



The traditional food of migrants: Meat, water, and other challenges for dietary advice. An ethnography in Guanajuato, Mexico



Carolyn Smith-Morris

SMU Anthropology, 3225 Daniel Boulevard, Dallas, TX 75275, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 January 2016

Received in revised form

26 April 2016

Accepted 1 June 2016

Available online 3 June 2016

Keywords:

Tradition

Migrant

Saliency

Refresco

Agua

Meat

ABSTRACT

The term “traditional diet” is used variously in public health and nutrition literature to refer to a substantial variety of foodways. Yet it is difficult to draw generalities about dietary tradition for specific ethnic groups. Given the strong association between migration and dietary change, it is particularly important that dietary advice for migrants be both accurate and specific. In this article, I examine the cultural construct of “traditional foods” through mixed method research on diet and foodways among rural farmers in Guanajuato, MX and migrants from this community to other Mexican and U.S. destinations. Findings reveal first, that quantitatively salient terms may contain important variation, and second, that some “traditional” dietary items –like “refresco,” “carne,” and “agua” – may be used in nutritionally contradictory ways between clinicians and Mexican immigrant patients. Specifically, the term “traditional food” in nutritional advice for Mexican migrants may be intended to promote consumption of fresh produce or less meat; but it may also invoke other foods (e.g., meats or corn), inspire more regular consumption of formerly rare foods (e.g., meats, flavored waters), or set up financially impossible goals (e.g., leaner meats than can be afforded). Saliency studies with ethnographic follow up in target populations can promote the most useful and accurate terms for dietary advice.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The term “traditional diet” is used variously in public health and nutrition literature to refer to the pre-colonial and wild foods of colonized groups (Bersamin, Zidenberg-CherrStern, & Luick, 2007, 139; Blanchet, DewaillyAyotte, Bruneau, Receveur, & Holub, 1999; Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Leatherman, 1994; Neuhauser, Thompson, Coronado, & Solomon, 2004; Shintani, Hughes, Beckham, & O’connor, 1991), to post-migration diets of rural or agrarian migrants now living in industrial contexts (Chambers, Pichardo, & Davis, 2014; Guarnaccia, Vivar, Bellows, & Alcaraz, 2012; Lee, Popkin, & Kim, 2002; Neuhauser et al. 2004; Popkin, 2001; Wandel, Råberg, Kumar, & Holmboe-Ottesen, 2008s), or to historically consumed foods in communities facing aggressive market pressures on diets (Schröder, Marrugat, Vila, Covas, & Elosua, 2004; Trichopoulou & Lagiou, 1997; Wiedman, 2010). Despite this substantial variation, both linguistically and in terms of dietary content, the term remains a common theme in nutrition and acculturation research. Dietary advice for migrating and

acculturating groups that is drawn from these literature may be confusing or offer unachievable instruction. As Fagerli, Lien, and Wandel (2005) have shown, clinicians must be able to communicate with both dietary and cultural-linguistic relevance for these vulnerable populations.¹ Given the well-documented nutrition transition in many parts of the world toward less healthy foods (Popkin, Adair, & Ng, 2012), the concept of a “traditional diet” deserves greater circumspection in public health nutrition and clinical practice.

Mixed method studies of acculturation and dietary change have produced divergent conclusions about the manner and form of change from “traditional” consumption patterns to contemporary ones (Abraído-Lanza, Armbrister, Flórez, & Aguirre, 2006; Ayala, Baquero, & Klinger 2008; Booth et al. 2001; Chambers, Pichardo, & Davis, 2014; Romero-Gwynn et al. 1993; Satia-Abouta, Patterson, Neuhauser, & Elder, 2002). For example, trends indicate that Latino immigrants “acculturate” to consume fewer fruits, vegetables and beans than in a “traditional healthful diet,” substituting more sugar and sugar-sweetened beverages (Ayala et al., 2008,

E-mail address: smithmor@smu.edu.

¹ See also new areas of research in food lexicons (e.g., Gmuier et al. 2015).

1331; Neuhauser et al. 2004). Yet because migrant group cohesion and adaptability vary by location and over the life course, it is difficult to generalize dietary change into group/ethnic models of acculturation (Lockwood, Lockwood, Abraham, & Shryock, 2015; Martínez, 2013; Renne, 2016). Instead, dietary acculturation involves a variety of cultural, social, demographic, and socioeconomic influences (Ebrahim et al. 2010; Guarnaccia et al. 2012; Kleiser, Mensink, Neuhauser, Schenk, & Kurth, 2010; Lawton et al. 2008; Nicolaou et al. 2009; Renzaho, 2004; Wandel et al. 2008). And the acculturation paradigm is now expanded by a wealth of more granular research on “constructs” like parenting, familism, and cohesion operating in the decisions and behaviors of migrants (Jasso & Becerra, 2003; Pearson, Biddle, & Gorely, 2009a; Pearson, Biddle, & Gorely, 2009b; Sussner, Lindsay, Greaney, & Peterson, 2008; Smith-Morris, Morales-Campos, Alejandra Cataneda Alvarez, & Turner, 2012; Vega et al., 1986).

In this article, I examine the cultural construct of “traditional foods” through mixed method research on diet and foodways among rural farmers in Guanajuato, MX and migrants from this community to Mexican and U.S. destinations. The specific goal was to determine whether the concept of “traditional food” was salient for a community of rural Mexicans and Mexican immigrants. My discussion contributes case data on the construct of “traditional food” for migrant populations, and offers a critical assessment of this term for dietary advice. Specific attention is given to the salient terms *maíz* (corn), *carne* (meat), *agua* (water), and “traditional food”.

2. Methods

This research was a multi-year, multi-site ethnographic investigation of the needs and support systems of binational Mexican families vis-à-vis changing dietary patterns over time and location. Research sites included a Mexican *rancho* (village), that community's primary internal migration site, and its primary external migration site. As an anthropological ethnography, the study produced quantitative and descriptive data about these Mexican/immigrant informants, as well as more detailed narratives on migration, family structures, foodways and mealtime habits. Like Baer (1998), Himmelgreen, Romero Daza, Cooper, and Martinez (2007), and others engaged in collaborative and cross-disciplinary research on dietary change, I contrast quantitative methods with extended interview and participant observatory data on locally unique issues.

2.1. Research sites

The primary site for this research, El Gusano, is a small, farming *rancho* with no commercial activity beyond a handful of home-front *tiendas* (shops) selling mainly snacks, paper products, and cleaning supplies. In El Gusano, participant observation, free listing activities, interviews, and dietary surveys were conducted. Two additional sites that were essential to understanding the context of migration were Dolores Hidalgo and Dallas/Fort Worth (among El Gusano and other Guanajuato families who had migrated to those destinations). Dolores Hidalgo is the *municipio* (county center) serving El Gusano, and a town of approximately 55,000 residents, county government offices, two university campuses, and numerous commercial and infrastructural developments. Dallas/Fort Worth is a large, metropolitan center in the U.S. and the primary international migration destination for residents of El Gusano. In Dolores Hidalgo and Dallas/Fort Worth, interview and participant observation data, but no free-list data, were collected.

2.2. Recruitment and sample description

Recruitment in El Gusano occurred in collaboration with a local development foundation, la Fundación Comunitario del Bajío (FCB) and with the invaluable assistance of two local *promotoras* who were able to introduce us to nearly all of the 60 families in the village. El Gusano residents are subsistence farmers who supplement their income through produce sales in nearby towns and occasional wage labor of some household residents. Almost half (43%) of sampled households received remittances from internal and international migrant family members. The average age of our informants was 42 years, and their average highest grade level achieved was 5.0. We interviewed equal numbers of men and women. Average household income was \$56 US with an average \$33 US spent on food.

These informants were interviewed in their homes or community locations. Recruitment and general rapport/trust-building were improved by the live-in presence of both the author and research assistants for several weeks prior to the beginning of, and during, data collection; and by the affiliation of our project with the ongoing community development network sustained by the FCB. The researchers lived with several key informants, shared all meals with them or other community members, and participated in events at the rancho's community building. We thereby spoke with or met at least a third of our sample prior to recruitment.

Following an informed consent procedure approved by the [institution name removed] IRB, a sample of 30 informants provided free-lists to the prompt of “traditional foods” (Bernard, 2002). An additional sample of 30 informants provided semi-structured, recorded interviews, and completed a battery of survey-style questions on the topics of migration, family, and foodways. Demographic characteristics of the sample are reported elsewhere (citation deleted). Field notes taken during participant observation were produced at least nightly, and discussed every 3 days across team members and with select key informants (selected depending on topic) following grounded analysis techniques (Bernard, 2002).

2.3. Research design

For the free listing activity, informants were asked, “name what you consider to be traditional food”. If clarification was requested, informants were told to define “tradition” however they viewed it, and all subsequent answers were encouraged and included. For example, if the respondent then asked, “do you mean traditional for Mexico?” or “traditional for me?,” the answer was always “yes, whatever you consider ‘traditional food’”. All responses were recorded in order of utterance, and informants were given ample time to exhaust their ideas on this term.

For in-depth ethnographic interviews, a 30-item interview guide was used and included prompts for a description of meals (with whom, roles, where, what was eaten), possible sources for food, and what migrants eat while away. At least the top eight Salient items, and sometimes additional food items, were also discussed.

2.4. Data analysis

Free listing is a “deceptively simple” technique that is “a mainstay of rapid assessment research” (Bernard, 2002, 282–285). By evaluating not simply the frequency with which terms are mentioned by informants, but also taking into account the order of their mention, the value of this technique is expanded (Romney & D'Andrade, 1964). Smith's (1993) method for computing a free-list salience index was used to take into account both frequency and order of mention, and yielded the quantitative data below. For this

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7307121>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7307121>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)