

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL IDENTITY IN ORGANIC FOOD PURCHASING

By

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To my parents Carlos and Rosario

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Despite extensive research on the topic of organic food consumption, there is very little information on social behaviors exhibited by people who prefer these products and their potential harmful effects on society. Distrust of the legitimacy of established institutions and elitism may have a significant influence on the purchase of organic foods. Consumers purchasing habits are often influenced by a desire to achieve goals that go beyond the practical use of the particular product in question. Thus, people's primary motivation to buy organic products is sometimes influenced more by private social benefits obtained from their purchase and consumption than by personal normative concerns (e.g. health). This study investigated and evaluated the social dynamics that influence consumers to purchase organic products. Three different social theories were used to determine if (1) rational choice, (2) distrust or (3) elitism are behaviors exhibited by organic food purchasers. This study was conducted in Florida in summer 2009 and assessed whether consistent consumption of organic food is (1) a rational choice, (2) an indicator of distrust and rejection of the legitimacy of the U.S. food system or (3) an indicator of social (group) identity.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **The Rise of Organic Food**

According to recent world figures, there are approximately 623,000 farms (31.5 million hectares) managed organically worldwide (Willer, Yussefi, & Sorensen, 2008). The sale of organic products has reached about US\$28 billion in recent years (*IFOAM* 2008). Numerous studies about the socioeconomic characteristics of organic consumers show that they generally have a college education, live in a city and are predominantly women between the ages of 18- 40 (Zhao, Chambers, Matta, Loughin, & Carey, 2007); (Onyago, B., Hallman, W.K. and Bellows, A.C., 2007)(Dettmann & Dimitri, 2010). However, some experts believe the figures only illustrate part of the organic story (Wheeler, 2008); (W. Lockeretz, 2007). The increased interest among researchers, policy makers and various advocacy groups is equally impressive. However, very little research and information seems to exist regarding whether or not social behaviors may have any influence on this growing interest in organic food consumption.

Today, most people in the United States have seen, read, heard or eaten organic foods. Some feel we have come a long way, because in the early days many critics considered it to be 'food myth', 'scientific nonsense' and the domain of 'food faddists and eccentrics' (Lockeretz, Shearer, & Kohl, 1981). But this does not mean everyone has accepted and embraced organic foods. Others suggest that 'pseudo-science' and unreliable reports are confusing the public and scaring them into choosing organic food (Murphy, 2004; Shan, 2006). The arguments among people on both sides of the discussion (i.e. organic and non-organic consumers) should be taken seriously;

because I believe when taken to extremes such arguments could have the potential to create social divisions that express themselves as potentially deviant behaviors like elitism, alienation, and extremism.

### **Social Groups**

Organic consumers are part of a growing and very influential group. As such, they are no different from other social groups composed of people who interact and share a common identity or common goals (Weldon & Weingart, 1993). Social groups are more than a collection of individuals. Any social group must exhibit some degree of social cohesion (Paskevich, Brawley, Dorsch, & Widmeyer, 1999) in order to exist. Social cohesion is a dynamic process in which people have the tendency to stick and remain together in the pursuit of objectives and/or to satisfy member needs (Eys, Loughead, Bray, & Carron, 2009; May et al., 2008). Additionally, members in a group may often feel close to each other as if they were part of the same family (Aversa, 1991). Characteristics shared by members of a group may include interests, values, representations, ethnic or social background, and kinship ties. Many social groups interact through social clubs and today even through virtual networks like the internet.

An example of a group, which has gained significant recognition in recent years are “food enthusiasts” also known as epicures or more commonly “foodies”. Many foodies are interested in topics and activities related to the food industry, including wine tasting, beer sampling, food restaurant openings, food distribution, food fads, health and nutrition. Many publications have food columns that cater to foodies. Interest by foodies has given rise to the Food Network a cable television channel and other specialized food television shows.

Other popular types of groups are the social networking web sites. These groups are rapidly increasing and becoming one of the preferred communication media for young people. Research suggests that they may increase adolescents' self-esteem and well-being if the tone of the feedback provided by viewers of their profiles is positive but may decrease self-esteem when the feedback is negative.

### **Research Focus**

This research project was originally influenced by my personal desire to understand how social factors influence people's decisions to purchase organic food. During my review of the extensive literature about organic food consumption, I realized that much of it has focused on describing the demographics of organic consumers and the reasons they give when asked why they buy these foods. Many of these types of studies have used the information provided by the respondents to generate recommendations to organic operations and other related entities, including advocacy groups, interested in developing strategic plans to maintain/increase farm profits or achieve transition to organic production systems (Aertsens, Verbeke, Mondelaers, & Van Huylenbroeck, 2009; Magistris & Gracia, 2008; Stobbelaar et al., 2007; Young, Hwang, McDonald, & Oates, 2010). Although potentially useful, much of the information derived from these studies cannot be applied to explain how and why social factors lead individuals or groups to purchase organic food. For instance, if consumers say that they buy organic food because it is better for their health, one should not assume that they are "finicky consumers" or that they are only implying that conventionally produced foods are of lesser quality. We also should not assume that they are well informed and know that organic foods are more nutritious than conventionally produced foods. Neither should we conclude that some of them suffer from a type of cibophobia (fear of

food) and thus are fearful of harmful substances present in conventional foods. Rather, one should begin with theories and hypotheses that could help to identify psychological and social factors associated with purchasing behaviors. It is also important that we understand that in many cases some behaviors cannot be easily observed or quantified, rather these latent factors can take different values under some specified set of conditions (DeVellis, 2003)

My research focuses on identifying psychosocial factors or latent variables that may influence people to purchase organic foods. I do not focus on the productivity, economics, or benefits of organic food because much has already been written about these topics, including numerous studies that deal with soil fertility, biodiversity, landscape quality, water use, and environmental protection in organic food systems (Gopinath et al., 2008; Pieper & Barrett, 2009; Pimentel, Hepperly, Hanson, Douds, & Seidel, 2005). I do not investigate the economic impact that organic foods have on our farm landscape because I believe that research that simply looks at the financial benefits of producing, purchasing and consuming organic foods at the regional and national level (Gomiero, Paoletti, & Pimentel, 2008; Baltzer, 2004; Taylor, 2007) may produce misleading results. Many studies with this focus provide evidence about the advantages of organic foods, but few address the social impacts of something that is perceived as simple and non-threatening like purchasing organic food, can have on society. This is a more interesting question to me, because it has the potential to address broader social issues. For example, should we be concerned about individuals or groups who choose to eat organic food because they feel superior to others or because they do not trust the contemporary mainstream food system?

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand how social factors influence people's decisions to purchase organic food, we must first acknowledge that appropriate social theories may be used to explain these behaviors. A social theory is a guide or conceptual map that provides information regarding human behaviors, social processes and social structures, so they can be applied in different settings, and situations (de Vaus, 2001). Social theories are composed of concepts or constructs and provide a convenient method for labeling a number of similar behaviors, which exist and can be determined analytically but are not directly observable (McIntyre, 2005). Theories are important tools in social research, because they help us identify distinctive features in individuals or groups (Caputo, 2007; Haig, 2008). They are "analysis of the totality of social becoming into...causal process" (Cargan, 2007). Further, theories can provide the basis for investigating how individuals or groups relate to each other, their peers, community, or culture (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Schiffhauer, 2007). Social theories like the Theory of Planned Behavior have been used to study several aspects of organic food consumption. However, a single theory may not explain all possible factors influencing human behavior. Thus, I felt that looking at a set of different theories would be useful in identifying key behaviors that may be characteristic of the people making the decision to purchase these types of foods (Bellew, Gilbert, Mills, McEwan, & Gale, 2006; Chang & Lusk, 2009; Shahanjarini, Rashidian, Majdzadeh, Omidvar, & Shojaeezadeh, 2010; Sobal & Bisogni, 2009; Stroebe, Papies, & Aarts, 2008).

As I reviewed the extensive literature on organic agriculture, including the early works and ideologies that were the foundation of the organic movement, I identified

common concepts that I believe influenced the development, implementation and acceptance of organic foods. These concepts include things like personal preferences and choices, trust, and moral and personal values (Nenci, Carrus, Caddeo, & Meloni, 2008; Ledgerwood, Liviatan, & Carnevale, 2007) appeared to have a significant role in the development of organic movement.

The organic farming movement developed almost independently in German and English-speaking countries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Authors like Vogt (Vogt, 2007) suggest that the principles and ideals of those involved in this alternative form of food production were influenced by several events that occurred in the past century: (1) a crisis in agriculture and agricultural science; (2) the emergence of biologically oriented agriculture science; (3) the Life and Food Reform movements.

### **Crisis in Agriculture**

Agriculture faced serious problems during both World Wars. These problems were for the most part due to soil, economic, and social problems. They were significantly important, because it led to new forms of food production. The potential of chemical fertilization and other forms of crop inputs for increasing crop yield, which had already been widely recognized by the end of the 19th century (Manlay, Feller, & Swift, 2007) became more relevant during this first part of the 20th century. Mårald (2002) suggest that agronomists during those days were driven almost solely by concerns of obtaining higher yields and feeding a growing world population. In the attempt to produce more food, limited natural resources, the environment and food safety were often disregarded.

Farm equipment, fertilizers and pesticides (i.e. chemical and technical dependant farming) were considered the cause or solution to several of the problems in agriculture

(McLaughlin & Mineau, 1995). As the use of fertilizers, pesticides and machinery became more common, many agronomists, farmers and researchers argued that the increased use of synthetic inputs instead of natural materials (e.g. animal manures) caused several problems:

- Inappropriate use of synthetic fertilizers disturbed plant metabolism, mainly because varieties were not yet adapted to higher nitrogen levels in soil (Barton Blum, 1992).
- Soil acidification due to the application of mineral fertilizers, which led to poor root-growth, unbalanced soil mineral content and a degraded soil structure (Monaco, Hatch, Sacco, Bertora, & Grignani, 2008; Nardi, Morari, Berti, Tosoni, & Giardini, 2004)(Nardi et al., 2004).
- Erosion became prevalent and an indication of the drawbacks of intensive farming practices (Manlay et al., 2007).
- The decline in soil fertility (i.e. soil fatigue) could not be attributed to harmful organisms or lack of nutrients; but rather to a disturbed balance among soil organisms, and accumulation of harmful organic substances.

### **Alternative Agriculture Movements**

Some authors believe that due in part to the agriculture and food related problems, at least 3 different agricultural movements contributed to the development of modern organic farming (Conford & Dimbleby, 2001; Heckman, 2006). The concepts and principles particular to these movements became relevant to many producers and consumers looking for alternative types of foods. Thus, it is important to understand the basis on which these movements were built to try to identify the potential reasons why some consumers and producers today prefer organic foods.

### **Biodynamic Agriculture**

In 1913, a movement known as biodynamic farming began in Germany (Bavec & Bavec, 2007; Koepf, 2006; P. Kristiansen, Reganold, & Taji, 2006). Rudolf Steiner was

an Austrian philosopher who in 1924 dictated lectures called the "Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture" (Scollan, 2006). During these lectures, he criticized the agricultural practices of the day. His suggestions that a spiritual world was accessible through direct experience and inner development (i.e. anthroposophy) were the bases for the biodynamic movement. In his esoteric-occult view, Steiner saw farms as living organisms and encouraged people to have an intimate personal relationship with nature. Although some people think biodynamic and organic farming practices are the same. There are very distinct differences. Biodynamic farming then and now avoids the use of mineral fertilizers and pesticides, because Steiner believed such substances were spiritually dead, rather than chemically or biologically harmful like they are considered in organic agriculture. Both systems are similar in the belief and principle that farming should be about being "close to," "going back to," and "following" nature, and to rely on minimal external inputs, especially in terms of science and technology (Ingram, 2007). Biodynamic farmers often indicate that they rely on methods that are self sufficient (Carpenter-Boggs, Kennedy, & Reganold, 2000). They believe biodynamic farming follows strict guidelines that provide more nutrient rich and balanced food and at the same type provides opportunities for different systems to come together and live in harmony.

Claims such as "a biodynamic farm isn't just a place to produce food; it is a convergence zone for cosmic forces that work on the plants, animals, soil, microbes, and maybe most importantly the farmer" (Carpenter, 2007) are not rare among those that practice biodynamic farming. In recent years, some of these farmers who started off as organic producers have made the transition to biodynamic farming because they

feel the commercialization of the organic movement is wrong (K. McLaughlin, 2005). These farmers are now trying to popularize other terms like "biodynamic," "Food Alliance Certified," "local" and even "beyond organic". These ideas, practices and advocacy for "friendlier" forms of agriculture and more "natural" foods are obviously not unique and new. Many of these alternative forms of agriculture and in the case of biodynamic farming, have been connected to religious and political points of view as in the examples of "Catholic agrarianism" (Marlett, 1999) and the "Nazi diet" (Treitel, 2009).

### **Organic Agriculture**

Years after Steiner and biodynamic farming influenced many farmers in Germany, another movement, based on the work of Sir Albert Howard developed in the UK, (Heckman, 2006; P. Kristiansen et al., 2006). It has been noted that Howard was somewhat skeptical about biodynamic farming (Conford & Dimbleby, 2001), but he did share the belief that improving and maintaining soil quality and organic matter led to biological equilibrium and fertility. Howard believed that concentrating on soil quality and fertility would result in more sustainable form of food production. His work had a significant influence on the formation of groups that to this day are involved in the promotion of organic agriculture. One such group is the Soil Association (<http://www.soilassociation.org>), which was formed in 1948 in the UK.

A growing food movement, dubbed "beyond organic," is attempting to raise awareness in farmers and consumers about having organic foods become "more closely aligned to their original principles" (Looking beyond organics to sustainability a growing food movement.2010; Painter, 2008). Many believe that purchasing organic fruits and vegetables that have been shipped long distances belies the idea of the

sustainability concept. For this reason, many talk about a local food system, which has led to millions of consumers to demand that their food be locally sourced (McWilliams, 2009). However, authors like McWilliams (2009) suggest that many of these consumers may not be asking the inconvenient questions. People who say that they prefer local foods rarely ask whether “food miles” or the distance that foods travel before they reach their homes really matter. Instead, according to some authors many of these “locavores” like to focus more on what is “righteously green” , saving the planet and feeling good inside all at the same time.

### **Biological Agriculture**

In the same way Steiner and Howard contributed to alternative forms of raising food in Germany and UK, Hans Peter Rusch and Hans Muller in Switzerland, focused their work on maximizing the use of renewable sources to ensure subsistence (Kristiansen, Taji, & Reganold, 2006). Their methods, which are generally described as a form of biological farming emphasized greatly on the use of soil humus and composting.

### **The Organic Movement**

All of these movements led to the formation of organic farming associations in the 1960s. Many of these associations were formed in Europe due in part to growing interest in ecological and environmental issues there (Torjusen, Sangstad, O'Doherty Jensen, & Kjaernes, 2004). By the 1980s the organic movement gained even more force, because many farmers were concerned with environmental pollution and began growing crops in more sustainable ways (Padel, 2001). However, by the 1990s and despite the growing awareness of organic agriculture, few consumers were familiar with

organic foods. Eventually, the rapid rise in organic farmland and consumer demand for organic foods occurred in part because:

- National and regional support programs encouraged organic farming practices
- Elevated consumer demand for organic foods, (i.e. environmental and food safety concerns)

The development of organic farming regulations in Europe in 1992 encouraged many farmers to transition their farm acreage and led to a rise in organic farmland (Byng, 1993). Additionally, food scares like listeria and salmonella, which shook up consumer confidence (Rosati & Aumaitre, 2004) might have caused the elevated consumer interest in food safety and quality during those days (Codron, Siriex, & Reardon, 2006). As a consequence, the demand for organic foods might have increased, because people believed that organic foods were less prone to food scares (Niggli, 2007). Yet, according to some authors food scares were not the only major factor driving consumer demand for organic foods (Codron et al., 2006). Environmental considerations, ethical and social beliefs, and growing interest in natural and healthy foods were also important.

Despite numerous reports that provide figures of the growth in production and consumption of organic foods, many supporters of organic agriculture believe that the adoption by more people has been slow (Gomiero et al., 2008). This in part might have to do with the belief that most consumers are not well informed or concerned about the relation between the food they buy and the effects that crop production systems have on the agricultural ecosystems and the environment. Thus, I believe there is a need for studies that look at consumer food preference from the perspective of measuring

whether consumers' values and any other traits or issues of their self have on the decision to purchase and consume that food.

In order to understand why consumers are interested in purchasing a product, it is necessary to understand the nature of their "finalized decisional process" (Zanoli R. & Naspetti, 2002). This is particularly important, because the information can help us understand what they are trying to achieve through the purchase. Some authors suggest that individuals often believe that their personal belongings, preferences and choices are extensions of their self (Belk, 1988; Ledgerwood et al., 2007). This is applicable not only to the cars we drive or the clothes we wear, but also to the type of food we choose. A person might decide to purchase food based on knowledge of how it was produced (Ritson & Hutchins, 1995). For instance, the consumer might be influenced by a positive attitude to a particular technology or a negative attitude to the alternative method of food production. Use of an appropriate theoretical framework can provide a structure to identify factors that influence the consumption of particular products.

## **Social Theories**

### **Theory of Planned Behavior**

Consumer behavior (i.e. purchase of organic food) has been extensively explained by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Arvola et al., 2008; Beale & Mainstead, 1991; Sparks & Shepherd, 1992). This theory has been used to explain food choices by adults (Sparks & Shepherd, 1992) and schoolchildren (Dennison & Shepherd, 1995) (Berg, Jonsson, & Conner, 2000; Gummesson, Jonsson, Conner, & Svensson, 1996). Concepts or constructs like (1) attitudes, (2) subjective norms, and (3) behavioral control are used by TPB to explain the intention to be part of specific behaviors (Kim,

Reicks, & Sjoberg, 2003). According to TPB, an individual's intention to behave a certain way is a result of his or her attitudes towards the behavior and the perceived social pressure (subjective norm) to perform that behavior (Berg et al., 2000). However, the theory of planned behavior is often criticized because it generally does not take into account affective and moral influences on behavior (Lavine, Thomsen, Zanna, & Borgida, 1998).

### **Theory of Conspiracy**

Conspiracy is a term that originally was a neutral descriptor for any claim of civil, criminal or political conspiracy (Camp, 1997; Fenster, 2008; Goertzel, 1994). However, theory of conspiracy can also be used in studies that deal with skepticism or mistrust in science, academia, or established institutions of authority (Feingold, 1995; Mervin, 2000; Paul, 2002). The term can be applied to ideas regarding the existence of secret societies, secret plots and many other outlandish beliefs (Bale, 2007; deHaven-Smith, 2010; Harris, 2009). In the United States during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, theories of conspiracy have become commonplace in mass media (Grossman, 2006; Harris, 2009). This has contributed to conspiracies emerging as a cultural phenomenon and the possible replacement of democracy by conspiracy as the dominant paradigm of political action in the public mind.

### **Social Identity Theory**

I decided to use the Theory of Social Identity, because it is one that contains constructs associated with personal and group behaviors and expressions of superiority and elitism, which I hypothesized are principal reasons why some people prefer organic foods. Tajfel and Turner (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel, 1981) suggested that our social identity is influenced by our own personality, as well as our intellectual characteristics, and by our

membership to specific groups (e.g. organic consumers) (Robinson, Robinson, & Tajfel, 1996). When the concept of social identity was introduced, the 'coherence; view became displaced in favor of a social self-enhancement view, derived from Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison processes. Social comparisons intergroup settings are designed to attain a positively valued distinctiveness from other groups (Tajfel, 1972, p.3), the motive is to 'achieve a satisfactory concept of image of the self' (Tajfel, 1974, p.4) through positive social identity. When we attribute importance and significance to being part of a social group, we develop social identity. (Crocker, Luhtanen, & Cooper, 2003) and (Reynolds, Turner, & Haslam, 2000) have indicated that specific variables like personal self-esteem or collective self-esteem are correlated with our bias toward others. Individuals may have a tendency as group members to judge the social world from the vantage point of their in-group. Authors like Baldwin and Wesley (1996) suggest that we often like others who we think are socially desirable and dislike individuals who are members of out-groups, or who express different attitudes than our own. Researchers working in social identity believe that people who show a bias toward members of out-groups do so to augment their own sense of self, to validate a shared view of the world, or perhaps for some other defensive reasons. The constructs of the Social Identity Theory, include Categorization, Identification and Comparisons. These constructs play an important role in many of our personal and group decisions. For instance, the decision of an individual to be a vegetarian might be more influenced by a feeling of satisfaction or superiority than by a concern for his or her health.

Identifying the underlying reasons why people purchase organic food is not an easy task. To effectively accomplish this goal I relied on social theory, because this was one of the ways that I knew I could look at “interrelated constructs, definitions, and propositions...and specify relations among variables, to explain or predict this [particular] phenomenon” (Kerlinger, 1973). Departing from my interest in explaining the social norms that may be influencing people to purchase organic foods, I researched different social theories that I thought address those factors that I felt could be influencing the behavior or outcome variable in question (i.e. organic food purchase). Once I found appropriate theories and defined how each of them fit into my overall goal, I was able to formulate the research question and hypothesis that guided my research design. My first approach was to look at the existing body of literature regarding organic foods and try to find common themes that other researchers have identified about this behavior.

### **Organic Food Purchasing and Consumption**

Some authors believe that consumer concern over the quality and safety of conventional food, which has intensified in recent years, may be the primary reason for the increased demand in organically grown food. For the most part, many studies indicate that organic food is often perceived as healthier and safer (Saba & Messina, 2003); (Schifferstein & Ophuis, 1998). However, some authors believe relevant scientific evidence is limited, and most of the available information may have been based on unreliable reports (Magkos, Arvanit, & Zampelas, 2006). To answer the questions regarding the benefits or potential harmful effects of purchasing organic food I had to have a clear understanding of the origins of organic farming and the historical tendencies that have characterized the organic movement. As I researched many of

these factors, I became convinced that factors like (1) social norms, (2) trust and (3) personal or group identity appeared to be very relevant in the organic food purchasing decision process.

### **The Impact of Food Choices**

According to experts, there may be numerous personal factors, which influence how people choose specific types of food. Some authors believe that “a person’s life course transitions and trajectories (persistent thoughts, feelings, strategies, and actions over a life span) are fundamental influences on the development of his or her personal system for making food choices” (Devine & Connors, 1998). In the case of organic food purchasing and consumption behaviors, several reasons have been proposed for the growth in their choice. These include: a concern for health (Grankvist & Biel, 2001; Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence, & Mummery, 2002; Wandel & Bugge, 1997) ethical moral, political or religious motives (Zander & Hamm, 2010; Gutman, 1999; Honkanen & Frewer, 2009) the quality and safety or safety of conventional foods (Williams, 2002) (Baker, Benbrook, Groth III, & Lutz Benbrook, 2002; Gifford & Bernard, 2006); environmental considerations (Sparks & Shepherd, 1992; Lea & Worsley, 2008) (Laroche, Bergeron, Barbaro-Forleo, 2001) and personal values (Dreezens, Martijn, Tenbult, Kok, & Vries, 2005). For some individuals and groups, the expression of their concerns and values through food choices may often lead to political activism, advocacy (Guthman, 2008).

Eating is one of the most fundamental acts we do. Despite the importance of food in our lives, many of us give relatively, little thought to the far reaching consequences of our food choices. The ethical issues related to many of the food choices we make have the potential to unify or divide groups. Movements for fair trade, organic agriculture,

and the purchase of local foods point to some of the topics that are currently being discussed by many and that require our attention. Other important topics like genetically engineered food, have raised many important ethical questions for many people (Sniegocki, 2009). Thus, we should not simply assume that these are passing topics, opinions or behaviors. Nor should we think that they really do not cause any harm to either supporters or critics.

Consider consumers that increasingly criticize globalization of agricultural production and question the economic, environmental and social consequences of global trade. They increasingly respond with their purchasing behavior and prefer products that were produced respecting specific ethical standards (Zander & Hamm, 2010). In contrast, consumers who have trust in the government's regulation of our food supply or care little about government regulation of food are less likely to purchase organic foods than consumers than consumers who have less trust of the government's regulation of food. Consumers who have more trust in conventional producers than they do in organic producers are less likely to be concerned about the environmental impacts of food production and less likely to buy organic foods than consumers who have less trust in conventional producers.

### **Identity**

Some authors (Bellew et al., 2006; Sparks & Shepherd, 1992) have suggested that people's desires, self concepts or identities can influence their behavior in such a way that they feel it is important to prove themselves as likable, acceptable and sometimes even superior to others. In some cases, consumers will often express this desire by avoiding common options or preferences shared by the majority (J. Berger & Heath, 2007). For many, their personal appearance, preferences and processions can be

major contributors to and reflections of their identities (Belk, 1988; J. Berger & Heath, 2008; Guthman, 2003; Hayes & Ross, 1987). To understand what influences purchasing behavior we must understand the meanings that people attach to the products they purchase. “Knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, people regard them as parts of themselves” (Belk, 1988).

Many people use specific ideological considerations in their food preferences. For example, for vegetarians, their diet is as much about how life ought to be lived and not only what to eat (Hamilton, 2000; Lindeman, Stark, & Latvala, 2000). And even when flavor, nutritional value and price are generally important factors when deciding which foods to purchase, for some people perceivable ethical and moral considerations are just as important in making that final decision (Nobis, 2002; Paarlberg, 2009; Sniegocki, 2009). Thus, when individuals purchase organic food, because they believe that organically grown food is good for the environment, they might have been acting more on their personal attitudes and moral values (Dreezens et al., 2005). Values are important guidelines in people's lives often expressed through the choices that they make regarding foods and other products.

### **Rational Choice**

For many, purchasing food is a routine that may or may not require a lot of thought. People buy food because they need to eat and feed their families. Things like flavor, appearance and ease of preparation may all be considered when purchasing food (Arvola et al., 2008; Beale & Mainstead, 1991; Sparks & Shepherd, 1992). However, other cognitive considerations may be involved when purchasing food (Dennison & Shepherd, 1995). These considerations include things like the person's (1) attitudes toward the product, (2) subjective norms, and (3) perceived control over

purchasing specific products (Kim et al., 2003). Often the individual's behavioral intention is a result of attitudes towards the behavior and the perceived social pressure (subjective norm) to perform that behavior (Berg et al., 2000). However, affective and moral influences may also have an impact on the individual's decision to purchase particular items (Lavine et al., 1998). Several studies have suggested that there is a likely positive relationship between knowledge of organic foods, social norms and purchasing behavior (Aertsens et al., 2009; Crocker et al., 2003; Gil & Soler, 2006; Klöckner & Ohms, 2009; Pieniak, Aertsens, & Verbeke, 2010) Crocker, 2009. For instance people who claim they have prior knowledge of organic farming methods and admit concern for the health of family and close friends will often make attempts to purchase organic food. However, it is not always clear whether or not their perceived (subjective) knowledge or actual (objective) knowledge is the best explanation or predictor of the reason why they choose organic foods (Radecki, 1995). Nevertheless, there is a consensus that knowledge is a key construct in information processing and thus in the consumer decision-making process.

## **Trust**

Public concern for the foods that they eat has at times been influenced by numerous food scares (Frewer & Miles, 2003; Miles et al., 2004) and the decline of consumers trusts in the regulation of our food supply (Warren, Hillers, & Jennings, 1990). Several authors have pointed out that one of the themes of the organic movement has been trust – “a trust embodied in an authentic and transparent relationship with the land and a trust threatened by a general cynicism in American politics and a specific lack of confidence in government” (Lavin, 2009). For some people certain foods present a considerable risk. Research in the area of risk perception suggests that many people

are strongly concerned about potential hazards, such as pesticide residues on conventional foods (Miles & Frewer, 2001; Saba & Messina, 2003; Wilkins & Hillers, 1994; Williams, 2002).

Despite the existence of foods labeled as “organic”, which many consider as an alternative to the perceived riskier conventional foods, some producers, consumers and others believe that now that the federal government (i.e. USDA) is involved the term has lost its “value”. For instance, some of these critics believe that the so called “allowed pesticides” have no place in organic food production or that the high cost of organic certification excludes the smallest and often most “pure” producers from selling “organic” foods, thus, exacerbating the movement’s enduring skepticism toward the state. Perceptions of risks and benefits have been shown to be relevant issues concerning the public’s acceptance of a product or technology (Alhakami, & Slovic, 1994). Trust measures should be specific to the hazard under investigation, since general trust was found to be less powerful than specific trust in accounting for risk perception (Saba & Messina, 2003).

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social research is often complex and it requires an logical and systematic approach so factors like the researchers' own personal opinions and attitudes towards the topic do not influence the results(Cargan, 2007). This chapter provides information on the methodology that I used to design the study, prepare, collect and analyze the data, and interpret the results to answer my research question. As stated in Chapter 1, the focus of my research is to determine whether rational choice, distrust or identity have any influence on organic purchasing behavior and whether these latent variables have the potential to express themselves in harmful or deviant social behaviors. In this chapter I describe my research design and why I selected three theories, constructs and research variables that I have used in my study. Additionally, I will development of instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods that I used.

### **Theory of Planned Behavior**

I chose to use the Theory of Planned Behavior (Figure 2-1), because its constructs (1) attitudes, (2) normative beliefs (3) perceived control and (4) intention are often used to explain many behaviors associated with actions like purchasing products (Ajzen, 1991a). An individual's intention to behave a certain way is a result of his or her attitudes towards the behavior and the perceived social pressure (subjective norm) to perform that behavior (Contento, Williams, Michela, & Franklin, 2006 Klockner, 2009). Thus, the Theory of Planned Behavior is often used for studies that involve decision-making processes. I decided that it would be an appropriate theory to apply to my research because it involves more rational or cognitive reasons that people use to make

certain decisions. Numerous studies have indicated that many organic purchasers are concerned about their health and the health of people who they care about and that they believe that organic food can address these needs (Lautenschlager & Smith, 2007) (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005). For this reason, I decided to focus on the construct of normative beliefs. People have personal beliefs that are influenced by the judgment of those who are significant in their lives (e.g. family, friends, teachers, etc.). Therefore, t people’s decision to purchase organic food may be based on concerns for the wellbeing of people who are important in their lives.

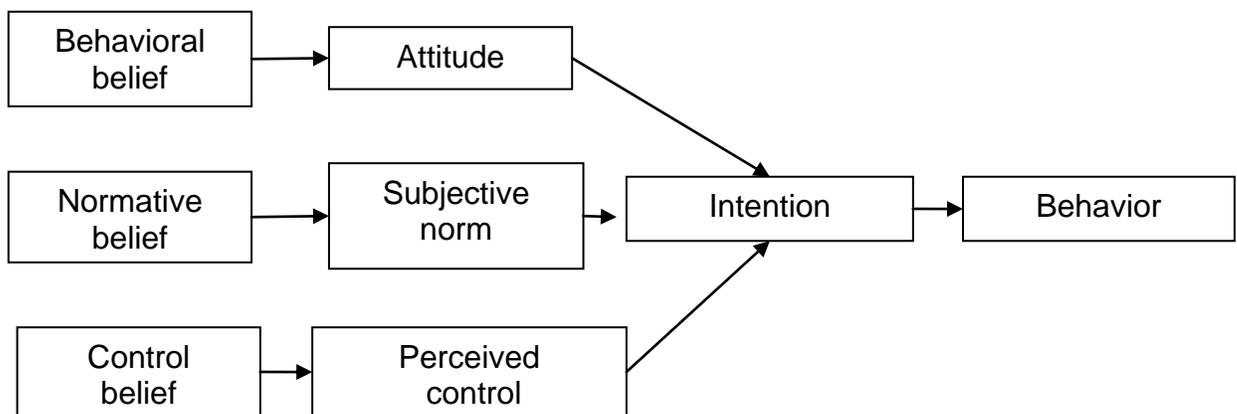


Figure 3-1. Constructs in the theory of planned behavior (adapted from Ajzen, 1991).

### Theory of Conspiracy

Organic farming developed in part as a response to some people’s concern over food that was not safe to eat because they felt it was produced with synthetic inputs that were harmful to their health and the environment. Conspiracy theory deals not only with political plots or inexplicable events (Camp, 1997; Fenster, 2008; Knight, 2003), but also

sentiments of skepticism, fear and paranoia. Additionally, many people who believe in conspiracy theories do not accept the legitimacy of governing laws or authorities (Goertzel, 1994) because they think that these institutions are plotting against them. Based on this reasoning, I chose to look at how a distrust of government and large food companies might be associated with people's decision to purchase organic foods.

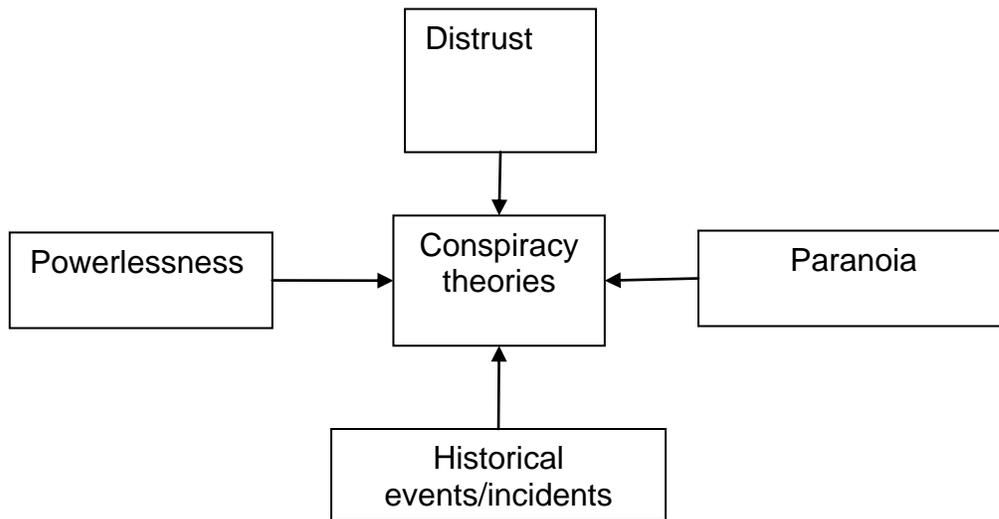


Figure 3-2. Constructs in the theory of conspiracy.

### **Theory of Social Identity**

It has been suggested that our social identity is influenced by our own personality, as well as our intellectual characteristics, and by our membership in specific groups (e.g. organic consumers). The theory of social identity can be used to explain the principal selfish and biased reasons why people consume organic foods. Researchers believe that people who show a bias toward members of out-groups do so to augment their own sense of self, to validate a shared view of the world, or perhaps for some other defensive reasons. The constructs of the Social Identity Theory (Figure 3) can be used to explain many of our personal and group decisions. For instance, the decision of

an individual to be a vegetarian might be more influenced by a feeling of satisfaction (Identification) or superiority (Comparison) than by a concern for his or health

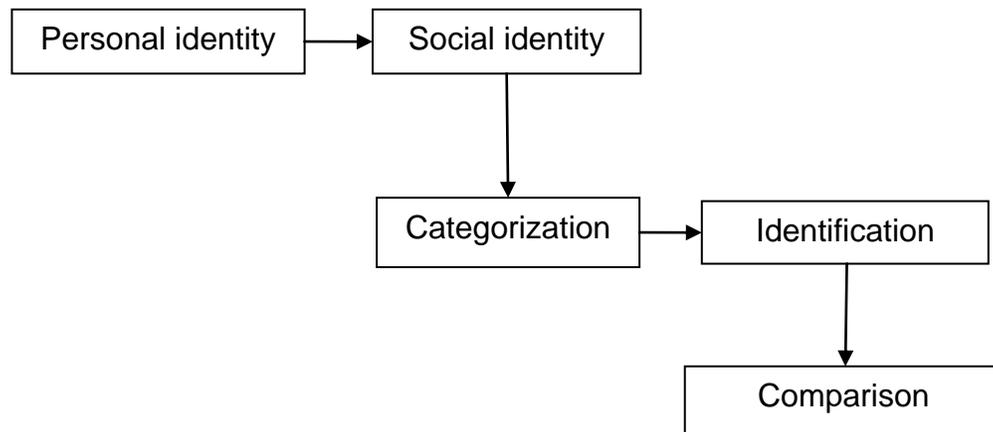


Figure 3-3. Constructs in the theory of social identity (adapted from Tajfel and Turner, 1976).

The following research question guided the development of my research design and research methods:

Is consistent consumption of organic food products (1) a rational choice, (2) an indicator of distrust and rejection of the legitimacy of the U.S. food system or (3) an indicator of social (group) identity?

### Research Design

Knowing that not everyone purchases organic foods or that some people buy them with different levels of commitment, I decided to use a cross sectional design to compare organic food purchasing groups and determine whether the differences in their purchasing commitment may be influenced by normative beliefs, distrust in the conventional food system or elitism. A cross-sectional design is a good way to conduct an analysis or snap-shot of a representative sample of a theoretical population (Cargan,

2007; D. A. De Vaus, 2001; Gravetter & Forzano, 2006) such as organic food purchasers. For my study, I was interested in determining if there were any relationships between people's commitment to purchasing organic food and the research variables. This meant that in addition to measuring people's level of distrust, elitism and rational choice, I also needed to find out about their organic food purchasing habits.

The organic food purchasing questions in my study were designed to measure how committed respondents were to purchasing organic foods. The questions measured not only the frequency in which respondents purchase organic foods, but also their opinions regarding the cost and difficulty in finding different categories of organic foods. I used the data collected from this organic food purchasing index (Appendix A) to calculate mean purchasing scores that allowed me to differentiate the different groups in my study. The organic food index was developed at the University to measure the intensity of organic food purchasing habits among U.S. consumers (Lapinski and Swisher, 2006). Most measures of organic purchasing behavior provide either nominal (yes or no) or ordinal (categorical responses) data. An index, on the contrary, provides interval data and therefore gives a more precise measure of the intensity of the organic purchasing behavior. To my knowledge, this is the first instrument that measures the *intensity* of organic purchasing behavior through an interval score. Prior to collecting and using any organic food purchasing data from this instrument in my study, I tested the organic purchasing index to make sure that the food groupings included by Lapinsky and Swisher's instrument would still be applicable today. The food groupings are not those of USDA or other federal agencies, but rather reflect availability and cost over

conventional products. For example, organically produced fruits and vegetables are relatively widely available and are often comparable in cost to conventional produce. Meat products, on the other hand, are difficult to find and are often very expensive. As part of this process, I visited grocery stores, natural stores and other similar places where organic foods are available to make sure that the food categories are still valid in the sense that these attributes of availability and cost remain true. I also asked a small sample of people (n=40) to complete the index to make sure that they would not have any difficulty responding to it. All categories and items in the questionnaire were still appropriate and for this reason I did not have to make any changes to the instrument.

Participants answered questions regarding seven organic food categories: fresh fruits and vegetables (FV), processed foods, (PF), meats, poultry and eggs (MP), milk (MK), dairy products (DP), breads and bakery items (BR), and grains (GR). For each of these seven food categories respondents indicated how they felt about the (1) *Difficulty: How hard is it to find organic food* and (2) *Cost: How expensive is organic food* when they purchased these items. For the question of how hard it is to find an organic food compared to its conventional counterpart (i.e. difficulty), participants had the option of indicating whether purchasing the seven organic foods products was 1= very easy, 2= easy, 3= hard, or 4= very hard. For the question of how expensive organic foods are compared to non-organic foods (i.e. cost), participants could indicate that they thought each of the seven organic foods categories was 1= about the same, 2= a little more, 3= quite a bit more, or 4= much more. For both of these questions, people could indicate that they did not know the answer.

I used the numerical values that the 40 test respondents chose for their responses under each of the two criteria and each food category to calculate 14 mean scores, the mean difficulty and mean cost score for each of the seven food categories. I then combined the two mean scores for each category and divided by two to derive a mean weight for each food category. For example, if the mean difficulty score for fresh fruits and vegetables were one and the mean cost score three, the mean weight for this food category would be two. I compared the weights I derived from those of Swisher and Lapinski, who had data from a much larger pool of respondents, and found that they differed only slightly from the 2006 assessment. I used each of the seven purchasing weight in calculating a purchasing score for every food category that participants indicated they bought when purchasing organic food. For example, if the weight for fresh fruits and vegetables is 1.5 and someone indicates that s/he purchases fresh fruits and vegetables almost always (score of four), that individual accrues a score of six for this item on the organic purchasing index. If the score for purchasing meat products is 3.5 and the person indicates that s/he sometimes (score of three) purchases organic meat products, the individual accrues an additional 10.5 points on the index. Combining all the purchasing scores for every food category, I obtain a summative, interval purchasing score that I used to divide respondents into different groups of organic purchasers. I used post-hoc assignment to assign individuals into one of two groups, committed and non-committed organic purchasers. Post –hoc assignment is used after the conclusion of a particular stage of a study to look for attributes that were not observable prior to the start of an investigation, but that the researcher knew existed (Babbie, 2005).

I chose to conduct my study in Florida by sampling people who live in five of the main urban areas in the state. Florida has one of the greatest concentrations of people from every region of the country. Thus, the accessible population of organic food purchasers found here is likely to be representative of buyers in the country. I chose to sample people in Gainesville, Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando and Tampa because these cities were not only easily accessible, but also have large numbers of places where people can find and buy organic food. I used a consumer intercept survey technique to recruit individuals to participate in my study. Consumer intercept sampling uses potential consumers in their natural environment (e.g. grocery stores, shopping centers, farmers markets) to conduct short questionnaires on their consumer habits, preferences, perceptions or behavior (Bush & Hair, 1985; Payet, Gilles, & Howat, 2005). Some of the advantages of using a consumer intercept approach are the speed in which people can be recruited to participate in a study, its low cost, and the ability to poll adequate numbers of consumers in short time. Every potential participant in the study was initially screened to identify if they would be a good candidate for the study. The screening criterion was based on the following:

- Person makes the decision regarding what food to buy for himself/herself.
- Person is familiar with the term “organic food”.
- Person can find and has access to places where organic foods are sold.

Once I had determined that the person fitted these criteria, I provided them with a copy of the informed consent (Appendix B) and explained the purpose of my study, as well as informed them of how long it would approximately take them to complete the survey (Appendix C). All respondents needed to confirm their agreement to participate in the

study by marking a box in the questionnaire next to the statement “I agree to participate in this study”.

### **Stages of Instrument Development**

The first step in the design of my survey instrument was to look back at my research question and hypotheses to make sure that I would apply an appropriate methodology. This is important because many different types of research methods can be used to conduct social research. Some of the main considerations I had were the amount of time to collect the data, reliability of the instrument, the sample population and their willingness to provide the information requested. I could have used a methodology that simply was aimed at describing people who purchase organic food in Florida. These studies (Dettman, 2008; Hughner, McDonagh, Prothero, Shultz II, & Stanton, 2007; Zepeda, Chang, & Leviten-Reid, 2006) basically consist of interview questions that identified the demographic profiles of organic food purchasers. I could also have tried to analyze the main determinants of Floridians’ knowledge and willingness to pay for organic food (Batte, Hooker, Haab, & Beaverson, 2007; Gil & Soler, 2006; Ureña, Bernabéu, & Olmeda, 2008). Although the information derived from these studies could be useful to people involved in the organic industry (e.g. producers, marketers, policy makers, etc), I felt that measuring and analyzing key social constructs and their relations with organic food purchasers could provide insights to other potentially harmful social behaviors like prejudice (Miller, Abdel-Maksoud, Crane, Marcus, & Byers, 2008) and hostility (Bucchi & Neresini, 2004) .

### *Research Question*

Is consistent consumption of organic products (1) a rational choice, (2) an indicator of rejection of the legitimacy of the U.S. food system or (3) an indicator of social (group) identity?

## Hypotheses

H1: Scores on the elitism index will be higher for committed organic food purchasers than for non-committed purchasers.

H2: Rational choice will predict the purchasing intensity of committed organic food purchasers

H3: Scores on the distrust index will be higher for committed organic food purchasers than non-committed purchasers.

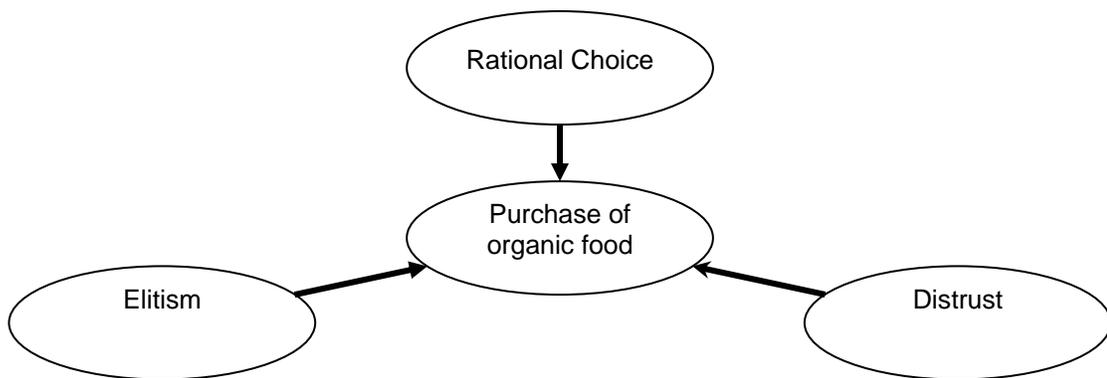


Figure 3-1. Conceptual model of variables influencing organic food purchase.

The aforementioned hypotheses are graphically represented via the conceptual model (Figure 3.1). This model depicts rational choice, social identity and distrust as antecedents that influence the decision to purchase organic foods. After defining my research question and hypotheses, I divided the instrumentation methodology into five stages:

- Instrument design and preliminary planning
- Pre-testing
- Final survey design and planning
- Data collection
- Data coding, analysis and interpretation

There are generally several stages in the development of survey instruments. As stated, I began by identifying the three social theories mentioned here and selecting the constructs and latent variables that I believed could best help me answer my research question.

### **Constructs and Variables**

For the development of my research instrument, I chose one construct from each social theory and one variable per construct. I decided to only use one construct from each theory because I wanted to develop an instrument that would be easy for participants to understand and complete. The intercept sampling approach places great constraints on the amount of time the researcher can anticipate that a respondent will be willing to devote to completing the instrument. I therefore had to develop instruments that could be completed in 10 minutes. Using more than one construct for each theory may have resulted in more questions and more time needed to complete the instrument.

For the theory of planned behavior, I used the construct of *normative beliefs*. (Ajzen, 1991b) suggested that normative beliefs are a person's perception of social pressures or benefits that he or she should or should not have. People are often influenced by how others (e.g. family, friend, teachers) judge them and for this reason make choices based on these beliefs (Arvola et al., 2008; Contento et al., 2006; Croker, Whitaker, Cooke, & Wardle, 2009). Studies that use the theory of planned behavior often find that social norms are important predictors in food choice decisions (Backman, Haddad, Lee, Johnston, & Hodgkin, 2002) accompanied by personal beliefs and cognitive functions that are often viewed as rational choices (Grankvist & Biel, 2001). For this reason, I used the variable of *rational choice* to represent this construct

because any concerns (e.g. health, environment etc) are generally an expression of previous knowledge or rationalization of an issue.

For the theory of conspiracy, I chose the construct of *Fear/Paranoia* and the variable of *Distrust*. Fear is often caused by personal experiences and information obtained from numerous sources (e.g. friends, family, books, internet). A well established fear over a particular person, group or product can lead people to reject whatever goes against their beliefs. This rejection to even the most scientifically based information, whether it is things like genetically modified organisms (Chetty & Viljoen, 2007), vaccines (Epstein, 2005; Kata, 2010) or animal food products (Lindeman et al., 2000) can cause some to distrust whoever is responsible for developing and distributing the information or product . For instance when food companies claim that their food has a high nutrient content, those that distrust them will believe that the food companies are only trying to sell their product. Their product is often no different than others in the market. This causes people to not only distrust that particular product, but everything else the individual, group or institution does.

The social identity theory in my study was represented by the construct of *Comparison* and the variable of *Elitism*. Consumers are often positively biased for certain products, because it makes them feel better about themselves to the extent that feelings of ethnocentrism or superiority are common.

Having defined the research question, hypotheses, theories, constructs and variables, I chose to use a scalar response format in all instruments (Table 3.1) because it generally provides a reliable method to rank-order research variables (i.e. rational choice, distrust and elitism) and generate a score that would indicate the level

to which the particular behavior is expressed (Downing, Baranowski, Grosso, & Norcini, 1995; Downing & Haladyna, 1997); (Babbie, 2005). The advantage of using this type of instrument is that it provides a composite measure of each variable in question (Babbie, 2005, p. 156, (Povey, Wellens, & Conner, 2001). This means that the measured is based on more than one item per variable. Once I completed the first draft, I tested the instrument for its validity.

Construct validation is an empirical evaluation of the meaning and consequences of the concepts being measured (Adcock & Collier, 2001; Shriver, Anderson, & Proctor, 2001; Messick, 1995). Most social variables are complex and require a strict process of defining them into measurable factors. During this process, known as operationalization (Guay, Boisvert, & Freeston, 2003; Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991; Bryman, 2004). I looked at the validity of my constructs by relating them to the research variables. For example, in the Theory of Conspiracy, the construct Fear/Paranoia construct represented by Distrust, reflects a specific characteristic or attribute people in this group often have towards institutions of authority (i.e. government). One of the items included in this variable read “The U.S, government only cares about supporting large industrial farms”. I theorized that people who do not trust our government because they believe they are in cohort with big agribusinesses, will often refuse to purchase most foods associated with large industrial agriculture.

During the summer of 2009, I asked people in Florida about their organic food purchasing habits and their opinions regarding these types of foods. As part of this study, I measured three different latent variables: (1) rational choice, (2) distrust and (3)

elitism using a scale type survey to determine if any or a combination of the variables may be influencing their purchasing behavior.

The study population was composed of committed and non-committed organic purchasers. Most respondents completed the two page survey in approximately five minutes. The participants were recruited using an intercept approach at various venues in Gainesville, Tampa, Orlando and Miami. This section depicts the results obtained from their responses.

The instrument was composed of four indices. The first index (Appendix A) measured organic purchasing commitment. As I indicated previously in this chapter, the questions in the organic purchasing index is a measure of the intensity of organic purchasing behavior. I used the data for post-hoc assignment of the respondents to two comparison groups (i.e. committed and non-committed organic food purchasers).

The other three instruments (Appendix B) were indices to measure the variables rational choice, distrust and elitism. Participants also provided common demographic information such as gender and income level. Everyone who agreed to participate in my study had to confirm that they were 18 years old or older before completing the survey.

Table 3-1. Theories, constructs, variables and instruments used to explain organic food purchasing.

Theory	Construct	Variables	Instrument
Planned Behavior	Normative beliefs	Rational choice	Index
Conspiracy	Paranoia	Distrust of government	Index
Identity	Comparison	Elitism, moral superiority	Index

My sample population was composed of 189 respondents. Married and single males and females from five different cities in Florida (i.e. Gainesville, Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa and Miami) with different income levels and two different levels of organic food purchasing commitment participated in my study during the summer of 2010 (Table 3-2). Of the committed organic purchasers who participated in the study, 27% were men and 35% were women. Non-committed organic food purchasers were composed of 19% men and 19% women. Regardless of their commitment to purchase organic food, the majority of the participants (35%) in the study had an annual income level of \$25,000 or less. Only 13% of respondents had an annual income of \$100,000 or more. This segment of the sample was composed of 9% and 3% committed and non-committed organic food purchasers respectively. I decided to use the demographic information strictly for descriptive purposes. Demographic profiles (e.g. gender, age, race, education) provide information about the members of a particular population or group. The information should not be used for explanation purposes. Typically, researchers collect demographic information about people in a study to create a mental picture of the population. The demographics of the respondents who participated in my study are summarized in Table 3-2.

Participants indicated their level agreement to items or statements for the research variables of (1) rational choice, (2) distrust and (3) elitism. Prior to the start of the study, I conducted a reliability test of the items for each variable. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency. The sample is arbitrarily divided into two groups repeatedly, without repeating any division. The pattern of response between the two groups should not differ significantly since the groups are randomly created. Alpha is

Table 3-2. Demographic characteristics of respondents, Summer 2010.

	Total (%)	Committed (%)	Non-committed (%)
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	46	27	19
Female	54	35	19
<u>Income</u>			
\$0 - \$25,000	35	20	15
\$25,000 – 50,000	28	19	9
\$50,000 - \$100,000	21	18	3
Over \$100,000	13	9	4

the average correlation between response patterns for all split-halves. The purpose of using Cronbach's alpha is to determine the degree to which responses to the items in an instrument are similar. Alpha coefficient ranges in value from 0 to 1 and is associated with the variation accounted for by the true score of the hypothetical variable that the researchers intends to measure (Hatcher, 1994). For most cases, the higher Cronbach alpha value, the more reliable the instrument is. However, seldom do we want to have Cronbach alpha value equal to one. Nunnally (1978) indicated that a value of 0.7 is an acceptable coefficient. However, lower values are sometimes accepted. Table 3-3 shows the Cronbach's alpha for each index.

Cronbach's alpha tests consistency. The item-total correlation test is performed to determine if items in a scale instrument represent the same construct. It is possible to have very consistent responses among items that are conceptually unrelated. The item-total correlation therefore permits the researcher to examine conceptual consistency. A value of less than 0.2 or 0.3 means that the corresponding item does not correlate very well with the overall scale and it should be eliminated.

Rational choice: Seven attributes or issues associated with purchasing organic food were presented to the respondents. Each item was rated on a 5-point continuous

scale ranging from "definitely false" to "definitely true". There was also a box that respondents could check labeled, "I don't know". The different attributes were: organic food is healthy and safe, it is more nutritious, can be trusted, it is good for my family and friends and it can reduce the incidence of diseases. These items were all treated as part of the variable of rational choice. The reliability test for this variable resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.77 and an item correlation of 0.35 (Table 3-3).

Distrust: The variable of distrust was composed of eight items. Statements like "The U.S. government does a good job of controlling contamination in our food" and "Large food companies care about selling their product than consumer's health" were intended to gauge if respondents trust these institutions. They were paired belief statements based on the different attributes associated with food (e.g., "American can trust the food that has been produced in large conventional farms" believe that by purchasing certain kinds of food, I can have a substantial positive impact on my health"). Items were scored on a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Test of reliability resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.71 and item total correlation of 0.54 (Table 3-3).

Identity: This variable was defined by ten statements measuring whether or not respondents believed that people who purchase organic foods were better informed, prefer a simpler lifestyle, are naïve, have more money or have high moral values. Items

Table 3-3. Cronbach alpha and item total correlation values for research variables.

Variable	No. of items	Chrombach's Alpha	Item total correlation
Rational choice	7	0.77	0.35
Distrust	8	0.71	0.54
Identity	12	0.68	0.50

were scored on a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Cronbach's alpha for the variable of identity was 0.68 and the item correlation was 0.50 (Table 3-3). Both the Cronbach's alpha and item correlation values for all variables were adequate (Hair et al., 1998).

Organic food purchasing: Participants also completed three separate questions regarding their organic food purchasing habits. The purpose was to determine mean purchasing scores (MPS) that were used to identify different levels of organic food purchasing commitment. My goal was to separate the sample population into groups and determine if there were any differences not only in their organic food purchasing habits, but also in the expression of the research variables.

#### Analysis

Using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), I ran three different types data analyses. The first step was to determine if the data I collected had a normal distribution. The test for normality showed that data was not normally distributed. For this reason I decided to use the non parametric Mann-Whitney U test to compare the theoretical groups in the study. The Mann-Whitney U test is the alternative test to the t-test and it is used to test whether two population means are equal or not. Mann-Whitney U test was developed by Wilcoxon in 1945. I conducted a correlation analysis to determine if there was any relationship between the research variables.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Organic Food Purchasers**

Once I had compiled the information that I obtained from the 189 respondents who participated in my study I ranked their mean organic purchasing scores to identify any differences in the intensity of their organic purchasing habits. As a result, I found two distinct groups in my study: (1) committed and (2) non-committed organic purchasers. Mean purchasing scores (MPS) for all respondents ranged from 0 – 11.15. This means that respondents with the lowest MPS (< 3.5) were less committed to purchasing organic foods than people who had higher scores. Using MPS to differentiate the groups of respondents was an important and necessary step to determine if the research variables (i.e. rational choice, distrust, elitism) in my study were different between people who were committed organic food purchasers vs those who were not. This is the first study that has compared groups of organic food purchasers based on the intensity in which they buy organic foods to explain what may be influencing this behavior. According to the results that I obtained, participants in the study seem to purchase fruits and vegetables, processed foods, and milk more frequently than any of the other food categories (Table 4-1). For instance, 28% of the 189 respondents indicated that they buy fresh fruits and vegetables fairly often. About 22% said that they buy this fresh food and vegetables very often and 18% said that they almost always buy this food category. Processed foods, which includes products like canned and frozen meals were also purchased quite frequently by the participants in this study. Twenty-five percent of people said that they purchased organic processed foods very often and about 5% said that they almost always buy these types of organic foods. In the case of

milk, almost 30% said that they buy it fairly often and 20% indicated to buy it almost always. Food categories such as Meat, poultry and eggs, bread and bakery items and grains were not as popular among people who participated in the study. The reason why this may be the case is because the categories are not available in the same quantities as the first three food categories that were presented to them choices in the study (Table 4-1). Fruits and vegetables, processed foods and milk can be found in a greater variety and availability in most places where organic food products are sold in Florida. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) does not have official statistics on organic food sales, so most of this information is available from industry sources (ERS, 2009). According to the Organic Trade Association (OTA) approximately 38% of food sales are fruits and vegetables, followed by dairy (15%) and prepared foods (14%). Organic breads and grains (11%), as well as organic meats (2%) have the lowest percentages of sales. This information depicted in Figure 4-1 and summarizes OTA's 2008 annual report regarding organic food sales by category in the U.S.

Table 4-1. Percentage of respondents who purchased seven different organic food categories.

Category	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often	Almost Always
Fresh fruits & vegetables	10	22	28	22	18
Processed foods (e.g. canned foods)	21	32	17	25	5
Meat, poultry & eggs	30	33	20	5	2
Milk	14	21	30	15	20
Other dairy products (e.g. yogurt)	20	30	25	10	15
Bread & bakery items	37	40	10	7	6
Grains (e.g. rice, oats, etc) & flours	55	20	9	10	6

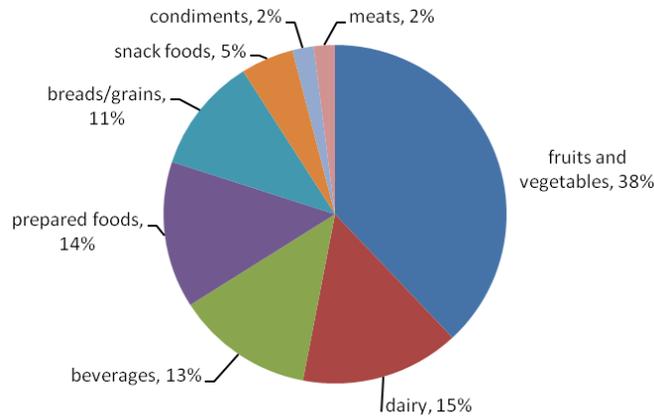


Figure 4-1. U.S. organic food sales by category.

Other possible reasons why respondents might have indicated that these were the food categories that they purchased more frequently could be due to convenience. Some studies indicate that for some people purchasing foods must be efficient (Chrysohoidis & Krystallis, 2005; Hjelmar, 2011). These studies suggest that availability of organic food products is important and that many shoppers are pragmatic and will not go to several stores to find the organic product they want. If the supermarket, farmers market or natural food store does not have a wide selection of organic food many consumers will end up buying non-organic food. Buying organic food is not always a sole individual decision, but also a family matter (Hjelmar, 2011). There are studies that indicate that people have reported that before having a family they used to buy cheap food which was really easy to find and prepare, but that once they got married and had children they made decisions to buy foods like organic milk, which they thought was healthier and better for them.

### **Committed and non-committed organic food purchasers**

Using the research question and hypotheses in my study as basis, I looked at two groups in my study and compared them to determine if the expressions of rational

choice, distrust and elitism were significantly different. Because my data was not normally distributed, I used the non-parametric Mann Whitney U test to compare the two groups. To use the Mann-Whitney test I first combined the raw data for both the committed and non-committed groups, to enable the statistical software (SPSS) to rank responses for every research variable from lowest to highest. The Mann-Whitney U test uses the mean ranks for the two groups to determine if they differ significantly from each other. In my study and for the variables of rational choice, distrust and elitism, I found that there were significant differences between committed and non-committed organic good purchasers. Both groups were significantly different ( $p < 0.05$ ) in terms of their expression of rational choice and elitism behaviors (Table 4-2 and Table 4-3).

Committed organic food purchasers had a mean rank of 67.66 compared to 54.33, the mean rank for the non-committed organic food purchasers. This means that committed organic food purchasers were more inclined to purchase organic foods

Table 4-2. Differences between committed and non-committed organic food purchasers in regards their expressions of rational choice, distrust and elitism (Mann-Whitney Test)

Research Variable	Group	Mean Rank
Rational choice	Committed	67.66
	Non-committed	54.33
Distrust	Committed	60.19
	Non-committed	66.16
Elitism	Committed	71.34
	Non-committed	48.50

Table 4-3. Test of statistical significance for the expressions of rational choice, distrust and elitism

	Rational choice	Distrust	Elitism
Mann-Whitney	1432.0	1648.5	1152.0
Wilcoxon W	2608.0	4574.5	2328.0
Z	-2.018	-902	-3.453
P < 0.05	0.044	0.367	0.001

based on rational choice than non-committed organic food purchasers. The responses to the items under the variable of rational choice suggest that overall most committed organic purchasers think that organic foods are safer to eat, are more nutritious than non organic foods and that if more people ate organic food there would be a lower incidence of diabetes and other common diseases. Most of the existing literature supports this finding. People who purchase organic foods on a regular basis give such cognitive responses to the question of why they buy organic foods. Thus, buying organic foods is the rational choice. There were no significant differences in the expression of distrust in government and large food corporations by the participants in the study (Table 5-1 and 5-2). The mean ranks for committed (60.19) and non-committed (66.16) suggest that both groups currently do not trust the involvement of the government and/or large food corporations in the food system. Regardless of their commitment to buying organic food, all respondents expressed distrust in the U.S. government and big food corporations. Both groups do not think that the U.S. government does a good job of controlling contamination in our food or that they are doing enough to keep small farmers in business.

Committed and non-committed organic food purchasers were significantly different in their expression of elitism (Table 4-2 and 4-3). The mean rank for the committed group (71.34) was higher than for the non-committed group (48.50). Some studies have suggested that eating specific types of foods, namely, those that people consider healthy give rise to moral judgments about those people who do not share the same habit (Steim & Nemeroff, 1995). These studies suggest that that moral judgments of

others differ depending on the foods they eat often guided by puritan ethics and principle of "you are what you eat".

There were significant correlations among the research variables in my study (Table 4-4). Both rational choice and identity were significant correlated ( $P < 0.01$ ) suggesting that there is a positive relationship between expressions of identity (i.e. elitism) and a rational choice response provided by people who buy organic foods. Additionally, the Spearman correlation test showed that there is a significant negative correlation ( $P < 0.05$ ) between distrust and rational choice and distrust and identity ( $P < 0.01$ ).

Regardless of commitment to purchase organic food, respondents indicated that when that rational choice was influenced by a negative trust in government and food corporations. Identity was positive correlated to rational choice regardless of commitment to purchase organic foods.

The decision to buy organic food involves a complex set of factors that cannot easily be gathered and interpreted by simply asking people why they prefer them. There are over 20 years of research on the topic of organic consumption and a general consensus on the principal reasons why individuals purchase organic food. However, few studies have looked at what some individuals or groups might be expressing in the context of social behaviors when they purchase organic food.

Table 4-4. Spearman correlations test among expression of rational choice, distrust and elitism

		Rational Choice	Distrust	Elitism
Rational choice	Corr. Coef	1.00	-0.166*	0.297**
Distrust	Corr. Coef	-0.166*	1.00	-0.301**
Elitism	Corr. Coef	0.297	-0.301*	1.00

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

My interest in conducting this research was to identify any existing differences between committed and non-committed organic food purchasers and determine whether this behavior might be influenced by rational choice, distrust or feelings of elitism. Numerous studies have been conducted and a broad range of factors from health to protecting the environment have been suggested to influence the organic food purchasing decision process. However, few studies have looked at the role that elitism and distrust have on this behavior.

### **Rational choice**

In contrast with many of the previous research that suggests people purchase and eat organic food because they are conscious about their health, as well as the health of their family and friends (Wandel & Bugge, 1997; Padel & Foster, 2005; Essoussi & Zahaf, 2009; Mondelaers, Verbeke, & Van Huylenbroeck, 2009), only the truly committed organic purchasers in my research indicated to agree with this idea, which was part of the variable of rational choice. There have been suggestions in previous literature that health might be the least important reason why some people purchase organic foods (Brunson, K., Scholderer, J., 2001). Authors like Michadelidou and Hassan (2001) suggest that this may be due to the fact that even when people are conscious and concerned about their health, this does not always result in consistent and committed purchasing of organic foods. Another possible explanation is that the perception that health is the main reason for purchasing organic foods is that it is not consistently supported by scientific research (Honkanen, Verplanken, & Olsen, 2006). Further, people's concern for their health may not always be a strong enough motivator for them to be committed to the consistent purchase of organic food.

## **Distrust**

Both committed and non-committed organic purchasers in my study expressed distrust in the government's role in our food system, as well as in big food corporations and large farms producing foods available in Florida. Respondents agreed that they did not think that the government was doing a good job in controlling contamination in our food or that they could trust food that has been produced in large conventional farms. Committed organic purchasers who do not trust foods produced in large conventional farms will consistently purchase organic foods, as it was expressed by their mean purchasing score in the organic food purchasing survey.

Although some might suggest that for consumers, who are aware of food safety issues, it is important to evaluate the risks associated with purchasing and eating certain types of foods, it may not always be easy for consumers to assess risks using traditional methods such as smell, taste or other physical attributes of food (Lobb & Mazzocchi, 2007). This means that people must rely on other things to determine whether they can trust the foods that are available for purchase. Knowing where the foods they purchase came from (i.e. place of origin), which has been suggested is primarily driven as a result of food scares (Loureiro & Umberger, 2007; Skuras, D., Vakrou, A., 2002) is a factor some may use to trust foods. However, even when people know where the foods came from their decision to purchase that particular food may be depend on the extent to which they trust in the credibility behind whoever is producing the food. Hence, people who distrust conventional foods that are produced in large scale farms will consistently purchase organic foods, because they are a better

alternative and present a lesser risk. For the non-committed organic purchasers in the study their distrust did not increase their organic purchasing habits.

The term trust can have different meaning for different people. For example, some authors (Lewis & Weigert, 1985) based their definition of trust on the German sociologist, Georg Simmel's work, and define it as "*a functional alternative to rational prediction for the reduction of complexity*". This means that people will trust those things that they can somehow predict will not harm them or bring about complex problems. A simpler definition is given by Morrow et al. (2003), who define trust as "*the extent to which one believes that others will not act to exploit one's vulnerabilities*". Trust can be seen as a combination of rational thinking (cognitive process) and intuition (affective influences) and which may be dependent on past experience (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). For this reason, many people may tend to not rely much on formal institutions as a basic way of safeguarding their health, economy, education and other personal interest (Tillmar, M. and Lindkvist, L., 2007).

According to the Pew Research Center (2010), for over a decade many Americans have continued to distrust the government and their performance in various areas of interest in the country (Table 4.1). During the last 12 years, there has been a decline in the level of trust in those government agencies involved in the country's food system (i.e. FDA and EPA). This may explain why there were no significant differences between committed and non-committed purchasers. Respondents in both groups expressed distrust in the involvement of government and big food corporations in the food system regardless of whether or not they purchased organic foods consistently.

Some reports have suggested that even when people are satisfied with the economy and their confidence in state and local governments is adequate, trust in the federal government does not necessarily improve. These reports suggests that only 20% of American are highly satisfied with the state of the nation and only 34% basically trust the government. The figures support the results obtained in my study part, since overall most of the respondents expressed a level of distrust in government as it relates their participation in the food system.

I think it is important to ask whether a little distrust in government or big food corporations is something to be concerned about. What is wrong with questioning or disagreeing with the way formal institutions handles issues like our national food supply? An equally important questions is weather a lack of trust is normal and in the case of foods, does it have the potential to lead to riskier or harmful behaviors? One obvious result of distrusting people or institutions is the divisions that it can create. Take the recent disagreements among people due to issues like food, health care, taxes, unemployment and religion, which may be unlike any other experienced in recent years. One could argue that these divisions are in part due to distrust that whoever is responsible for handling these issues is not doing a good enough job and one that will benefit all of us.

Table 4-5. Approval Ratings of Federal Agencies by Americans during a twelve year period.

	1998	2010	Change
	%	%	
FDA	75	58	-17
EPA	69	57	-12
Defense Dept.	76	67	-9

Source: Pew Research Center

When people cannot trust what others are doing, many will attempt to do something and try to fix whatever they think they are doing wrong. Such sentiments may in part be why political groups like the Tea Party, which continue to discuss the morals and values of American society and express their dissatisfaction with the state of the nation by holding rallies and other demonstrations, was formed. Extreme religious groups, which express their views regarding what is right and wrong openly, will warn people that those who do not agree with them should suffer and be condemned. Others who feel that they cannot trust what is present in conventional foods and see nothing wrong with eating and drinking raw foods, because they are actually good for the body and “natural” might voice their opinions about having these products available in the market without restrictions. There are others who because they think vaccinations actually make people weaker and cause some diseases, argue for lenient laws regarding this issue. It may seem a stretch to think that people who choose to buy organic foods, because they do not trust in government and food corporations or are part of organized groups all share these seemingly extreme ideas or opinions or that these are issues are even a concern or a problem. They are only expressing their opinions and it might be a coincidence that they prefer organic foods. Why would something as non-threatening as buying organic food be associated with other radical lifestyle decisions?

### **Identity and Elitism**

Committed organic purchasers expressed both strong identity and trust opinions about organic food. Making good food choices are a key issue for organic food purchasers because many of them feel that opting for these types of foods is a moral obligation. We all need to eat, but some groups feel strongly about the types of foods they eat. These same groups create movements and missions to either try to recruit

new members to be part of their lifestyle or influence policies that deal with issues like animal rights and food security for all. They strongly believe that their ethics are expressed by the products they purchase. Fair trade, organic agriculture, and the purchase of local foods are some examples of products that people feel are ethical. They also do not just simply make a statement with the purchase of these products, but also expressed their disgust for certain products and technologies like genetic engineering.

There have been several studies that address the role of identity in the consumptions of foods (Guthman, 2003; Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; Moisander & Pesonen, 2002; Nenci et al., 2008). Identity is something that people strive to attain (Gollwitzer, Wicklund, & Hilton, 1982; Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2001; 2007). Generally, individuals will attempt to find others who have similar identities to form formal or informal groups. Several authors suggest that group members will communicate their group identity to others through socially recognized symbols (Ledgerwood et al., 2007). For example people who are part of a organic and sustainability club, might all ride bicycles to meetings, wear t-shirts made of 100% organic cotton, shop at the local farmers market every week and avoid any foods that contain high fructose corn syrup. Their beliefs and attitudes communicate knowingly or unknowingly that they belong to a select group of people with intellect, specialized training, knowledge, commitment or other noticeable and distinct attributes. They will also often feel that their opinions or ideas need to be taken seriously, because they are based on things like morals, values, knowledge or best interest and are the most likely to be constructive to society or fit to govern others. Thus, some organic purchasers might not only represent themselves as

part of group who prefers these types of foods, but also suggest to others that being part of their group is good and that by sharing their values or objects they might also help make their community or society a better place. For some organic consumers, this is an important part of believing in the value of organic food, because it is a way of fighting back against intensive agricultural production, environmental degradation, global trade and other relevant issues. They increasingly respond to these issues with their purchase behavior and specific ethics.

However, it is when these concepts turn into expression that cause very harmful behaviors that we should pay attention and investigate whether they could lead to deviant behavior. Take the case of Nazi Germany, where two broad implications occurred. First, they established diet campaigns (Figure 4.1) to get their citizens to “return to nature” as an instance of anti-modernity. Second, the idea that promoting foods that were wholesome, harmless and safe might very well been part of the expression and goal to have a “superior race” that consume a special diet and one that was different than the one shared by other groups. In fact, biodynamic agriculture was the method that Nazis seemed to promote in their quest for obtaining this special diet (Treitel, 2009).

I am not suggesting that we should all be concerned about people who practice biodynamic agriculture; because they have the potential of being as dangerous as the Nazis were to Jews and everyone who oppose their ideology. More research would need to be conducted on this issue to determine whether or not this may be a possibility. However, some authors suggest that relationship between in-group



Figure 4-2. Poster depicting the campaign in Germany during 1934. It reads “Today as yesterday: Remaking the German kitchen”.

cohesion and out-group hostility can take place when groups are in competition over physical resources, political power or other desired goals (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif & Sherif, 1953). People with extremist behavior may have the perception that an out-group constitutes a threat to in-group interests or survival and creates conditions where identification with the in-group is directly associated with fear and hostility toward the threatening out-group. To the extent that threat is a factor, members of minority groups might show a stronger correlation between in-group identification and prejudice against the dominant out-group specifically (Brewer, 1999). Thus, if biodynamic supporters are currently small group of farmer and consumers, and for some reason ever feel that their lifestyle, morals, or values are threatened, authors like Duckitt and Mphuthing (1998) suggest that substantial interrelationship between in-group

identification will take place and negative attitudes toward others will occur. Their findings conclude that there are two different types of prejudice that can occur. One type is rooted in perceived conflict and entails a reciprocal relationship between in-group identification and out-group hostility. When intergroup attitudes are not conflict-based, attitudes toward the in-group and prejudice toward the out-group are essentially independent.

Many who buy organic foods believe that this is a form of environmental activism (Johnson, 2009). They claim that by choosing organic products, which “they believe are better for their health and the biosystem”, they are “protecting the planet and our future”. Food choice has become a form of expressing personality ideals and identity (Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; Lindeman, 2009). For people who purchase organic food, their choice is much more to them than concern for things like health and taste, it is perhaps the expression of ideology of how life ought to be lived (e.g. Amato & Partridge, 1989; Warde, 1997) that gives is much more important to them, because it generally gives them a sense of self-satisfaction. Such behavior also allows for communicating to others qualities that can morally admired (Chaiken & Pliner, 1987; Mori, Pliner & Chaiken, 1987; (Steim & Nemeroff, 1995). For some, choosing organic foods is part of their goal to look a certain way, live in a healthy manner almost as if being part of a new religion (Belasco, 1997; Brandt, 1997; Leichter, 1997). Buying organic foods might communicate more than being part of a “fashionable trend” but rather that the individual belongs to a group that is in touch with reality and knows what is good and what is condemnable.

## **Legitimacy**

I believe that the concept of legitimacy may be the predominant expression in distrust of institutions of authority and expressions of superiority. The term is used in many different ways and can be used to refer to different situations. For many groups, including environmentalist and green consumers legitimacy in part deals with people's questioning and refusal to recognize political entities, leaders, policies, laws, or procedures. For instance, many advocacy food groups question the legitimacy of food that was not produced according to their personal values and beliefs (Scott, 2006). They question whether leaders' acquisition and exercise of power has been in accordance with the society's generally accepted procedures (e.g. political or moral values). For example, there are some who think that it necessary to regulate the U.S. food and drug safety through the use of a precautionary principle ((Soule, 2004). Thus, a plan is formulated that addresses the beliefs and values of proponents of the initiative. The potential concerns arise when such efforts try to enforce regulatory constraints that potentially could violate political legitimacy.

According to some authors, legitimacy may be conferred in a many different. It may involve formal rituals that are either religious or quasi-religious in nature, royal birth, popular elections etc. Consequently, people who gain or hold power by illegitimate means tend to work very hard to discover or create ways of endowing themselves with legitimacy after the fact, often by inventing a new ideology or religion and attempting to indoctrinate the people with its legitimating formulas through various forms of propaganda, thus creating moral incentives for the citizenry to obey their government.

Although some studies have suggested that distribution, price, certification and labeling are all linked to consumers' level of trust when purchasing organic foods, I did

not measure whether this was true, because my hypothesis was that committed organic purchasers would express distrust for government.

Ethical considerations are becoming dominant in consumer food choices because of the unease expressed by many regarding the increasing gap between production processes and consumption. Current trends show that consumers have three types of ethical concerns: the first type of concerns covers substantive issues like animal welfare, the second covers requirements with respect to reliable information and the third one covers involvement and participation. The last type of consumer concern goes against the idea of the passive, utterly vulnerable consumer, who has to be protected by the state or some market optimum. Moreover, it turns out that many consumers are diversifying their food choices depending on their life style, culture and life situations, which means that there is a trend towards the increasing diversification into various food styles and corresponding farming and production styles. However, there are several arguments against the idea of the steering role of consumers' values and concerns on the market *per se*. It is proposed here that these arguments are not compelling and that consumers, together with other stakeholders such as producers and regulators, have responsibilities in making the food sector more ethically acceptable.

The current food production system has some inherent features against incorporating ethically acceptable values. As a consequence of the increasing importance of all aspects of food in society, other aspects of food beyond basic nutrition are becoming increasingly important (for example, different farming and production styles, like fast food, Slow Food, international food and health food). It seems

necessary to regulate the representation and coexistence of these styles of production and within markets and to formulate criteria of coexistence from an ethics point of view. Future trends which the food sector has to incorporate into food production practices are the diversification of food, farming and styles through types of ethically acceptable coexistence, and the better incorporation of more consumers' values through the mechanisms of participation and involvement. The food sector has a bright future if it is able to learn to live with diversity and social contextualisation through consumers' involvement and participation in food production.

In Western Europe, from the eighties onwards, production and consumption of food has become increasingly politicized. In the fifties, sixties and seventies, one can say that, at least with respect to the ethical values and goals of the food system, there was a large, implicit consensus across various stakeholder communities, including consumers: food was not seen to be a political and ethically controversial issue. Nothing political could happen with food; the only ethical issue that was at stake was food shortages in various parts of the world mostly due to misdistribution of food. Food was essentially seen as "fuel" that could be made available for consumption in larger or smaller quantities, and could be unsafe to eat, but consideration was generally given to other issues. This consensus was a mainly result of the food security problems facing Europe in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Next to the total neglect of the ethical issues that could be addressed with genetically modified food, it is also remarkable that this report clearly subscribes to a conception of the consumer which was at that time prevalent: consumers are seen as to be protected with respect to food safety, but in other aspects consumer protection, or at

least the provision of information needed by consumers needed to make an informed choice, is not seen to be necessary. Food is framed as politically and ideologically neutral, and quality is not an issue. There is a very strict division of responsibilities between companies, governments and consumer organizations: the food industry is responsible for food production and organizing food choices, the authorities are responsible for guaranteeing the safety of the food, and consumer organizations lobby for food availability and fair access to the food supply for all.

However, since the eighties, food is becoming more and more an item on the political agenda. Food catastrophes like BSE, Dioxin, Foot and Mouth Disease and other food safety incidents cause social crises which extend beyond straightforward matters of food safety. They demonstrate the gap which has developed between the locations where consumers shop for, prepare and consume a meal, and the distant places where (parts or ingredients of) the final food stuffs are produced. This gap between production and consumption not only determines various kinds of ethically unacceptable production practices but also contributes to an increasing feeling of consumer alienation, and a lack of trust by consumers, in the motives of various actors in the food sector.

Policy measures and marketing strategies have contributed to the new awakening of ethical concerns with respect to food production. These phenomena have influenced the emergence of new ethical issues and intuitions, argumentations or perspectives. Some, (perhaps more cynical) observers would argue that the emergence of food ethics is correlated with the rise of the affluent, middle class consumer, and has become increasingly the focus of societal debate in order to appease the moral unrest

of this group of consumers. Ethics is partly constructed by, and a marketing tool for, organisations which promote specific ethical standards or political agendas, or non-government organisations which protest against the activities of particular multinational companies or methods of food production. Of course, the way these ethical orientations have emerged is dependent on how consumers and their values are conceptualized by press, communication and marketing activities (Miller and Rose 1997). However, this comment is made from an outside perspective and has no constructive solutions to the disturbances resulting from living with these ethical issues. Consumer protests have often been limited to some of the usual ethical concerns (for example, animal welfare or fair trade), but at the same time, were sometimes effective. Via boycotts and other protests, consumers have ensured that certain products were taken off the shelves. An interesting description of consumer ethics trends is given by the measures that are published every three years regarding the attitudes of European consumers to technology, including the medical uses and agricultural and food uses of genetically modified organisms (GMO). Consumers differentiate between different types of applications of biotechnology, particularly medical applications in contrast to agri-food applications. They also make a distinction between GM-crops and GM foods, the latter being the least supported by European consumers. Perceptions regarding the risks for society, and potential usefulness of applications play the most important role in the consumer rejection or acceptance of GM foods and crops. This implies that consumer benefits are the most important factors in determining whether GM crops are accepted or not. Price is not often mentioned as a factor contributing to consumer decision-making. In addition, in Europe less than 50% report high levels of trust in governments.

Some studies have shown that ethical self-identity can influence intentions to purchase organic foods (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008). Further, this ethical self-identity may be expressed in the form of altruistic behaviors (Dahm, Samonte, & Shows, 2009)(Dietz, Fitzgerald, & Shwom, 2005) may in part shape attitudes and intentions to buy organic foods

The purchase of organic foods by certain groups is part of an identity that for many denotes positive socially conscious behavior and in the case of this study expression of elitism and lack of trust in government and big food corporations. There are many organic food purchasers who believe that when they buy organic foods they are expressing their eco-friendly behaviors (Dahm et al., 2009). These behaviors although seemingly harmless might have the potential to be part of other more risky behaviors like prejudice, social isolation, radical political activism.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

My study showed that significant differences may exist between groups of people with different organic purchasing habits. Committed and non-committed organic good were significantly different ( $p < 0.05$ ) in terms of their expression of rational choice and elitism behaviors. However, these groups did not differ in their level of distrust in government and large food corporations. Organic food purchasing food is considered by many who practice it as a form of activism that involves political, economic, environmental, and ethical acts (Lavin, 2009). Several groups debate about the benefits of products like free range eggs, grass fed beef, natural diets, raw foods, local foods and the harmful effects of pesticides, and genetically modified crops. Often conventional and high calorie foods have been identified as one of the causes of the rising obesity rates. The groups in favor of organic foods claim that the American food system is broken and that is part responsible for issues ranging from global warming, intellectual property rights and national sovereignty. This politicization of the American diet can often lead to campaigns that oppose global trade, genetically modified crops, and demand higher wages for farm workers and more socially just treatment.

Despite numerous finding that show that, organic food consumption is associated with healthy habits. My study revealed that organic buyers are more likely to buy organic food because they feel of sense of being part of the well informed elite group who knows better than to trust that government and big food corporations are providing us with good food. For example, many of the respondents agreed that the food corporations were more interested in selling their product than the actual health of their clients. They also agreed that buying organic foods is a moral obligation and a smart

decision. These items meant to measure forms of skepticism/distrust and elitism, may surprised even those who provide the answers in the first place, because they feel these behaviors are terrible crimes on par with other deviant human behaviors. The risk may not be necessarily be in the expression of the purchasing behavior, but on some of the other behaviors associated with expressions of elitism and mistrust. Ethical eaters (Bell and Valentine 1997), which includes vegetarianism, organic food, Slow Foods movement have their social critics, academics (Friedmann 1993; Miele and Murdoch) that see these trends as active opposition to industrialized food provision and the legitimacy of institutions involved in our food system.

Given the possible consequences associated with extreme expressions of mistrust of authority and superiority it may be necessary to conduct more focused research that measures whether these behaviors have the potential of resulting in harmful forms of alienation and social divisions. Buying and eating food is for the most part a normal activity. Our food choices are a reflection of our personal social and ethical values and our morality. But, should our choices reflect what we think everyone must do to change our societies and communities? Should our food choices reflect of what we think is fundamentally right and good, not only for ourselves but also for others?

Through the so called moral or ethical food choices, people are expressing only part of the things they believe in. The people in this study who choose to buy organic or other similar forms of “alternative foods” are expressing levels of elitism and mistrust that may seem harmless, but that have the potential of being accompanied by more risky actions.

For some organic purchaser the corporate food system is broken and needs to be fixed. Many advocates believe that food must be produced in ethical ways and that they need to change the world, show other what they think is fundamentally right and good way of life.

The responsibility of consumers regarding their food choices may have large implications beyond agriculture and economic growth of an industry. This makes it necessary to investigate the consequences that committed or non-committed organic purchasers can have in our society when they express elitism and mistrust in other aspects of their lives.

APPENDIX A  
ORGANIC FOOD PURCHASING

How often do you buy these organic foods? Please check one box for each category of food.

Category	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often	Almost Always
Fresh fruits & vegetables						
Processed foods (e.g. canned foods)						
Meat, poultry & eggs						
Milk						
Other dairy products (e.g. yogurt)						
Bread & bakery items						
Grains (e.g. rice, oats, etc) & flours						

Indicate how hard and expensive it is for you to use the following categories of organic foods?

How <b>HARD</b> is it to find the category of organic food listed here? 1 = Very easy 2 = Easy 3 = Hard 4 = Very Hard 5 = Don't know	Food Category	How <b>EXPENSIVE</b> are the categories of organic food listed here compared to non-organic food? 1 = About the same 2 = A little more 3 = Quite a bit more 4 = Much more 5 = Don't know
1    2    3    4    DK	Fresh fruits & vegetables	1    2    3    4    DK
1    2    3    4    DK	Processed foods (e.g. canned foods)	1    2    3    4    DK
1    2    3    4    DK	Meat, poultry & eggs	1    2    3    4    DK
1    2    3    4    DK	Milk	1    2    3    4    DK
1    2    3    4    DK	Other dairy products (e.g. yogurt)	1    2    3    4    DK
1    2    3    4    DK	Bread & bakery items	1    2    3    4    DK
1    2    3    4    DK	Grains (e.g. rice, oats, etc) & flours	1    2    3    4    DK

APPENDIX B  
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

**I have received a copy of the letter of consent for participating in the study “The Role of Social Identity in Organic Food Purchasing” and understand that my participation is voluntary.**

**I agree to participate in this study**                       **I do not agree to participate in this study**

Sex: M  F     Marital Status: Single  Married     **I am over 18 yrs. of age**

Which of the following categories best describes the **total income for your entire household?**  
\$0-25,000     \$25,001-50,000     \$50,001-100,000     Over \$100,000

How often do you buy organic foods when shopping for groceries? Please check one box.  
Never     Occasionally     Often     Almost always

For each of the following statements, please indicate whether you think the statement is definitely false, probably false, probably true, definitely true or you don't know.

	<b>Definitely false</b>	<b>Probably false</b>	<b>Probably true</b>	<b>Definitely true</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
1. Eating organic food is better for the health and safety of farmers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Organic foods are safer to eat.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Organic food is more nutritious than non-organic food	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. You can trust the food was grown organically if it carries the organic seal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Organic farming is better for the viability of farmers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. People who are important to me eat organic foods	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. If more people ate organic food we would have a lower incidence of diabetes and other common diseases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statements below.

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
1. The U.S. government does a good job of controlling contamination in our food.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. Organic food is a scam	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Large food companies care more about selling their product than consumers' health	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. The U.S. government is doing enough to keep small farms in business.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. Supporting farmers who protect the environment is one of the priorities of the U.S. government.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. Americans can trust food that has been produced in large conventional farms	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. The U.S. government only cares about supporting large industrial farms.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. Many food manufacturers sacrifice quality to cut down on production costs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree about the following statements

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
1. People who buy organic food are likely to be well educated	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. People who buy organic food probably have a decent income.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Many organic food purchasers are snobs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. Purchasing organic food only contributes to more social divisions among citizens.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. Most people who purchase organic foods tend to prefer a simpler lifestyle.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. Buying organic foods is just another passing fad.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. Organic food purchasers embody the truly conscious consumer.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

- |   |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 8. Many people who purchase organic foods are naïve.                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Spending money on organic food is a smart decision.              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Purchasing organic foods should be everyone's moral obligation. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Paying higher prices for organic foods is foolish.              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. People who buy organic foods are "living in the past".          | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## **The Role of Social Identity in Organic Food Purchasing**

My name is Juan Carlos Rodriguez. I am a graduate student at the University of Florida. My advisor is Dr. Mickie Swisher in the Department of Family, Youth & Community Sciences. My research deals with attitudes and opinions about organic food. If you agree to participate, it will take about 10 minutes to complete my survey.

You must be 18 or older to complete the survey. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question. You can quit at any point. There is no direct benefit or compensation to you for completing the survey. There are no known risks to you for completing the survey. Your name will not appear on the survey and no one will be able to connect your name to the survey you complete. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by the law. The only people who will see the completed surveys are my advisor and I.

You can contact me at [jcro@ufl.edu](mailto:jcro@ufl.edu) or my supervisor at [mesw@ufl.edu](mailto:mesw@ufl.edu). We can be reached by telephone at 352-273-3538. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, contact the UFIRB Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 36211-2250, 352-392-0433 or [irb2@ufl.edu](mailto:irb2@ufl.edu).

Thank you for your help.

**Juan Carlos Rodriguez**  
**Graduate Student**

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