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**The Problem of Changing Food Habits Report of the Committee on Food Habits 1941-1943 (1941)**  
**National Research Council (NRC)**

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## FORCES BEHIND FOOD HABITS AND METHODS OF CHANGE \*

KURT LEWIN

### INTRODUCTION

The following report is a partial account of a study conducted by a field staff †‡ at the Child Welfare Research Station of the State University of Iowa. The objectives of the study were twofold; namely, 1) to investigate some aspects of why people eat what they eat, and, if possible, 2) to study methods of changing these food habits.

In studying the first question we have tried to combine approaches of cultural anthropology with quantitative methods of psychology. Two techniques were used. One is the Bavelas test,<sup>1</sup> a projective questionnaire,<sup>2</sup> with which 2,300 school children were tested.<sup>3</sup> The second method consists of interviewing housewives. Five groups were studied; three representing economic subdivision (high, medium, and low income levels) of White American stock, and two subcultural groups, Czech and Negro.

Several methods of changing food habits were compared experimentally. One experiment compares the effect of a method of group decision in one case with the effect of a lecture. Another experiment compares the effect of group decision with the effect of a request.

The results of the interviews with housewives are presented first.

#### I. WHY PEOPLE EAT WHAT THEY EAT

##### A. Method of Interviewing and Analysis

After a period of preliminary trials of various methods, the final data were collected during May and June, 1942. It should be kept in mind that the results describe the attitudes and habits of the people at that time (only sugar was rationed). The material was collected from the residents of a midwestern town with a population of about 60,000. Although surrounded by farming country, the town has a variety of industrial plants. It has employed a nutritionist for a number of years and has had a good nutrition program.

\* This study was financed by a grant from the Committee on Food Habits.

† The staff consisted of Alex Bavelas, Leon Festinger, Myrtle Hubbard, Patricia Woodward, and Alvin Zander. Alex Bavelas acted as "discussion leader," Myrtle Hubbard as "expert" or "lecturer" in some of the experiments. One experiment was conducted by Ben Willerman. Alvin Zander, Beatrice Wright and Patricia Woodward did a major share of the analyzing and writing.

‡ Indebtedness is expressed to Dr. Sybil Woodruff, Head of the Department of Home Economics of the State University of Iowa, and to Prof. Lynn Garwood and Dr. Alice B. Salter, of the Department of Sociology, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

§ A preliminary report<sup>2</sup> has been made but complete results are not yet available.

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