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Why Kids Are 'Lovin' It': A Q Methodology Analysis of the Appeal of McDonald's

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ABSTRACT

Why Kids Are 'Lovin' It': A Q Methodology Analysis
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The dramatic rise in childhood obesity is a major concern nationwide. Unprecedented media exposure, drastically decreased time spent interacting as a family, and the consumption of calorie-dense foods are all heated topics of discussion with ties to weight gain. In this research, possible associations are examined between media, social groups and a favorite fast-food restaurant among children: McDonald's. Q methodology was used to analyze the various factors that draw children to McDonald's. With a theoretical background in social learning theory, this study had 29 children rank-order 30 photographs depicting elements of the McDonald's experience. Pictures included the most and least popular food items, social events like birthday parties and eating with family, physical aspects of McDonald's, such as the Playplace and dining area, famous McDonald's characters and celebrities, promotional events and giveaways, like the monopoly game, food coupons and Happy Meal toys. The participants then took part in an interview.

Results of the study resemble existing research into what motivates children to go to McDonald's, including the food and Playplace. However, this study also reveals three new factors contributing to the restaurant's popularity for kids: their need to be with friends and family, frequenting the restaurant as a sort of comfortable rite or tradition, and the fame with which McDonald's is associated. The findings suggest the importance of social education about food habits from parents, in spite of an increased dependence on media and peers for information.

Keywords: social learning theory, obesity, children, McDonald's, advertising, Q methodology

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In a world where Ronald McDonald is more recognizable than the Christian cross, there is cause for wonder at just how and why fast-food has come to rule the lives of Americans (Schlosser, 2002, p. 4). Americans increase their consumption of fast-food each year currently spending around $190 billion on deep-fried delights ("Revenue of the United States," 2013). Eric Schlosser (2002) claims that more money is spent on fast-food than higher education, computers and software, magazines, books, movies and even new cars (p. 3). Fast-food has been linked to weight gain in adults and poor nutrition in children. Consumption of fast-food is undoubtedly playing some role in the national obesity epidemic. Americans spend around $190 billion annually on obesity-related medical bills; almost as much as they spend on their fast-food habit (Sifferlin, 2015; Cawley & Meyerhoefer, 2012). However unfortunate these effects are for an adult population, not just "grownups" experience the effects of a sedentary, media heavy, fast-paced, fast-food lifestyle. Childhood obesity is at its all-time high and growing which increases the need to understand some of the factors that may be driving this phenomenon - particularly food and media consumption. The current study seeks to understand how advertising influences children's food choices and favoritism of one particular restaurant - McDonald's - within the context of social learning theory in today's modern, media-dependent society.

Chapter 2: Context and Historical Overview

The Birth of the Burger and Fast-Food Culture

Reflecting the complexity of factors that come together to form America's current culture of consumption, the history of how the country came to its present state is not so simplistic. In his book, Schlosser describes a sort of graceful merging of overall economic growth, increased mobility (new highways, roads and many more cars), and the new Southern-California-based McDonald's enterprise that changed how America spent its free time and money (Schlosser, 2002). Cars were key in the evolution of fast-food culture as it is today, developing simultaneously with new suburban housing and a working-class dominant culture with a high demand for a fast meal (Hogan, 1999).

Though often credited as being the first fast-food burger joint, McDonald's cannot claim complete monopoly of the burger world from the beginning. The actual invention and name of the hamburger has been credited to many contending sources and continues to be an unresolved issue today (Hogan, 1999). It was originally used as a fair food, some claim as early as 1885, but it was not considered fit for every-day consumption. Despite that, the 1920s became a turning point for the hamburger. America saw a change in how, where and when this type of meal was consumed, an innovation of Billy Ingram and his White Castle System (Hogan, 1999).

Legend has it that the modern hamburger was invented by J. Walter "Walt" Anderson, who would later partner with Billy Ingram. Anderson worked as a cook at a restaurant and was frustrated at how long a meatball was taking to cook. He decided to flatten the meatball into a patty to cook faster. That patty was placed in a bun instead of between the traditional two slices of bread, and the modern-day burger was born. His original burger, now known as the White Castle Slider, was recently named the most influential burger of all time (Begley, 2014).

The miracle of White Castle's success and the subsequent popularity of American fast-food was not simply in their tasty sandwiches, but their ingenious marketing (Goldberg, 2010). In a time when the American public had deep-seated fears about the sanitation of ground beef (see Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle)*, the White Castle chain was able to address and change negative beliefs, making the hamburger an American staple food in just a few short years (Goldberg, 2010). In addition, the White Castle creators engineered a uniform system of operation, comparable to that of Henry Ford: burgers were consistently and dependably made across all of the restaurant locations (Bowen, 2009; Hogan, 1999). There were many contenders and copiers of this innovative idea. Yet, the fast-food restaurant world would again be revolutionized in 1948. The birth of the Speedee Service System enabled a then non-existent McDonald's to become the empire that it is today.

McDonald's: Humble Birth to Fast-Food Domination

Richard and Maurice (Dick and Mac) McDonald had taken part in various business ventures before they opened a drive-in restaurant in Pasadena, California. Later, they moved to San Bernadino and opened the McDonald Brothers Burger Bar Drive-In, which was wildly successful. The restaurant was next to a high school and quickly became popular for the younger crowd. Unfortunately, their location and most frequent customers drove away other clientele. Coupled with the limited range of customers, the McDonald brothers were exacerbated at the amounting costs and turnover of bell hops as well as silverware and china for their guests (Schlosser, 2002).

In 1948, they closed the McDonald Brother Burger Bar Drive-in restaurant, reopening as simply "McDonald's" three months later. The revived and revolutionized restaurant now functioned under the Speedee Service System, which would increase the restaurant's production speed, lower prices and raise sales (Schlosser, 2002). In essence, the Speedee Service System

was the new Cadillac compared to White Castle's Model T operating system (Bowen, 2009). The original menu from the Burger Bar was streamlined from 25 items to just nine: a hamburger, a cheeseburger, three soft drink flavors (all in a 12 oz. cup), milk, coffee, potato chips and a slice of pie. One of the most important changes incorporated into their new restaurant was the new demographic it served: families (Love, 1986).

The most transcendent McDonald's star came along after just a few years of this new booming business: Ray Kroc, "the salesman." Though the McDonald brothers were doing well locally in California, they themselves had proved inept franchisers of the restaurant. In fact, in their short time with the Speedee Service System they had spurred more copycats than franchisees. Originally a milkshake mixer salesman to the company, Ray Kroc took the system and spread it nationwide under the McDonald's name (Schlosser, 2002). In 1961, he purchased the company from the McDonald brothers and expanded the empire across the globe (Kroc & Anderson, 1987).

The Discovery of Lucrative Fast-Food Advertising (to Children)

Ray Kroc employed an aggressive franchising scheme where he insisted on complete adherence to McDonald's strict operating rules. In exchange for complete obedience to the operating regimen, Kroc granted virtually complete freedom in marketing. Jim Zien, a McDonald's franchisee in Minneapolis, Minnesota, took advantage of this liberty and began to advertise rigorously in local newspapers eventually expanding to radio and television in 1958 and 1959 respectively. These ads were accompanied by jingles, whose catchiness would eventually launch McDonald's even further into popular culture and the hearts of Americans. Zien's ads paid off, quickly leading to his domination over all other McDonald's restaurants in sales by 1960. In addition, Zien created a precedent for subsequent campaigns (even to present

day) as he shared his ads freely across the nation's McDonald's franchises, thus allowing all McDonald's restaurants to benefit (Love, 1986; Gross, 2012).

Following Zien's lead, franchises across the country began pouring more and more money into advertising. At this time, other franchisees began appreciating the importance of children as consumers of their products. Children enjoyed McDonald's because it not only sold their favorite foods, it provided them an opportunity to order their own food and watch the cooking process. Zien, among others, realized that virtually the only medium to reach children was television. Not only that, but advertising on children's daytime TV was only one-fourth the cost of adult prime-time television. Moreover, children idolized the television personalities broadcast to them, and responded well to their endorsements. Soon, Zien intuitively directed all of his advertising budget to purchase time on three TV shows for kids in Minneapolis. Needless to say, McDonald's was one of the earliest advertisers to target children directly on television (Love, 1986).

In this same child-directed spirit, two Washington, D.C. McDonald's franchisees, John Gibson and Oscar Goldstein, sponsored a local children's show, Bozo's Circus. The show was short-lived and cancelled just a few years later in 1963. Yet, the clown Bozo's success inspired Gibson and Goldstein to hire the actor who played Bozo, Willard Scott, to create a new persona and spokesman for their ads (Gross, 2012). Scott came up with an easy-to-remember name for what would become one of advertising's most iconic characters: Ronald McDonald (Love, 1986).

Shortly thereafter, Ronald McDonald would become the national spokesperson for the McDonald's corporation. In 1965, he made his first national appearance, just as McDonald's launched their first nationwide television ad campaign (Love, 1986). Willard Scott, who had originally portrayed Bozo the clown and Ronald McDonald in local advertisements, was

replaced with someone thinner to sell McDonald's food in the national campaign. Thus began the McDonald's marketing machine, whose embarkation in television advertising would soon lead to Ronald McDonald being one of the most recognizable global icons. McDonald's facilitated the development of fast-food culture by making restaurant food affordable for working-class families (Schlosser, 2002). Not only was McDonald's a household name, but with the increased exposure, sales skyrocketed, jumpstarting the burger franchise's ascension to global superpower.

The Cooking-Free Culture of Convenience

The McDonald's revolution spawned several new restaurant chains, many of which meticulously copied in detail the exact format of the McDonald's kitchen (Schlosser, 2002). Today, this assembly-line format is the same across most fast-food restaurants in America. Regardless of the type of fare (Mexican, Italian, American, etc.) the food from these chains tends to have a similar composition. With recent developments in nutritional science and calorie consumption, we now know that fast-foods are typically low-cost foods that provide fantastic amounts of energy (in the form of fats, calories, and simple carbohydrates). "Energy dense" foods like those provided by McDonald's, Burger King, and Domino's represent the lowest-cost dietary options to the customer because they provide a lot of energy for a low price. Coupled with excellent and consistent taste, convenience and large portions, countless restaurants make overeating and weight gain almost too easy for consumers. Likewise, many Americans simply do not have time or the means to pay for any other kind of food as they struggle to support their families (Drewnowski & Darmon, 2005).

Other changes, beyond the structure of the industrial kitchen, have facilitated America's dependence on fast-food. Traditionally in American society, the woman of the house has been in charge of preparing food. Even today, the centuries-old belief still appears to exist, with 87% of

home meals prepared by women (Helm, 2010). As McDonald's was becoming a national powerhouse of food production, another revolutionary social innovation came to pass: these kitchen-comfortable women began flocking more to the workforce. Hogan (1999) states that some women found themselves working outside the home simply because they needed the extra money to support their families (due to constant inflation), while many others had varying personal motives. Between 1950 and 2000 the labor force participation of women almost doubled, from 34% in 1950 to 60% in 2000. The numbers are expected to continue to rise (Toossi, 2002).

With the woman-cook out of the home, Pollan (2010) notes the death of the fundamental American family dinner, a vital time for socialization and health benefits. He also notes a lack of appreciation for "foodwork" or time-consuming meal preparation (Pollan, 2010). As a result, more Americans are obese and may face serious health problems (Decker, n.d.). Flammang (2009) also argues that if foodwork continues to be unimportant, unacknowledged and restricted to females only, everyone will suffer. Indeed, the problems will not lie simply with how and by whom the food is prepared, but also how children spend their time and resources while parents are so "busy."

Kid Consumers

With overloaded parents and major corporations who focus specifically on this demographic, kids have become a substantial consumer force. Though perhaps small in physical stature, children spend big: nearly $40 billion dollars of their own money a year; yet they influence up to $500 billion dollars of other consumers (Barbaro & Earp, 2008; Calvert, 2008). Also of note, 87% of young children's income comes directly from their parents (Calvert, 2008). Advertisers who target children have three main objectives: 1) to directly seek children as customers, 2) to indirectly persuade parents through children's "pester power", and 3) to engrave

positive brand associations on the minds of the younger generation (Dotson & Hyatt, 2005, p. 36). The FTC suggests that child requests often shape a family's decision to visit a fast-food restaurant (Botha et al., 2012). Thus, the power and control that children can have over consumption is great, though somewhat immeasurable in its entirety. Children are increasingly sophisticated in their awareness of brands, products, prices, etc. This knowledge has greatly expanded since the 1960s when children were first recognized as their own market segment; which ushered in studies documenting children's advertising (John, 1999).

By determining their motivations, greater steps can be made to understand why it is that kids like fast-food as they do. Though obvious that fast-food in all its forms is not inherently evil and companies have made efforts to improve their image and health level over recent years, it is questionable whether consumers are making those healthy choices themselves as they approach the food counter ("McDonald’s USA," 2011; Strom, 2013; Cahana, 2011). The Industry (under the direction of the CFBAI) has tried to regulate advertising to minors (and subsequently children’s choice) by including and emphasizing healthier items in each ad (“About the Initiative,” n.d.). Notwithstanding these efforts, a study done with subjects from 3-7 years of age showed that children recalled toys and unhealthy food far more than any healthy food choices shown on TV commercials (Bernhardt, Wilking, Gilbert-Diamond, Emond, & Sargent, 2015). Unfortunately, this study, coupled with the fact that children are actually seeing slightly fewer food ads per day does not give much hope to researchers that there will be a rapid change in young people’s overconsumption of calorie rich nutritionally poor fast-food (Harris et al., 2013). As children see advertisements, they will continue to desire the products that are being shown and will use their great swaying power to get what they want - even if it is just the toy in the Happy Meal (Emond et al., 2015).

The Evolution of a Mediated Society: Radio, Television, Internet and Advertising

Without a constant media presence, children would not be as aware of "what they want" in the form of new brands, products and trends. However, media in various forms has become ubiquitous and necessary within American and many other modern societies. With busier parents, media exposure has become a simple solution to occupying the kids for large chunks of time. The most popular of all media, television, has become one of the greatest babysitters ever known to man. As children watch the black box for hours, it also "watches" them, keeps them quiet, and connects them to a new world of wonder (University of Cincinnati, 2012). Television is now joined by other forms of media to easily distract kids. Interestingly enough, the development of a massively mediated society follows a similar pattern as that experienced by the fast-food industry.

The beginning of the electronic media dependence of today has its roots in radio. Similar to fast-food, radio became widely available to the American public in the 1920s, thus wedging itself into consumer culture. Though it was a pricey investment at the time, many families still spent the money. Over the next 30 years, with a few hiccups as economic crises and war hit, radios became more and more common within homes. By the 1950s, 95% of American homes had invested in one. Most importantly, radio was the first widely-circulated medium that allowed for the development of a national cultural identity (Craig, 2004). This legacy continued on by radio's successor: television.

Though television technology was around by the late 1920s, the idea needed refining and did not really catch on until the latter half of the century. By 1947, the number of TV sets in homes across America was in the thousands, and by the late 1990s, 98% of U.S. households had at least one television. To make matters worse, the television would stay on for hours - often without anyone actively watching (Stephens, 2000). Not only did this waste electricity, but

homes became centered around the TV. Today, furniture is now organized with the TV as the focal point and most interesting member of the family.

Radio and television in the United States were different than the rest of the world: they were not run by a tight-fisted, controlling government. Instead, funding came principally through advertising of private parties. This became the foundation of American consumer culture. In addition, radio revolutionized advertising in the early 20th century. Radio was able to communicate through music, jingles and the spoken word, thus diminishing the need for literacy (and expanding its reach to even younger audiences). Radio and television advertisements were run very similarly - often with direct endorsements from companies and celebrities; even entire shows were sponsored and written by these companies (O'Barr, 2010). Some early advertisers were skeptical at first of how much impact a massive barrage of advertisements would be for viewers, but brands and even specific details about their products proved quite memorable (Krugman, 1965). Yet, Zielske, a renowned advertising researcher in his day, maintained that regardless of how initially memorable an ad was, it would quickly be forgotten if consumers were not continuously exposed (Zielske, 1959). Over the next half-century and especially today, advertisers appear to live and breathe by this creed.

The internet proves an excellent medium for constant advertising, and is the fastest growing medium in history (Hylund, 2013). Though it was first used privately in the 1970s, the world wide web was not widely used until the early 1990s (Coshe.com, 2013). The first banner ad was aired in 1994, and now users see well over 1,500 banner ads per month (Morrissey, 2013; Singel, 2010). Sadly, the internet and all of the ads that come with it have become addictive for many children, even being named a clinical diagnosis in some countries (Brody, 2015).

The McDonald's Advertising Machine: Television Advertising

Having reviewed the evolutionary power of these mediums and their attachment to advertising, it is important to understand how one of the world's most prominent advertisers has employed these resources. For over half a century, McDonald's has shrewdly fought for the limelight on the most prevalent types of media available in order to reach children. Though radio and print were the first mediums used by McDonald's to reach its customers, television has become its favorite for advertising (Love, 1986; Harris et al., 2013). Coincidentally, television, above all other media, is still the favorite choice for kids.

Children now watch more TV than they ever have - weekly viewing increased an average of 2.2 hours over just four years (2009-2013), climbing to 35 hours a week for children (McDonough, 2009; Rothman, 2013). That's roughly five hours a day of just television - tablet and other interactive media uses were not included in these studies. Additional sources claim that the average child over 8-years-old spends more than seven hours a day with all types of screen media, while children ages two to eight spend at least two hours in front of the screen daily (Rideout, 2014).

As kids are exposed to more TV and media, they inevitably are exposed to more advertisements. Of the 40,000 advertisements children see each year, one thousand or more are for fast-food chains (Calvert, 2008; Feloni, 2013; Story & French, 2004). According to Strasburger (2001) 61% of commercials children see are for food, and more than 90% of those are for sweetened cereals, candy bars, fast-foods, junk foods or other nutritionally questionable foods. In addition, by watching excessive amounts of TV or other media, children are living more sedentary lives. Even since the 1970s, advertising on children's TV shows has been considered a major factor contributing to the high frequency with which these low-nutrient foods appear in the diets of American children (Aspray, Royer, & Ocepek, 2014). Thus America's

youth are getting a double-dose of obesity promotion: not only are they watching more TV, but what is being shown on TV is also promoting an unhealthy lifestyle.

Many studies have documented the effectiveness of such persuasive food advertising in increasing children's requests for junk foods or trips to fast-food restaurants and in changing their views of what constitutes as "healthy" nutrition (Buijzen, Schuurman, & Bomhof, 2008; Strasburger, Jordan, & Donnerstein, 2010; Feloni, 2013). A recent study published in *Time* revealed that 34% of these child consumers are indeed eating out on a daily basis (Sifferlin, 2015). McDonald's advertising to kids has proven to be especially effective: customers reported that 41% of children under 12 asked to go to McDonald's at least once per week, with 15% of kids asking to go every day (Harris et al., 2013). In the U.S. alone, $8.65 billion of the hundreds of billions spent annually on fast-food is given to the McDonald's machine ("Statistics and Facts on McDonald's," 2014).

Understandably, it might be hard to resist the 40,000 advertisements children see each year (Feloni, 2013; Story & French, 2004). Ensuring its place in the minds of America's youth, McDonald's airs hundreds more commercials than the next closest fast-food competitor (Feloni, 2013). On average, preschoolers saw 5.1 ads each week for McDonald's, 6- to 11-year-olds saw 6.1, and adolescents saw 5.2 (Harris et al., 2013). One study documented that 79% of 25,000 fast-food television placements (70% of which were McDonald's) aired on just four popular kid's networks: Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, Disney XD, and Nicktoons (Bernhardt et al., 2013). Not only are fast-food advertisements extremely prevalent, they are highly concentrated to where advertisers know children will be exposed.

In 2014, McDonald's spent $1.42 billion overall on global advertising. The most current data for McDonald's advertising specifically to children estimates that $42 million of that budget went to Happy Meal ads. Preschoolers saw an average of 3.4 ads per week for just Happy

Meals, while older kids saw an average of 4.2. Collectively, food and beverage companies spent over $633 million on television advertising to children, and a total of $695 million total on television, radio and print advertising. As radio and print form a very small portion of the total expenditures, the major focus of this section was devoted to delineating the impact McDonald's has had on children's television advertising. Though television remains the favorite medium, children are spending increasingly more time with other screen media, making it worth mentioning. Predictably, fast-food advertisers are following suit by creating online advertisements and websites to attract children.

New Forms of Media

New media, such as company websites, internet and other digital advertising platforms account for 7% of all reported youth-directed marketing, or $122.5 million in 2013. Though traditional marketing has experienced a decline in spending, this media has seen a 50% increase compared to data collected in 2006 (Federal Trade Commission, 2012a). Even more attractive for fast-food companies is that advertising on the web is virtually unrestricted, allowing advertisers more freedom and creativity than traditional mediums (Montgomery, 2000). In turn, the young internet user is given a unique experience that overall may be more effective than traditional advertising (Weber, Story & Harnack, 2006). In its subtlety, internet advertising blurs the lines almost indistinguishably for children (even older children) between content and advertising. Because of the liberty that companies can take on this less-restricted medium, most foods advertised on popular kids' websites do not meet independent nutrition standards, further encouraging unhealthy eating choices through sheer exposure (Ustjanauskas, Harris & Schwartz, 2014).

A study of 40 top food company sites directed to children (including McDonald's) found branding to be a major component of the display. All of the sites directed to children used brand

logos, their product as part of the background and scenery, a product as part of the game content, sound, animation, graphics and links to other similar websites. Almost all (96%) of the sites had cartoon characters, with 50% featuring celebrities or athletes. Offerings such as branded coloring pages (83%) and branded downloads (91%) were prevalent. 52% of these sites contained direct messages to children urging them to ask their parents to buy products or participate in promotions (Weber et al., 2006). All of these are techniques used to further the reach of brands by building brand loyalty, consistent with the observations of television branding by Connor (2006).

Advergames

One of the most popular attractions to children under 12 are websites featuring games, many of which strategically include product placement within each game (Ustjanauskas, et al., 2014). All top food companies with a kid-friendly website feature games. Over time, these "advergames" have proven an excellent way to increase brand awareness and brand loyalty. Advergames ensure consistent branding over multiple exposures (Weber et al., 2006). In 2012, HappyMeal.com was the fast-food website that attracted most child visitors, with 118,000 unique 2- to 11-year-olds per month. Another popular website domain owned by McDonald's, McWorld.com, had over 10,000 visitors. These websites featured various advergames; the numbers alone suggest that they were effective in attracting *Players*. Additionally, HappyMeal.com was the only child-directed fast-food website that advertised through display advertising on third-party websites (Harris, et al., 2013).

Display Advertising

Display advertising is the most common form of internet advertising (Ustjanauskas et al., 2014). Up to 98% of children's web sites allow advertising, with two-thirds of kid sites relying primarily on ad dollars for profit (Neuborne, 2001). 3.4 billion food advertisements appeared on

popular children's web sites over a year's period between 2012-2013; 83% on just four web sites: Nick.com, NeoPets.com, Disney Online websites, and CartoonNetwork.com. 64% of ads were for breakfast cereals and fast-food while 84% of advertised products were high in fat, sugar and/or sodium, a common concern for fast-foods (Ustjanauskas et al., 2014).

Of the excessive amount of display ads directed at consumers daily, just 2% of fast-food display ads appeared on kids' websites. Though the percentage is relatively small, this still averages out to 87.5 million ads viewed per month and 1.1 billion fast-food ads seen per year by children. Consistent with Ustjanauskas et al. (2014), more than 80% of these ads (approximately 875 million display ads) appeared on just four sites, three of which were the highest ranking for food sites in general (see above): Nick.com, Roblox.com, Disney Online websites, and CartoonNetwork.com. Based on the sheer popularity of internet use with children, it is not surprising that only four restaurants did not advertise on kids' websites: Jack in the Box, Dunkin' Donuts, Taco Bell, and Chick-Fil-A. Though mobile phone and mobile display advertising is existent, the majority of ads were seen targeting children on traditional websites (Harris et al., 2013.

Smartphone Apps

Mobile applications offer a similar platform of entertain that online games do. Accessibility to a mobile device is no problem as most children receive their first cell phone at the age of six. The majority of parents say they purchase the cell phone for security reasons, followed by other parents who want their child to be able to keep in touch with friends and family ("Study Finds Average Age," 2015). Regardless of the purchase reason, many young children have cell phones and access to online content and smartphone applications. Apps on these smartphones are increasingly popular; when the iTunes App Store and Google Android Market first began in 2008, they boasted a meager 600 apps (Federal Trade Commission, 2012b).

Today, Google Play has 1.6 million apps, while the Apple App Store offers 1.5 million, and there are still other less popular contenders such as Amazon App Store and Windows Phone Store that offer a substantial amount of downloadable material ("Number of Apps," 2015). Overall, approximately 28.5% of apps (over 367,000) are geared toward children from the Apple App Store, with 25.8% of apps (over 318,000) for kids on Google Play. Recognizing the powerful consumer marketing potential in children, Apple has now launched a "Kids" App Store that offers over 80,000 apps ("Back to School," 2014).

With more than 72% of children under 8 and 38% of children under age 2 having used a mobile device in the past year, (with up to half of them using these devices daily), it is no wonder that McDonald's has also spread into this type of interactive kid media ("Back to School," 2014). In conjunction with their application that displays promotions and nutritional information for menu items, McDonald's has designed an advergame app. "McPlay" is one of just two fast-food restaurant apps (Wendy's produced the other) specifically targeting children (Harris et al., 2013). Nevertheless, a quick search on any application store will reveal various other apps that offer restaurant trivia, brand logo quizzes and other such "games," suggesting that there are various mobile app sources that may target children directly or indirectly with advertising messages.

Social Media

As users and consumers flock to mobile phones and the internet, much of their time is used on social media; with children as no exception. One study found that 59% of children are social networking by the age of 10. Though children under 13 are legally forbidden from use of social media giant, Facebook, it still tops the list of sites that children are drawn to and sign up for underage. In 2012, reportedly 5.6 million Facebook users were under the minimum age; along with the number of overall Facebook users, this number is likely to continue to increase

(Harris et al., 2013). 52% of eight to 16-year-olds admitted to having ignored the official age limit. The same age group reported that 40% (WhatsApp), 24% (BlackBerry Instant Messenger), 11% (SnapChat), and 8% (Ask.fm) had ignored the age limits on these sites ("More Than Half," 2014).

Facebook also seems to be the most prone to advertising to children of the social mediums. McDonald's would often direct its 61 million fans (those who had "liked" the page) to its website via Facebook posts, show menu items or offer a video to watch. McDonald's also has a presence on other social media platforms such as Twitter and YouTube, with its own channel on the latter (Harris et al., 2013). Naturally, McDonald's runs its own Happy Meal commercials on its YouTube channel, which has met with skepticism from concerned parents and organizations. In addition, according to the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, YouTube Kids offers programs that include long segments featuring products and brands. These appear to be user generated, yet the producers of the videos are suspected to foster undisclosed relationships with the brand names they are promoting ("Stop the Unfair Ads," n.d.). Because of the sheer volume of internet sites and platforms, it is difficult to determine just the reach that advertising may have on children. Yet, with more time on the internet and better technology to follow user behaviors and preferences, children will be shaped increasingly by online advertising messages.

Alternative Advertising

While advertising is usually coming from television, radio, print, internet or mobile phone devices, child marketing reaches far beyond these conventional boundaries. Aspray, Royer, and Ocepek (2014) list a number of multiplatform food advertising strategies that companies are using to combat resistance to direct advertising. Within this list are various techniques employed by the McDonald's Corporation to make lifetime consumers. Marketing

ploys include: special packaging of food products (i.e. the Happy Meal), the creation of licensed figures or games for branded foods (i.e. Ronald McDonald and friends), giveaways (called premiums) of toys (i.e. toys in Happy Meals), movie characters endorsing new food products (i.e. The Minions campaign in 2015), branded books, toys and movies (i.e. *The Wacky Adventures of Ronald McDonald,* produced by Klasky-Csupo, who also produces shows such as *The Simpsons*), other branded products (Barbie dressed in a McDonald's uniform), promotional tours, peer-to-peer marketing, product fan clubs (McDonald's Fan Club), email lists of people interested in a particular brand or product (A pop-up invitation usually appears within the first millisecond of time spent on the McDonald's website), exclusive selling rights in public schools (also associated with drink and snack food products - some of which are also sold at McDonald's restaurants), incentive programs linked to educational activities (McSchool Nights - Proceeds of sales of one night at McDonald's go to school fundraiser), food-company sponsored curricula (such as using their products in nutrition and science materials handed out in schools, i.e. "540 Meals" - a documentary where a science teacher lost weight on McDonald's food), interactive food company websites (McWorld.com, HappyMeal.com), and product placements in movies and comic strips (*Mac & Me, Richie Rich*) (Aspray et al., 2014, p. 34).

Furthermore, McDonald's has other marketing ploys that are an excellent pull for children and parents. Among these, they are the largest private operator of playgrounds in the U.S., with over 8,000 playgrounds at its restaurants. Whether it be the need for a Happy Meal, the newest toy or the Playplace, 90% of American children between three and nine visit McDonald's every month (Schlosser, 2002).

Nonetheless, it is the toys that McDonald's executives consider the most excellent draw to the restaurant. Indeed, McDonald's includes one in 20% of their sales, distributing 1.5 billion toys worldwide. This makes it the world's largest toy distributor, handing out nearly ⅓ of all of

the toys in the U.S. (Barnes, 2001; Jacques, 2014). Of course, children enjoy this meal-time premium: 87% of 6 and 7-year-olds and 80% of 8 and 9-year-olds said they liked receiving toys with their meal (Jacques, 2014). With an ability to lure young consumers consistently, it is no wonder that toy premiums and giveaways were present in 69% of children's advertisements (compared to 1% in adults) (Bernhardt et al., 2013). The sheer amount of toy incentives further suggests why kids for so long have ranked McDonald's as their favorite restaurant (Jacques, 2014).

Demographic Differences

Not only do marketing tactics vary for consumers of different ages but also between ethnic groups. For instance, preschoolers saw more fast-food advertising on Spanish TV than any other Hispanic youth group. In contrast with English TV, where about one-half of the ads are for fast-food, approximately two-thirds of those on Spanish TV show fast-food. But most of these advertisements are for lunch and dinner items. Whereas about half of the fast-food ads aimed at children watching English television are kids meal ads, only 5% of the fast-food ads seen by Hispanic children were for kids' meals (most of which were for McDonald's) (Harris et al., 2015). Needless to say, McDonald's is one of the biggest spenders on Spanish TV advertising directed at youth (Jones, 2015). Moreover, McDonald's was the only major franchise to continue its use of language- and ethnicity-specific sites (MeEncanta.com for Hispanics, MyInspirAsian.com targeting Asians, Mcdonalds.com/365Black targeting blacks). Hispanic children were not just exposed to and visited MeEncanta.com, but were 30% more likely than all youth to visit HappyMeal.com (Harris et al., 2013).

Black youth saw 58-60% more advertising for fast-food restaurants than white youth. This large deviance from white youth ad exposure can partially be explained by the difference in time spent watching television between black and white kids, where blacks watched 42% more

TV than whites. Some restaurants also seem to have placed advertisements during programming viewed mostly by black youth (Harris et al., 2013). Not surprisingly, McDonald's was one of the biggest spenders on black-targeted TV (Jones, 2015). To further cater to this demographic, McDonald's also has a portion of their website (mcdonalds.com/365black) devoted to black consumers; yet HappyMeal.com was still a major attraction for kids. The kid-directed site was visited by black youth 44% more often than all youth (Harris et al., 2013).

Differences in advertising to these different ethnic groups have cause for concern because of the increased percentages of obesity in Hispanic and black youth, as compared to whites (Ogden, Carroll, Kit & Flegal, 2014). Along with this higher rates of obesity, Hispanic and black children see more advertising in the media and in their communities than their white counterparts. Moreover, major food companies were far less likely to target Hispanic and black kids with healthier food product advertisements. Many organizations have called for a change in these subtle tactics in hopes of better combatting obesity (Jones, 2015).

Ad Regulation

As children prove a vulnerable group, susceptible to various factors incorporated into well-timed and executed ads, many attempts at regulation of ads (particularly food ads) have occurred over the years. Far from being linear or regular, the push for government intervention of the industry has been cyclical; the biggest contenders include government agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the Department of Health and Human Services and Congress. Other important names involved in ad regulation (or against it) include the Institute of Medicine, media companies (such as Disney, Nickelodeon), media trade associations (National Association of Broadcasters), food giants (McDonald's, General Mills, Kraft Foods), advertising trade associations (National Advertising Review Council, which is associated with the Council of Better Business Bureaus (CBBB) and

other general business trade associations), and industry associations (Children's Advertising Review Unit, Children's Food and Beverage Initiative, Sensible Food Policy Coalition). Those pro-regulation include the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and other private foundations, professional associations (American Psychological Association, American Academy of Pediatrics), and public interest nonprofits (the Ad Council, Action for Children's Television) (Aspray et al., 2014, p. 26-27). These latter-mentioned companies have been behind a large number of studies relating obesity and advertising.

Some of the major actions taken to formally regulate advertising to children include: The FTC Improvement Act of 1975, which among other things gave the FTC more power to pursue violations "affecting commerce" rather than violations "in commerce;" the Children's Television Act, enacted in 1990 by the FCC, designed to increase the amount of educational children's programming on television; the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) in 2000, which regulated internet privacy; and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) which provided funding for prevention and wellness activities targeting obesity among other things (Udell & Fischer, 1977; Calvert & Kotler, 2003; "Children's Online Privacy," 2002; "American Recovery," n.d.; Aspray et al., 2014).

In 2006, the FTC, Department of Health and Human Services and Institute of Medicine called for reform. Responding to their call, the Council of Better Business Bureaus launched the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI). Ten major U.S. food companies pledged at least half of their child-targeted ads to promote "better-for-you" products, or encourage healthier lifestyles. Over the next few years, more companies joined the initiative; currently 17 are involved. Four companies (Cadbury Plc, Coca-Cola Company, Hershey Company, and Mars Inc.) pledged that they would not advertise on programming directed at children younger than 12 years, while the other companies committed to 100% "better-for-you"

advertising. Yet, disparities still remain as it is given to each company to define what a "better-for-you" product is, as well as what constitutes as children's programming (Powell, Szczypka, & Chaloupka, 2010; "About the Initiative," n.d.). Bernhardt et al. (2013) found in their study that though many corporations had pledged to self-regulate the focus on real food products instead of toy giveaways, their actual advertisements showed otherwise.

With an added awareness of the risks of obesity to American society, the food ad industry continues to garner more attention. Many voices called for change to the $4.6 billion fast-food ad industry, and reportedly children ages 6 to 11 did see 10% fewer TV ads for fast-food in 2013. However, children still continued to see three to five fast-food advertisements daily. Additionally, while television advertising of these foods has decreased, social media and mobile device advertising has increased exponentially, as has children's usage of these sites and devices (Orciari, 2013). In spite of all the positive initiative to educate and promote health awareness, obesity still prevails, and children are an increasingly more powerful, lucrative and attractive target market for producers of junk food.

The "Healthier" McDonald's Today

In response to various recommendations from health organizations, in 2011 McDonald's announced that it would revamp Happy Meals by automatically including a small portion of apples, as well as reducing its portion size of French fries by more than half (Harris, et al., 2013). They continue to increase their healthier options, and have begun to include calorie counts for their food (Strom, 2013). It has even been rumored that McDonald's will add "superfood" kale to the menu to further cater to consumer's changing tastes and preferences for higher-quality ingredients (Haq, 2015). In 2012, McDonald's aired 31 different TV ads promoting Happy Meals; consistent with their commitment to offer healthier options, they were the only restaurant to use health/nutrition as a selling point in children's advertising. However, though healthier

options were also being featured, children saw Happy Meal ads featuring Chicken McNuggets almost eight times more than ads for any other menu item, on average viewing 3.6 ads per week (Harris et al., 2013). Market studies show that those restaurants offering healthier options are more popular with parents, which would likely explain the rapidly growing chain, Chick-Fil-A's, climb to popularity after offering grilled chicken nuggets and other more nutritious options (Harris et al., 2013; Bertagnoli, 2014).

Some research shows that healthier options, when advertised more frequently, may be more popular than unhealthier alternatives with kids (Ferguson, Muñoz & Medrano, 2012). This is consistent with the recency effect, elaborated further on in this section. The findings of Auty and Lewis (2004) suggest that by simply increasing the number of ads for nutritious foods would encourage healthier choices by kids.

Yet the evidence for the strength of the recency effect when comparing healthy with unhealthy options is conflicting: a study done with subjects from 3-7 years of age showed that children recalled toys and unhealthy food far more than any healthy food choices shown on TV commercials (Bernhardt, Wilking, Gilbert-Diamond, Emond, & Sargent, 2015). But perhaps advertisers could use toys to their advantage. One study showed that 6-12 year olds were twice as likely to select a kids' meal with apples and water over fries and a soda when the toys were only offered with the healthier meal options (Hobin, Hammond, Daniel, Hanning & Manske 2012). However, by including the toy option to encourage healthier choices, children might simply be persuaded by the marketing cues of the offered premium rather than consciously understanding that they are making a healthier food choice based on their hunger, taste or knowledge (Simon, 2013). This early consumer learning based on premiums could be detrimental to children as they continue to grow into adult consumers.

McDonald's enjoyed a two-and-a-half-decade reign as the restaurant with most "kid appeal," recently beat out by Chick-Fil-A in 2014. Even so, however much "kid appeal" Chick-Fil-A may have, McDonald's still commands most sway among families because of its sheer size and accessibility (Bertagnoli, 2014). In 2014, the franchise earned over $27 billion worldwide ($8.65 billion in the U.S.) with over 36,000 restaurants (over 14,000 in the U.S.) ("Statistics and Facts on McDonald's," 2014). In spite of reported decreasing customer satisfaction and visitation frequency, McDonald's continues to be one of the biggest spenders on advertising, especially child-directed advertising of any food company (Harris et al., 2013; "Statistics and Facts on McDonald's," 2014). McDonald's has committed to promote nutrition and active lifestyle messages in 100 percent of its national kids' communications, which includes merchandising, advertising, digital and Happy Meal packaging. They have also pledged funding for various grass roots community nutrition awareness programs ("McDonald's USA," 2011).

As children continue to use more media, they will only be more exposed to messages from corporations such as McDonald's. They will be increasingly targeted from a young age by businesses eager to create lifetime consumers, loyal to their brands. McDonald's has an extensive history of targeting children in their advertising, yet the future for kids and McDonald's may be bright. Love (1986) states that "the fundamental secret to McDonald's success is the way it achieves uniformity and allegiance to an operating regimen without sacrificing the strengths of American individualism and diversity. McDonald's manages to mix conformity and creativity" (p. 7). If Love's (1986) statement is to be a predictor of McDonald's permanent place in American and world culture, the corporation's promised nutrition-promoting changes will need to be widely implemented and adhered to, with children choosing healthier options because of these positive media messages.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Overview

Advertising Strategies

While TV and food consumption may seem as though they are spiraling out of control, advertising really only follows the crowd. In a report published by *Bloomberg Business,* author Eric Chemi looks at advertising trends over the past century. He concludes that the ad business is "boring" because it follows the economy predictably and has done so for the past 100 years, accounting for 1-1.4% of GDP spending (Chemi, 2014). These figures might seem confusing in light of the many complaints by members of society about the mass amounts of marketing they are exposed to every day. Data from Nielsen shows that there were more advertisements on primetime television, but as Chemi (2014) insinuates, there are also more products to be advertised (Luckerson, 2014). Food advertising to children goes back to at least the 1930s, with Mickey Mouse advertising Post Toasties over the radio. However, some major changes in the 1960s led to more children's programming, which in turn attracted more advertisers (Aspray et al., 2014). The real truth is, as people search out and use more media in their lives, they are inviting more advertising in as well.

Branding for Life

Those working behind the McDonald's name had stumbled onto something revolutionary before other companies were even convinced of the extreme power behind advertising, particularly to children. This gave them an excellent advantage over their competitors, even after they realized the value in this market segment (Love, 1986). Ray Kroc understood appealing to young people, explaining that "a child who loves our commercials and brings her grandparents to a McDonald's gives us two more customers" (Schlosser, 2002, p. 41). McDonald's has astutely employed the three objectives most advertisers have in mind with a child target market, (i.e. directly seek children as customers, indirectly persuade parents through kid's "pester power", and

to encourage positive brand associations) (Dotson & Hyatt, 2005, p. 36) (see also "Kid Consumers" section of this paper).

A large portion of McDonald's early and current success is due to branding. By creating an emotional connection with the consumer from a young age, McDonald's could essentially create lifelong, loyal customers. This has been well-documented retrospectively on various brands: advertisers now understand that consumers rely on emotions (personal feelings and experiences), rather than information (such as statistics or proven facts), to guide their purchasing decisions. Likewise, positive emotions toward a certain brand have greater influence on brand loyalty than trust and other evaluations based on the brand's characteristics. Furthermore, an emotional response to an ad has at least two to three times greater sway toward purchasing the product than the actual content of the advertisement (Murray, 2013).

According to Connor (2006), food ads aimed at younger children focus overwhelmingly on branding, intent on creating enduring customers through portrayals of fun and excitement. These advertisements feature little to no food, but instead focus on an emotional connection with the children. The immediate sale is not as important as the deep-rooted bond the brands are trying to create with the kids. Many of the characters featured in these advertisements are soft, nurturing characters, particularly animals. Reiher and Acuff (2008) claim that children dream primarily of similar characters up until the age of 6. Through these animal dreams, children sort out their fears or problems; thus advertising with similar characters creates a great emotional appeal as well as fostering trust. Though the attractiveness of these characters begins to wear off early, the allure continues in the packaging and premiums accompanying the actual food product for older children (Reiher & Acuff, 2008).

The timing for branding is crucial. The best time to create lifelong customers is with preschool-aged children who are uniquely susceptible to advertising. At this age, children are

not as skilled at distinguishing programs from commercials and cannot determine well between reality and what they see on television (John, 1999; Connor, 2006). Furthermore, beginning at 24 months, children begin to request products often by brand. Preschool-aged kids ask more frequently than older elementary kids, and requests for food are granted 50% of the time by parents (Story & French, 2004).

This sort of branding advertising seems to have great effect. According to researchers at the Stanford University School of Medicine and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital, children ages 3-5 were asked to sample two identical foods from McDonald's. One was placed in a bag with the all-too-familiar "Golden Arches" logo on the outside, while the other bag was left blank. The children had an obvious preference for the food marked clearly as McDonald's. Researchers also found that the degree of preference children had for the food was directly correlated with the number of television sets in their homes and frequency with which they ate at McDonald's (Conger, 2007).

By creating lifelong customers of young people, McDonald's can also capitalize on another essential part of a brand's likeability for children: whether or not the parents like the brand (Story & French, 2004). As one of the first advertisers to directly target children beginning in the early 1960s, McDonald's fostered meaningful relationships between kids and TV personas Bozo the clown and his successor, Ronald McDonald (Love, 1986). Today the clown still appears in advertisements, now targeting the grandchildren of those first viewers.

Once brands are considered emotionally likeable by children and reinforced by parents, Kimmel (2012), citing Franzen and Bowman (2001), lists five important aspects that help retain positive brand associations. First, contiguity connects two elements perceived together in space or time often seen in McDonald's advertisements that repeatedly pair emotion (i.e. happiness) with a visit to McDonald's. Secondly, repetition aids in brand associations as the elements (such

as happiness and a trip to McDonald's) are frequently paired together; repetition creates a stronger link between these two components of emotion and the brand. The third constituent is similarity, or the activation of one element leading to the activation of another element (i.e. an ad for Burger King triggers the memory of similar restaurant, McDonald's). The fourth element, recency, poses that associations that were created most recently will be most readily remembered (if happiness was most recently experienced at McDonald's, it will be more salient than other emotions when thinking about the restaurant). Lastly, vividness entails that the more unique or vivid an association, the more readily it will be recalled (such as a colorful clown, Ronald, who is only at McDonald's) (Kimmel, 2012, p. 108).

This last aspect in the list cited by Kimmel (2012), vividness, finds many associations with another important aspect in marketing: color. Particularly important when advertising to children, color is a source of vital information. Within the first 90 seconds of an interaction with either people or things, a person will make up their minds. Science tells us that about 62-90% of the initial assessment made is based on colors alone (Singh, 2006). Where children may have limited reading and cognitive ability compared to an adult, color becomes increasingly important to judge the value of a product or person. Yellow is often used in fast-food to attract customers' attention, peak their appetite and encourage eating. Color is also important to branding and recognition of a company logo. It has a significant emotional aspect that induces an almost automatic reaction to a product (Singh, 2006). By inundating children with carefully crafted advertisements on a number of levels, many brand association goals can be met, further cementing McDonald's into the minds of young consumers.

Direct/ Indirect Advertising and Product Placement

Building on a brand-loyal foundation, older children's ads involved more specific, direct advertising of products (Aspray et al., 2014). In their study of children's advertisements, Page

and Brewster (2007) found that most promotional strategies included jingles, slogans, "real" children with the food and animal characters to make the ads more memorable and attractive.

Bernhardt, Wilking, Adachi-Mejia, Bergamini, Marijnissen, and Sargent (2013) compared children's advertising to that of adults. They found that visual branding was more common in children's advertisements where food packaging was visible in 88% of the ads (compared to adults' mere 23% visibility). A street view of the restaurant was present in 41% of kids' ads and just 12% of adult ads. Toy or prize giveaways were present in 69% of children's ads, with a meager 1% of adult ads featuring premiums. Children's ads also had movie tie-ins 55% of the time, while adults came in far less frequently at 14%. These researchers found that in contrast to the usual children's emphasis on movie characters or giveaways, adult advertisements showed larger pictures of the food, coupled with an emphasis on taste, price and portion size. The contrast in advertising techniques between adults and kids is stark, increasing the need for concern as children are exposed to countless "self-regulated" ads featuring toy premiums that lure them in and attach themselves to fast-food purchases.

With ads and media becoming increasingly more prevalent, and in spite of their catchy jingles and giveaways, on-demand TV and internet consumers can easily skip or overlook advertisements. In fact, the average brand recall across all commercial campaigns is estimated to have dropped 30% in recent years (Williams, Petrosky, Hernandez & Page, 2011). As previously mentioned, Apray et al. (2014) list a number of multiplatform food advertising strategies that companies are using to combat resistance to direct advertising (see "Alternative Advertising" section for a more specific look at how McDonald's has employed most, if not all, of these methods). Tactics involve special packaging of food products (collectible cookie tins), the creation of licensed figures or games for branded foods (Doritos Crash Course), premiums/giveaways of toys in kids' meals, movie characters endorsing new food products (Got

Milk campaign), branded books and toys (Oreo Cookie Counting Book), other branded products, promotional tours (Nabisco Nilla Wafers banana pie eating), peer-to-peer marketing, product fan clubs (Burger King Kids Club and its five million), email lists of people interested in a particular brand or product, exclusive selling rights in public schools (pouring rights for PepsiCo products), incentive programs linked to educational activities (ads on Channel One, or the national in-school current events program for Sunny D), food-company sponsored curricula (such as using their products in nutrition and science materials handed out in schools), interactive food company websites (that often include games and activities for kids - Burger King and most snack foods have these), and product placements in movies and comic strips (Aspray et al., 2014, p. 34).

Though the aforementioned list includes many different techniques to avoid being skipped over by consumers, product placement seems to be one of the most popular and effective. Williams et al. (2011) estimate that total spending on product placements in entertainment reached about $7.55 billion in 2010. Apparently this is money well spent.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of product placement, one study asked children of various ages to watch one of two movie clips from Home Alone. In one group, the children watched a clip with Pepsi being served during a meal. In the other clip, a similar scene was shown, but without branded products. Afterwards, children were invited to choose between Pepsi or Coke. Those who had seen the clip with products made a markedly different choice than those who had not. Interestingly enough, age did not seem to be a factor in their decision. The researchers concluded that it was not simply exposure to the film, but also previous exposure and a "reminder" or recent exposure that can affect product choice (Auty & Lewis, 2004).

To facilitate proper product placement, Redondo and Holbrook (2008) offer some recommendations to match program and product area. Most appropriate for buyers of packaged

convenience foods are "films with no sex, with action/adventure content, without drama content and with no violence (ordered by importance)" (p. 707). Consequently, these kinds of foods are those typically consumed by the younger generation, and they're being thrown directly into the media that would be approved for most children. McDonald's has clearly capitalized on this as well by flooding children's most popular networks with advertisements (Bernhardt et al., 2013).

Frequency and Recency of Advertisements

With advertisements in the right media and programs, there are a few other factors worth mentioning that affect consumer preference. As demonstrated by the Pepsi/ Home Alone study, frequency and recency can have a great impact on consumer preference (Auty & Lewis, 2004) (see also "Direct/Indirect Advertising and Product Placement" section). Ferguson et al. (2012) had some children watch a commercial for a relatively healthy item while others watched one for a less healthy item. Both ads were from the same fast-food company. Interestingly enough, children from both groups showed a preference for the advertised item. Gerard Broussard from OgilvyOne in New York offers support for these study findings: he asserts that effective frequency implies that repeated messages to an audience will result in learning and eventually action. Moreover, recency theory says that the most effective advertising occurs close to the time when consumers are ready to buy (Broussard, 2000). As children eat quite frequently, advertising food items often and particularly close to meal times might be one of the most efficient techniques used by food advertisers.

Frequency and recency have slightly different consumer foci. Frequency is centered on achieving changes in awareness hopefully resulting in a sale. Recency mostly looks to affect short-term sales. Broussard (2000) continues that too little advertising is likely to be ineffective, while too much may be aggravating and prove a deterrent to potential buyers. Fast-food ads often air around mealtimes for children, or during Saturday cartoons - when they are most likely

viewing television and are apt to ask parents for the products they see advertised. In an experiment done by Harris, Bargh and Brownell (2009), however, advertising at any time was seen to induce unnecessary hunger or snacking.

In the Harris et al. (2009) study, children ages 6-12 watched a cartoon that contained either food advertising or advertising for other unrelated products and were given a snack while watching. Children consumed 45% more when exposed to ads with food. These same ads increased consumption of products not in the presented advertisements; furthermore, these effects were not related to reported hunger or other conscious influences reported by the test subjects. This scenario shows just how powerful recency in food advertising can be in priming automatic eating behaviors, and can go far beyond simple brand preference. The vulnerability of the human mind adds more concern to just how sensitive children (and those of all ages) can be to advertising regardless of its timing.

As children are advertised to from various angles, it is not always the food itself that draws them in for a sale. A recent study saw that fast-food commercials with toy giveaways led children to ask their parents to take them to the restaurants. The frequency of the advertisements was key: the more the children saw the fast-food commercials, the more they ate fast-food. Not surprisingly, the regularity of child visits to fast-food restaurants was also related to a few other factors: families with more TVs in the home, a TV in the child's bedroom, more time in front of the tube, and more time spent watching one of the four children's networks where the majority of child-directed ads air (Emond, Bernhardt, Gilbert-Diamond, Li, & Sargent, 2015). Acknowledging the findings from the previous study by Harris et al. (2009), where regardless of hunger children ate more when exposed to food ads, there is doubt as to whether the children who were asking to go to these restaurants were actually hungry every time they asked to go.

Social Learning Theory

Children have become such an excellent consumer market because they tend to be more susceptible to advertisements than older populations (Aspray et al., 2014). While timing and frequency of advertisements, as well as product placement, are key to delivering food marketing messages to children, they are also born with some innate predispositions toward certain foods and against others. For all that, the child's early experiences, as well as social and environmental factors, can modify the expression of these inherent inclinations (Beauchamp & Mennella, 2011; Varela & Salvador, 2014). Ventura and Worobey (2013) found that children who are pressured to eat a certain food may not care for that food in the future. However, the popularity of a food among peers may reinforce and encourage the preference for a previously disliked item. How children are raised and reinforced through family, peers, and media may greatly determine their food preferences.

Socialization "is the process by which someone learns the ways of a given society or social group so that they can function within it" (Elkin & Handel, 1972, p. 4). There are typically three main influencing agents: parents, peers and media. Originally it was taught that parents are the main source of rational influence on children, with peers and media being primarily irrational influences. This rationale gives parents the most power over their child's socialization process. However, with more time in front of the television and in commercial environments (shopping), this seems to have changed. Brand names have become more prevalent in homes; they are also more popular and sought-after by peers, increasing their importance to children. Of equal or even greater importance, as less time is spent with parents, other socialization agents step in to do their work (Dotson & Hyatt, 2005). Ferguson et al. (2012) further demonstrated this in their study. Advertisements, particularly those most recently

seen by subjects, were more powerful determinants of what products children wanted than parental influence or advice.

Social learning theory, outlined by Albert Bandura (1977), explains more of the socialization process and its implications. According to the theory, learning is not simply behavioral but cognitive and takes place in a social context - particularly through observation. In such contexts children are not just passive receivers of information, but they are constantly learning from what they observe. Modeling of learned behaviors is often a result. Further demonstrating Bandura's theory of modeling behaviors (particularly behaviors seen in commercials), children will often engage in similar behavior that they experience through ad exposure such as eating junk food. Moreover, the persuasive impact of advertising of a certain brand of product may spill over to other items within the same category as children continue to mirror the behaviors they see on television. This also explains why children may be drawn to calorie-dense foods of various types - because they constantly see it on TV (Buijzen, Schuurman, & Bomhof, 2008). Children are more prone to continue to behave in certain ways when these behaviors seem realistic or are rewarded, or are even reinforced by coalescing parents who purchase the food their children ask for (Strasburger, Jordan, & Donnerstein, 2010).

In their study, Buijzen et al. (2008) note that an important moderator between advertising and food consumption variables was consumption-related family communication. When families strived for harmony and conformity (socio-oriented family communication) they were quite successful in breaking the bond between advertising and product consumption. But in a world where parents are taking a back seat to raising their children there is cause for concern about what types of consumer lessons are being taught to the youngest generation.

Overall Impact of Advertising on Children

There is astounding evidence for the persuasiveness and prevalence of food advertising to children. Kids who grow up in a media dependent, advertising inundated, fast-food addicted world may find it hard to resist all of the messages that are thrown at them on a daily basis. Because of its sheer ubiquity, the impact of mass media on children's likes and dislikes is almost immeasurable. Children are babysat for hours each day by the television, and consequently are often shown by the media how to act and to think (University of Cincinnati, 2012; Bandura, 1977; Buijzen et al., 2008). This is often only reinforced by parents who cave in to children's "pester power" (Dotson & Hyatt, 2005). Simply put, as children are exposed to more food advertising, they ask for more food, eat more food, and create preferences for calorie-dense junk food that reach far beyond their primitive years (Emond et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2009). As children grow into adults, they will take their habits with them. If states' obesity rates continue at their current pace, then these future young adults will become the new cases of type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension and arthritis that are predicted to increase 10 times just between 2010 and 2020. The main culprit, of course: obesity (Levi, Segal, St. Laurent, Lang, & Rayburn, 2012).

Body image is an increasingly prevalent topic, and has become more important to children. Many scientists claim that genetics or the way someone is "wired" is the main determinant of an eating disorder. Yet parents, peers and media play a large role in how a child feels about himself or herself (Smolak, & Levine, 2015). Particularly the messages media convey about what to eat and how to look, as contradictory as they are, may prove detrimental to children who learn primarily from these sources.

As children are taught, reinforced and rewarded for their food choices by the media, a few questions remain for consideration. Though partial answers have been given to help

understand children’s fascination with fast-food (particularly McDonald’s) the changing scope and depth of the media again increases the importance of revisiting these topics (Rotfeld & Taylor, 2009). As children continue to consume more media and learn from these non-traditional sources, the effects cannot be clearly predicted. Not only will a deeper look into the motivations behind food choice be beneficial to the current generation of children, but to their future children, as well.

Based on this review of existing literature and social learning theory, this current research was guided by the following questions:

RQ1: What archetypes represent children who like McDonald’s?

RQ2: What are children's perceived motivations for going/desiring to go to McDonald’s?

Chapter 4: Method

Participants

Many studies document children's advertisements, most of which feature a toy premium, concluding that the main pull of McDonald's is the prize in the Happy Meal box (Bernhardt et al., 2013). Jacques (2014) provided evidence to support this theory, as the great majority of children reported liking receiving the toy in their Kid's Meal. However, previous research does not provide a clear indication of whether or not the toy is the main pull or even the ultimate goal of a trip to McDonald's. The study done by Ferguson, et al. (2012) asked parents to list their children's main motivations for going to McDonald's. Parents reported various responses: 32% of their children were attracted by the food, 36% were attracted by the playground, but only 25.3% were attracted by the toys; the remaining percentage of parents did not report on their child's main motive. Conversely, as these results were based on parental report, rather than direct detail from children, there is cause to wonder what the kids themselves would have answered. Moreover, the children in the experiment ranged from ages 3 to 8 years. Research in psychology has revealed that children under the age of 7 are heavily influenced by advertisements particularly because they cannot distinguish between the advertisement and real life. The current study aims to ask children from the ages of 7-11 why they like McDonald's, in hopes that more understanding may emerge about motivations to visit fast-food restaurants, fast-food addictions, the nationwide obesity epidemic and what may be done to encourage children from a young age to make healthier choices when dining out.

Studies documenting children's food knowledge, brand awareness and consumption patterns look at children from varying ages. Nonetheless, within childhood exist various developmental stages that are key for processing information about food choices, especially from advertisers, parents and even peers (Story & French, 2004). The best age for this current study

was determined using the writings of Deborah Roedder John (1999), who combines Piaget's cognitive development approach, information processing theories and consumer socialization research to explain children's comprehension of advertising, perspective and the world around them at certain ages. Based on this research, the ages of 7-11 were determined as best fit for the study because children are able to think abstractly and recognize that not all advertisements are truthful. However, while children are able to reason and discern an advertiser's motive, they do not yet possess the heightened awareness of group or cultural expectations or need to shape their own identity that can further complicate a researcher's understanding of the cognitive consumer process (as seen with children 12 and older). Moreover, as children get older, their decisions become more dependent on the situation and task (John, 1999). Children ages 7-11 are developing cognitive complexity and consumer knowledge, despite that they remain more straightforward, simple and understandable in their decision processes.

Advertising techniques change based on the consumer's age and ability to comprehend the message. Cowburn and Boxer (2007) found that children within the target category also received more food-based free gifts than their counterparts, all of which were aimed at enticing children to buy and engage in unhealthy eating habits. Even with age and less free food, Cowen (2012) argues that American food in general continues to cater to a child's palate (blander, simpler, sweeter) as parents in the United States are more willing to indulge their children's desires. In contrast, Cowen (2012) argues that other countries expect the children to eat what the adults give them, which is typically "adult" food - with more spices, varying flavors and heartier in general. What food American kids eat has become a reason for worry as childhood obesity has become an all-too-common occurrence. A 2012 report from the CDC reported that one in six children were considered obese ("Childhood Obesity Facts," 2015). However, other sources, including the American Heart Association, list that number to be as much as one in three

children. Not surprisingly, the American Heart Association also lists childhood obesity as the number one health concern among parents in the United States surpassing even drug abuse and smoking ("Overweight in Children," 2014).

According to some studies, and particularly why the age group of 7-11 is so key for this investigation, children in this age range have experienced big shifts in prevalence of obesity from 1974 (4% obesity) to 2012 (almost 18% obesity). While the obesity rates for preschoolers tend to be less and have notably declined in recent years, rates for children ages 6-19 have continued to increase (or at least remain at a constant) annually. Of utmost concern is that while more children are becoming overweight, those that are heaviest are only getting heavier, making them even more prone to health complications (May, Freedman, Sherry, & Blanck, 2013; "Childhood Overweight," 2014). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, children of this age group now spend $40 billion dollars of their own money and influence another $500 billion in spending annually (Calvert, 2008). By understanding children's consumer behavior from a cognitive standpoint, it may be easier to change or influence it positively.

Procedure

In spite of the great amounts of research that have gone into understanding child consumer behavior, there is still a disconnect of understanding concerning what drives the child buyer. Particularly of interest is to understand purchase decisions from a child's perspective, and how likely advertising plays into his or her decision from a social learning point of view. The Q method was chosen for this study because of its ability to analyze subjectivity, as well as its capacity to discover motivations for behavior without investigator judgments overshadowing the results.

Q method provides researchers with a scientific way to look at human subjectivity and is built on two main assumptions: (1) subjectivity is "a person's communication of his or her point

of view" and (2) "subjectivity is always self-referent" (McKeown & Thomas, 1988, p. 12). Unique to Q sort, however, is that Q method is able to inquire and receive answers from individuals without blatantly asking questions that may affect a participant's response.

Q sort participants are not simply samples of the population, but are variables that can reveal something of the nature of human behavior toward the subject. Brown (1980) asserts that only a small number of respondents is necessary as "all that is required is enough subjects to establish the existence of a factor for the purposes of comparing one factor with another" (p. 192). Brouwer (1999) further explains that the sample size is to be smaller than the number of statements (or photos for the purposes of this study) that participants will sort. Likewise, as Q methodology is traditionally taught at Brigham Young University, this number is one less than the total number of statements/photographs. As there will be 30 photographs, the number of participants necessary in the study was determined to be 29, according to the aforementioned specifics of the Q method. Following the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, children ages 7-11 from the local Boys and Girls Club were asked to participate in this study with the consent of their parents and support of the Club staff. In order to qualify for the study, those in the age range must answer "yes" to both qualifying questions:

1) Do you like McDonald's?

2) Have you eaten at McDonald's in the past three months?

The basis for the first qualifying question lies in that subjects for the Q sort must like going to McDonald's of their own free will (rather than it simply being a parental choice). As for the second qualifying question, there is evidence from Schlosser (2002) that the great majority of American children - 90% between ages three and nine - visit McDonald's every month. This number can only be expected to have risen, as Millennials (and subsequently their children) are more likely than other groups to eat out. However, there is surmounting dissonance

from parents who willfully take their children to McDonald's, yet feel guilty for doing so. Likewise, the media-savvy consumer-parent cannot help but be wary of the unhealthy information the media has conveyed over the past few years about the world's biggest fast-food chain (Baertlein, 2015). McDonald's has been responding to the mass negativity created by the media with various campaigns and menu changes which has some parents feeling more at ease about the restaurant (Harris, et al., 2013; Baertlein, 2015). Though the instances that children eat at McDonald's are suspected to be greater, the range of three months was chosen to better bridge the gap between actual parental practice and assumed parental perfection (where parents believe themselves to be much healthier and self-controlled than they actually are). Children participating in the Q sort will be compensated with a small art pack, including coloring utensils such as paper, crayons and pencils.

Part of the strength of the Q sort comes from its combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Each Q sort process begins with the creation of a concourse, usually statements (but in this case photographs) which represent a particular area. The concourse is made up of actual statements (or photographic representations of statements) that individuals have made about a specific topic (Brown, 1980). The subjects will be asked to rank order 30 photographs depicting the McDonald's experience on a 10-point scale ("What I least like" (-5), to "what I most like" (+5)). Participant selections will be recorded and subsequently entered into a computer program, (see Appendix B for Q sort ranking template). After the ordering is complete, a brief interview consisting of five questions will be conducted:

1) Why did you choose these two pictures as what you most liked?

2) Why did you choose these pictures as what you least liked?

3) Why do you go to McDonald's?

4) What is your favorite thing about McDonald's?

5) What do you dislike about McDonald's?

The average completion time is estimated to be around 30 minutes for each participant.

Q Sort Analysis

The data collected during the Q sorts will be analyzed using PQMETHOD computer software. In preparation for factor analysis, the data will have been entered into a matrix where participants filled the columns and rows with their rank-order. In the computer program columns of data are correlated to determine how similar or dissimilar participants are in their rankings. Following this correlation, the factor analysis and varimax rotation are performed to identify "factors". Factor analyzation consists of pairing those who have sorted statements in similar ways into groups called "factors." Each factor represents a specific group of people with similar attitudes toward the subject.

The final step includes determining z scores for each of the 30 photographs in each factor. The z scores matched the 10-point scale participants used to sort their statements and thus ranged from -4 to +4. Z scores that are greater than -/+1.0 are generally considered significant (with significance increasing as the number approaches +/-2.0 and beyond). These polarized z scores represent the "What I like" and "What I dislike" photographs associated with each factor. These z scores are then used to determine specific traits associated with each archetype determined from the data of the study.

Following the statistical analysis, the researcher uses the significant photographs from each factor to further explain and supplement statements from participant interviews. This aids in the understanding of the characteristics of individuals in each factor group and their main motivations. Of particular interest will be findings that reflect media effects, especially social learning theory, that can explain further why these individuals like McDonald's. Selected personal statements, along with the photograph Z scores, will be included below.

Determination of Q Sort Photographs

The particular photographs for this study were chosen based on research from Ferguson et al. (2012) who reported on parental perceptions of why kids wanted to visit McDonald's (food, playground, toys). Another study published in *Childhood Obesity* further guided our photo selection of food items, revealing that the most frequent items for kids 6-11 years old were French fries, chicken nuggets, cheeseburgers, soda and apple pie, whereas their least favorite options were the Yogurt Parfait (purchased by less than 1% of kids), and apple dippers, which were only purchased by 3.5% of the target age group (Cahana, 2011). Toy photographs, particularly those that were associated with movie characters or recently featured at McDonald's, were chosen based on the advertising research by Bernhardt et al. (2013). While the playground is obviously a large pull for some, other aspects of the physical environment were also included (drive thru, dining area, etc.) in order to cover the subjective experience and possibly give new insights into what kids really do like about the experience. Additionally, celebrities and athletes endorsing McDonald's were featured as they play a part in overall promotion of McDonald's products. Pictures depicting social aspects of McDonald's (an outing with parents, friends, McDonald's employees) were included to address social learning and social motivators to go to McDonald's. See Table A1 for a full list of the photographs used for this study.

Chapter 5: Results

The factor analysis of the Q sorts yielded five significant factors. Factors are defined by Brown (1980) as "operational definitions of the attitudes or value preferences" of those participating in the Q sort (p. 55). Though all individuals organized into a factor would not have selected the exact same pictures in identical sequence, they will have sorted the photographs similarly, representing a particular attitude toward the subject, McDonald's. Because these factors are grouped together based on similar but not identical preferences, they characterize only general perceptions. These factors cannot be counted on to be demographic identifiers of individual responses, but serve to give us a general idea of how certain groups of people might think. The nature of Q sort allows the researcher to identify both majority and minority perceptions, offering a unique interpretation and new insights into why kids like McDonald's.

Factor 1: The *Ritualists*

The first factor consists of rankings of five individuals who held similar views on 12 pictures (both positive and negative) (see Table C1). The children in this factor were named "*Ritualists*" because they considered the McDonald's experience as a sort of ritual in their lives: comfortable, controllable, yet special and unique to them. *Ritualists* go to McDonald's because it is part of a habitual rite initiated by their parents quite possibly at a very young age. Over time, regular McDonald's attendance has become something that is very comfortable to them, and a trip to McDonald's is now often initiated by their suggestion. Though their parents take them to McDonald's, *Ritualists* find their friends to be a central factor to their experience, while their parents play a supporting, albeit removed, role. One participant recalled, "I like being with my friends at McDonald's...one time I went to McDonald's with my friend...we played at the Playplace and it was really fun." Another participant noted that family at the restaurant was a means to an end because with Mom or Dad he "can actually go to McDonald's". To this

Ritualist, his parents are the ride and the money behind his special McDonald's experience. Essentially his parents are the connecting force that allows this ritual to happen.

Because of the elevated amount of control and predictability they desire, his group revealed that they are not particularly keen on meeting new people - one participant noted that she is shy and "doesn't make friends really easily." Another participant similarly mentioned that because he didn't really know the other kids he didn't want to play with them. This ensures a regulated environment, predictable surroundings and guarantees that they will have a good time.

Though *Ritualists* seem to like all of the food and the menu, there are a few "comfort" foods a *Ritualist* prefers. These foods include Baked Apple Pie (the highest ranked item on their Q sort), fries, and Chicken McNuggets.

Ritualists come off as somewhat self-interested, or spoiled, though not unpleasant to be around. Peripheral things to the McDonald's experience (much of which is seen in advertising and media, and which does not directly involve routine predictability) - such as athletes, celebrities, McDonald's characters, birthday parties - are not important to this group and appeared as the items that were most disliked by them. One *Ritualist* commented, "I like sports, just not watching other people play - I only like watching my own team play." This reveals further a preference for the familiar and predictable.

Throughout their selections, *Ritualists* show that they are creatures of habit who want to maximize control over spontaneity. A visit to McDonald's forms a routine part of these kids' lives. It is a pleasant, predictable, safe place to enjoy eating comfort foods, where they can be with friends of their choice and family.

Factor 2: The *Foodies*

The children in this factor are obvious McDonald's food enthusiasts. This group consisted of five kids with similar views on 10 pictures (both positive and negative) (see Table

C2). Because of their affinity for food, this group was deemed the "*Foodies*." Notably, they prefer the cheeseburger to everything else, followed closely by Chicken McNuggets and fries. *Foodies* have a wide spectrum of food that they like. Indeed, what other participants reported as their least favorite aspect of the cheeseburger (pickles and other such condiments) were the *Foodies*' favorite part. One *Foodie* commented enthusiastically about the cheeseburger: "there's cheese and meat and pickles;" another said "it has delicious pickles and they make it taste super good." Because they pay attention to the food, *Foodies* are also aware of the value and cost of the items they get at McDonald's. One *Foodie* was excited because of the "multiple refills for free" on his soda, or the different options of cheeseburger he could get.

The big dislikes for the *Foodies* seemed to be anything that might stand between them and their cuisine of choice. This included McDonald's characters who were "all stupid and weird," the "tables and floor [that are] dirty and the bathrooms and hallways" of the dining area, the menu, and employees. Essentially, most aspects associated with the interior of McDonald's were in *Foodies*' disfavor.

Though they like a wider array of food offered at McDonald's, it is limited to higher-calorie, higher-fat foods. For *Foodies,* salad is simply unacceptable. Responses ranged from "I kinda don't like [salad]" to two participants who said they hated it, but admittedly had never actually tried it ("salad is yucky. I haven't tried the salad, but my mom has.")

Foodies did like one non-food item: sports teams. This unique choice reveals a more active side to these kids. A *Foodie* mentioned "I like sports and they're really fun; I watch them mostly every day. And I play them too." One possible explanation is that *Foodies* are not simply going and staying at McDonald's. They go for the food, but the other aspects of McDonald's (like the Playplace and dining area or social environment) are not as important to them. These are on-the-go kids involved in sports and other activities. They might get fast-food before going

to a sporting or similar event. As with any form of entertainment, however, it is important for *Foodies* to be surrounded by good food while they are out and about.

Factor 3: The *Players*

By far the biggest factor group, factor three, is comprised of eight individuals who held similar views on 11 pictures (both positive and negative) (See Table C3). These kids hold a great love for the iconic McDonald's Playplace, and thus were named the "*Players*". First and foremost, these are children who like to have fun; they like to be a part of the action. One *Player* commented "...when I go I make it really fun." Another participant stated that "I like the Playplaces because they kind of make kids smile." She further commented on the design and colorful components of the Playplace that she liked. *Players* feel that the Playplace is unique and special at McDonald's. One child said, "I like the Playplace, other restaurants don't really have Playplaces." For *Players*, the Playplace is the McDonald's experience, where everything else trails behind it. One *Player* revealed, "my mom says 'how about we go to the Playplace' rather than asking 'do you want to go to McDonald's?'"

Though secondary to the Playplace, *Players* also have a desire to be with family. One *Player* stated: "usually we don't get to do family outings that much... so I like to go to places with my family." Another said "when I am with family it makes me more happy." To sum up the experience, another *Player* stated, "I like being with my family. And I like McDonald's."

Not only is McDonald's the ideal place to go to play and to be with family, it is most definitely the ultimate place to go for a birthday party. One comment was "I would love to have my party there," another simply related how fun it was when she attended a birthday party there once.

Though the ambiance and company are important to the McDonald's experience, the food still forms a large part of the attraction. Happy Meals, Yogurt Parfaits and fries are some of

their favorites. Admittedly, one *Player* said she would get the Happy Meal "for the toy." This group is composed of picky eaters, and a toy is much easier to play with than undesirable food. In particular, they disliked the cheeseburger because it came with any combination of cheese, or pickles, or lettuce or "veggies". From experience many of these kids had learned that even when they ask for a cheeseburger without all of the condiments..."they always put pickles...and I barely like it!" Admittedly, *Players* are aware of their limited food preferences. One commented, "I don't really eat my vegetables". This explains their aversion to salad as well.

Players are accustomed to making their own fun and need few added frills, but they do seek thrills and novel experiences. For all that, the traditional ("creepy") McDonald's characters, including Ronald McDonald, are far from what they would deem fun or ideal. Though *Players* seek excitement, it is not derived from large cartoon-like characters, particularly those which they find scary. *Players* also have an aversion to sports stars, mostly because they do not care to watch sports. They would much rather be playing the sport, and be a part of the action. One *Player* commented: "all the sports are so boring to watch" followed by "it's a restaurant… restaurants and sports don't really mix." *Players* thrive off an unstructured playtime with family and carefully selected food close by.

Factor 4: The *Socialites*

Factor four consists of four individuals. These individuals held similar beliefs on nine pictures (both positive and negative) (see Table C4). This group was fittingly called the "*Socialites*" because of their desire to be surrounded by friends and family. They search for and thrive off of the human experience at McDonald's. One participant noted: "being with my family helps me bond with them more than being alone." Another child enjoyed being at McDonald's "because you can eat together, talk together," while another simply stated "I like spending time with them." This group desires and needs more interaction with their parents and

families; in turn *Socialites* are more connected with their family than the other factor groups. Likewise, they value very much their friendships. A *Socialite* commented "being with friends helps me grow because I'm very extroverted." The main pull to McDonald's for these kids is the time spent with those they love most.

Because social interaction is what drives *Socialites* to go to McDonald's, the food is not as important as in other groups. They like Chicken McNuggets and soda but are somewhat passive in their tastes - they are the only group that did not report *disliking* any foods. Beyond food, unique to the *Socialites* is their preference for Happy Meal toys. In particular, they seek out toys featured at McDonald's from movies. One *Socialite* commented about the toys: "sometimes they're really interesting;" perhaps making a good conversation piece.

Though *Socialites* enjoy spending time with people, they expect reciprocation and respect from others. *Socialites* dislike the McDonald's staff, as they "aren't always as lively as they make them out to be," and "they're not very talkative". A *Socialite* assumed that the ill-tempered employees were "usually exhausted because they work graveyard shifts." Other characters associated with McDonald's - both Ronald McDonald and the McDonald's characters - were not favorable to *Socialites* either. Though *Socialites* enjoy being with those people they know well, without a personal relationship with these characters, they found them to be "creepy" and "scary," and they "might just come running after you." In the same vein, the *Socialites* also felt that the Playplace was not somewhere they would like to be, commenting that it is "stinky" and "you don't know what happens in there." In avoiding the Playplace, *Socialites* bond through communication instead of play.

Factor 5: The *Tabloids*

Just two individuals fit into the fifth and final factor. They held similar attitudes toward 12 pictures in the Q sort (see Table C5). Because of their selections, (apparent love of celebrities

and general suspicions about McDonald's) they are called the "*Tabloids*." To be sure, *Tabloids*, like the *Socialites*, do put family first. One *Tabloid* commented "as long as I'm with my family I don't mind it," while another enjoyed the personal connection she felt with her family while at McDonald's. However, what sets *Tabloids* apart from the other factors is how image conscious and content conscious they are, coupled with their love for the flashy and famous.

This was the only factor group who ranked celebrities so highly. One participant put it frankly, "I love celebrities." Like celebrities, *Tabloids* enjoy being seen and heard, and are loyal fans. They are also the only group who have a preference for Ronald McDonald, the literal face of McDonald's and world-renowned icon. Because they are well-acquainted with him, they have come to accept and like him.

Yet *Tabloids* are also very conscious of image, color and content. Indeed, these kids are at least remotely aware that they (in the words of a *Tabloid*) "judge [a book] by [its] cover," claiming to like or dislike certain elements of McDonald's without actually trying them. Similar to false and ludicrous claims on a *Tabloid* magazine, both children in the *Tabloid* factor were concerned about hidden ingredients in their food, such as sugar and bleach. They both suspected McDonald's was "just trying to get more people" with breakfast all day or that the monopoly game was "just a scam." They distrusted the dining area and the drive thru, and even said they disliked Chicken McNuggets (a favorite for all other groups except the *Players*), apple dippers (because they "look like a hot dog you dip in mustard") and soda. As suspicious and wary as they are of McDonald's, *Tabloids* still enjoy being there with family and love any association with celebrities and fame.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The current study strives to understand the delicate relationship between children, media, their social circles and their eating habits. Of particular interest is how these elements apply to one of the world's largest restaurants, McDonald's. In light of an alarming increase in the rate of obesity in children, this study came about as an attempt to begin to understand in a deeper, more complex way, the variables that affect food choice and restaurant preference. This section seeks to address the research questions of this thesis by describing and detailing the archetypes that represent children who like McDonald's and what motivates them to go to the restaurant.

The Q sort revealed three new, unique factors and insights into why kids like McDonald's. Previous research on the pull of McDonald's for children had parents report on their child's main motivations to go to the restaurant (Ferguson et al., 2012). The majority believed it was the playground (36%), followed closely by the food (32%) and lastly by the toys (25.3%). There was a small percentage (6.7%), who did not specify. From a corporate standpoint, McDonald's executives see the toys as the biggest incentive for kids to come to McDonald's. A toy is present in one in 20% of their sales, with 1.5 billion toys being distributed worldwide (Barnes, 2001; Jacques, 2014). Merely stating that playgrounds, food and toys were the reason kids liked the restaurant is too simple a solution to a complex puzzle.

To some extent, the current study does reflect parent's responses to Ferguson et al. (2012), particularly where the *Players* and *Foodies* are concerned as major factor groupings. Even so, with five factor groups the distribution of individuals belonging to each factor differs from that reported by Ferguson et al. (2012) and is as follows: *Ritualists* (5) = 17%, *Foodies* (5) = 17%, *Players* (8) = 28%, *Socialites* (4) = 14%, *Tabloids* (2) = 7%, no category (5) = 17%. Note that there were five participants who did not fall into any single group. This is to be expected as the Q sort cannot account for every single individual but does seek to accommodate

the greatest amount of general perceptions held by individuals in a population. This section will deal primarily with what was observed in the Q sort findings and how this compares and fits into the existing literature.

All five factors revealed surprising depth to the query at hand. *Ritualists*, the first factor, seek out the restaurant for its predictability and ability to provide comfort and control through familiar food and ambiance. The *Foodies*, obviously fans of the food, are on-the-go kids and big supporters of sports teams. The *Players* love McDonald's because of the many options that it offers them - the Playplace, a fun location for a birthday party, followed by family and food. *Socialites* thrive on the interaction between friends and family, with a love of Happy Meal toys and little need for the Playplace. *Tabloids* prefer the celebrity ties to other aspects of McDonald's, and though they still like the restaurant, they are suspicious about the food and underpinnings.

All of these groups demonstrate signs of generations-old branding that is now being handed down to them. Advertisers and corporations aim to connect on an emotional level with consumers from a young age. After all, it is the emotions that more reliably predict buyer behavior than information or proven facts about the establishment (Murray, 2013). Likewise, many parents now worry openly about the "unhealthy" image that the media has generated for McDonald's in recent years (indeed many kids have internalized these messages, particularly the *Tabloids*). Despite that, it is certain that a good number of these parents still take their children to the restaurant, remembering nostalgically their own childhood at McDonald's (Baertlein, 2015). This practice establishes a habit within the family. Each factor group interprets the McDonald's experience differently.

For *Ritualists*, *Players*, *Socialites* and *Tabloids*, a deep emotional connection with McDonald's is formed over time as they visit the restaurant. The emotional bonds of the family

become tighter - particularly as seen with groups such as the *Players*, *Socialites* and *Tabloids* who rank family over friends. Parents play a central role in the creation of these experiences. Without their parents, most of these children would not frequent McDonald's as much as they do. Over time, kids begin to ask or expect to go to McDonald's.

Just as parents cater to their children's requests to go to McDonald's, or what Dotson and Hyatt (2005) call "pester power," Tyler Cowen (2012) argues that all American food caters to a child's palate. After generations of indulging sweeter, blander food preferences (championed by McDonald's), parents are also inclined to search out this cuisine. With added perks such as a Playplace and toys to entertain their little ones, parents are more likely to frequent the restaurant, purchase, and eat the food. Herein lies a good portion of the $500 billion children influence every year in consumer spending (Barbaro & Earp, 2008; Calvert, 2008). However, this Q sort reveals that some parents may be mistaken as to why their child asks to go to McDonald's; these results show it is likely much more than the Playplace or the food.

Parents and Social Learning

Given the great importance of the family in almost all of the factor groups, it is evident that parents of these children are contributing to their child's attitudes toward McDonald's through socially learned actions and attitudes. Simply by going to McDonald's, parents are communicating a belief about the restaurant. Various quotes from participants in all categories seemed to closely echo what a parent would say (whether there is "too much sugar" in an item or if it is "unhealthy"). Though in its entirety this hypothesis is beyond the scope of the current preliminary study to prove, the observations of Buijzen et al. (2008) offer an interesting explanation for the data. In their study, they found that family-based, consumption-related communication about food advertising became a moderator between what kids experienced through advertising and what they ate. Socio-oriented families (who strove for unity, harmony

and conformity) were more successful in disrupting the effect of food advertisements on their children's consumption behavior because of increased communication within their family unit.

Taking the great effect communication can have on children's choice, it is more apparent why time spent together as a family is so important. Michael Pollan (2010) spoke of the death of the fundamental American family dinner, an important event for families to bond and communicate in the home. With parents busy at work during the day and packed schedules in the afternoon, one of the only times a family can be together is at McDonald's. Though the dynamic is different in each case, and particularly for each factor group, McDonald's does allow for a place to relax and bond as a family, albeit outside of the home.

While together at McDonald's, parents of *Ritualists* and *Players* may communicate through word or deed that McDonald's is the place for memories, good food and fun, while the added frills (such as sports teams, sports stars or McDonald's characters) are not necessary. Parents of *Foodies* may pick up McDonald's before taking their kids to sports events, thus creating an association between the two. *Socialites* have learned that McDonald's is an excellent place to have their parents' full attention, and that that is where families can spend time together. *Tabloids* may have learned from their parents to like Ronald McDonald and are wary of the suspicious ingredients in their food.

While *Tabloids* are the most conscious of their food content, comments from children in all groups seem to be remotely aware of "healthy" vs. "unhealthy." The preferences and actions of the majority of participants did not demonstrate that health was a significant worry to them, however. With little interest in the quality of their cuisine, obesity should be a concern for parents and children alike. Of course, McDonald's itself cannot be solely blamed for unhealthy preferences. Yet, the food selection here and at other fast-food establishments is not encouraging many healthy food choices. Repeated exposure to fast-food in turn creates unhealthy habits that

reach beyond childhood (Emond et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2009). In the past, some of the communication about food habits would happen at the typical family dinner table (Buijzen, 2008). These health conversations are now being outsourced to an establishment that practices the opposite. Fortunately, McDonald's is still offering them a place to bond and learn from each other. While important, it is a variety of sources, not just parents, that inform a child's food selection and behavior.

Peers, Media, Advertising and Social Learning

Another powerful socializing agent, friends, is a favorite among *Ritualists*, *Socialites* and *Tabloids*. With increasing time spent away from families, children turn more to their peers and media for approval and education. In the United States today, peers and the media are stepping in to teach values and behavior to children more than parents (Dotson & Hyatt, 2005). Particularly for *Ritualists*, friends are even more central to the McDonald's rite than family, suggesting their influential power on this group. Based on their preferences, *Socialites* and *Tabloids* also place a lot of importance on friends.

As media is being used by all groups in this study, advertising is undoubtedly playing a role in socially educating and reinforcing what children are learning from parents and peers. Ferguson et al. (2012) found that advertisements, especially those most recently seen, were more powerful determinants of what products children wanted than parental influence or advice. Most of the items chosen by children in the current study were those that were heavily advertised. In comparing these food selections to Cahana's (2011) findings about food preference, many similarities were found. Cahana (2011) reported on the most ordered and least ordered items by kids in a general population; favorite products included fries, Chicken McNuggets, cheeseburgers, soda and Baked Apple Pie. These items were all seen in turn throughout the five factors in the current study though no single group selected all of the products. *Ritualists*,

Foodies, and *Socialites* preferred Chicken McNuggets. Fries were chosen by all of the groups, except the *Socialites*. Soda was a favorite for *Foodies* and *Socialites*. Most importantly, though, all of the favorite foods corresponding to Cahana's (2011) and the current study can be ordered in a Happy Meal, with the exception of the Baked Apple Pie.

Harris et al. (2013) noted that the Happy Meal with Chicken McNuggets was advertised eight times more than any other menu item, while kids on average saw a Happy Meal advertisement 3.6 times a week just on television. With parental concession, media and peer influence, the three objectives of advertising (to directly seek children as customers, to indirectly persuade parents through children's "pester power", and to engrave positive brand associations on the minds of the younger generation) are seen in action through purchase decisions (Dotson & Hyatt, 2005, p. 36). Though the current study did not ask attitudes and exposure of the participants to McDonald's ads, almost all did report using one if not various forms of media every day. All respondents used media at least a few times a week. Because of the ubiquity of McDonald's ads, it is safe to assume that these children are being exposed to at least some amount of advertising (Bernhardt et al., 2013; McDonough, 2009; Rothman, 2013). Ray Kroc's vision of a child "who loves [McDonald's] commercials" and brings her family with her to the restaurant has been realized (Schlosser, 2002, p. 41).

Advertising is a powerful influential force; however, the favorite Baked Apple Pie of the *Ritualists* and Yogurt Parfait of the *Players* (both considered dessert items) only accounted for 4% of the ads viewed by children (Harris et al., 2013). At first glance, the apple pie was assumed by the researcher to be a particularly common comfort food. This might explain why it was so highly ranked by *Ritualists* who seek to surround themselves with familiar things. Nevertheless, in light of what is known about social learning via parental communication, some statements from participants in the Q sort indicate other forces at work.

Additional Factors Contributing to Food Choice

Various comments revealed that the Baked Apple Pie could be a parent-approved "safe" alternative to getting a dessert (especially because the Happy Meal does not include one), or even a breakfast item. Statements included: "It's really sweet, and I love apple pie… also when you eat it, it's not too much sugar because it's really small," and "the apple pies are really good...when I was with my dad we had apple pie for breakfast and it was really good and it was really fruity too." The results for the Yogurt Parfait tell a similar story with comments comparing the Yogurt Parfait to the Baked Apple Pie, or talking about the fruit in the parfait. The parfait, however, is one of the least ordered items by children (purchased by less than 1%), but happens to be a favorite among the biggest factor group.

The parfait in particular merits further investigation for disambiguation. It may be that the picture of the Yogurt Parfait was simply appetizing to participants. Because there were few dessert options to choose from in the concourse, participants may also have chosen the parfait instead of another dessert option, such as ice cream. Regrettably, it is beyond the scope of this study to determine the exact cause.

Another popular product (to dislike), salad, was not listed among Cahana's (2011) findings for either a popular or unpopular item. It is likely that no salads at all were even ordered by children. *Foodies* and *Players* were the factors who were outspoken about loathing salad. A response from a *Foodie* (after expressing disgust) suggests salad is considered adult food: "I haven't tried the salad, but my mom has." *Players* just couldn't seem to fathom eating vegetables in this manner. In contrast to what a salad may offer, the food choices reflected by all groups in this study are high-calorie, high-fat foods. Vegetables were of little concern by respondents. Cahana (2011) reports that the "unhealthy" menu items are the ones that most kids go for, be it

for palatability or socially learned tendencies. Many of the menu items that the kids chose to represent themselves are those that are least expensive.

It may be the price in conjunction with taste that sells these items so well, to both kids and their parents who have to foot the bill (Cahana, 2011). Overloaded and busy parents might consider fast-food a cheap, time-saving alternative to home cooking. Regrettably, the false idea has long-since proliferated society that junk food is cheaper than healthy food (Bittman, 2011). These ideals and practices are passed on to kids through social learning. *Foodies* in particular seemed more aware of the value of food (taught by the parents) because of their own predispositions.

Psychological Components of Food Choice

Clearly, there is a viable connection between frequent visits to McDonald's and quality family time. There exists another emotional connection to food proves to be an equally strong force. Though *Foodies* expressed a strong interest in what they were eating, all of the groups listed various food items as favorite reasons to go to McDonald's. In a study exploring comfort foods, Wansink, Cheney and Chan (2003) explain that though there is often a physiological need for food to power one's body, there may also be a psychological and addictive component to food. When a person ingests food that tastes good to him or her, the body releases trace amounts of opiates. Though the amounts of opiates are quite small, they serve to elevate mood and satisfaction and could reinforce a preference for foods that reproduce those positive feelings. There could also be negative feelings associated with not consuming the food. A study about chocolate addiction found that cravings for the sweet treat were possibly driven by the desire to avoid the negative feelings associated with *not* eating the chocolate. This physiological reaction could only be replaced by the positive feelings associated with eating the chocolate (Wansink et al., 2003). The same may be true for fast-food. Memories may be linked to family and friends

but French fries as well. To be sure, the current study in no way suggests that children are harboring any addictions to food. However, there is likely a psychological component to their food consumption and choices, particularly as these habits continue over time.

A multi-faceted influence on society, advertising may help trigger further psychological reactions to food. Researchers Bernhardt, Wilking, Gilbert-Diamond, Emond, & Sargent (2015) found that children were more apt to recall unhealthy items and toys that were advertised over healthier options. Emond et al. (2015) assert that as children see advertisements they will continue to desire the products shown. Ferguson et al. (2012) found that the more recent item seen on an advertisement (whether it was unhealthy or healthy) was the most desired by children. Unfortunately, the ads kids are seeing most are Happy Meal ads, and research suggests those will be the products they desire (Harris et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the groups in this study appeared to desire more the individual items within the Happy Meal rather than the Happy Meal itself, with the exception of the *Players*. As no factor blatantly disliked Happy Meals, it is unknown if participants would order the whole Meal or simply the individual items they preferred when they eat out.

Sports Sponsorship and Fast-Food

Much emphasis has been given to the media by way of advertisements and commercials. However, another popular media outlet is seen in sports. The *Foodies* were the only group who reported liking sports teams. Sports *stars* were disliked by *Ritualists* and *Players*. Sports stars fail to fall within the locus of control of *Ritualists* and represent too much structure for the *Players* factor. Notably, *Foodies* did not select any individual sports star's picture that had been included in the Q sort (neither Kobe Bryant nor LeBron James); instead, they chose the McDonald's basketball team photo. One participant noted: "I like sports and they're really fun, I watch them mostly every day. And I play them too," suggesting a more general preference for a

variety of sports. The same participant mentioned two teams that he cheered for - both locally based. One of these teams is the local professional basketball team with billboards in the area and news articles linking the team with McDonald's (Nba.com, n.d.).

Sponsorship from major corporations, such as McDonald's, has been known to lead to exercise or an increase in healthy food consumption, yet this is dependent on their product. Sponsorship can also have an adverse effect by exposing viewers to more unhealthy items or practices. McDonald's major presence in sport has drawn increased attention in recent years because of the disconnect between what they are supporting and what they are selling (Outram & Stewart, 2014; Collin & MacKenzie, 2006). Yet, their presence in sports is lucrative and gives them a competitive advantage (Amis, Slack & Berrett, 1999). Kelly, Baur, Bauman, King, Chapman, & Smith (2011) argue that because of the vulnerability of children to marketing, especially those under the age of eight, sports sponsorship can be quite problematic and confusing. The associations made in a child's mind (such as McDonald's has with sports) may be incorrect and contradictory. Though the effects may be many, the breadth of our current study can only conclude that sport appears to be a substantial part of these kids' lives. McDonald's and sports are likely experienced together, at least for *Foodies* - whether eating fries at a game or stopping by the restaurant to celebrate a victory. McDonald's has managed to become omnipresent in sport thus cementing an association in the public's mind.

Children's Declining Involvement in Sport

Contrasting the *Foodies* who double as sports fans, the *Ritualists* and *Players* did not like athletes. Though there is an obvious distinction between sports stars and sports teams, participants' interview responses indicate that the sports stars *were* the sport for these two factors. A *Ritualist* commented, "I like sports, just not watching other people play - I only like watching my own team play." A *Player* similarly remarked, "all the sports are just so boring to

watch." These two participants clearly did not like watching but at least the *Ritualist* indicates participating in a sport. For other children, there simply may be a dwindling interest in sport participation, adding yet another concern to children's activity level. Data from Aspen Institute sheds more light on the situation.

Aspen Institute strives to "reimagine sports in America with health and inclusion at its core" through Project Play. They report that kids 6-12 years of age saw a drop from 34.7% to 26.9% of sport inclusion (at least three times a week) between 2007 to 2014. Time spent in front of the screen often gets the blame for taking kids out of activity, but Aspen Institute reveals that parents also have worries about protecting their children. Approximately 87.9% of parents were concerned about the risk of injury, 81.5% the quality of coaches, 70.3% worried about the cost, 67.9% worried about time and 66.1% disliked the emphasis on winning over having fun (Facts: Sports Activity and Children, n.d.). The website includes no information about kids' attitudes toward sports. Though children need not participate in an organized sport to be active, it brings into question how the *Players* (and all kids) spend the rest of their time when not at the McDonald's Playplace.

Family: Still the Nucleus of Society

These results provide some direction for the current issues of obesity, media use and family interaction explained in depth previously in this thesis. These results are unique in that they inform the preoccupied parent that though this is a heavily-mediated society, their children still depend on them for health education and habits. In an over-scheduled culture, children yearn for time with their families, and are now finding it mainly at places like McDonald's rather than their own homes. For some, McDonald's and other fast-food establishments are becoming a surrogate home. In addition, with further prevalence of media, quality communication from family is happening less, and may be somewhat ambiguous. Children are taught how unhealthy

a certain food may be, yet this is the food they are offered as they visit McDonald's or similar restaurant (Baertlein, 2015). Obesity in the U.S. is a growing concern; yet governmental food and media regulation can only go so far to protect the rising generation. The children in this study have revealed that it is meaningful communication and practices in the home by parents that can begin to counteract the very health problems parents are so concerned about.

As for *Foodies* who prefer eating above all else at McDonald's, food education and parental example is still important. *Foodies* are not exempt from social learning from their parents. To enhance healthy choices, media promoting healthy lifestyles by sports teams, such as the NBA FIT program and the NFL Play 60, may be beneficial for *Foodies*. A continuation of this marketing could make healthy choices seem even more normal and feasible for these kids.

Regrettably, there is no way to measure the participants' typical daily ingestion or body mass index (BMI). Health from normal eating habits outside of McDonald's cannot be determined either. Given the alarming statistics, these children are just as at risk for obesity as their counterparts across the country. In a similar vein, this study does not seek to generalize to the entire national or global population; yet it does provide viable data from a strong sample of McDonald's young target market. The children who participated met qualifications for frequency in eating out at McDonald's and an affinity for the restaurant reflected in national statistics.

As all children will be affected by parental interaction and food choices, there remains the question of what parents can do to promote healthy decisions. A study done about food communication and coercion by Miller-Day and Kam (2010) found that parent-child communication is more persuasive than parental control over purchase decisions. Teaching children correct principles is the first step. Secondly, giving kids some freedom to govern their own food choice within these bounds may bring forth increased health benefits. The power to

influence social learning of children cannot be underestimated by parents, followed by peers and media outlets.

Chapter 7: Limitations

Whereas this study does shed new light on an old phenomenon (why kids like McDonald's), it is exploratory in nature. This study found three new factors, besides the presupposed *Foodies* and *Players*. These findings include factor groups such as *Ritualists*, with a need for control and affinity for the familiar; *Socialites*, who thrive off of human interaction; and image-conscious *Tabloids* with a flair for fame. Each group responds differently to media, peers and parents, yet they reveal a society that feeds on fast-food culture.

Q methodology with its smaller sample sizes becomes intrinsically "about me," and is an excellent and simpler way to begin to understand how food and environment interact in a child's world. Just as human beings are complex, their motivations for eating where, when and how they do are deeply rooted. The factors have been discussed in depth, yet there are children who would fail to identify with one single factor. Likewise, children are subject to change their motivations for going to McDonald's or any other restaurant.

This study used photographs instead of a typical statement-based concourse. The researcher selected specific pictures to represent particular ideas, however, perceptions of pictures are many. Particularly with children, if the image itself is not attractive, then the idea represented becomes less attractive or vice versa. This could have caused bias in some responses though strides were made to avoid this. Likewise, some of the concepts behind the pictures were foreign to participants. Halloween coupons were known by very few. Almost none of the children had ever seen McDonald's characters with the exception of Ronald McDonald. To be sure, depictions of these interesting characters are still present in some McDonald's establishments. The monopoly game was another little-known concept to children. A concourse containing more photographs of food and other elements from McDonald's may have helped to better interpret participants' choices.

As with all studies, respondents may change their responses based on a variety of factors including their mood or even their perception of the interviewer or their surroundings. Though all attempts were made to create a neutral environment with a non-biased interviewer, there still exists the possibility that some responses do not reflect what is truly felt by participants in the study.

Chapter 8: Future Research

As a preliminary study, this project is limited in scope. Participants were not asked to reveal specifics about demographics, upbringing, or family life. In the future, it would be interesting to take into consideration some of these aspects: how gender figures into food preferences at McDonald's, how different ethnicities learn through a social environment and apply that to their food choices, how these aspects may change with age. More specific studies, involving measuring personal media exposure may help understand why individuals consume food as they do. Each of the five categories from this thesis could be tested through survey to find out more about their motivations, personalities and predispositions.

Most importantly, given that obesity and food consumption are major concerns for the government and most parents, could McDonald's or other restaurants consider incorporating healthier versions of some of children's favorite elements, as revealed in this study, into their restaurant? Perhaps even school cafeterias could look at some of these elements and find healthier alternatives, even if it be involving greater parent-child communication about the food. Indeed, perhaps the parents must first be educated in order to change children's opinions. This research shows that it is not just the high-calorie food that people love, but it is the interactions around a meal that make it a positive experience. Undoubtedly, there is hope for Americans to return to healthier habits and happier lifestyles.

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Appendix A: Description of Q Sort Photographs

Table A1

Description of Q Sort Photographs

Statement Number	Picture Description on Card
1	Halloween Gift Certificates
2	Sports Stars
3	Soda
4	Apple Dippers
5	Happy Meal Toys
6	McDonald's Characters
7	Celebrities
8	McDonald's Menu
9	Baked Apple Pie
10	Birthday Parties
11	Cheeseburger
12	Being with Family
13	Fries
14	Happy Meals
15	Sports Teams
16	Ronald McDonald
17	McDonald's Dining Area
18	Salad
19	McDonald's Monopoly
20	Drive Thru
21	Yogurt Parfait

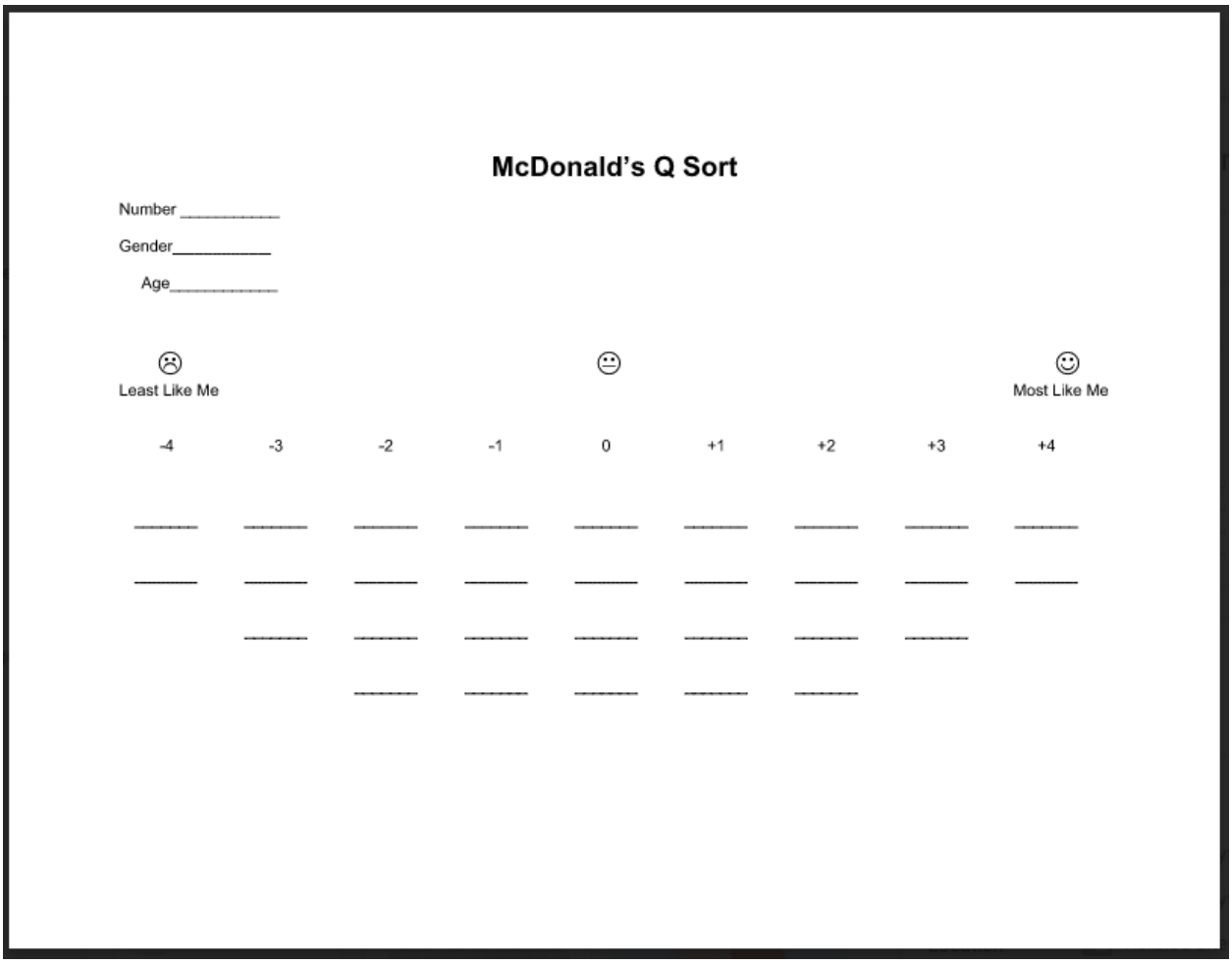
(continued)

Table A1 (continued)

Description of Q Sort Photographs

Statement Number	Picture Description on Card
22	Breakfast All Day
23	Being with Friends
24	McDonald's Employees
25	Happy Meal Movie Toys
26	Coupons
27	McDonald's at the Food Court/Mall
28	Chicken McNuggets
29	Playplace
30	Making New Friends

Appendix B: McDonald's Q Sort Ranking



Appendix C: Q Sort Results

Table C1

Factor 1: The *Ritualists* - Significant Positive and Negative Statements

Statement Number	Picture	Z-score
9	Baked Apple Pie	1.675
13	Fries	1.429
23	Being with Friends	1.413
8	McDonald's Menu	1.203
28	Chicken McNuggets	1.188
12	Being with Family	1.156
2	Sports Stars	-1.038
24	McDonald's Employees	-1.129
7	Celebrities	-1.199
10	Birthday Parties	-1.209
30	Making New Friends	-1.602
6	McDonald's Characters	-2.025

Note: As the z-score ascends, it represents a stronger preference by participants. Likewise, as z-score values descend, they represent greater disfavor by participants.

Table C2

Factor 2: The *Foodies* - Significant Positive and Negative Statements

Statement Number	Picture	Z-score
11	Cheeseburger	1.873
28	Chicken McNuggets	1.849
13	Fries	1.540
15	Sports Teams	1.125
3	Soda	1.125
6	McDonald's Characters	-1.076
17	McDonald's Dining Area	-1.089
8	McDonald's Menu	-1.268
24	McDonald's Employees	-1.308
18	Salad	-2.114

Note: As the z-score ascends, it represents a stronger preference by participants. Likewise, as z-score values descend, they represent greater disfavor by participants.

Table C3

Factor 3: The *Players* - Significant Positive and Negative Statements

Statement Number	Picture	Z-score
29	Playplace	2.162
12	Being with Family	1.571
10	Birthday Parties	1.249
14	Happy Meals	1.167
21	Yogurt Parfait	1.079
13	Fries	1.076
18	Salad	-1.107
16	Ronald McDonald	-1.165
11	Cheeseburger	-1.186
2	Sports Stars	-1.474
6	McDonald's Characters	-2.052

Note: As the z-score ascends, it represents a stronger preference by participants. Likewise, as z-score values descend, they represent greater disfavor by participants.

Table C4

Factor 4: The *Socialites* - Significant Positive and Negative Statements

Statement Number	Picture	Z-score
12	Being with Family	2.122
23	Being with Friends	1.453
3	Soda	1.428
25	Happy Meal Movie Toys	1.227
28	Chicken McNuggets	1.200
24	McDonald's Employees	-1.311
29	Playplace	-1.320
16	Ronald McDonald	-1.868
6	McDonald's Characters	-1.873

Note: As the z-score ascends, it represents a stronger preference by participants. Likewise, as z-score values descend, they represent greater disfavor by participants.

Table C5

Factor 5: The *Tabloids* - Significant Positive and Negative Statements

Statement Number	Picture	Z-score
12	Being with Family	1.868
7	Celebrities	1.568
23	Being with Friends	1.214
16	Ronald McDonald	1.162
13	Fries	1.048
28	Chicken McNuggets	-1.043
4	Apple Dippers	-1.079
22	Breakfast All Day	-1.224
20	Drive Thru	-1.382
3	Soda	-1.387
17	McDonald's Dining Area	-1.692
19	McDonald's Monopoly	-1.907

Note: As the z-score ascends, it represents a stronger preference by participants. Likewise, as z-score values descend, they represent greater disfavor by participants.