam's introduction to Hawai'i in the 1940's, unless you went fishing, hunting or slaughtered your own animals. Also, during and after World War II, the US banned much of the fishing off the coast of the Hawaiian islands, because "the government worried about the security...fishing was severely restricted for everyone", taking away one of the main sources of protein for residents of the Hawaiian islands (Laudan 1996:36). The cost for imported fresh meat was high and the availability of imported meats was low, not to mention the fact that few people had refrigerators in their houses. All of these factors greatly contributed to Spam's popularity in the Pacific. This was in contrast to the eventual decrease in Spam consumption on the mainland because of better access to meat, refrigeration, and more variety of affordable foods.

### **Deconstruction of Tradition Reflecting Symbolism**

1. Why did they adopt or borrow Spam as a tradition? What needs were fulfilled?

Spam became popular among Hawaiians for several reasons as noted earlier; Spam provided the family with a solid source of protein (especially when fish was not available) that did not require refrigeration for storage and it was affordable—features important to most Americans in Spam's early days.

Specifically, for the population of indigenous Hawaiians, living far below the poverty line, often in campgrounds, with little to no electricity, Spam was an important food because it could be stored outside of a refrigeration unit (Harrison 2005:195). Spam substituted for fish when they were not allowed to catch it, and other meats. Spam was adapted into recipes, resulting in a creolization of flavors and tastes (Harrison 2005:188). As opposed to rice, that was mostly served plain or with soy sauce as a side dish, Spam took a low-cost, lead role. Spam consumption was passed along to future generations as a popular food even when fishing became available again because it was convenient and, as opposed to the cost of fresh meat on the mainland that became cheaper and more widely available with the expansion industrial farming, the price and availability of meat in Hawai'i did not follow suit. Spam fed a generation of islanders when fish was hard to get and the price of meat was high. Symbolically, it represented a relief from both government-imposed restrictions on fishing

and the high cost of meat. Additionally, it provided nourishment as a ‘comfort food’ because it was a low-cost protein source for struggling islanders with few economic resources and not allowed to engage in the traditional activity of fishing.

Creolization of Spam into Pacific Islander food culture can be seen in various dishes like Spam musubi (Spam sushi) or the recipe shared with me by Participant 13, “we’ll get the Spam, chop it up in little chunks, we’ll add tomato sauce and string beans”. Another Creole invention, Spam musubi (aka Spam sushi, Spam served over a block of rice and wrapped in seaweed) was such a staple in places like Hawai`i that 7-11 sells it, next to the hot dogs, for \$1.19 (Personal correspondence Trisha Silva 10/16/11).

Hawaiians adopted Spam because it met physical needs, as a source of protein and replacement for fish and because it was available to them economically. Additionally, the enthusiasm for Spam emerged because Hawaiians utilized it in their own personal recipes. Although Hormel encouraged creative Spam recipes to all of its consumers, the popularity of Spam died off on the mainland US before Spam recipes became ingrained in cultural food traditions. This was not the case in Hawai`i and across the Pacific.

2. What effects does the adoption of these invented traditions have on culture and ultimately identity?

Aside from the use of Spam in recipes and its use as a substitute for fish resulting in a creolization of traditional recipes, Pacific Islanders in this project talked about how Spam was a staple in their household. “Have to have Spam in our house. Spam, we eat it for breakfast, we eat it for lunch, we eat it for dinner. We have so many recipes for Spam” (Interview 20).

Spam is a staple food in many Pacific Island nations and traditions are tailored around it. For instance, in Hawai`i, the SpamJam is a Spam festival where Spam is celebrated in various ways. One year the organizers constructed a 300 foot long piece of Spam musubi (Armstrong and Black 2007:180). Enthusiasm for Spam is not only in Hawai`i, various other Pacific Island groups, like Guamanians, have an affinity for Spam. The Spam on Guam even has its very own label that is “in honor of Guam’s liberation”(Armstrong and Black 2007:140-141). McDonalds on both Hawai`i and Guam sell Spam-related items. Spam has been commoditized around the Pacific contributing to its widespread availability and consumption.

Spam was adopted as part of Pacific Island culinary heritage because of what it symbolized as a comfort food, an alternative source of protein, and relief from restrictions imposed by outsiders. Pacific Islanders affiliated Spam with themselves and with the culture of the Pacific Islands, because they have incorporated it into their diet since World War II, reifying it as a traditional food. Yet the history of its popularity and subsequent adoption in Hawai'i was a result of neo-imperialism and militarization. The US restrictions on fishing were a direct product of militarization. Neo-imperialism and the annexation of Hawai'i directly contributed to the widespread low socioeconomic status of indigenous Hawaiians across the state. Thus Spam became a symbol of relief from the effects of outside hegemonic forces in the Pacific, feeding communities and substituting for fish they were not allowed to catch.

Although it was introduced via militarization and affiliated historically as a symbol of hard economic times, not one Pacific Islander had negative feelings toward Spam's presence in the traditional food category because of its origin. This sharply contrasted with the example of rice, where several people debated whether or not, given rice's introduction with colonialism, if it should be labeled as traditional. Spam was enthusiastically given membership into the traditional foods category, although it fell into the category of neo-imperial foods. Spam's introduction through the militarization in the Pacific, seemed to be forgotten or trumped by its impact on food culture and its related creolization into Pacific Island culture. Although the origin of Spam was known, attitudes towards the authenticity of the food as a part of Pacific Island culture were not lessened. Overall, the enthusiasm for Spam among the sixteen (out of eighteen) Spam-eating Pacific Islanders in this study indicated that most people identified with this food and held it in common as part of their traditions and ultimately a facet of their identity. The popularity of Spam has not decreased since islanders got better refrigeration techniques or better access to fresh meats. The fact that Spam was held in common across the Pacific and islanders on the mainland and in the Pacific continued to consume it in large quantities, designated the food as a major part of Pacific Islander tradition. It was the one food that received more attention and the most enthusiasm during interviews, emphasizing its importance to the community engaged in this research. Point of origin did not matter and did not affect Spam's continued popularity, even in the face of health disparities associated with it.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of Spam and rice in conjunction with Pacific Islander identity illuminates key points about meaning making and the creation of tradition; it also reflects areas of tension surrounding tradition. Ultimately, the origins of traditions do not seem to matter as much as the enthusiasm of the group adoption of them and what the tradition symbolizes. Although traditions can be affected by any number of processes, such as by creolization, the invented tradition, and any commoditization, meaning making and identity associated with tradition, are often shared group concepts that demonstrate how people have made sense of their world and their experience in light of hardships or even what history dictates. Ultimately, traditions are shaped through the majority of people who reify them because of what the traditions symbolize.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WAY**

#### **FORWARD**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

My research illustrates that Pacific Islanders eat a wide array of traditional foods and multiple subcategories of traditional foods emerged from the data. To explain the diversity of foods and the ways that people qualified the authenticity of traditional foods, I explored the history of foods and food culture in the Pacific, because the population of my research either migrated to San Diego from the Pacific themselves or descended from family who originally lived in the Pacific. The investigation of food culture history in the Pacific revealed bouts of conquest, neo-imperialism, economic deprivation, and migration. My research indicates that, in the past and present-day, Pacific Islanders adopted new ingredients into their traditional food recipes because of tangible factors like the availability of food, prices, and taste, and because of intangible factors like the influence outsiders had on culture through creolization. Pacific Islanders have thereby been creative in regard to what ingredients make up traditional foods. Knowledge of and the practice of traditional food preparation and commensality, or eating a meal together, superseded the emphasis otherwise placed on the ingredients of the dishes and promoted a shared group identity. Therefore, the meaning behind the meal or the foods came to the forefront, de-emphasizing the ingredients themselves.

This conclusion is important to understand when designing health and wellness resources that could be used for lifestyle interventions to help curb obesity for the Pacific Islander community on the mainland US because the role of traditional foods spans far beyond sustenance. Lifestyle interventions that inspired this project, such as the Pili `Ohana project in Hawai`i, which work to help curb obesity and promote weight loss for Pacific Islanders living in the Pacific through a diet based on specific traditional foods (those named in my research as ancestral foods) are effective in the Pacific but must be modified for Pacific Islanders living in the mainland because of several reasons. First, the traditional foods that fall into the ancestral category abundantly grow in the Pacific, however many of

them, like taro and breadfruit, are difficult to find on the mainland US. Also, Pacific Islanders interviewed in this research said that canned substitutes of traditional foods like coconut milk are less authentic than if they were made by hand. Additionally, the Pacific Island immigrant experience on the mainland in San Diego is quite different from life in Hawai`i. Food culture on the mainland is influenced by a different variety of foods, different prices of foods, and more ethnic groups (than in Hawai`i) having an influence on popular food culture. In order to adapt the model for a lifestyle intervention based on an authentic diet of traditional foods for Pacific Islanders in the mainland, these issues should be considered.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIFESTYLE INTERVENTION MODELS**

Based on these conclusions, lifestyle intervention models focused on dietary solutions and traditional foods for Pacific Islanders living on the mainland US could adhere to the following recommendations:

1. Be explicit about how traditional foods are classified because, as demonstrated in this research, there are multiple categories and understandings of traditional foods
2. Expand beyond the cultural category and include seasonal, local foods because tropical foods (foods readily available in the Pacific) are often hard to acquire, expensive, or simply cannot be grown on the mainland US

As noted in the findings, elders and community leaders, like pastors and chiefs, command much respect among the Pacific Islander community on the mainland. These solutions should be acceptable to the community if the community leaders show support of them and promote them across the community. Also, the overt history of ingredient substitution into traditional food recipes by Pacific Islanders indicates that emphasis is placed on the symbolism behind traditional foods, rather than on the ingredients themselves. To conclude, lifestyle interventions based on dietary solutions for Pacific Islanders on the mainland could be designed with ingredient substitution in mind and will be most effective when coupled with support from the community leaders and elders, because the community tends to respond to the wishes of the community leaders. In addition to specifically discussing the design of lifestyle intervention programs, this chapter recommends some specific ideas that local communities and community-based groups could embrace to promote healthier lifestyles.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED HEALTHY LIFESTYLE PROMOTION**

Throughout my research, Pacific Islanders in San Diego acknowledged some community-based resources for health and wellness here in San Diego including:

1. A local community-oriented personal trainer
2. Health fairs put on by local Pacific Islander groups
3. Health forums infrequently put on by Asia/Pacific groups

Overall, people felt, there is a presence of community-based resources available to Pacific Islanders, but not a big one. In moving forward, it is important to understand that community-based, bottom-up approaches are optimal to health promotion for Pacific Islanders on the mainland, because as discussed earlier, the Pacific Island community lacks trust in outsiders, such as non- Pacific Islander doctors and health professionals. Within the community, Pacific Islanders value health advice from role models, who actively promote health through personal achievements, the most. Thus, acknowledging the importance of providing Pacific Islander based community resources is necessary.

These issues regarding health resources, combined with findings that emphasize the role of traditional foods, not necessarily their ingredients inspired the following two community-based recommendations. By promoting ways to facilitate a dialogue within the community regarding ingredient substitution, traditional foods could be modified to be healthier, without losing the sense of solidarity promoted through shared group commensality of traditional foods. Additionally, by encouraging community leaders to actively engage with their community on topics of health and wellness, healthier lifestyles for the Pacific Islander community on the mainland US could be achieved through a community-based, “bottom-up” approach.

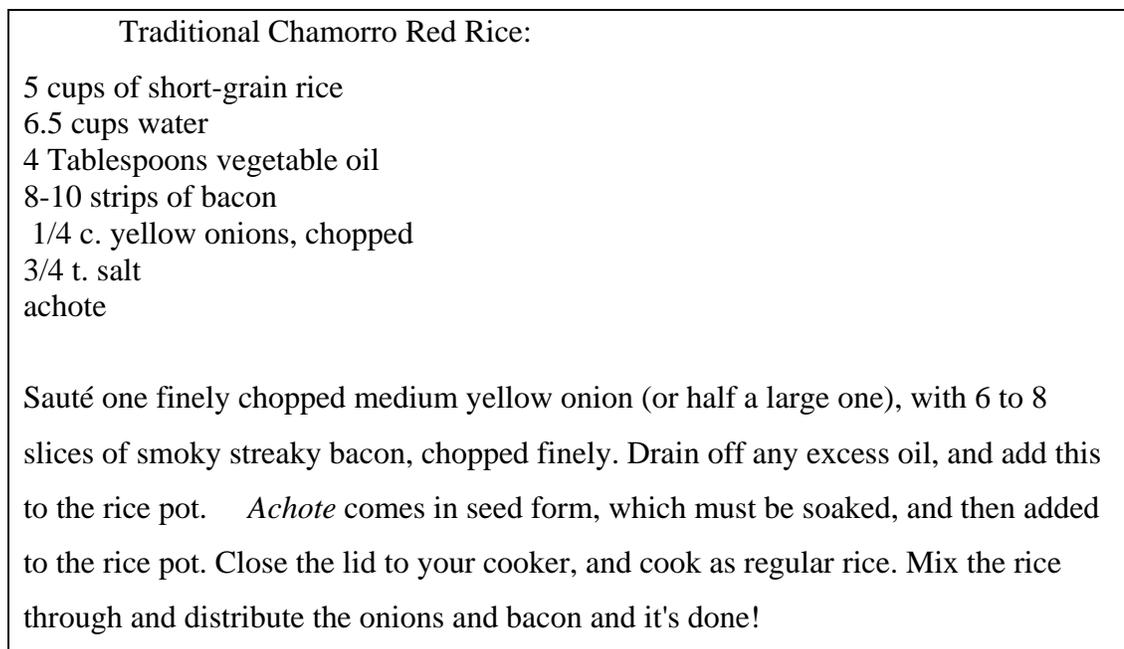
### **Adaption of Healthy, Alternative Ingredients to Traditional Food Recipes by Creating a Dialogue in the Community**

Food-based resources derived from within the community, like cookbooks and recipes cards, are two other ways to communicate healthier lifestyle strategies, while including important cultural features. One example of this is the cookbook, “A Taste of Health” produced by Nashville’s R.E.A.C.H. 2010 coalition. This cookbook collected

recipes from the local African-American community and developed healthier alternatives, like the addition of more vegetables and decreasing the amount of oil, to those recipes. The cookbook was designed in conjunction with the community, as the coalition held a food cook-off, where participants tasted and rated important components of the foods like the appearance and taste of the recipes. The coalition also made follow-up phone calls, held cooking demonstrations, and held focus groups to get the community's opinion on the recipes and the cookbook. Overall, the Nashville community found the cookbook's recipes as an effective new approach to healthy cooking and it is an effective model for community-based recipe intervention.

My project's findings support the notion that traditional foods play a very large part in the life and culture of Pacific Islanders in this study. Even when people know they should not indulge and eat traditional foods, they state it is hard not to because traditional foods are served frequently at family parties, taste delicious, and symbolize important cultural characteristics. Pacific Islanders comment how they do not eat traditional foods as often as they would like to because the ingredients are too rich and the foods are unhealthy. Thus there is the need for healthier versions of traditional foods because desire for them remains strong despite their negative ramifications to health. New recipes could be developed based on the original traditional food components, with modified preparation styles to reduce unhealthy characteristics like reducing the amount of oil, substituting healthier oils for less healthy ones, baking instead of frying, etc. Recipe substitutions that add more nutrients, or reduce the fat, sugar, or salt content, without negating the significance of the food or affecting flavor too much, should be developed. Ideally, alternative ingredient and recipe substitutions should be developed by community members, to assure acceptance and authenticity of the food. Community members could get together once a month at someone's house or at a community kitchen, for a potluck dinner, and try out new recipes and discuss ingredient substitutions, so that way the ideas are derived from the community and through group brainstorming and tasting, suggestions can emerge through discussion regarding how to make dishes taste the best.

Below this recipe for red rice, provided to me by Participant 14 (Figure 3), is a list of creative ways to alter the recipe to make it healthier.



**Figure 3. Traditional Chamorro red rice.**

Suggestions for recipe substitutions, and the resulting benefits to the diet include:

1. Substitute brown rice for white rice. This adds a whole-grain component to the dish. Whole grains promote heart health.
2. Substitute a teaspoon or so of liquid smoke and a half-cup of vegetarian broth for bacon, to lower the total fat content of the dish. Other recipes left out the bacon altogether.
3. Substitute olive oil for the vegetable oil. Olive oil provides more health benefits than vegetable oil. Studies suggest that olive oil contributes to a “reduction of risk factors of coronary heart disease, prevention of several varieties of cancers, and modification of immune and inflammatory responses” (Stark and Madar 2002:170). Also, you can use less of it because it is thicker.

People are willing to make a change to their diets and several participants report substituting foods like brown rice for white rice and whole-wheat flour for white flour, without it having a negative effect on flavor. Community members already implementing alternatives could put a master list of helpful substitutions together.

One additional challenge to finding suitable substitutions for traditional food recipes is sharing the information with the rest of the community in some public forum because the development of healthier recipes and ingredient alternatives should be a community-wide discussion. Group gatherings, like dinners or family get-togethers are two places where recipe sharing could be encouraged. Also, with greater access to the internet, websites could

be set up to promote the sharing of recipes. One example of a community-run website tailored to Pacific Islanders is the Rotuma project (<http://www.rotuma.net/>). This website provides an open, social platform for people of Rotuman descent to communicate with each other. One of the main features of the website is a recipe sharing forum. For those Pacific Islanders less computer savvy, or who prefer a more hands-on approach, cooking classes and group workshops could be designed, where people brainstorm and share ideas like recipes and ingredient substitutions. A group cookbook could be published or a set of Pacific Islander recipe cards with alternative ingredient ideas.

Additionally, workshops or classes could be taught that detail the traditional preparation of certain foods, like the island-style way of making coconut milk, for example, where the coconut is scraped out and the coconut pulp is squeezed through cheesecloth to make coconut milk—a process that is not usually practiced on the mainland US. Workshops to reconnect people with traditions that are otherwise being lost are an important way to reclaim culture and insure the younger generation is exposed to long-held traditions. Workshops and cooking demonstrations could be held at schools where there is a high concentration of Pacific Islander children, like the Pacific American Academy in San Diego.

The adaptation of ingredients, sharing new recipes, and revisiting traditions that have been lost by migration to the mainland, are ways to spread healthier eating habits while honoring the important role of traditional foods for the San Diego Pacific Islander community.

### **Shaping Community Role Models and Health Advocates**

Research has shown that role models or community leaders are important to community-based health. Role models well versed in the health disparities of their communities are by far the most effective because they have insider's perspective on community health issues. Communities desire role models who can identify with their health disparities. Vincent and colleagues report one thing that would help the group of Mexican Americans they were working with to self-manage diabetes was “access to a role model, someone with diabetes who was successful at self-management and would understand the challenges” (2006:95).

Pacific Islanders interviewed in this project San Diego hold community-based role models in high esteem. Leaders are important because they understand traditions, enthusiastically promote group activities, and are seen as key advisors to friends and family. Moreover, their role inspires the community through activities that promote a shared understanding of culture. Therefore, it is important for leaders to be active promoters of good health. Because of the long-standing Pacific Islander cultural value that holds larger bodies higher in esteem, many of the leaders in the San Diego Pacific Islander community are “bigger dudes” (Interview 11). This accepted image does not align with health promotion because obesity causes health problems and it is contradictory for larger-sized community leaders to encourage weight loss if they themselves are not doing so. Therefore, community leaders, even if they are overweight, need to engage with the community regarding how they themselves are making positive improvements to their health, to create awareness community-wide. Respondent 19, for example, who is a community leader involved in PIFA and other community groups, feels more confident and helpful as a role model since losing 100 pounds. Personally demonstrating change, as opposed to just talking about it, feels to him a more effective way to advocate health.

Along the same lines, community leadership opportunities to promote health could be offered to members of the San Diego Pacific Islander community who demonstrate healthy lifestyle changes like weight loss, adoption of exercise programs, or participation in activities that cultivate both tradition and health. People making positive, healthy changes could use their personal experiences to promote health within the Pacific Islander community if given the opportunity to be a role model.

Additionally, health education programs might specifically target community leaders who currently act as role models, so that they learn and convey accurate and effective health messages to the community. Community leaders could advocate what healthy lifestyle initiatives they are personally implementing and their progress in the programs to inspire their community. For example, they could discuss a weight loss program they just began or the culmination of a year of non-smoking. Community leaders have the ability and the most influence to spread messages of health advocacy and awareness.

## CONCLUSION

This project examines the role of traditional foods among the Pacific Islander community and makes connections between traditional foods and health. Food culture in the Pacific shifted because of politics and power structure changes. Because the majority of Islanders adapted to these changes, cultural evolution occurred-- instilling new cultural features and traditions through practice and through the workings of social memory. This affected diet, nutrition, identity and traditions through observable and symbolic means.

Pacific Islanders on the mainland use traditional foods as a way to reinforce, reclaim, and hold onto culture and heritage. Yet, health and traditional foods are at odds sometimes. Traditional foods can be related to solutions that address Pacific Islander health, if foods from the ancestral category are consumed more often, or healthier, seasonal ingredients are substituted into traditional food recipes. Some Pacific Islanders are making the switch to include healthier ingredients in their traditional foods and the meaning behind the food has not changed. However, Pacific Islanders will continue to eat some “unhealthy” traditional foods, like Spam, because of what they symbolically represent.

Pacific Islanders in San Diego do relate food to health and see a need for improved health resources, namely those that are community-based and incorporate cultural features. Lifestyle intervention models loosely based on the successful projects in the Pacific should take into account the differences in food availability and culture on the mainland US in order to be most effective. They can be adapted to life on the mainland by taking into account the foods seasonally and locally available and the multitude of meaning conveyed in the consumption of traditional foods. Aside from lifestyle interventions programs, community-based groups can contribute to health promotion for Pacific Islanders living on the mainland by creating forums for local Pacific Islander groups that discuss the adaptation of ingredients into traditional foods recipes to make them healthier, sharing new recipes across social networks, and helping leaders to be more effective role models.

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**APPENDIX**  
**DOCUMENTS**

**FOCUS GROUP ANNOUNCEMENT**

**PACIFIC ISLANDER  
FOOD AND FOOD  
TRADITIONS  
FOCUS GROUP**

ALL PACIFIC ISLANDERS WELCOME!



WHEN: FRIDAY, JUNE 17, 2011 6:30-7:30 P.M.

WHERE: OB PEOPLE'S ORGANIC FOOD MARKET  
IN THE COMMUNITY ROOM (UPSTAIRS) 4765  
VOLTAIRE STREET, SAN DIEGO, CA 92107

**SNACKS AND DRINKS PROVIDED!**

**GIFT CARDS TO "L AND L BARBECUE" WILL  
BE RAFFLED OFF TO PARTICIPANTS**

FOCUS GROUP ORGANIZED BY SDSU ANTHROPOLOGY  
GRADUATE STUDENT, WENDY LEICHT, FOR THESIS  
RESEARCH

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT WENDY  
AT [ocwendy99@aol.com](mailto:ocwendy99@aol.com)

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Introduction**

1. What ethnic group or groups do you and your family identify with or belong to?
2. When did your family migrate from the Pacific to the US?

### **Tradition**

1. What island (Polynesian, Micronesian, Melanesian) traditions do you retain and practice here in San Diego?
2. Why are these traditions important to you?
3. Do these traditions help to reinforce your Pacific Islander identity?
4. If so, why or how?
5. Is food a part of these traditions?

### **Food**

1. Do you categorize certain foods as traditional Pacific Island foods?
2. If so, what foods?
3. Is there a certain designation that you use when categorizing certain foods as traditional (Pacific Island foods)? If so, what is the designation that you use and how do you use it?
4. How often do you eat traditional Pacific Island foods?
5. Who prepares the traditional Pacific Island foods?
6. Are certain Pacific Island foods only eaten on special occasions? If so, what occasion?
7. Do some Pacific Island foods have a more elevated status for you?

8. Do some Pacific Island foods connect you to your Pacific Islander heritage, more so than other foods?
9. What is your favorite food in the traditional Pacific Island food category?
10. What do traditional foods remind you of?
11. Do you use food to connect yourself and your family to your Pacific Islander heritage?

### **San Diego Experience**

1. Do you eat traditional foods here in San Diego?
2. Do you cook traditional foods here in San Diego?
3. How has the consumption of traditional foods evolved or changed in your life?
4. Where do you go to obtain the ingredients for cooking traditional island foods?
5. Who cooks?
6. Does the person preparing the traditional foods prepare them in the same way the generation before them prepared the food?
7. Have the ingredients changed because you are preparing these foods on the mainland?  
If so, how?
8. Has the style of cooking changed?
9. Is new meaning placed on these traditional foods because the ingredients have changed or style of cooking is different?

### **Eating Out/Authenticity**

1. Do you go out to eat traditional foods?
2. If so, where do you go to eat traditional Pacific Island foods?
3. Do you think some dishes on the menus at Pacific-island themed establishments/

restaurants are inauthentic? If so, why?

4. Are some foods served at Pacific Island themed restaurants more authentic than others? If so, why? What makes a food more authentic to less authentic to you? What is the distinction?

### **Health**

1. Is health a major concern in your life?
2. Do you make connections between food and health? Do you think that diet is a major part of health?
3. Do you think the Pacific Islander community holds larger body sizes in esteem- is bigger beautiful?
4. Do you think there is a place for traditional foods within the **new** paradigm of health and wellness that is being promoted? Do traditional Pacific Island foods play a part in your views of diet and health?
5. Do you have any concerns about the health of the Pacific Island community?  
If so, what do you think should be done or could be done? What should nutritionists and researchers look into?
6. Are there a lot of resources to help Pacific Islanders with nutrition and health management? Have any of them been beneficial?

## LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Potential Participant,

Thank you so much for showing interest in my thesis research. Below you will find a short explanation of the project.

My research project explores the role of traditional foods and how those foods relate to health and identity within the San Diego Pacific Islander community. I am asking Pacific Islander adults and students to participate in interviews. I like to think of the interviews more as a streamlined conversation, rather than as a stringent set of questions, so if you would like to participate, please allot at least 30 minutes of time for it, although most of time, the conversation lasts a bit longer.

The major topics I would like to address with you include:

- \* What foods you consider to be traditional and the role of traditional foods in your life
  
- \* Connections between traditional foods and health
  
- \* Connections between traditional foods and identity as a Pacific Islander

Also, I want to let you know that to ensure I get what you are telling me right, I will be requesting your permission to audiotape the interview. Your responses will be kept anonymous - that is, recorded without any identifying information that is linked

to you and reported anonymously in the final report.

The results of my research will be reported in a thesis that I will complete as a requirement of my graduate program. My research is designed to support future community-based research in nutrition and/or public health, especially within the Pacific Islander community. By learning how Pacific Islanders view the ties between health and food, future researchers will be able to design mindful approaches to address well-being, weight, and nutritional status, as well as, identify the role(s) of traditional foods.

Should you need any further information about me or the project, please feel free to contact me at (808) 499-4468 or via email at [ocwendy99@aol.com](mailto:ocwendy99@aol.com). Thank you again for your interest in the project and I hope to hear from you soon

Best,

Wendy Leicht

Graduate Student

Department of Anthropology

San Diego State University

**SAMPLE CODEBOOK: WHERE DO YOU BUY  
TRADITIONAL FOODS?**

<b>grocery store</b>	<b>Filipino store</b>	<b>Asian supermarket</b>	<b>Sam's liquor in national city</b>	<b>Samoan Store: Taste of Polynesia</b>	<b>middle eastern markets</b>	<b>Gets them from Hawai'i</b>
15: most items from whole foods	15: achote	5,10, 17,18: 99 Ranch	19, 20	20: taste of Polynesia, 14	11	9
6: any store		19: Marupai				