Food&Brand Lab

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CORNELL UNIVERSITY

# *Are All Comfort Foods Created Equal?*

## Background

Are all comfort food bad for you? No way.

Research shows comfort foods can consist of both snack-related foods and meal-related foods. In addition, preferences for these comfort foods vary across age and gender.

Females tend to prefer snack-related comfort foods. Men strongly prefer more meal-related comfort foods. In particular, women are more likely to prefer foods like, candy and chocolates, while men prefer items such as; pizza, pasta, steak, or casseroles.

Not only were preferences different but also how they felt about their comfort food choices differed. There appears to be an association between meal-related comfort foods and healthy feelings. Women tend to feel less healthy and guiltier than men about their comfort food choices.

Comfort food preference also differs with age. Younger adults appear to like more snack- related comfort foods like candy and chips. Older adults prefer more meal related foods like pasta, steak or casseroles.

Knowing how eating habits develop can help to implement change in dieting and food consumption habits. Comfort foods can include reasonably nutrient dense foods that have additional health-related benefits other than solely their taste.

### Key Teaching Point

- Women prefer more snack related comfort foods and men prefer more meal related comfort foods.
- Women feel less healthy and guiltier about their comfort food preference.
- The older you are the more you prefer meal related comfort foods

## Student Demonstration

Before reviewing the background information provided, ask the students to take out a piece of paper. Ask them to answer the following questions:

*What is your favorite comfort food?*

*What do you think your mom's favorite comfort food is?*

*What do you think your dad's favorite comfort food is?*

On the blackboard have two columns labeled: Male and Female. Ask the students to share their answers with the class. Keep a list on the board of their answers. As the students answer, a pattern should develop. Ask the students to brainstorm why there are possible differences among these groups.

Now share the background information provided and discuss how this relates to your class findings. According to the research, the students' preferences should be more snack related items than their parents' preferences. However, females' comfort food preferences should have more snack related items than males'.

Ask the students to brainstorm possible implications from these findings and how we can use them to improve health.

Wansink, Brian, Matthew Cheney, and Nina Chan (2003),"Exploring Comfort Food Preferences Across Age and Gender," Physiology and Behavior, 79:4-5, 739-747

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