

Eaters Ethnography

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Final Report
Reading List
Interview Questions Template
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Seasoned Spoon Cafe

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Introduction

If you walk through the Great Hall in Champlain College at Trent University and look up, you will see the Seasoned Spoon Café. To get there you have to walk through a dimly lit hall, up a “creepy staircase” lined with cement, and through a heavy wooden door. On the other side of the door there is another set of stairs encased between cement walls, lined with posters describing upcoming community events, student research projects about the café, as well as profiles of the farmers who have a connection with the café. A giant sculpture of a spoon hangs above the staircase, and if you are not careful, or you are particularly tall, it may catch your hat as you walk beneath it. Surrounded by large windows, an ample amount of light is allowed to filter through on sunny days. Generally, the atmosphere feels cheerful and homey, which is likely supported by the mishmash of tablecloths draped across an assortment of differently sized tables. Walking through this space, you are likely to encounter an eclectic mixture of diners enjoying their meals. The demographics span a variety of different groups, including students, professors and faculty members, University staff, and sometimes even a few community members. Whether engrossed in conversation or quietly reading a book over a cup of hot coffee, the Spoon seems to provide a space a variety of needs. Along the left wall is a long counter lined with old-fashioned dessert display cases brimming with delicious treats for every dietary pallet; gluten-free peanut butter gnoche cookies, carrot muffins, ginger cookies, vegan energy cookies or apple spice cake. In addition to the desserts, the Spoon also retails an assortment of teas, hot chocolate, and pots of fair trade coffee. Water, being the beverage of choice for many, is made available free of charge. On the right side of the café is a large blackboard where chalk inscriptions display the day’s specials, as well as the occasional birthday greeting for a staff member. Arriving at the counter, the final stop on the Spoon tour, you are greeted by a spread of soups, an assortment of wraps, and whatever the main course the cooks have selected for that days menu. Before your total is rung up on the cash register, you may be asked if you are a ‘member’ if the staff do not recognize you, but whoever you are, you will be treated to a warm smile.

There is an equally diverse range of seating options, whether you choose a table by the windows, or to be tucked away in the corner. Regardless of where you sit, opportunity exists for the formation of new friendships, or catching up on conversation with old friends.

I came to this project through recognizing a great need for the Seasoned Spoon to diversify its clientele. From sitting on the Board of Directors since the spring of 2008, I have experienced both a personal connection to the organization, as well as a growing awareness of the financial burdens which the café has been facing over the course of its short institutional history. Although a portion of the staff wages are subsidized through the Ontario Work Study Program (OWSP), the Trent International Program (TIP), a small levy paid by all full-time undergraduate students, as well as the odd private donation, the Spoon is still barely breaking even. Despite its official status as a non-profit organization, it remains necessary for the Spoon to make a small level of profits in order to ensure preparedness in the case of any unexpected costs. Financial constraints are augmented by the organization's attempts towards recognizing the importance of paying a 'living wage', both to students, many of whom are already struggling to service the financial demands of post-secondary education, and non-students, as to ensure a sense of job security while promoting an personal investment within their positions. For this reason, the Spoon subsidizes the minimum standard allotted through OWSP. Due to it's proscribed values, an enormous percentage of the profits from product sales are absorbed by the cost of wages. In addition to this, a global food crisis has contributed to an exponential rise in the price of staple goods; this year alone, the average price for essential food items purchased by the Spoon have risen by 23.71 percent. Over the past year alone some goods have more than doubled in price, while the Spoon's prices have not reflected these increases. In fact, the price of wraps and soups have remained fixed to the same rate for the past three years, meaning that certain menu items are actually losing money (*Financial Presentation*, Seasoned Spoon AGM [2009]). Also this year, the Spoon incurred additional financial challenges via the competition posed by the Ceilie, which was recently renovated to provide a fully functional sports bar complete with a liquor license. In contrast, the Spoon does not currently

possess a liquor license, and even lacks the finances for the purchase of proper and much needed equipment, such as an industrial oven.

Viewing the aforementioned pressures, I knew that some changes would have to be made if the café was going to be able to continue its operations, let alone considering any possibilities for the expansion of services. In order to determine what the Spoon was doing right, as well as where and how we needed to improve our services to appeal to a wider range of people within the Trent community, I decided to talk to people who eat regularly at the café, as well as some who rarely or never do. Having heard several rumors that cast the Spoon's reputation in terms of a 'hippy hangout,' with 'weird vegan food,' I became more and more interested in uncovering the roots of these stigmas, particularly if they were contributing to a decline in customers. Reflecting upon the way food issues were becoming of greater importance in my life and within my community, I also possessed a genuine desire to gain a better understanding of what people think about the food they eat and food issues in general.

In the hopes of having a positive and tangible impact on my community that is accessible to the Board and Co-op members, I have chosen the method of engaged anthropology to conduct and present my research. A prominent concern that I hold in presenting this paper involves a fear that this ethnography, like many other research pieces that have come before, will end up on a shelf collecting dust, and will never be read by anyone except academics enlisted with the task of reviewing or grading this work. To rectify this, I embrace this project with the sincere hope that it will aid in the promotion of positive change within the organization of the Seasoned Spoon Café. Furthermore, I intend to use the ideas collected through twenty-two interviews to implement concrete changes during my second term as an acting Board Member this coming year. I also hope that others will find intellectual nourishment and inspiration in the presentation of my research, particularly for the purposes of addressing issues of accessibility and promotional strategies.

Institutional History

The Seasoned Spoon Café (hereafter called the Spoon) is a non-profit, student-run, cooperative café that began as the ‘Stone Soup Project’, which was an attempt by students to provide an alternative to the dominant food system on the University campus. Initiated by a food issues working group under the incorporation of the Ontario Public Interest Research Group, the projects early dimensions involved the distribution of organic soup by donation. They also put forth a proposal to “not only provide an ethical food alternative but would give students opportunities for meaningful involvement both practically and academically” (The Seasoned Spoon website). Today, the café provides research-based opportunities and healthy organic food under the following policy stipulations:

Mandate of the Seasoned Spoon

- To serve healthy, organic, locally grown, affordable food
- To be a student-run, co-operatively structured, not-for-profit organization
- To offer student learning opportunities through paid staff, volunteer work, and Community Based Education courses
- To encourage the diverse use of preexisting student space on campus
- To strengthen university links with the Peterborough community
- To increase community awareness of food issues through educational outreach
- To be accountable to our members by continuing to serve their interests and remaining true to our mandate
- To be as accessible and inclusive as possible. This will include active outreach to inform our membership of our services and to seek their input.
- To have a decision-making process that is based on consensus and that promotes respect
- To respect the diverse opinions that will exist within the group and encourage active debate.

Administrative Structure

Although day-to-day café operations are overseen by a Board of Directors, decisions are made by the entire membership at Annual General Meetings, which are held twice during each academic year. The Spoon is member-based cooperative and, as such, believes that stewardship over the

organization's business and direction should be shared collectively and collaboratively. Anyone who purchases a membership card is incorporated as an acting member of the cooperative, and is permitted to attend bi-weekly meetings of the Board of Directors in order to offer input. Food coops provide the opportunity to reach a wider network of people in order to raise awareness about food issues, (Hartman 2003: 30) and the Spoon takes this responsibility seriously, offering research and job opportunities for many students on campus. The staff consists mainly of part-time student positions, although there a few positions open to community members, including the coordinator, manager and baker.

Research methodology

I utilized the snowball method to locate interview participants. This process included the distribution of e-mails to colleagues, teachers, and friends that I thought might express interest in the stated goals of my project, as well as those who might have connections to people who may also be interested. Furthermore, I made presentations in classes on my project and collected names of students who agreed to meet with me for the purposes of conducting a short, half to one hour-long interview. I spoke to many people about my research, and met several individuals through word of mouth and personal connections. I interviewed twenty-two individuals including students, faculty, members of the university administration, in addition to café staff. In order to protect their identities, all of the participants have been given pseudonyms¹. I also spoke informally with many others who all had something to say about the food on campus and the food system in which we live.

Community

Miguel grew up eating “very exotic foods” despite living in an isolated community. He is currently a member of the coop and eats there regularly. He recognizes the lack of student space, and feels that the Spoon provides space for socializing and hanging out. He finds it very comfortable.

¹ Except where speakers are public figures who have consented to their name being used

Paul grew up in numerous countries, eating mostly rice and meat. He does not eat at the Spoon, however enjoyed the soup he tried during his interview. He usually eats somewhere he won't run into people he knows, as he feels that eating is a private matter.

Thomas, a first year student, dines at the Café for the sense of community he extracts throughout his experience in the space. Upon his first visit, he did not know anyone, but now feels more inclined to invite people he knows to come along with him, and he regularly shows up to see who is there.

Growing up in a rural area and in attending to a garden plot for his family's food needs enhanced his interest in the Café.

During her first visit, Becca described the atmosphere of the Café as intimate and small. She said she initially felt a bit like an outsider during her first year when she came to eat by herself. Feelings of discomfort are perhaps revealed by the way she would come only for the food, and often felt impelled to leave shortly after finishing her meal. Despite these early sentiments, at the time of her interview Becca was in her second year and has been actively involved with the Spoon on a voluntary capacity, which she has helped her to feel closer to the community.

Marshal described the food he ate growing up as "static," usually involving something simple and often already prepared, as he grew up in a busy household. He has never eaten at the Spoon. He eats at Aramark when he needs food on campus, and lately has been going to the Champlain College pub, The Ceilie, which he finds provides a more personal atmosphere than the campus dining halls. He also alluded that his affinity for the Ceilie is related to the high degree of visibility it holds as a result of it being situated in a high traffic area. "It draws you in when you can see what a good time people are having and hear the good music they play," he remarked. He also stated that he likes the food at the Ceilie, which is prepared on site. Marshal later remarked that he understood the food served at the

Ceilie to be “handmade,” despite the fact that this food is sourced through Aramark’s supply chain and involves only marginal amounts of preparation. He noted that he likes to support local businesses in his community, but is often unaware of whether or not he is consuming food that was sourced locally throughout his daily dietary routine.

Maggie started volunteering with the Spoon in order to become in tune with the student and food communities. Although it's a coop, being a member doesn't necessarily make you a part of the community, but volunteering and now working at the Spoon has given her a sense of belonging and being a part of something larger. She brought with her a solid understanding of eating seasonally, because growing up in Africa necessitated this lifestyle.

Darlene is a member of the coop, and lives on campus in the Trent Global Living Community residence in Champlain College. She's in her second year, but transferred from another school. She has the smallest meal plan through Aramark, but especially at this time of year, wishes she could use her excess of flex dollars at the Spoon.

Josephine, a member of the University administration does not eat on campus very often, but prefers to make her own food and bring it from home. When lunch time rolls around, she is looking for solitude, not company, so probably would not think to come to the Spoon as it is fairly crowded during that hour. However, when she has lunchtime meetings, Josephine prefers the Café for the type of food options that are provided. She self-describes as a vegetarian and notes that she has been consistently satisfied with the food quality.

Jessica is a member of the coop and likes the setup of the Spoon because it allows you to chat with people you do not know. She puts a strong emphasis on the social aspect of eating, and likes how the

Spoon “subtly promotes this” through the way the tables are arranged: “It feels nice and warm, like you're at home in a kitchen.” There is a stereo in the kitchen area, and she enjoys the sound of music playing in the background. Jessica also identified the space as a “great place to network socially, as well as around food issues.” She appreciates that the artwork on the wall aids in the promotion of a communal atmosphere, which is aesthetically pleasing to look at while eating. Commenting on the staff, she contended that she was welcomed “as a friend”, and that she finds it nice to be able to chat about the food with the people who are directly involved in its preparation. Her appreciation for the Café has grown steadily since coming for the first time as a transfer student. Jessica also critiqued the popular construction of the Spoon as the site of ‘hippy’ culture and said “people need to just come once to realize that it’s cool, and not nearly as intimidating as it may seem.” Indeed, the method of production at the Spoon is much less 'radical' than the methods under which Alice Waters and her colleagues “foraged” their produce. Fresh ingredients were gathered from streams, roadsides, woods and friends gardens. (2003: 329)

Marcus says he met people the first time he went to the Café and found everyone to be friendly. He contends that his decision to become a member was motivated by the supposition that he would dine there regularly, and also thought that it was a “good cause.” The notion of membership seems to have played a symbolic role, as Marcus cites that he felt becoming a member would help him to make a commitment that, if he failed to follow through with, would lead to a feeling of a lack of integrity. He also noted how he feels like you are considered to be “automatically cool” if you are associated with someone who has a social network connected to the Café. Knowing this, Marcus goes to the Café assuming that he will often know someone there, although he admits that his awareness of the problems in the food industry have contributed to his more regular attendance. Originally he would not have gone to the Café alone, but “now its like, I don't care. I go alone and it's fine with me.” He does feel that there is a level of exclusiveness at the Spoon. He suggested that this exclusivity is rooted in a

sense of hierarchy where one must feel ‘worthy’ of going. Since becoming more aware of issues surrounding the food industry, he enjoys a relatively higher level of comfort in the Café. The correlation between political motivations for selecting the Spoon over other options is illustrated in Marcus’s commentary on the location of the Spoon. He concluded by saying that “because it is out of the way, most people going [there] have a specific purpose, besides eating out of necessity or for fueling up.”

Kat lived in residence in her first year, and initially held a degree of fear related to going to the Spoon. Her knowledge of the Café came out of hearing about it through an International Development Studies class. In connecting the mandates of the Spoon to the overarching themes and content of the course, she began to feel that the Café reflected her interests and represented an organization that she wanted to support. To overcome her trepidation, Kat visited the Café alongside a classmate where she was immediately captivated by the big tables and how they seem to foster a sense of community. She also commented that while the spatial organization “saves space and allows more people to fit,” she perceives the benefits of incorporating some smaller tables into the floor plan. Kat eventually gained employment in the position of Café Manager. Through this experience she developed a feeling that the cooperative could be doing more to engage its membership:

It would be exciting to use the alternative coop system to allow people to have a say to make the Spoon more accessible. It would be nice to have the cooks meet with members to have menu discussions, while keeping a strong emphasis on what is available locally at that time. If people have more of a sense of ownership, they will take more responsibility.

Kat connected the process of taking more responsibility with the childhood experience of setting the table. Here she recalled her mother requesting that she makes the table look nice, instead of just simply commanding that she, “please put out the plates.” This, she said, gave her a more vested interest in carrying through the tasks expected of her.

In her interview, Kat also noted how she is impressed by the extent of staff involvement, whom she says have regularly volunteered for supplementary projects. She feels that the staff “goes above and beyond” anything she has witnessed in her experiences working at other Cafés. Kat concluded by saying that the Spoon should build on the advantages that already exist compared to other businesses.

Serena heard about the Spoon when it first opened from a friend that was involved during the organization’s formation. In her initial visit, she thought of the Café as a place where she would be comfortable, and where there would be like-minded people. Serena notes that since then, her comfort level has continued to rise. As she commented, “I now feel like I’m coming home.” In addition, she believes that the social and environmental connections that the Spoon upholds are incredibly important in her attraction to the space.

Competition & Opposition

Serena says that she does not eat at other places on campus, but notes the presence of her friends eating at these venues and sees the food to be excessively expensive. Notwithstanding price, she suggested that a possible allure of Aramark relates to the consistency of their products line, something that she said appeals to the majority of people. George Ritzer in his article about Slow Food versus Fast food, explains that this need for consistency has been built out of McDonaldization which emphasizes efficiency over quality. This is the standard by which Americans judge alternatives. He also notes the problematic Slow Food Movement, which mostly attracts members of upper classes who can afford higher prices for better quality food. (2001: 21) Speaking politically, Serena spoke of her concern over the appropriation of the health food movement, and described an interesting experience in a 100 Mile Market in her hometown. The 100 Mile Market relates to the recent movement in food politics that emphasizes the importance of eating locally sourced goods over foods that travel long distances. In this

case, the owners of the market were in the bio-technology industry of pharmaceuticals, but decided to buy farmland and raise meat, in addition to their ownership of a market store. One week Serena noticed a significant increase in prices as asked about the owners for explanation, to which she was informed that the inflated prices were due to shipping costs. She didn't understand how the prices could have increased so drastically when it seemed that they were ordering in larger quantities. She also noticed that they were buying produce from local farmers and then selling them at “ridiculous prices.” She felt like they were “really deep in the capitalistic system”, and felt uneasy with the way they would express the importance of community without acting in accordance with those principles. In light of this, she now prefers to buy directly from the farmers at her local farmer's market.

Although he doesn't frequent the Spoon, Frederick believes that, when eating there, you are receiving better value to the dollar: “For your money you're going to get way more than you would at Aramark... They're using pre-shredded freezer-packed bagged lettuce.” He feels that the food system is a very important current issue, and will be for the next 50 years. At one point in the interview he pointed to a commonly held view that sees flaws in the food system as one related to lack of supply, and critiqued this through his insistence that the problems relates to poor and unequal mechanisms through which food is distributed. Relating this to the capitalism, he notes how a more accurate understanding of the flaws inherent in the food system are “skewed based by the capitalist values upheld by our society.”

Corinne feels that the history of the Spoon and the café itself should be promoted more but, at the same time, recognizes the constraints that are placed on the Café due to the stipulations of their contractual agreement with Aramark, which is negotiated by University administration on behalf of the Café. However, she feels that if students knew how hard it was to get the Spoon started, and if they had to fight to keep the space alive, they might be more attracted to it. She noted how histories could generate based on “word of mouth” and that “there is nothing in the space dedicated to honouring the history” of

the Café. She says that in the absence of this record of history potential customers may be inclined to diminish the special character of the Spoon in comparison to other restaurants: “Unless you happen to hear about it, you might just see it as another Café, without even recognizing that it serves local, organic food.” Corinne admits that she occasionally buys candy from Aramark, but normally avoids spending money there particularly for reason that she relies on debit transactions that, through Aramark’s system, levy a \$0.50 fee per transaction. Despite the option for students to put money on their student cards to avoid the fees of debit transactions, she avoided this also because she feels it promotes, through convenience, an impulse to spend money there.

Corinne also conveyed how the utilization or occupation of space plays an important role in creating identity and community. “If your friends hang out in other places, you will too, and this becomes your identity.” She goes on to explain that when first year students eat at Aramark because of their meal plan, and develop a group of friends who all eat together, this soon becomes part of their identity. Aramark recognizes the importance of brand identity, and has managed to negotiate a mandatory meal plan for all first year students because of that very reason.

Diana lives downtown and makes most of her food, but when she does eat on campus, it is at the Spoon. She makes a point of not spending money on Aramark food.

Paul was the first person I have ever met who said he was satisfied with Aramark, and he said that he eats on campus a lot. He doesn't eat at the Spoon, as there are other options on campus, although he admits that he does not usually think about health when choosing his food. He sometimes goes on health kicks, but they usually only last 2-3 days during which time he will eat vegetables. Otherwise he tends to eat a lot of meat, which he cited as another reason against for not eating at the Spoon. I eventually asked why he agreed to participate in an interview about the Spoon, particularly if health food was not on his radar, and he explained that he was “bored with life”, so he thought it would be

nice to try something new.

Before Marcus came to the Spoon, he dined predominately at the Otonabee College Cafeteria for reasons of convenience. “They were always fast,” he said, adding that most of his classes were on the East Bank during that period as well. In his interview, Marcus reflected on other healthy, alternative vegan or vegetarian restaurants he has been to, and how the selection of options is often displayed to customers. “You see it there, and you're like, wow, it's delicious! It would be nice to *see* more food at the Spoon. The wraps are good, but that's all there is, and that's very wheat-heavy and not very appealing to the eye.”

Jessica thinks that in comparison with the Spoon, Aramark is ridiculously expensive. She tries to eat organic food as much as possible, but that is constrained by budgetary limitations. She often spends a portion of food budget at JoAnne's², purchasing nuts and cereal there, but goes to Price Choppers, a mainstream supermarket, because of its convenience, proximity to the downtown core, and the relatively cheap price for daily staples.

Thomas recalled that he ate at place on campus other than the Spoon only once, but that he will never do it again because the level of quality dissatisfied him. “They used dehydrated onion flakes and served a 'gross' bagel.” He tries to avoid processed foods, and likes to take the time in order to cook from scratch, but finds it difficult being a student and having little time and even less money to allow for these choices. He notes that he is not opposed to eating meat, but prefers vegetarian cuisine, partly because of health, and partly because of economic and ethical reasons. However, for Thomas the thought of processed soy does not represent a sound alternative. He feels that a growing allergy to soy and products containing soy derivatives are related to the high level of processing in the food system.

2 Local health food store which offers a wide selection of organic products

Becca was raised by Chinese parents in the suburbs of Toronto. The location of her family's home forced them to drive long distances to get their groceries which were then often from large chains in addition to stores retailing 'ethnic goods.' "There wasn't a lot of choice close by, and everything around was very corporate." She contends that this lack of choice has affected her eating patterns, as she generally does not think about food issues such as fair trade, organic, and local consumption. She assumes that in dining out restaurants do not generally consider these issues either. Becca also noted that her shyness towards expressing facets of her Chinese cultural upbringing led to a tendency to eat sandwiches for school lunches, although was sometimes given thermos lunches, which lead to embarrassment and social alienation. As a result of this, she and her sister would request more Western food ideas. This has changed as she has begun to develop greater appreciation for Chinese food, and is slowly learning to cook traditional dishes from her mother when she goes home to visit. In first year she lived on campus and had a board meal plan, which allowed you to "eat all you wanted" and which provided some degree of choice. By the spring, however, she began to feel the affects of the processed foods on her body, complaining that she felt "really sluggish and heavy." She also dislikes how the meal plan discourages students from eating downtown at some of Peterborough's many restaurants. Becca also found the designated 18 meals per week provided by Aramark, as well as the corporations flex dollar system, to entail an excessive level of economic and food waste. Through her observations of this system, she noticed that leftover food was often reused later in the week, reconstituted as ingredients in other dishes. "You would recognize food from other days. Leftover meat became meatloaf or was used in a stirfry, spaghetti became chow mein." While noting that this was a means to eliminate food waste, she said that the regular reuse of food led to a feeling of dissatisfaction with food quality herself and amongst her friends. In her second year, she lived alone and notes that her inexperience grocery shopping and meal planning contributed to a decline in her health. After some tips from her father, she eventually developed a greater appreciation for cooking and has become a lot more

comfortable in the kitchen.

Marshal lived in residence in his first year, so didn't get into the habit of eating at the Spoon. "You have a meal card, so there's no point. Your food is 'free.'" Now if he eats on campus, it is Aramark food at a Cafeteria or campus pub.

Miguel lived in residence in first year, and had a meal plan and no money. He quickly tired of his meal plan and thought Aramark was the "worst ever." His exposure to approaches of critical thinking in his classes led to an application of this thought to the food habits. He feels that the Spoon provides an alternative to the corporate system presented by Aramark, and that the Spoon provides a means to resist this dominance. Miguel recommends increasing the Spoons public exposure as a method of promotion: "If more people knew [what the Spoon represented] they would like to eat here."

Maggie recognizes as the Spoon as being a necessary space that is separate from Aramark.

Sophia would really like to see the Spoon take over the provisions of food services at Trent, although realizes that this goal is currently unrealistic. She finds Aramark to be repugnant, and believes that people would be really supportive of giving the Spoon more power, as she does know of anyone who is particularly attached to the corporation for reason of quality or brand loyalty. She thinks the Spoon should make a bid on the food services when Aramark's contract expires, although recognizes the implications of such an immense undertaking.

Space & Location

Maggie believes that the Spoon is a great space, and a great concept. "There's always good music and good food. It's a shame that a lot of people feel intimidated by what it stands for." She later remarked

her perception of Trent as divided or segregated on the basis of ideology and remarked on the supposed differences between the 'left' and more 'conservative-minded' individuals and groups. There is a perception that "all the hippies go there" she said in reference to the Café.

Although the space is often crowded during peak hours, Maggie sees the Café as a good place to socialize or even to study. Moreover, she says that she likes the Spoon's location because "we get to look down at all those people [in the Great Hall] eating gross [Aramark] food." In contrast, she notes that the location can be a disadvantage for those who have not yet visited, and thus do not know what to expect. "They don't know what they're missing", she said in closing.

Miguel picks up on the reoccurring theme that there is a stigma surrounding the idea of the Spoon, and feels the Café "does a terrible job of dealing with the problem." According to his view, only those who hold a specific rationale for seeking out the space will bother making the extra effort to eat there. He in turn suggests that the Spoon would benefit by giving out samples around campus in order to demonstrate the quality of the food, even though it may, at times, resemble "hippy food." At this juncture, he recalled the annual All Day Breakfast festivity, and recommends holding similar events more frequently while building and branching out from the same group of regulars as to bring in "people with differing views about what this place is."

Annie, the current coordinator of the Spoon, echoes the statements of many others as she remembers her own feelings of intimidations experienced during her first visit. She did, however, feel an immediate sense of appreciation for the space and developed a desire to be a part of it the initiative as she discovered that it was representative of many of her beliefs. During her interview, Annie expressed the importance of proper, simple signage for letting people know where and what the Spoon is, as it does exist in a rather remote, tucked away part of the university.

Marshal, who had never been to the Spoon, found the location (up on the second floor above the Great Hall) intimidating because of the open windows. “So you're eating, and it looks like they're standing up there, looking down on you and judging you, saying 'You should be eating good food.' This is the image I get whenever I see them.” For him, the atmosphere is one of the most important factors when deciding where to eat, along with the price and taste, and the distance from his house, as he does not have access to transportation. The atmosphere of the Spoon “doesn't seem very inviting. It seems kind of like an exclusive club because of the location. You go up a creepy staircase up to a room where you can look down on other people.” He finds the idea of a cooperative with a membership structure “snooty.”

Thomas recognized the sentiments of people like Marshal and if he could change anything about the Spoon, he would change the location. If it were more visible, maybe it would feel less “clubby.”

Becca found the Spoon kind of hard to find, but once you come up the stairs “there's no other way to go.”

Andrea is not a member, and rarely eats at the Spoon. On the occasions that she does eat there, she finds atmosphere pleasantly crowded. From a sustainability perspective, she likes the use cloth napkins, which reduces the amount of waste that is produced. She also noted that the Spoon is not part of her daily route, and is thus “easy to forget about.” Since she also suffers from severe arthritis, the location of the Spoon remains largely inaccessible for her and says that the long walk from the East Bank, followed by the stairs is “too much to do every day.” However, Andrea notes that if the Café operated on the East side of the river she would eat there more regularly, as it is her favorite food choice on campus. At the same time, her busy schedule prohibits makes dining at the Spoon an excursion that she

often does not have time for anyway. She recommended a delivery cart or express station as a way to rectify many of the identified problems. She also lauded the possibility of the Spoon conducting business throughout the summer: “Being open and running a service such as this in the summer would be great- years ago you couldn't even get a coffee on campus during the summer.”

Josephine finds the space crowded, but on the other hand contends that this is what keeps people coming back. “The setup has improved significantly, but aspects such as the furniture still feel rather ad hoc at times.” Still, she thinks that this is the kind of niche that gives the Spoon character. Furthermore, as Josephine looks for a space to dine, atmosphere is of the utmost importance. She is looking for a place that is accessible to a wide range of needs, and appreciates windows that can open, no carpets, and no scents such as air fresheners and noted that it is important for restaurants to have proper ventilation in the kitchen to limit the odors of cooking and smokiness. She is also looking for a restaurant that can provide an environmentally friendly takeout system, “so even if their space isn't accessible at least their food is.”

When questioned over the possibility for expansion, a member of Trent’s administration commented that “the university is as supportive as space allows,” but hesitated at the idea of expansion before the Spoon is financially stable. If a space could be identified, the university would negotiate with Aramark on behalf of the Spoon,³ but would encourage the Spoon to conduct a traffic assessment before making any plans of expansion. In hearing from students with varying perspectives, some have expressed frustration at the Spoon's levy fee and use of student space. However, even those who express frustrations still seem to recognize the value of the environment that the Spoon fosters and would not want it to disappear completely.

³ Currently the university negotiates with Aramark who holds a monopoly over food service at Trent when any changes to food service are proposed.

Jessica has heard people talking about the intimidating “hippy culture,” but when people come to eat the good food they recognize the quality. The location is great, but she wishes the patio could be opened on nice days,⁴ which would also provide a space for growing herbs.

Darlene made the important note that the space is not accessible.

Mary has not been to the Spoon and was not sure why when she thought about it. She did, however, make reference to the location as inhibiting: “You have to go upstairs to get to it,” adding that it is secluded. She also does not find herself in Champlain College very often, but remarked that she would likely go if it were more conveniently located. When she does eat on campus, she does not often sit down. She suggests that she might be enticed to go to the Spoon if they offered a ‘to go’ option, noting, “when you're busy it's nice to be able to eat as you walk away.” Because of McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2001) people have come to expect food to be fast, and eating has become something we don't make time for, but instead something we do on the run.

Marcus thought about spaces at Trent and has noticed that some people come to the Spoon to sit down and study, but felt that among those students, many had a particular ‘look.’ They seemed more relaxed and laid back, were more studious, and had more intellectual conversations than those he has witnessed in some of the other university spaces. “The majority of the students who eat here seem to be really involved in their studies and global issues,” he said. He joked about bringing in the typical ‘business student’ and what would happen- if they would feel comfortable, and if the staff would feel as comfortable with this.

⁴ The balcony which runs along one side of the Café and looks out over the river does not meet height requirements, and so can not be used.

Jackson thinks the Spoon is a “cute little space.” It could be a little tidier or better organized for times when guest speakers come to do events in the Spoon. “It’s great that it is student run, and that students feel comfortable playing music in one corner while the Café is playing music in the kitchen at the other end of the Café.” However, when it comes to more but for more formal events, he does not always think to bring colleagues for lunch engagements precisely because of the laid back atmosphere. “There is something that doesn’t draw certain middle-aged professor or middle class students who for them the Spoon feels a little too hip, making it somewhat uncomfortable.” More mainstream students probably wouldn’t feel comfortable either, because “although the guitar playing amuses me, some people aren’t used to that laid back atmosphere.” While he spoke against conforming to the style offered in mainstream settings, he did think that this should be considered as a possible factor as to why certain groups are not coming. “Some people don’t take the Spoon seriously. It would be really good if the Spoon could do catering in other locations because it becomes difficult to organize events when they have to be restricted to the Café’s physical space.” He, along with others, expressed a hope that the Café could make use of the Senior Common Room⁵ next year.

A few people mentioned that they came out of solidarity, and not necessarily for the food, as the soup and salad can occasionally get boring.

Alexander thought that since the space is limited by capacity, it would be beneficial to rearrange the seating. It would also be nice to have tables by the windows overlooking the Great Hall.

5 The Senior Common Room, located in Champlain College, is currently closed to undergraduate students and remains locked and underutilized even by those that have access.

Food Issues

It appears that Hartman must have been right when he suggests that the “repercussions of the counter culture's challenge to the food industry may still be unfolding.” (2003: 30) Miguel thinks that people should be more aware of the affects of global trade through NAFTA on the environment. He feels it would be beneficial for the Spoon to hold a Teach In along these lines. Eating locally and organically encompasses issues of fair (or at least fairer) wages as well as environmentalism, so he fully supports the Spoon and the work they do at Trent, Miguel does admit that while he normally loves the food, “17% of the time it's no good. Flavours sometimes don't work out due to experimentations.” He also commented about the excellent accessibility of organic food, saying, “there is a myth that local organic food is inaccessible to poor students, but if that's true, it's not evident at the Spoon.”

Maggie also agreed that although the food is usually awesome, other times she finds it doesn't have enough flavour. She has noticed that everyone adds salt automatically when they sit down to a meal at the Spoon. She doesn't consider herself very “into” food issues, but does try to buy locally. “People are ignorant to what they're eating and the nutritional value of that food.” However, she feels that those who appreciate the Spoon really do. “If you're ignorant to what you're eating, that's your loss. There is love in the food, because the staff have an investment in it.” The immense care that employees of the Spoon show is reminiscent of Alice Waters “The Farm Restaurant Connection” which describes the environment out of which her restaurant Chez Panisse grew. Like the Spoon, Waters and her friends recognized that restaurants are communities which require a concerted effort toward building a strong relationship amongst all members in order to nurture the healthiest, most delicious possibilities. (2003: 329) The Spoon tries to build cyclical relationships between producers (farmers) and consumers, or co-producers, as Carlo Petrini, founder of the Slow Food Movement in 1989 prefers to call them. (Kummer 2002: 25) Like the Spoon, founders of Chez Panisse understood that the restaurant's success

was “dependent on the health of the planet, and recognized that “the search for good ingredients is pointless without a healthy agriculture and a healthy environment. (Waters 2003: 328) This is the main difference between Aramark and Spoon. The connection to the food means that staff have a responsibility to ensure the most delicious product because they know how good it can and should be. When responsible for producing for a specific purpose, farmers too have a sense of responsibility to the health of the community and the land, creating a web of interdependent communities. (Waters 2003: 334) Food from Aramark is practically impossible to trace, as it is shipped in, already prepared and in packaging, and although cooks of Aramark undoubtedly care about the quality of their product, without the connection, a strand of that web is missing.

Becca remembers that she originally tried to be a vegetarian in Grade 12 but didn't know how to cook. Through volunteering at the Spoon she has learned some vegetarian cooking tips, and through a workshop held at the Spoon has also learned how to sprout seeds. Through her two years of living away from her family she has recognized the importance of knowing how to eat properly and now she even cares about the quality of the vegetables she buys, favouring seasonal, fresh ones over frozen ones. Focusing on local produce through the winter months has forced her to experiment with new recipes, and she has learned how to use some of these ingredients through cooking at the Spoon. “I cook a lot now and really enjoy it.” She also feels there should be a big emphasis on education, because “the more people learn about food issues, the more they start to question the way things are, and the way we are growing our food.” (Belasco? Questioning food)

From what he can remember, Thomas has only had one bad meal- a bland soup. The problem with this inconsistency is that our food choices are so infinite with a global market and under NAFTA, that if you have something you don't like, you probably won't come back to have it again. If someone comes in for their first time on a day when the wraps aren't as good as they usually are, they may be

influenced by this, and may never come back. Like Becca, he too has had to build his confidence in cooking during his first year away from home. Being a student, he doesn't have a lot of money, and also doesn't want to go back to eating processed foods like when he was younger and pickier, so he tries to make most of his food from scratch, which is both cheaper and healthier, although it is much more time consuming. members of upper classes who can afford higher prices for better quality food.

George Ritzer wrote about the power of fast food advertisements over young Americans and how they “hook” them at a very early age on fast food and it's simple salty-sweet foods.” (2001: 19)

Andrea thinks the Spoon serves excellent food however since she is unable to access the Spoon on a regular basis due to her arthritis as mentioned above, she ends up eating salads from the Aramark Cafeterias, which she is pretty happy about, as there is a good selection, and they are light and nutritious, and not full of fat. Her preference of food is more along the lines of the Spoon, especially because she does mostly simple cooking, and so she appreciates having good food. She also really appreciates that the Spoon doesn't use takeout containers, and when she eats at the Cafeterias she brings her own plate and cutlery.

An interesting theme that arose in multiple interviews was the theme of students changing their parents eating habits. Jessica was raised in a rural Prairie setting, and ate “typical Prairie meals” of meat and a simple vegetable. She became a vegetarian when she was a teenager, and had to start experimenting with cooking and figuring out how to get the protein she needed. The town she grew up in didn't have markets, so growing up unfortunately all her vegetables came from the grocery store. She was thankful that her mom has really made an effort to learn how to cook for her, and has become much more open about trying whatever “weird new concoction” Jessica came up with. Kat doesn't remember conversations about food security when she was growing up, but has been finding that her parents are much more aware now, and interested in learning more. Kat remembers taking the “Agrarian Change

and the Global Politics of Food” class and talking with her mom about it. Although her mom still primarily goes to the grocery store, when Kat is home they will go to the organic Farmer's Market together. Alexander, although he grew up eating home-cooked food which was fairly local, such as potatoes, flour, meat and eggs, has definitely noticed a shift in his parents attitude in more recent years toward limiting imported foods.

Darlene lives on campus, and finds the board meal plan satisfactory, since there are meat and vegetarian options each day. She describes herself as “surviving” this year with her meal choices. She does believe that it is “always important to have an alternative place [to eat] on campus,” so is thankful for the Spoon when she is looking for a change from her daily choices in the cafeterias.

Rumors circulating about the Spoon, even amongst those who have never been there is that they try the best they can to be sustainable by offering local products, and as much organic as possible, and also that they serve, “a lot of vegetarian things.”

Lots of people would like to see a few more options, although there exist at least two dominant views as to how this should take form. While some feel that even compromising the mandate's values about locality would be an okay thing to allow for more diversity, others maintain that it is important to maintain locality as an important consideration, even if it means having a reduced selection in the colder months, based on our geography.

Most people who eat at the Spoon seem to be aware of eating healthily, and try to be conscious of what they are putting in their bodies. Frederick, although he doesn't eat at the Spoon regularly, really “loves the vegan stuff.” He likes to eat healthily, especially after his dad was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, which is hereditary.

Marcus feels that food issues are one of the foremost topics at Trent and in wider circles these days, as people recognize how industrial food is very unhealthy for us. He didn't like "healthy" food when he was a kid, but now really enjoys it. He likes vegetarian food, especially since becoming aware of meat issues in a documentary he saw in his "Food Production and Moral Economy" course, such as the ethical treatment of workers and animals. He finds that vegetarian food is hard to make and hard to come by. Also, visual appearances of food can be deceiving. The flavour of organic foods is way better, despite the sometimes-imperfect look to it. Non-organic produce tastes like water.

He thinks people should be thinking more critically about food prices. Many people mentioned that the cost of food was one of the first things they thought about when they purchased their food or went to a restaurant. Our whole food system is structured around being cheap and convenient, and Marcus thinks we need to change our ways. He wasn't aware that the Spoon pays its workers "fair" wages, but thinks that this is definitely a good thing. We need to get rid of the notion of cheap food being a good thing.

Food production should be transparent and accountable. However because the food system is structured the way it is, the fact remains that not everyone is able to afford to shop in an organic market, and buy nutritious food. The alternative is much cheaper. Corinne doesn't think the costs of non-local food are hitting our pockets, because if they were, organic, local food would cost less instead of more.

Agrichemicals were introduced to produce higher yields during a time in the 50s and early 60s when people completely trusted in science and technology, completely changing the agricultural system, and making non-organic produce much cheaper. (Belasco 2007) People would have to turn to alternatives if they couldn't buy cheap food from all over the world, in the grocery store. But, she despaired, "people are so short-sighted, in terms of what they support and why." Corrine has also changed her eating habits after having seeing a documentary called "Addicted to Plastic." She tries to eat mainly a vegetarian diet, avoiding canned meats because of the chemicals in the plastic lining of the tin. She is glad that there are lots of people talking about eating locally, these days, but gets frustrated when they

still complain when there's a lack of variety. If people were to really want to eat locally, they have to understand that, "yeah, you're gonna eat a lot of fuckin' carrots in the winter!"

Many of the students I spoke with had attended the International Development Studies conference this past winter on Food Sovereignty, and found the speakers and conversations to have really challenged them, and made them think much more deeply about the foods we are consuming each day. Many people recognize that food issues are becoming increasingly important. Once we start to question the process behind the food that sustains us, "we are not likely to be so easily appeased." (Belasco 2007: 230) Frederick feels the importance of local food in the economic sense that our money should be spent locally so that it's going back into our own communities. Serena is studying International Development Studies and Environmental Resource Studies, with an emphasis in Food and Agriculture. These programs are becoming more important to students as they recognize the failings of the current food system. Trends such as the 100 Mile Diet are increasingly being talked about, as people consider the social and environmental connections of our food. (however eating local organic produce is not a new phenomenon. People have been talking about and acting upon these issues since the 60s and 70s when communal living in Canada and the United States became popular. Ideas which emerged then seem to be resurfacing with the more recent food crisis, but even in the 60s, many thought collapse of civilization was imminent and living off the land was "necessary for survival." (Hartman 2003: 29) Waters also reminds us that "until 1940 most produce was... organic... and fresh, seasonal and local... There's nothing radical about organic produce: it's a return to traditional values of the most fundamental kind." (Waters 2003: 330) During the 1970s there was a clash between the organic movement and the food industry, but as food marketers recognized that health-conscious consumers were mostly from affluent neighbourhoods, the food industry had to cater to them. Belasco 2007: 227) Out of this grew a new type of mega 'organic' farms which directed profits and control to large companies who bought out all of the smaller ones. This trend has been growing steadily to the point that at the time of his research,

Pollan stated that “five giant farms control ½ of the \$400 million organic produce market in California.” (2003: 164) “A corporate organic farmer suggested to a family farmer struggling to survive in the competitive world of industrial agriculture that he 'should try to develop a niche to distinguish yourself in the market,' to which he replied, 'I believe I developed that niche 20 years ago. It's called 'organic.' And now you're sitting on it.” (Pollan 2003: 165)

Serena notes that the failings of other alternative restaurants, such as Grassroots a vegan coop restaurant which used to run in Peterborough, has to do with consistency. When you go to Aramark, you know what you're going to get, whereas at the Spoon your coffee will sometimes be stronger one day than the next. She says, “I like the inconsistency [of the Spoon] but if want to stay alive, you have to appeal to a wider audience” who is used to predictability.

Similarities arose within the more popular Peterborough restaurants among the people that I interviewed. The most popular choices, which could be considered for their alternative cuisines, and which could help the Spoon to expand its selection based on their menus were; Island Crème, Hot Belly Mamas, Night Kitchen, Karmas, & the Planet Bakery.

Most people have heard about the Spoon through word of mouth, with the majority being introduced to it by a friend or staff member who works at the Spoon. A few remember when it first started, if they had a connection to someone who was involved in its founding. Some have heard about it through their classes (in particular International Development Studies), and some were informed about it during Introductory Seminar Week. A few mentioned seeing it in the Arthur⁶, on the Trent website, or on a restaurant rating website.

6 Trent University's student newspaper

Spoon has done lots with few resources, and with a fair amount of opposition from the Aramark Corporation whose monopoly over the food system at Trent has proven to provide great challenges in the Spoon's scope of practice.

Lack of accessibility to fulfill mandate. Out of this would come solutions to some of the other problems.

Education has also brought into a wide range of people. Not only impacts students' health and thinking, but has a ripple affect to their parents and family members.

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2008 A Little History. Electronic document, <http://www.trentu.ca/seasonedspoon>. Accessed April 20, 2009.

Waters, Alice

2003 The Farm-Restaurant Connection. *In A Slice of Life: Contemporary Writers on Food*, Bonnie Murranna, ed. Pp. 328-336. Woodstock: Overlook.

Wilson, Liz

Pass the Tofu Please. *In Culinary Tourism*. Lucy M. Long, ed. Pp. 245-267. University Press of Kentucky.

Recommended Reading

Belasco, Warren

2006 Meals to Come

Brown, Ed

1970 The Tassajara Bread Book

Lappé, Frances Moore

1971 Diet for a Small Planet

The True Light Beavers

1972 Feast: A Tribal Cookbook

Thomas, Anna

1972 The Vegetarian Epicure

Interview Questions

Have you heard about the Seasoned Spoon Cafe?

| | |
|---|--|
| Yes | No |
| Where did you hear about it? | Do you eat on campus? Are you satisfied? |
| Have you eaten at the Spoon? | Would you like to know a bit about the Seasoned Spoon Cafe? - give brochure to read, or explanation |
| Perceptions? Did you like it? How did you feel? | Does this interest you? What is the most intriguing aspect? Do you think their mandate addresses important issues? |
| What did you have/ do you usually have? | Do you support the coop model? |
| Do you like the food? | Can you think of ways to make the space more accessible to a wider range of people? |
| Are you a member of the co-op? | There has been an indication that students/faculty would like to see the Spoon to expand their services. What role can the university play in supporting this process? |
| Was there anything you didn't like? a) food? b) atmosphere? | |
| Do you think prices are reasonable? | |

Did you live on campus in first year?

Please tell me a bit about your background/ current eating habits:

- family
- food eaten while growing up
- where have you lived? (How has geography influenced your food choices?)
- What kind of food do you eat now?
- Do you cook?
- Do you have any food necessities/restrictions/preferences (allergies, vegetarian, etc.)
- Favourite restaurants
- field of study/ profession/ way you spend your days
- issue you are passionate about

Are the following issues important to you, and if so, in what order?

_ price of food _ taste of food _ localness of food _ organic _ fair trade products _ fair wages
_accommodating of dietary needs _ atmosphere _ selection

Why did you decide/agree to do this interview?

Seasoned Spoon Ethnography Consent Form

PART A:

I would like to interview you as part of an ethnography of the Trent community which will be conducted as it pertains to the Seasoned Spoon customer base (those who come and those who do not). This will mean conducting ethnographic research which will be both analytical and provide the basis for establishing future promotion tactics. (Applied anthropology to determine what barriers people have in connecting themselves with the Seasoned Spoon, to ensure promotion can be done to address such concerns).

A fully detailed report on the findings will be presented to the Seasoned Spoon Café at the end of the research period. It is important that the report is highly comprehensible as people from all backgrounds and ties to the organization could potentially read it. All participants will be kept anonymous aside from those who are public figures, such as the head of the Seasoned Spoon Café.

Field research is part of the requirements for ANTH 491H with Professor Anne Meneley, who can be reached at extension 7329 or ameneley@trentu.ca. Researcher: Hanah McFarlane, student, board member, Seasoned Spoon Café. Hanah McFarlane can be reached at 760-0886 or hanahmcfarlane@trentu.ca to answer any questions.

PART B:

I have read the above description of the research in which I have been asked to participate and understand the possible risks and benefits involved. I have also been told that I may withdraw from this project at any time. I further agree that information I provide may be cited anonymously (or, in a way that I won't be identified as an individual) in the researcher's essay or other class work. I voluntarily agree to participate in this project.

PART C:

Signature: _____

Name (Please print): _____

Date: _____