Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:

http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/dspace/

This is the authors' version of an article published in *Health, Risk & Society*. The original publication is available at:

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13698575.2012.662948#tabModule

Please cite this article as:

Henderson, J., Ward, P., Coveney, J., and Meyer, S., 2012. Trust in the Australian food supply: innocent until proven guilty. Health, Risk & Society, 14(3), 257-272.

DOI:10.1080/13698575.2012.662948

© 2012 Taylor & Francis

Please note that any alterations made during the publishing process may not appear in this version.

Trust in the Australian Food Supply: Innocent Until Proven Guilty

Abstract

International research demonstrates diminishing trust in the food supply associated with food scares which undermine trust in expert advice. Even though Australia has not experienced major food scares, there is evidence of diminishing trust in the food supply. Interviews were conducted with 47 South Australian food shoppers from high (n=17) and low (n=16) socioeconomic regions of Adelaide and from rural South Australia (n=14) about food governance and trust in the Australian food supply. Participants display a high level of trust in the food supply associated with a perception that Australian food is safe; a lack of exposure to food risks; and trust in personal food safety practices. The media was the only factor which created distrust in the food system. Other participants express confidence in the food supply where confidence is understood as a lack of reflection. Contrary to concepts of reflexive modernization which presume an increasing awareness of risk and placement of trust as a means of reducing uncertainly, participants adopt an 'innocent until proven guilty' approach displaying little knowledge or interest in knowing about food regulation relying instead on routine food safety practices as a means of managing uncertainty.

This paper identifies factors which increase and decrease trust in the Australian food supply. There is a burgeoning literature on trust in a number of disciplines including sociology (Meyer et al, 2008; Giddens 1994; 2006; Mollering 2001; Mollering & Sztompka 2001) public health (Ward & Coates 2006; Gilson 2003; Lupton 1996) psychology (Miles & Frewer 2002; Silvester et al 2007) and political science (Alexander 1996; Fukuyama 1995) which reflects the growing awareness in both research and policy of the importance of trust for society's health and wellbeing. This is even more evident in literature around consumer concerns and perceptions of the trustworthiness of food. As a fundamental aspect of trust (Giddens, 1994; Luhmann, 1979), studies of trust and food have also stimulated an interest in understanding consumer perceptions and concerns around food risks and the extent to which exposure to risk challenges trust in the food system leading to greater reflection upon food safety (Green, Draper, & Dowler, 2003; Houghton, Van Kleef, Rowe, & Frewer, 2006; Lupton, 2004; Shaw, 2004).

To trust is to 'accept the risks associated with the type and depth of the interdependence inherent in a given relationship' (Shepard & Sherman 1998: 423). The truster makes the choice to accept these risks based on two judgements. One, the truster must have positive expectations regarding the competence of the trustee, and two, the truster must regard the trustee as being concerned about, and willing to act in, the best interest of the trustee (Calnan & Rowe 2004). Since these definitions imply that trust is merely a product or process of inter-personal relationships between individuals, we also qualify the definition. By a 'relationship', we do not limit trust to being an inter-personal or inter-subjective outcome. Rather, we view relationships as 'systems of communication' between individuals and social systems, and therefore trust is the process and outcome of relationships between individuals-individuals, individuals-social systems, and social

systems-social systems (Luhmann 1995). With regards to food, trusting relations happen at both a macro and micro level (Calnan & Rowe 2006) between the consumer and other individuals, as well as between consumers and food systems.

Trust, Risk and Reflexivity

There is considerable debate in sociological literature about the relationship between trust and reflection; that is, whether trust is a reflexive act or whether trust can be taken-for-granted (Barbalet, 2009; Meyer & Ward, 2009; Misztal, 1996; Mollering, 2006). Consistent in this debate, is the notion of risk, and the level to which risk impacts the ability or capacity to reflexively, rather than blindly, trust. For proponents of reflexive modernization (Beck 1992; Beck et al. 1994; Giddens, 1994) one of the defining features of modernity is the production and consumption of risks. Modernity has resulted in the emergence of new "social, political, economic and individual risks" which transcend the mechanisms designed to manage them and challenge traditional sources of collective meaning (Beck 1994: 5). The result is increasing uncertainty which necessitates "self-confrontation" as we focus our attentions on minimising and managing the 'controllable' risks arising from modernity (Beck 1994: 5). A process of self-confrontation locates "the politics of risk at the heart of forms of social and cultural life" (Elliott 2002: 297).

As risk monitoring involves both agency and calculation of response (Elliott 2002), reflexive modernization is also associated with greater choice and consequently, an increase in reflexive considerations regarding who and what to trust. For Giddens (1991) risk is associated with responsibility and blame – on the part of humans. The process of modernity was supposed to bring the world under 'control' although the unintended consequence has been the generation of global risks whereby individuals are held accountable and encouraged to regulate themselves and

3

their lifestyles. A greater engagement with science and technology is associated with a set of obligations to act responsibility for the collective good (Elliott 2003; Heir 2003). People are morally and ideologically obliged to present themselves as responsible, self-reflexive decision makers which requires making choices between competing 'experts' and actions. Greater knowledge, which is an outcome of modernity, has led to greater uncertainty and the search for alternative expertise and knowledge claim. On one hand this may leads to greater insecurity which has been conceptualized as 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens, 1990), and 'existential anxiety' (Giddens, 1991), in which 'stasis' or 'eschatological fatalism' becomes the norm. That is, individual actions are paralysed by the complexity of the modern world and issues of trust become moot leading to lack of reflection upon food safety (Beck 1992). On the other hand, the search for 'authentic' knowledge may lead to the placement of trust as a means of managing uncertainty. In other words, a lack of certainty leads to both the need for trust and feelings of anxiety (because trust risks being broken). The placement of trust then becomes an active or reflexive process as the individual is required to make a judgment about the source rather than trust unconditionally (Zinn 2008).

An alternate view challenges the role of reflexivity in relation to trust arguing that trust can be taken-for-granted. Biltgard (2008) argues that trust is often not based on conscious choice; but rather that it is habitual. For Misztal (1996) trust is based on the assumption that the world will operate as it has before and that as long as this occurs trust is automatic. For Biltgard (2008: 106) we do not reflect on whether we should trust, but rather trust 'because nothing has happened so far to indicate that we should not'. Habit reduces the complexity of the choice through the predictability of the social world resulting in action which is automatic rather than reflective, with trust only becoming a conscious choice when expectations are not met. For Luhmann (2000)

4

however, trust in the absence of reflexivity would be regarded as confidence rather than trust.

Trust in the food supply

A number of authors have argued for diminishing trust in the food supply in light of food scares which have damaged trust in actors in the food chain (Biltgard 2008; Masood 1999; Kjaernes et al. 2007; Berg et al 2005; Berg 2004). The Trust-in-Food survey conducted in seven European countries demonstrated that while retailers are trusted to maintain the safety of food products, other food actors including farmers, food authorities, the food manufacturing industry and the media, are distrusted by food consumers (Poppe & Kjaernes 2003). While the passage of time (Berg 2004) and institution of measures to increase the transparency of food governance (Halkier & Holm 2006; Wales et al 2006) have increased levels of trust in the food supply in general, trust in farmers and politicians remains low (Kjaernes et al 2007). Trust in media is also low but is tempered by the expectation that the media will identify emerging food risks. There is a taken-for-granted expectation that the media will exaggerate these risks (Kystallis et al 2007). Despite lack of trust in the media, there is evidence that the media impacts upon consumer attitudes and behaviours. Studies have found a relationship between the volume of media reporting and people's perception of risk that is unrelated to the generalised level of trust in the media (Frewer, Miles, & Marsh, 2002; Frewer, Scholderer, & Bredahl, 2003; Vilella-Vila & Costa-Font 2008). Further, there is a convergence of the values of readers of elite press with media presentations over time (Bauer, 2005)

Trust in the Australian food system differs from Europe. One recent study found that while politicians and the media are distrusted, farmers enjoy high levels of trust, with participants aged 18 to 24 displaying higher levels of trust in all food related institutions except the media

5

(Henderson et al. 2011).   Australia boasts one of the safest food supplies in the world and has not experienced food scares of the magnitude experienced in Europe however recent Australian surveys highlight fears surrounding the use of pesticides, food additives and preservatives (Buchler et al. 2010; FSANZ 2008a). Consumer confidence in food has been challenged by a number of local developments, namely food microbiological scares (e.g. the Garibaldi case in South Australia) (Beers 1996); new technological developments, (e.g. genetically modified foods) (Cox et al. 2007; Lupton 2005); food irradiation (Australian Consumers Association 2002); and the publicity given in Australia to food scandals overseas, for example BSE in Europe and more recently melamine-tainted milk in China (FSANZ 2008b; Breidbach et al 2010).

This paper reports findings from interviews with 47 South Australian consumers about factors which increase and decrease trust in the Australian food supply. The discussion is underpinned by exploration of the role of reflexivity in trust in the Australian food supply.   The role of prior experience in relation to trust in food sources is also explored through the views of Australian consumers who lack exposure to major food scares.

Methods

Methodology and Study Design

This study explored theories of trust through the lens of trust in the food supply. A qualitative methodology was adopted for the first component as the study was exploratory.   The qualitative data informed the development of a national survey about trust in the food supply (Henderson et al. 2011; Taylor et al. 2011) Data for this component of the study were collected through 44 semi-structured interviews with 47 participants who had primary responsibility for food purchasing as earlier research suggests that these people are more likely to consider the safety and

quality of their food (Coveney, 2007). Three interviews were conducted with couples who are both responsible for food purchasing. Participants were aged between 18 and 65 years. The study used purposive sampling techniques to attract participants who are information rich (Patton 2002). Popay et al. (1998: 346) argue that one of the markers of quality in qualitative research is sampling via relevance; that is choosing a sample which produces 'the type of knowledge needed to understand the structures and processes within which the individuals or situation are located.' The sample was structured by location, age and gender. Participants were sought from three locations: from the high socioeconomic status (SES) eastern suburbs (n=17) and low SES southern suburbs of Adelaide the capital city of South Australia (n=16) with a third group of participants drawn from rural South Australia (n=14) as research suggests that reflexivity is stratified by class (Lupton 2003; Shilling 2002; Ward 2006). Elliott (2002) argues that rather than individualizing social inequalities, greater reflexivity is associated with new divisions based upon access to information and opportunities for symbolic participation in the public sphere. As Shilling (2002: 634), states 'different patterns of socialization result in class-based orientations towards symbolic knowledge which affect the degree to which the social world is seen as open to individual intervention.' In addition, rural participants, in particular farmers, were sought due to their role in the food chain and more limited access to food outlets. Four rural participants were recruited from areas surrounding Adelaide and ten from the mid North of South Australia, a region approximately 230 kilometres north of Adelaide.

The sample was also structured by age as younger consumers have been found to be are less concerned with food choice and healthy diets and were more likely to take risks in terms of food choice and health (Green et al 2003: Lupton 2005). Moreover, as a distinct subculture, young adults are recipients of targeted marketing of commodities, including foods and beverages

(Coulson, 2002). The participants for this study were spread evenly across the age range, with the largest group aged 40-49 years (n=13) and smallest groups aged 30-39 (n=8). As degree of trust in food has also been found to be related to gender (Green et al, 2003; Lupton 2005) both female and male participants were sought, however the requirement that participants be the primary shopper resulted in the recruitment of more females than males (13 males and 34 females).

Recruitment

Participants were primarily recruited via a sample stratified by region that was drawn from the electronic white pages (an electronic record of listed phone numbers). As participation was voluntary, the sample used was a convenience sample (Neuman 1997). Drawing names from the electronic white pages failed to elicit younger participants who often use mobile phones rather than maintain a home phone service (Dilman et al. 2009). Younger participants were recruited through flyers on campus at Flinders University in the first instance with additional participants gained through snowballing. Participants from farming families were also actively recruited through snowballing.

Data Collection

The interviews were of approximately one hour duration and addressed issues of food choice; information about food; food safety; governance of food; trust in institutions and overall level of trust in the food supply. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The data for this paper are primarily drawn from discussion of the governance and level of trust in the food supply.

8

Data Analysis

Techniques from grounded theory were used as a means of analysis. The data were initially coded using open codes (Strauss & Corbin 2004). In this case, reasons for trust and distrust in the food system were coded as open codes in the first instance with axial codes developed subsequently through the development of subthemes reflecting the range of responses. Data were managed using Nvivo8. Throughout the data collection, coding and analysis, the team prioritised key principles for introducing quality in qualitative research, especially as outlined by Popay et al (1998). These principles included: illuminating the subjective meaning, actions, and contexts of respondents; adaptation the research design so as to respond to the circumstances and issues of real-life social settings met during the course of the study; purposive sampling processes that were compatible with the social circumstances of respondents; ensuring that data is not merely described, but is moved to analysis and synthesis; and, giving priority to theory development and testing.

Ethical Considerations

Ethic approval for this project was gained through the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Ethics Committee. Approval was subject to the use of a script prepared by the researchers in recruiting participants as a means of ensuring uniform information was provided over the phone about the purpose and role of the participants in the project.

Results

The participants in this study generally displayed a high level of trust in the food supply. One younger woman from the low SES Southern suburbs exemplifies this belief stating that

'[o]verall I assume that it's fairly safe all the time. Yeah I probably I would always assume that it's safe.' (L8)[1].   This quote is interesting because, like many people, the participant displays a great deal of uncertainty when talking about the governance of food safety.   For example, she 'assumes' that the food is 'fairly safe' and she would 'probably assume' it is 'safe'.   Other participants are less equivocal. A woman from the high SES Eastern suburbs observes 'I would say I'm 90 percent happy with trusting what I've purchased.' (J25) while a male from rural South Australia who is responsible for the family shopping states 'I'd be very confident yes.   I wouldn't be buying food and feeling like 'oh, I'm not sure about this' sort of thing.' (J42).   Both of these participants invest trust in their own knowledge, experience and expertise.

Australian Food is Safe

Trust in the food system arises in part, from a perception that Australian food is safe.   One younger vegan respondent when asked about his perception of the safety of his food stated:

I trust the food here, actually more I gotta say more than I would in some other country to be quite honest. In my situation I am very satisfied with how I eat my food overall, if I would want to improve the situation I would like to grow more of my own food, but besides that, I am satisfied I do trust most of the food that I eat, I trust that it is safe. (L5)

When questioned as to why they perceive Australian food to be safe, participants cite both the rigour of Australian food standards and general cleanliness of the environment.   This is despite well published food scares such as the 1995 South Australian Garibaldi small-goods scare with resulted in the death of child and illness in 23 others. A woman from the Eastern suburbs

---

[1] Nomenclature refers to participant identification code.

notes for example:

> I think our standards in Australia are quite high and I think that reflects - obviously, we've had the Garibaldi and issues like that but I think - personally I think that they're doing the right thing with that [food regulation]. (J21)

Australia is contrasted favourably by participants with other countries which are viewed as being more open to economic uncertainty and to corruption of the food regulation system.

> I know that Australia has reasonable high hygiene standards and standards in general manufacturing and processing of food but you have no idea what's going on in other countries…   I suppose other countries with a level of corruption as well and you don't know how many corners are being cut along the way for making profits and things. (J18)

The preceding quotes highlight the link between perceptions of risk (and safety) and their impact on trust.   Food is perceived to be safe in Australia (i.e. relatively few recent food scares) which has a positive impact on trust.   Luhmann (2005) makes the explicit link between risk and trust and argues that where no risk is considered, there is no need for trust (i.e. risk is required for trust to become an issue).   Luhmann (2005: 16) goes on to explain the relative importance of trust in the future, given the increased risks involved in the project of modernity 'one should expect trust to be increasingly in demand as a means of enduring the complexities of the future which technology will generate.'

Despite a high level of confidence in standards and legislation there is some reservation about the policing of standards related both to resourcing of food safety but also to flexibility of the

standards. One woman notes that 'they can always put the guidelines down but they're only going to work if you've got somebody who follows them up to make sure that they happen,' (J27) while another states that:

> The legislation is good.   It's the implementation that it falls down in because of the lack of resources put into it.   You know, it's all very well you can write a piece of legislation but if you don't have the backup to it, it's not going to work as well as it should. (J9)

Questioning the way in which standards are written focuses upon their flexibility. One male respondent with extensive experience in the food industry argues that the standards are 'very hard to police, it's like a cop if you had a speed limit of minimum 60 in this zone, maximum 75, well what's speeding what's not'. (J15)

A second subtheme relates to the cleanliness of the environment in Australia and to a perception that Australian food production is 'clean and green'.   This view is best exemplified by a woman from the high SES Eastern suburbs who argues that:

> We're very lucky in this country because …we're told that our farmers are the best in the world and you know, they probably are…they're very efficient, they're very clean. It's constantly reinforced with us all that we grow clean food so I think we live in an environment where it's just, what else would it be? (J24)

Rather like some previous quotes whereby we highlighted the uncertainties exhibited by participants, this participant talks about being 'told' that farmers are the best and this 'probably' being the case, and also being 'reinforced' that we grow clean food and 'thinking' that the environment is clean but then leaving us with an existential dilemma of 'what else would it be?'.

12

This continues to raise the issues of contingencies in the minds of participants.

The cleanliness of Australian produce is also asserted by rural and farming participants who are generally critical of GM cropping which is currently banned in South Australia and also in reflection, albeit often negative, upon the impact of food regulation on farming practice. Again, participants contrast Australian produce with food produced in other countries, most notably, in South East Asia. This is particularly evident when taking about the purchasing of seafood. One respondent states for example, '[w]ell there's a big thing about getting fish from South East Asia because of the I don't know whether it's the lead or pollutions that's in the water or fassa [white] fish so I wouldn't buy fish as such from there.' (J5)

Role of exposure to food risk

A second factor which has been identified by participants as contributing to trust in the food system is a lack of personal negative experience and exposure to major food risks. Many participants argue that they have no reason not to trust the food system. A male from Southern Adelaide states that:

> …unless you've got a reason, not to trust, like you've had an experience or you've, you know, something has happened, then, I think then perhaps you wouldn't trust them, but I always grew up that you trust things until there's a reason no to (L4).

This raises a really important theoretical and conceptual issue, since Giddens (1990; 1991; 1994) makes the case that trust can no longer be 'assumed' or 'taken for granted' in late modernity, although our participants talked about the opposite – rather similar to the 'innocent until proven guilty' scenario. Our participants stated that they would trust food or food sources (albeit

13

Australian ones) unless they were told otherwise.   Participants note however, that their trust in food could be diminished by a bad experience.   The same male states 'I guess all you need is that one food poisoning case and that's like you know, well I'm not eating that again'. (J14)

A lack of major food scares was also cited as a reason for trusting the Australian food supply.   One participant states that she trusts food as 'we live in a country where we've never had a reason not to trust our food' (J24) while another notes that 'I think we've had no bad experiences' (J43).   Australia is contrasted favourably with countries which have experienced major food scares or environmental catastrophes.   A woman from the high SES eastern suburbs argues that 'I mean we haven't got foot and mouth, we haven't got all those other nasty diseases and with all this.' (J27).   When asked if there were countries that they would be reluctant to purchase food from one female participant said 'England, I certainly wouldn't buy meat because they've got the cow disease.   European countries, probably not because they've had nuclear drop-outs (sic).' (J28).   Fear of food contamination is more evident in those who have had direct experience of major food scares. A young woman who had been in England during the BSE outbreak indicates that 'I wouldn't eat meat [beef] in England, I wouldn't, I couldn't. Just that scare.' (J14).

Trust in Personal Food Safety Strategies

A final rationale offered for trust in the food supply is trust in the personal food safety strategies. Participants in this study demonstrate a belief that the risks associated with food can be managed through considered purchasing, storage and preparation of food.   Heir (2003) argues for a convergence of discourses of risk and those of moral responsibility.   Rather than seeing uncertainty leading to greater political and social engagement he views it as playing out in the

14

functioning of everyday life through "routinized patterns of responsible living" (Heir 2003: 13). A focus upon risk management through everyday routines is viewed as leading to an exaggerated role for human agency and choice in the management of risk which is reflected in food policy which promotes the role of individualised food safety practices (Jackson 2010). Many participants in this study, not only see considered purchasing, storage and preparation of food as an effective food safety strategy but view themselves as being an integral part of the food safety chain. One woman from the eastern suburbs states for example, 'when I get home I have to continue that trust by storing it, by washing it and doing all those sorts of things' (J21). Another argues that:

> You've got to take responsibility in the end for what you put in your mouth so if you know, if you're prepared to trust the government then that's fine but I think you can't always then turn around and say, but you said this was safe and if you didn't actually wash it before you cooked it or you left it sitting on the bench and then it went off and then you, you know froze it and then you reheated it and you know, there comes a point where you've got to do it yourself. (J24)

Participants use a number of strategies to ensure the food they are purchasing is safe to eat including the use of 'use by' and 'best buy' dates; visual cues; and the smell and feel of fresh produce. They are also discriminating about where they purchase food with many stating they would walk out of 'anywhere that looks as though it's not been cleaned.'(J9). Participants also place trust in food outlets that they have established relationship with. One woman says 'I guess the guy, like at [suburb], I know he gets his fish in – you know, fresh'. (J29). Others purchase food from Farmer's Markets and other venues where there is a more direct relationship with food

producers.   A younger participant manages food safety through purchasing food though:

> …more of a food co op and also the Torrens island one [Farmer's Market] as well you are
>
> more face to face with the growers or try to cut down the chain as much as possible between
>
> myself and the actual grower. (L5).

The storage strategies adopted by participants centre on refrigeration of purchased and prepared food.   A woman from the Eastern suburbs notes that 'you can get a nice piece of meat home …if you don't store it or you don't cook it through well then you could have problems' (J21) while another from southern Adelaide says 'I make sure that…it's cooled or frozen or whatever appropriately, so the sauces where you're more likely to have illness, you know sickness through contaminated food.' (J10)

Food preparation strategies include care about the products used; cleanliness; and use of separate cutting boards and knives for meat, chicken and vegetables.   This is viewed as an effective means of preventing food poisoning leading one woman to say:

> I sort of in my own self try to avoid those situations full stop anyway and when in doubt
>
> chuck it out, you know.   So I feel confident in the food choices that I make but also in my
>
> preparation choices and like I said when in doubt chuck it out. (J10).

Fuelling Distrust: Media Reporting of Food Scares

The major factor identified by participants as diminishing trust in the food supply is media reporting of food contamination and food scare incidents.   Participants were questioned about the credence they placed on media reporting of food scares.   Many stated that the essential nature of food leads them to believe that media reporting of food scares is accurate as 'if there's a food scare

it affects a lot of people' (J37).   Participants also cite journalistic ethics as ensuring that accurate information is given about food.

> I would presume that with food poisoning or food scares or something like that, they would report it properly and not try and either beef it up or you know hide something. I would think that bound by certain, 'cos I mean journalists have certain code of ethics in things like that you know so hopefully they do the right thing on that. (J4).

These quotes highlight a sense of trust in journalists and the media around food scares, but not necessarily a generalised trust. Other participants are more sceptical of media reporting citing lack of evidence and sensationalism in media reporting.   An older woman from low SES Southern Adelaide states 'I think most of what they write isn't based on analysis. I think it's just, you know, a fear without thought,' (J9); while a rural participant claims:

> Sometimes I think it's just scare tactics with their news generally, whether it's about food or a lot of other things … it just sensationalises things and I think that's the same sort of thing with the reporting of food scares. (J41).

Participants manage uncertainty by seeking trusted media sources or expert opinion within the media.   Trusted media source include the government owned ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission) television, radio stations and websites and broadsheet newspapers.   This perspective is exemplified by a younger woman from the eastern suburbs who states that 'I tend to trust the likes of the ABC and some of the established papers like The Australian, whereas the other ones that are more commercial….' (J18).   Participants contrast these sources with tabloid newspapers and commercial television services which are viewed as untrustworthy.

Well I think there's probably a part of our media that's not tabloid. …Where they just tell the facts yeah you probably need to listen to them a take notice and take the precautions... (J15).

Trust in media reporting also depends upon who is cited. The experts identified as trustworthy are medical experts and government scientific advisors. A woman with young children talks of her trust in information about food risks from medical experts.

Particularly when they talk about children and how there's a big outbreak of something or whatever and 'a spokesman from the Women's and Children's [hospital] has suggested', all those things I think are pretty legit. (J21).

Trust in government scientific advisors is evident in the following quote from a rural male.

I think in those sorts of things, where the health commission [South Australian Department of Health] gets involved, then – say, like in the salmonella outbreak, then I think that sort of information is pretty straight up, it has to be. (J42).

Lack of Reflexivity and Confidence in the Food System

Finally, there is a group of primarily younger, participants who express no interest in thinking about or reflecting on issues of food safety (we link this to the ideas of functional knowledge in the discussion section of this paper). These participants are satisfied in the knowledge that 'someone else' was looking after their concerns, and they personally do not have to engage time or energy in the pursuit of knowledge about these issues. In terms of conceptual understandings of trust, Luhmann (2000) makes a semantic distinction between trust and confidence, with the distinguishing feature being reflexivity – trust involved a reflexive act (an active decision) in relation to risk whereas confidence involves not considering any alternatives.

A lack of reflection upon food is best exemplified by a young man who when asked about trust in food states 'I'd rather turn a blind eye, just you know close my eyes and open up my mouth.' (L1). These participants assume that the safety of the food supply can be taken for granted. One young woman states for example 'I think, you know, my experience and perhaps the experience from many others [is] that you are not really too concerned about regulation and certain standards.' (L2). She places her faith in 'supermarkets and the guy that brings in the truck and loads the fruit and the tomatoes and apples, so yeah I take it all for granted really, that they do the right thing.'(L2). For others, confidence arises from a belief that the government will take care of it. Another young woman says 'we just think that somebody else is looking after it for us like most things, yeah. Yeah we just trust that the government is looking out for us.' (L6).

Discussion

Data from interviews with South Australian shoppers indicate that these people show considerable trust in the Australian food supply and in food governance. This is reflected in a belief in the rigour of Australian food standards and of food production techniques. Contrary to expectations, differences in trust in the food supply were not evident across regional and socio-economic boundaries with all participants displaying considerable trust in the Australian food system. Despite trust in the food system as a whole, there is evidence of uncertainty and a degree of reflexivity with regards to who can be trusted. Media sources and the policing of food safety are generally given less credence than farmers and legislators. The primary response however, rather than seeking and trusting expert information to make risk calculable, is to place trust in the efficacy of personal food safety routines. This is in keeping with Heir (2003) and appears to be related to a relative lack of experience of negative food outcomes. Zinn (2008)

19

along with others (see Brown 2008 and Mollering 2001) argue that trust has both a rational component which arises from experience of the source and an irrational component based on instinct and emotion. Diminishing trust in the food supply in other contexts has been associated with major food scares (Kjaernes et al. 2007; Berg et al 2005; Berg 2004). Australia has not experienced a food scare of the magnitude of, say, BSE. Australia's relative isolation and a belief in limited food importation have also been identified as factors that contribute to trust in the Australian food supply (Lupton 2005). Participants in this study often cite that their default position is to trust Australian food which we have linked to the old adage 'innocent until proven guilty'. This finding is in keeping with Biltgard (2008) who argues that trust in the food supply is habitual and not considered unless that trust is challenged by adverse events contradicting widely held views that trust is something which has to be 'won' (Giddens, 1990, 1991; Taylor-Gooby, 1999). Alternatively, it may be argued that habitual trust does not engage with reflexivity which from a Luhmannian perspective, means that the 'default' position is something other than trust.

Perceptions of 'foreign food' are more negative with participants expressing concerns about the impact of food standards, pollution and food scares upon the quality of food from other countries. Lack of knowledge and subsequently trust in food systems in other countries is a factor in distrust in foreign food. Luhmann (2000) regards familiarity as a central prerequisite for trust. For example, when we are familiar with something, we base any future decisions (to trust or not trust) on the past i.e. we try to become more familiar with our world (enabled through modernity). In this way, trust builds on familiarity since it uses past information (familiarity) to narrow down the potential possibilities for the future (which incurs risks). These values are reflected in campaigns such as the buy Australian campaign which promote the virtues of local produce as a means of protecting local markets in light of the removal of trade barriers (Allen & Hinrichs 2007).

Participants in this study also place trust in their own food safety strategies as a means of reducing risks from their food. The reflexive modernization thesis presupposes that lay people should, and can, interpret and manage food risks within the context of their everyday lives. For Giddens (1991), risk is associated with personal responsibility for self-care. He argues that in accepting the responsibility of self care, the citizen is forced to decide whether they are worthy of their own trust, just as they would evaluate the state or other individuals they may place trust in. Self-trust is based on an individual's belief of their capacity to transcend to a life of reason rather than basing decisions solely on beliefs and desires. Participants in this study, not only view personal food safety practices as a means of protecting against food poisoning but argue that they have a responsibility to undertake these actions. This can be viewed as a response to expert advice about safe food handling practices and also provides evidence of the extent to which food safety has been individualised, and 'responsibilised' (Halkier & Holm 2006).

The Australian media was the only factor identified as contributing to distrust in the food supply. Whilst the media is a significant source of information about food (Järvelä et al 2006), it has been argued that the media does not provide an adequate avenue for information about food risks as reporting depends upon the perceived newsworthiness of stories (Kitzinger & Riley 1997). Risk by its nature is often poorly defined, can be ignored and involves projected outcomes all of which ensure that health risks are poorly reported by the media (Kitzinger & Riley 1997). As a consequence food reporting is often negative. Bauer (2005) found that negative reporting was associated with declining trust in technologies most notably among readers of elite press who showed a greater convergence of views with media presentations over time. In this study, there are mixed findings in relation to the degree of trust placed in the media reporting of food however elite media such as the ABC and some broadsheet newspapers are viewed as

21

credible sources of information leading participants to place greater trust in reporting of food risks from these sources.

Finally, there were a group of younger participants who are unconcerned about food safety, which may partly be attributed to the 'invincibility of youth' (van Exel et al. 2006) but may also reflect a larger theme in this paper around ambiguity, uncertainty and contingency. Whilst the young people were more overtly unconcerned about reflecting on food governance or food safety issues, the majority of participants exhibited uncertainties around 'who establishes rules for food safety,' 'who undertakes surveillance and policing of food quality and safety' and so on. The obvious response is to provide the information, maybe via social marketing, about these issues, so that the lay populace can make informed choices. However, a more fundamental issue needs to be dealt with first – what knowledge do people need in order to live their daily lives (i.e. functional knowledge)? The concept of functional knowledge is concerned with the idea that different people require different levels of knowledge (and hence information) in order to function within their roles in society. Certain groups need to know certain things in order to live their lives (or function) within their social milieu (Unger 2003; 2008). The question then becomes, what functional knowledge is required by different population sub-groups, with respect to knowledge about food quality, safety, availability and so on. The answer from our research is that, at the moment at least, our participants do not perceive functional knowledge deficits (there were few expressions for more information about any particular aspect of the food system). However, the uncertainties and ambiguities apparent within the quotes in this paper reveal a potential need to increase awareness of many of the 'invisible' aspects of food production, governance and policing. It may then facilitate a move from confidence to trust, under the influence of familiarity.

Conclusion

Interviews with South Australian food shoppers demonstrate that despite well published international and local food scares that participants express few anxieties about the Australian food supply. Contrary to the reflexive modernization thesis, the food supply is generally assumed to be safe unless participants have evidence to the contrary. While participants talk of personal responsibility for food safety, this is driven by habit rather than anxiety, with personal food safety strategies viewed as an effective means of preventing food related illness. Participants express ambivalence and uncertainties about food governance however, do not perceive lack of knowledge as problematic, suggesting that they are not actively seeking this information. This data informed the development of a national survey on food and trust. The survey explored both individual and systemic aspects of trust in the food supply through exploring trust in food actors and in individual food safety practices. A lack of interest in information about food governance leads the authors to conclude that trust may be habitual unless it is breached and that this information may not therefore, be necessary to functioning in their daily lives.

References

Alexander, J. (1996). Critical Reflections on Reflexive Modernization. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 13, 133-138.

Allen, M. & Hinrichs, C. (2007) Buying into 'buy local': Engagements of United States local food initiatives. In D. Maye, L. Holloway & M. Kneafsey (eds.) *Alternate Food Geographies: Representation and Practice,* Emerald publishing group: London.

Barbalet, J. (2009). A characterization of trust, and its consequences. *Theory and Society, 38*(4), 367-382.

Bauer, M (2005). Distinguishing red and green biotechnology: cultivation effects of the elite press. *International Journal of Public Opinion*, 17, 63-89.

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage Publications,

Beck, U. (1994). The reinvention of politics: Towards a theory of reflexive modernization. In U. Beck, A. Giddens & S. Lash (eds) *Reflexive Modernization. Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Cambridge: Polity Press (pp.1-55).

Beers, M. (1996). Haemolytic-uraemic syndrome: of sausages and legislation. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 20, 462-6.

Berg, L. (2004). Trust in food in the age of mad cow disease: A comparative study of consumers' evaluation of food safety in Belgium, Britain and Norway. *Appetite*, 42, 21-32.

Berg, L., Kjaernes, U., Ganska, E., Minia, V., Voltchkova, L., Halkier, B and Holm, L. (2005). Trust in food safety on Russia, Denmark and Norway. *European societies*, 7, 103-129.

Bildtgard, T. (2008). Trust in food in modern and late-modern societies. *Social Science Information*, 47, 99-128.

Breidbach, A., Bouten, K., Kröger, K. and Ulberth, F. (2010). Capabilities of laboratories to determine melamine in food-results of an international proficiency test. *Analalytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry*, 396, 503–510

Brown, P. R. (2008). Trusting in the new NHS: instrumental versus communicative action. *Sociology of Health & Illness,* 30(3), 349-363.

Buchler, S., Smith, K., & Lawrence, G. (2010). Food risks old and new: Demographic characteristics and perceptions of food additives, regulation and contamination in Australia. *Journal of Sociology,* 46, 1-22.

Calnan, M. R., & Rowe, R. (2004). *Trust in Health Care: An Agenda for Future Research.* London: The Nuffield Trust.

Calnan, M., & Rowe, R. (2006). Researching trust relations in health care: Conceptual and methodological challenges - an introduction. *Journal of Health Organization and Management, 20*(5), 349-358.

Coulston, N. (2002). Source of food safety information: whom do adolescents trust? *Appetite*, 38, 199-200.

Coveney J (2007) Food and trust in Australia: Building a picture. *Public Health Nutrition* 11, 237-45.

Cox, D., Evans, G. and Lease, H. (2007). The influence of information and beliefs about technology on the acceptance of novel food technologies: A conjoint study of farmed prawn concepts, *Food Quality and Preference*, 18(5), 813-823.

Dilman, D., Phelps, G., Tortora, R., Swift, K., Kohrell, J., Berck, J. & Messer, B. (2009). Response rate and measurement differences in mixed mode surveys using mail, telephone, interactive voice response (IVR) and the internet, *Social Science & Medicine*, 38(1), 1-18.

Elliott, A. (2002). Beck's sociology of risk: A critical assessment, *Sociology,* 36: 293-315.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand [FSANZ] (2008a). Consumer Attitudes Survey 2007: A benchmark survey of consumers' attitudes to food issues. Canberra: Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

Food Standards Australian New Zealand [FSANZ] (2008b). Melamine in foods from China http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/newsroom/factsheets/factsheets2008/melamineinfoodsfromchina/

Frewer, L., Miles, S. and Marsh, R. (2002) 'The media and genetically modified foods: evidence in support of social amplification of risk', *Risk Analysis* 22(4): 701-11.

Frewer, L., Scholderer, J. and Bredahl, L. (2003) 'Communicating about the risks and benefits of genetically modified foods: the mediating role of trust', *Risk Analysis* 23(6): 1117-33.

Fukuyama, F. (1995). *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Free Press Paperback.

Giddens, A. (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, A (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Giddens, A (1994). Risk, trust, reflexivity. In: Beck U, Giddens A, Lash S, editors. *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition, and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 194-197.

Gilson, L. (2003). Trust and the development of health care as a social institution. *Social Science and Medicine*, 56, 1453-1468.

Green, J., Draper, A., and Dowler, E. (2003). Short cuts to safety: risk and 'rules of thumb' in accounts of food choice. *Health Risk & Society*, 5(1), 33-52.

Halkier, B. and Holm, L. (2006). Shifting responsibilities for food safety in Europe: An introduction. *Appetite*, 47(2), 127-133.

Heir, S. (2003). risk and panic in late modernity: implications of the converging sites of social anxiety, *British Journal of Sociology,* 54(1): 3-20.

Henderson, J., Coveney, J., Ward, P. & Taylor, A. (2011). Farmers the most trusted part of the Australian food chain: results from a national survey of consumers *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 35(4), 319-324.

Houghton, J. R., Van Kleef, E., Rowe, G., & Frewer, L. (2006). Consumer Perception of the Effectiveness of Food Risk Management Practices: A Cross-cultural Study. *Health, Risk & Society, 8*(2), 165-183.

Jackson, P. (2010). Food stories: consumption in an age of anxiety, Cu;ltural Geographies, 17(2): 147-165.

Järvelä, K., Mäkelä, J., & Piiroinen, S. (2006). Consumers' everyday food choice strategies in Finland. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 30(4), 309-317.

Kitzinger, J. and Reilly, J. (1997). The rise and fall of risk reporting. *European Journal of Communication*, 12(3), 319-350.

Kjaernes, U, Harvey, M. and Warde, A (2007). *Trust in food: A comparative and institutional analysis.* Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers.

Kystallis, A., Frewer, L., Rowe, G., Houghton J., Kehagia, O., Perrea, T. (2007). A perceptual divide? Consumer and expert attitudes to food risk management in Europe, Health, Risk & Society, 9(4): 407-424.

Luhmann, N (2005). *Risk: A Sociological Theory*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Luhmann, N. (1979). *Trust and Power: Two works by Niklas Luhmann* (H. Davis, J. Raffan & K. Rooney, Trans.). Brisbane: John Wiley and Sons.

Luhmann, N. (1995). *Social systems*. Stanford, Califonia: Stanford University Press.

Luhmann, N: (2000). Familiarity, Confidence, Trust: Problems and Alternatives. In: Gambetta D, editor. *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lupton, D. (1996). Your life in their hands: trust in the medical encounter. In: Gave JV, Gabe J, editors. *Health and the Sociology of Emotions*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 157-172.

Lupton, D. (2003). *Medicine as Culture.* London: Sage.

Lupton, D. (2004). "A grim health future": food risks in the Sydney press. *Health, Risk & Society, 6*(2), 188-200.

Lupton, D. (2005). Lay discourses and beliefs related to food risks: An Australian perspective. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 27, 448-467.

Meyer S, Ward P, Coveney J & Rogers W (2008) Trust in the health system: an analysis and extension of the social theories of Giddens and Luhmann, *Health Sociology Review*, 17, 177-186.

Meyer, S. B., & Ward, P. R. (2009). *Reworking the sociology of trust: Making a semantic distinction between trust and dependence.* Paper presented at the The Australian Sociological Association 2009 Annual Conference Proceedings, The Australian National University, Canberra.

Miles S, Frewer L. (2002) Trust, Perceived Risk, and Attitudes Toward Food Technologies. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32, 2423-2433.

Misztal, B. (1996). *Trust in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Mollering G. and Sztompka, P. (2001). Trust. A Sociological Theory. *Organizational Studies,* 22.

Mollering, G. (2001). The Nature of Trust: From Georg Simmel to a Theory of Expectation, Interpretation and Suspension. *Sociology*, 35, 403-420.

Mollering, G. (2006). *Trust: Reason, Routine, Reflexivity*. Oxford: Elsevier.

Neuman, W. (1997). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* 3rd ed., Allyn & Bacon: Needham Heights, MA.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation methods.* Sage: Thousand Oaks: California.

Popay, J., Rogers, A and Williams, G. (1998). Rationale and standards for the systematic review of qualitative literature in health services research *Qualitative Health Research*, 8(3), 341-351.

Poppe, C. & Kjærnes, U. (2003). Trust in food in Europe. National Institute for Consumer Research, Oslo.

Shaw, A. (2004). Discourses of risk in lay accounts of microbiological safety and BSE: a qualitative interview study. *Health, Risk & Society, 6*(2), 151-171.

Shepard B. and Sherman, D. (1998). The Grammars of Trust and General Implications. *Academy of Management Review*, 23, 422-438.

Shilling, C. (2002). Culture, the 'sick role' and the consumption of health. *British Journal of Sociology*, 53, 621-638.

Silvester J, Patterson F, Koczwara A, Eamoon F (2007). Trust: Psychological and Behavioral Predictors of Perceived Physician Empathy. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92, 519-527.

Strauss A & Corbin J. (2004). Open Coding. In: Seale C, editor. *Social Research Methods*. London: Routledge.

Taylor, A., Coveney, J., Ward, P., Henderson, J., Meyer, S., Pilkington R & Gill, T. (2011). Fruit and vegetable consumption the influence of aspects associated with trust in food and safety and quality of food, *Public Health Nutrition*, DOI:10.1017/S1368980011001698.

Taylor-Gooby, P. (1999). Markets and motives: trust and egoism in welfare markets. *Journal of Social Policy, 28*(1), 97-114.

Ungar, S. (2003). Misplaced metaphor: A critical analysis of the 'knowledge society'. *Canadian Review of Sociology & Anthropology*, 40, 331-347.

Ungar, S. (2008). Ignorance as an under-identified social problem. *British Journal of Sociology*,

59, 301-326.

van Exel, N., de Graaf, G. and Brouwer, W. (2006). 'Everyone dies, so you might as well have fun!' Attitudes of Dutch youths about their health lifestyle. *Social Science and Medicine*, 63, 2628-2639.

Vilella-Vila, M & Costa-Font, J. (2008). Press media reporting effects on risk perceptions and attitudes towards genetically modified (GM) food, *Journal of SocioEconomics* 37(5): 2095-2106.

Wales, C., Harvey, M. & Warde, A (2006) Recuperating from BSE: The shifting UK institutional basis for trust in food, *Appetite* 47(2): 187-195.

Ward P. & Coates A (2006). "We shed tears, but there is no one there to wipe them up for us": narratives of (mis)trust in a materially deprived community, *Health: an Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Medicine and Illness*,;10, 283-301.

Ward P: (2006). Trust, Reflexivity and Dependence: A 'Social Systems Theory' Analysis in/of Medicine, *European Journal of Social Quality*, 6, 121-133.

Zinn, J. (2008) Heading for the unknown: Everyday strategies for managing risk and uncertainty, *Health, Risk & Society*, 10(5): 439-450.