



Food For Thought

An Analysis on How Food Shapes Our Memories



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Abstract

This capstone project explores the connection between food and memory, emphasizing how food shapes our lives and culture. It examines how food can bring people together and facilitate communication, even in therapy. In the scopes of the project I note down the stories of memorable dishes of my grandmother, my friend and myself and recreate the said dishes, uncovering their history and associated memories. Ultimately, the project highlights the profound impact of food on our social, psychological, and cultural development, connecting us to the past and future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Food memories are deeply intertwined with our personal and collective identities, shaping our behaviors, preferences, and relationships, as well as influencing cultural practices and traditions.
- Social memory, according to Sutton (2012), plays a normative role in creating social orders and identities, influenced by collective memory
- Food traditions become embedded in social memory, passed down through generations, and contribute significantly to cultural identity.
- Identity, as described by Hall and Gay (2012), encompasses memories, connections, encounters, and values that contribute to a person's sense of self, with cultural aspects such as food playing a significant role.



Literature Review

- Food culture, as highlighted by Shah (2008), is not just about food but is a reflection of broader social and cultural dimensions, shaping how people relate, interact, and make sense of their lives within their communities.
- Family meals are utilized in therapy, as described by Possic (2008), where therapists use the ritual of a family meal to create a safe space for patients to express their feelings and thoughts without judgment, fostering open communication and support.
- Cooking and the physical interactions involved in the cooking process carry cultural and psychological significance, connecting individuals to their heritage and preserving cultural identity (Bigot, 2020). Traditional dishes often pass down through generations without relying on cookbooks, emphasizing the importance of mimicking ancestral cooking methods and embracing personal variations.
- Food serves as a sensory trigger for memories, evoking the past through smell, taste, and sound, as observed in Salmaner's study (2014) and supported by other authors. Food-related spaces, such as kitchens and dining rooms, become areas for recalling, articulating, and reinventing the past, promoting harmony between ethnic and cultural identities.



Research Question

How is food connected to memory and identity?

What role does food play in our development as people, and human beings in general?

How is the preparation of food significant on its own?

Methodology

THE METHODOLOGY OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT IS BASED ON ORAL HISTORY, INVOLVING INTERVIEWS WITH TWO PARTICIPANTS LIVING IN ARMENIA. THE SELECTION CRITERIA FOCUSED ON INDIVIDUALS WITH MEMORIES OF FOODS NO LONGER EASILY FOUND IN ARMENIA. THE INTERVIEWS WERE AUDIO RECORDED, LASTING AROUND HALF AN HOUR EACH, AND COVERED TOPICS SUCH AS INGREDIENTS, COOKING TECHNIQUES, AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FOOD. A RESEARCH CREATION COMPONENT WAS INCLUDED, WHERE I RECREATED THE DISHES DESCRIBED BY THE INTERVIEWEES. THE PROJECT CULMINATED IN CREATING SHORT STORIES AND VIDEOS TO FURTHER HIGHLIGHT THE PARTICIPANTS', AND MY OWN, PERSONAL HISTORIES AND THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FOOD, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY.



Artist Statement

FOOD, A VESSEL SAFEGUARDING FADING MEMORIES, TRANSCENDS MERE SUSTENANCE TO BECOME A HEARTFELT CONDUIT TO OUR PAST AND A CATALYST FOR PROFOUND EMOTIONS. THROUGH MY CAPSTONE PROJECT, I UNRAVELED THE INTRICATE BOND BETWEEN FOOD AND MEMORY, DISCOVERING THAT FLAVORS, AROMAS, AND TEXTURES WEAVE CHERISHED RECOLLECTIONS TOGETHER. RECREATING DISHES RECOUNTED BY INTERVIEWEES BECAME A LABOR OF LOVE, PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EVOKING RAW NOSTALGIA. THIS PROJECT ILLUMINATES THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF FOOD, BRIDGING CULTURES AND FOSTERING SHARED EXPERIENCES, INSPIRING OTHERS TO EXPLORE THE RICH TAPESTRY OF THEIR OWN CULINARY MEMORIES.

Lilit's Story

Lily's story is a nostalgic journey through her childhood and the significant role food played in shaping her identity. Born in Russia to Armenian parents, Lily embraced her Armenian heritage, and the contrast between Russian and Armenian cuisines became a vivid reminder of her cultural identity.



The memories of her childhood are intertwined with culinary experiences, including the unique oxygen cocktail from her kindergarten days that transported her back to carefree moments. Food became a love language, connecting Lily to her family and providing comfort during stressful times. As a young adult, she continued to explore different cuisines, with sushi representing her love for Asian culture. Food holds a special place in Lily's life, symbolizing her cultural roots, love, comfort, and cherished memories.

Liza's Story

Dimitrov, an Assyrian village near Yerevan, holds a special place in my family's heart as my grandmother, Liza, often shares fond memories of her childhood there. Recently, I had the privilege of interviewing her about our Assyrian heritage, and her stories about Dimitrov stood out. Despite food not being considered a luxury for her family, memories of her grandmother's dishes were deeply ingrained in her.



Prompted by my grandmother, we embarked on a journey to Dimitrov, where we explored sacred places, ancestral homes, and the fields of her childhood. Along the way, we discovered a lost recipe that held great significance to my grandmother, symbolizing a connection to her roots. The visit to Dimitrov not only unearthed cherished memories but also highlighted the strong bond between food and heritage in the Assyrian community.

My Story



FOOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN A POWERFUL FORCE IN MY LIFE. IT HOLDS CHERISHED MEMORIES AND EMOTIONS, CONNECTING ME TO MY CHILDHOOD, FAMILY TRADITIONS AND LOVE. THE DISHES I GREW UP WITH, LIKE COMFORTING BORSCHT AND MY GRANDMOTHER'S BEAR CAKE, CARRY IMMENSE SIGNIFICANCE. FOOD HAS BEEN A SOURCE OF COMFORT, JOY, AND EXPRESSION, ALLOWING ME TO CONNECT WITH LOVED ONES AND PRESERVE TRADITIONS. NOW, AS I COOK FOR MY OWN FAMILY, I HOPE TO PASS ON THE LOVE AND CONNECTION THAT FOOD BRINGS.



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Thank You!