

An Ethnographic Study of

Students' Eating Behavior On Campus

Monday 22 April, 10:20-11:15am in Scott Lab, Room 56

Under the direction of Dr. Mark Moritz, our Anthropology class conducted an ethnographic study of students' eating behavior on campus using a combination of observations, semi-structured interviews, surveys and grounded theory. We found considerable differences between how students eat during the week and in the weekend. Students' busy schedules shape where, what, when, how, and with whom they eat on campus.



ANTHRO
5650

Research
Design and
Ethnographic
Methods

OUTLINE

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Ethnographic research**
- 3. Findings**
- 4. Discussion**

INTRODUCTION

1

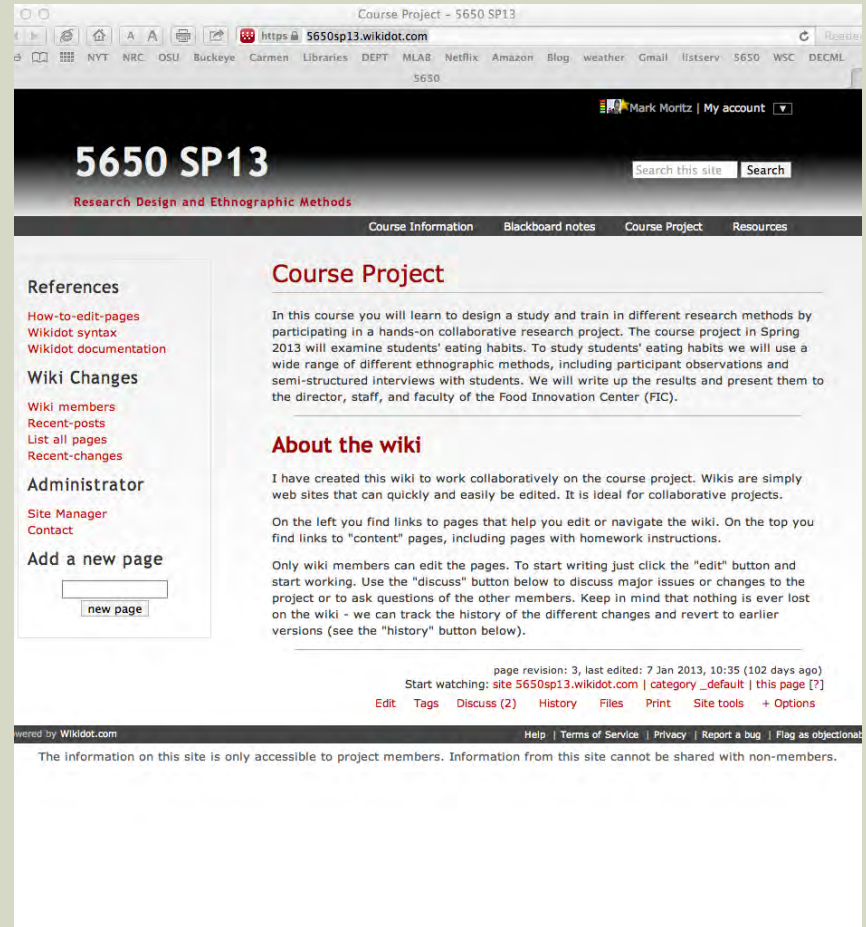
PROBLEM STATEMENT



- The goal of this study was to come to a better understanding of the factors that shape students' eating habits at the Ohio State University.

COLLABORATIVE COURSE PROJECT

- ANTHRO 5650: Research Design and Ethnographic Methods.
- OSU campus as a natural laboratory.



Course Project - 5650 SP13

5650 SP13

Research Design and Ethnographic Methods

Mark Moritz | My account

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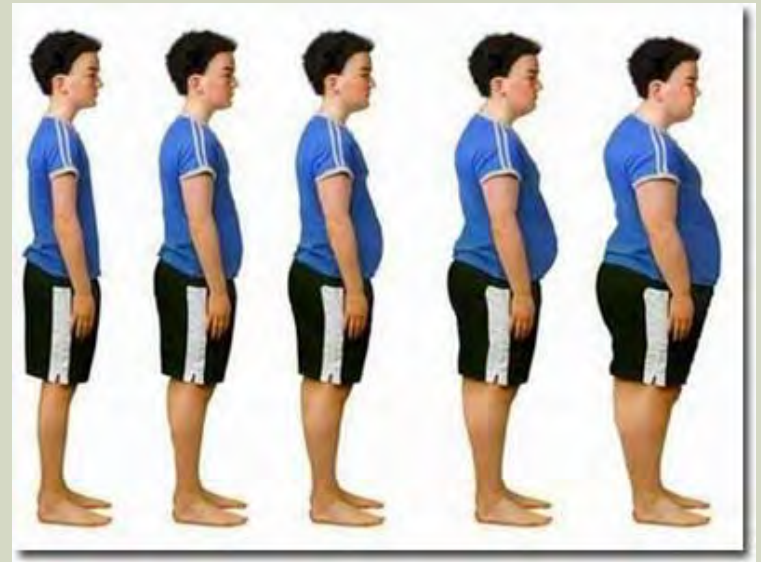
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LITERATURE REVIEW

- Studies of students' eating behavior focus on:
 - Food choice (nutrition, calories, labels)
 - Health indicators (weight and BMI)
 - Dorm versus off-campus eating habits
 - Gender differences
 - "Freshman 15"
- The common methods are:
 - Surveys
 - Food diaries
 - Body measurements



The Freshman Fifteen

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

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MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEW (POV)



Henrich, Joseph, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan. 2010. Most people are not WEIRD. *Nature* 466(1 July 2010):29.

ETHNOGRAPHY



AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH



■ IRA approach

- Iterative
- Recursive
- Abductive

■ Considering meaning and context questions

- POV2 → POV1

■ Increase understanding and narrow focus using grounded theory

Agar, Michael. (2006). *An Ethnography By Any Other Name*. Forum: Qualitative Social Research.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We used an ecocultural approach as conceptual framework:

1. Ecocultural context (e.g., schedule of classes, institutions, living arrangements)
2. Cultural models of development (e.g., ideas that students have about food, their goals)
3. Direct focus on activity settings (e.g., everyday eating routines in social settings).

OBSERVATIONS

- Observations of everyday eating activities in places on and around campus at different times during the week (n = 47).



SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

- Semi-structured interviews with descriptive questions to get students' model of their own eating habits (n = 57).
- Typical descriptive grand-tour question:
 - Can you describe your typical eating habits throughout a school day? For example, when do you eat, what do you eat, where do you eat, with whom do you eat? Starting with the morning when you get up until at night when you go to bed?



ONLINE SURVEY

- Online survey using Google Drive (n = 356) to measure self-report of student eating behavior and eating preferences.
 - Non-random sample of OSU students with 81% female respondents.

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Campus food (1 of 7)

We would like to ask you a few questions about what you think of the food on campus.

I find the food that I eat on campus to be:

Check as many as apply.

- full of variety
- interesting
- tasty
- bland
- boring
- all the same
- healthy

Please rate how much you agree (1) or disagree (5) with the following statements

Food on campus is healthy.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Disagree

Food on campus is interesting.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Disagree

Food on campus is boring.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Disagree

Campus food has adequate variety.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Disagree

FINDINGS

3

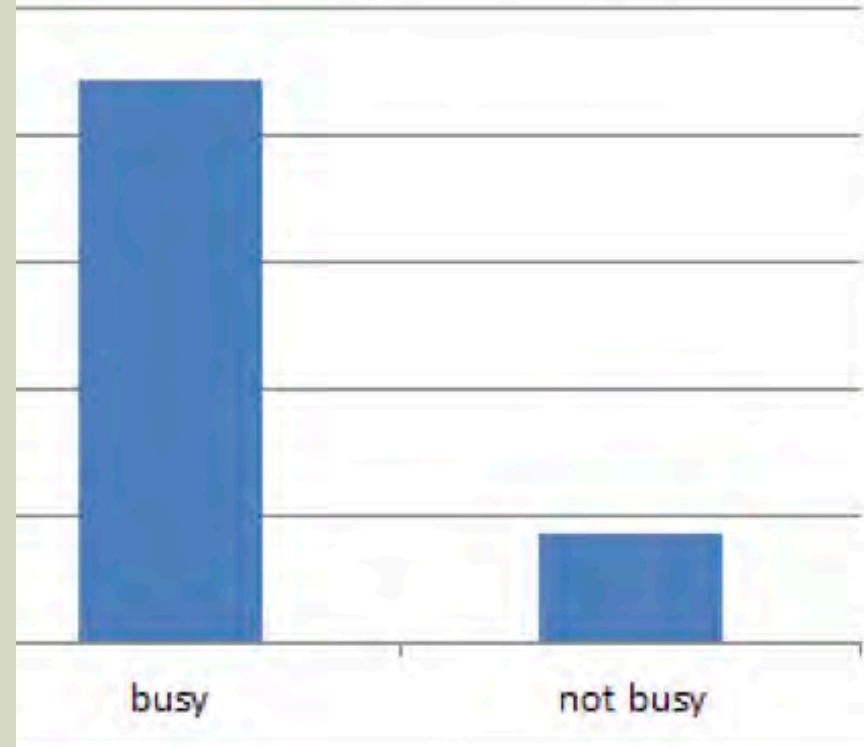
EATING ALONE OR WITH OTHERS



A BUSY SCHEDULE ...



84% of students reported have a busy, very busy, or extremely busy schedule.



... MEANS EATING ALONE ...

48% of surveyed students reported that they regularly or always eat alone.

"A lot of my lunches and dinners end up being in class, so I just eat alone."

"I usually tend to eat alone just because it's kind of a spur of the moment, "hey I'm kind of hungry and I have 20 minutes before class."

"During the week-alone. Our schedules are pretty busy you know. If it's in between classes, I usually eat by myself."

... BUT EATING ALONE IS AWKWARD ...

"I feel like you have to get used to it, like the first few times you do it, you're like - oh my gosh this is so weird."

"I like can't do it, and it's really strange because, like, I was an only child so I was alone a lot, but eating alone I cannot do it. I just can't do it."

"I'd probably be on my phone [when eating alone], just to not look super awkward."

... BUT STUDENTS LEARN TO COPE

Using mobile technology



Through experience

Frequency of eating alone	Awkward scale (5=more awkward)
Never	3.2
Occasionally	2.7
Regularly	2.6
Always	2.2

Spearman's $R = -0.173$, $p = 0.005$

EATING ON WEEKENDS IS DIFFERENT

"Yeah, if you eat with a group, people will talk and you will lose much time, especially on weekdays. But on weekends it doesn't matter - I think."

"On weekends, I eat in groups. Never alone."

"During the week alone...But on the weekends I'll go with friends or roommates [to eat]."

DIFFERENCES IN EATING HABITS

	When I eat with others	When I eat alone	P-level
I eat more	3.05	2.99	NS
I enjoy my food more	2.67	3.11	P<0.001
I eat more slowly	2.51	3.51	P<0.001
I am more aware of manners	2.12	3.57	P<0.001
I use my phone less	1.66	4.10	P<0.001

1 = strongly agree

2 = agree

3 = neutral

4 = disagree

5 = strongly disagree

Kruskal-Wallis Test (Nonparametric ANOVA)

DISCUSSION

4

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

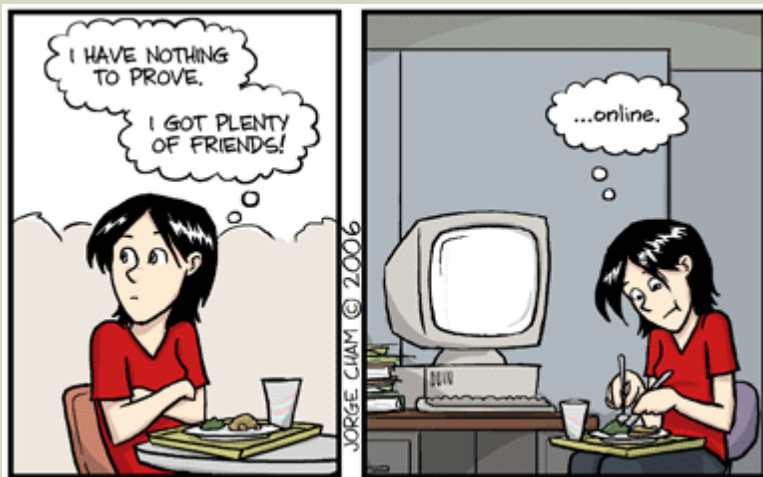
1. To better understand students' eating behavior we need to use a holistic approach that includes observations in natural settings and students' cultural models.
2. It also requires a theory of human behavior that takes into account the habits, constraints, and emotions that shape how students experience and make decisions about eating.



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Option 1

- Individual work spaces with electrical outlets and internet in restaurants so that students can work and socialize using FaceTime.



Option 2

- Seating arrangements that facilitate conversations with others that promote “civility and common purpose”.



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THANKS
Questions?

THE END