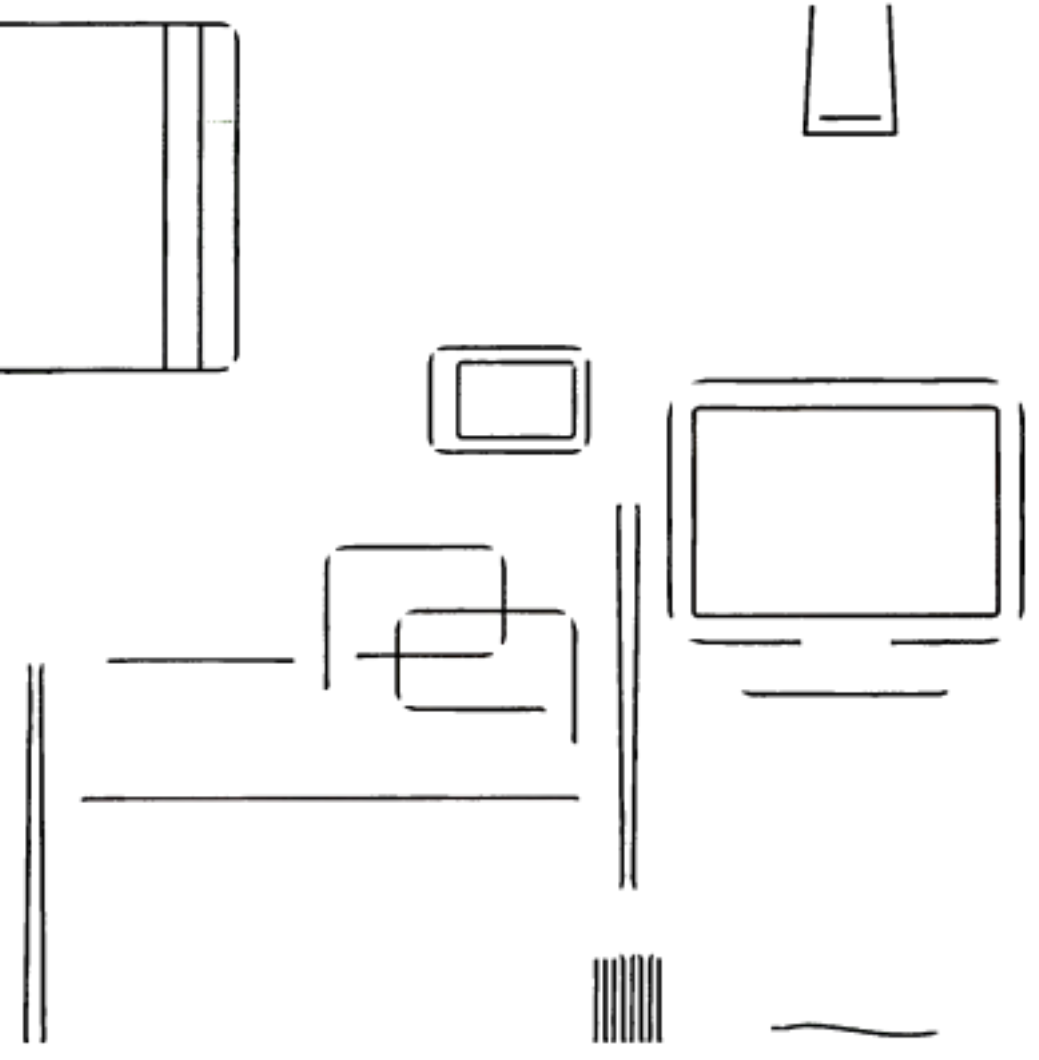
# FOOD STUDIES



# STUDIES

## A Hands-On Guide

Willa Zhen

BLOOMS BURY



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"The field needs an introductory survey textbook like this. The hands-on activities address an important component missing from most of the work in this field that values text over material."
**Jonathan Deutsch, Drexel University, USA**

"This book fills a niche in the growing food studies realm. The pedagogical features are wonderful and likely to stimulate a lot of discussion."
**John T. Lang, Occidental College, USA**

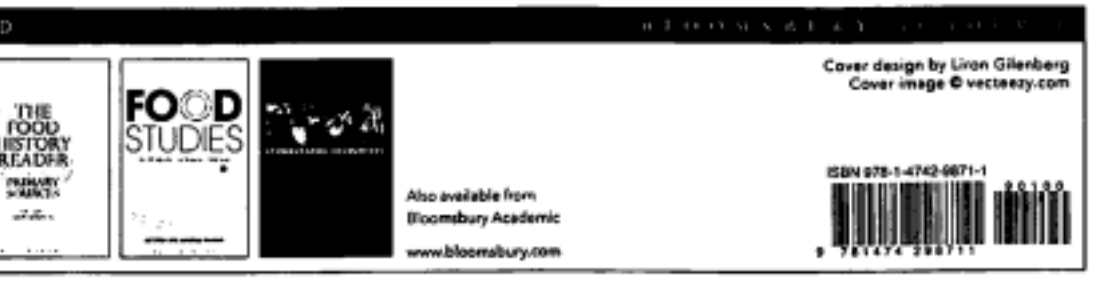
Traditional food studies textbooks tend to emphasize theoretical concepts and text-based approaches. Yet food is sensory, tactile, and experiential. *Food Studies: A Hands-On Guide* is the first book to provide a practical introduction to food studies. Offering a unique, innovative approach to learning and teaching, Willa Zhen presents creative hands-on activities that can easily be done in a traditional classroom—without the need for a student kitchen. Major theories and key concepts in food studies are covered in an engaging, tangible way, alongside topics such as food production, consumption, technology, identity and culture, and globalization.

A fantastic resource for supporting student engagement and learning, the book features:

- practical activities, such as grinding grains to learn about the importance of food technology; working with restaurant menus to understand changes in food trends, tastes, and ingredients; writing food poetry; and many more
- pedagogical features such as learning objectives, discussion questions, suggested readings, and a glossary
- a companion website offering lesson plans, worksheets, and links to additional resources.

This is the perfect introduction for students of food studies, anthropology of food, food geography, food hospitality, sociology of food, food history, and gastronomy.

**Willa Zhen** is Professor of Liberal Arts and Food Studies at The Culinary Institute of America, USA.

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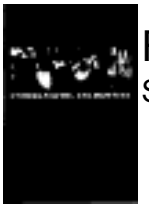

FOOD
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*Food Studies: An Introduction to Research Methods,* Jeff Miller and Jonathan Deutsch
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# Food Studies

## A Hands-On Guide

**WILLA ZHEN**

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
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# Studies A

## Hands-On Guide

WILLA ZHEN

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# Introducing Food Studies

## Introduction

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Introducing Food Studies

# Introduction

It was not too long ago that at dinner parties and other social events, people would ask me why I study food. After telling them about my work. I'd get a polite, knowing nod and half-smile suggesting I am both naive and a bit dim. Fast-forward to today, the question that is asked instead is how I study food. Faces light up when people hear about my work, and there are good questions directed my way about the work I do and the ways in which I teach my students. This shift in attitudes may be attributed to a variety of changes in public opinions about food. We are ostensibly living in a "foodie" culture and food media is pervasive— in traditional print media, on television and streaming services, and in social media. Food-themed documentaries like *Chef's Table* and food-based travel shows have wide audiences, as do books on food for the popular audience. There are entire networks on television devoted to food programming. Not to mention the rise of internet celebrities whose careers revolve around food—bloggers, YouTube stars, and so on. A colleague who teaches restaurant marketing has observed that restaurants are to millennials (a term describing people born between 1981 and 1998) and older gen Zs (a term describing the cohort born right after the millennials) what nightclubs were for baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964).1 Whereas baby boomers (the parents of millennials and older members of gen Z) used to line up to get into the hottest, most legendary nightclubs like Studio 54, showing off their status and cultural capital (or "coolness") by rattling off the collection of places where they came, saw, and danced the night away, today their children seemingly brag about what and where they have eaten.

Nowadays, food is a significant form of cultural capital, or the knowledge, behaviors, and skills that people possess that shows off their cultural competence and standing in a society. Knowing about food is a way of marking



that you are "cool" and knowledgeable about social trends. It signifies that you belong in a particular social group. As writer William Deresiewicz points out, "Food, for young people now, is creativity, commerce, politics, health, almost

religion" (Deresiewicz 2012). Young people rattle off the names of celebrity chefs, debate the worth of Michelin stars, James Beard Awards, and San Pellegrino Top 50 rankings, and gain status among peers through the currency of "likes" and "retweets" and "shares" on social media. Some ambitious millennials and older gen Zs have even gone on to open their own pop-up restaurants, such as Flynn McGarry, who *New York Times* praised as "The Chef at 15" (see Chocano 2014), and Jonah Reider, a Columbia University student who opened a pop-up restaurant called Pith in his dorm room and was profiled in *New Yorker* (see Allen 2015). Others aspire to be celebrity chefs and dream of a life owning their own food establishment. This "culinary capital" shows off who we are (and who we wish to become) (Naccarato and Lebesco 2013). We could say that we have reached a new critical mass of popular interest in food.

In academic environments, food has long been a subject of inquiry and is not a new phenomenon per se. For instance, in my own academic discipline of anthropology, the founding father of American anthropology, Franz Boas (1858-1942), meticulously documented the harvest and treatment of salmon among the Kwakiutl Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest (Boas 1921). (He did not document recipes, which raises another series of questions for another day.) If we look to other disciplines such as history, geography, economics, political science, and sociology, we will also find that food holds a place as a subject of inquiry and topic of discussion often going back to the earliest days each discipline. Yet the formal articulation of Food Studies courses and programs in college and university settings dates back mostly to the last thirty years. What I mean by this is that professional conferences, professional associations, academic journals, degree-granting programs, and serious food-focused scholarship have been built up only in the last thirty years. Miller and Deutsch observe that "given its importance, one would think that Food Studies would have a prominent place in the academy, in mass media, and even in primary and secondary education" (Miller and Deutsch 2009: 7). Warren Belasco (2008: 6-8) suggests that these biases against studying food may be attributed to the dualistic tradition in Western philosophy that prioritizes the mind over the body, the association of food as a women's subject (and therefore less worthy of study), and efforts by the food industry to "obscure and mystify the links between the farm and the dinner table" (Belasco 2008: 4). Additionally, food is also fun (Rozin 1999)—therefore suggesting it is inherently less serious or worthwhile for study. Marion Nestle, one of the founders of New York University's Food Studies Program, reflects that there was a time

when "nearly everyone considered food far too common and quotidian to be taken seriously as a field of study" (Nestle 2010: 160). Thankfully, this is less and less the case as food has become a major part of the educational experience (see Cosgrove 2015).

Food has come front and center in education, starting from very elementary levels of education to the most advanced. Schools and universities have added in campus gardens and incorporated sustainability programs. Campuses are increasingly making efforts to cut down waste by eliminating disposable plastic bottles on campus in favor of reusable cups and mugs. Some dining programs have removed plastic lunch trays to discourage overeating and to avoid food waste. Other institutions have built sophisticated recycling and composting facilities. Campus dining rooms have made efforts to buy from local, sustainable purveyors and switched fair trade products. Schools have also developed their dining programs to have tastier, healthier options. Campuses are being landscaped with edible gardens, and showcase them in their promotional materials. Some elementary schools even teach lunch as a subject. And increasingly, educational institutions are also addressing food inequality in their communities. Several American college and university campuses are now operating food pantries for students, staff, and faculty in need in response to the high cost of room and board fees and increasing sensitivity of debt among students, and the now-prevalent practice of hiring contingent and adjunct faculty who sometimes earn below a living wage for their labor. These actions taken by schools, colleges, and universities show that food and Food Studies are part of mainstream education.

Professional organizations like the Association for the Study of Food and Society, the Canadian Association for Food Studies, and others have cemented themselves as solid organizations dedicated to furthering intellectual inquiry into the study of food, signaling that the discipline has "matured" (Edge, Engelhardt, and Ownby 2013: 13). Professional organizations establish, promote, and regulate specialized knowledge and, through their membership, maintain this knowledge. These types of developments have made it easier for today's student to study food and to pursue Food Studies careers. This all suggests that one's decision to study food is not being questioned in the same way as it once was in the recent past. We are fortunate now to have to justify less and less why it is an admirable, important, and, dare I say, responsible task to study food.

Now we are at the forefront of the next stage, thinking about new meaningful and thoughtful ways to delve into this inquiry. It is in this spirit, and recognition of the pioneering work of the many colleagues and scholars before me, that this book is written. This text is different from other Food Studies resources in that it

recognizes that Food Studies is at times devoid of, well, food. This problem came to me during my own education, as I pursued



ethnographic fieldwork among cooks and in cooking schools in China. My purpose was to understand how cooks became cooks—and to do so, I decided to roll up my sleeves and do it alongside the people I was studying. As I trained in three cooking schools, I kept wondering why my work was considered so novel and strange among colleagues. I was often asked, "Why would you want to learn to cook? Wouldn't hanging out with the cooks be enough?" My answer to this was a resounding "no," as I contended that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand the pressures of cooking without standing behind the stove myself. As I began my teaching career, I began to think about this issue even more—why the teaching of Food Studies has often had very little to do with food itself.That is to say, the sensory, material, and experiential aspects of food are often left out of the conversation when discussing food. Some scholars have suggested that this unease with the hands-on aspects of food may be attributed to long-standing biases in Western thought (Belasco 2008: 2-4, 5-8; Miller and Deutsch 2009: 6-7). That may certainly account for a fraction of the reasons. But it does not quite capture the whole picture. Miller and Deutsch point out that Food Studies research tends to cluster into three themes: research methods with Food Studies examples, research that uses food to enhance methods, or research that employs methods unique to Food Studies, such as sensory testing for studying taste preferences (Miller and Deutsch 2009: 8-9). We could go on as to many reasons why Food Studies lacks food.

But instead of being weighed down by why Food Studies have been devoid of the materialities of food, some scholars have used this gap as a call to' arms, a justification for why Food Studies should roll up their sleeves and dig in. Philosopher Lisa Heldke reminds us that we need "liberal artisans" in the twenty-first century, a play on educator John Dewey's belief that society needs well-rounded individuals who can both "think" and "do" (Dewey 15 1981: 280). Heldke urges readers to think of foodmaking as a "thoughtful practice" (1992: 203). She suggests that "foodmaking, rather than drawing us to mark a sharp distinction between mental and manual labor, or between theoretical and practical work, tends to invite us to see itself as a 'mentally manual' activity, a 'theoretically practical' activity" (Heldke 1992: 203).

Recent sociopolitical events have furthered the impetus among some scholars to participate and get our hands dirty. Fabio Parasecoli, writing on "Food Studies in Trump's United States" for the *Huffington Post* adds that "it

becomes crucial to pair the insights and the analysis that are central to Food Studies with hands-on projects and initiatives for change and social innovation" (Parasecoli 2016). He suggests that it is through this combination of thinking and doing that will allow the next generation of "liberal artisans" to "not only find satisfactory careers, but also to have positive and creative impact on the environments in which they find themselves operating" (Parasecoli 2016).



As Berg, Nestle, and Bentley (2003) reminds us. Food Studies is not only an academic discipline but also a means to change society. Warren Belasco adds that Food Studies is "inherently subversive," as studying food involves crossing traditional disciplinary lines and asking "inconvenient questions" (2008: 6). To begin thinking about and asking good questions about food, we must consider the different ways in which we can approach food and Food Studies.

## Thinking about food: Setting up the *mise en place*

> *Mise-en-place* is the religion of all good line cooks. Do *not* fuck with a line cook's "meez"— meaning his setup, his carefully arranged supplies of sea salt, rough-cracked pepper, softened butter, cooking oil, wine, backups, and so on. As a cook, your station, and its condition, its state of readiness, is an extension of your nervous system—and it is profoundly upsetting if another cook or, God forbid, a *waiter* disturbs your precisely and carefully laid-out system. The universe is in order when your station is set up the way you like it: you know where to find everything with your eyes closed, everything you need during the course of the shift is at the ready at arm's reach, your defense are deployed.
>
> (Bourdain 2000: 65)

*Mise en place* is a French term meaning "everything in its place." In culinary work, it refers to the setup and organization one must take care of before cooking or food service. Culinary work involves a lot of organization and planning, much of which takes place long before any stoves get turned on. *Mise en place* is important to chefs because it is a systematic approach to preparing for food service. This approach involves planning, reflection, and foresight. Cooks and chefs must think ahead and anticipate issues like the number of diners booked in for the night. The number that will likely walk in through the door. The

number of no-shows for reservations. Thinking about how best to utilize the food that will soon spoil, before it does. And the countless other issues that arise within the course of normal restaurant operations. This is part of *mise en place.* Cooks and chefs also have their particular setup of how they like to arrange their seasonings, spices, and tools in their work stations. Servers might have a certain way of arranging their service station—where they put their silverware, napkins, bar mops and cleaning cloths, and the like.

I borrow from this term to consider what mental preparations the aspiring Food Studies scholar must need to know to study and practice Food Studies. We begin our



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about food so far? How have you set up your mental *mise en place*? What do you know about food? How did you learn this information? How might that change as you expand your understandings of food and the field of Food Studies? Furthermore, what have you been told about food? How might you challenge your preexisting ideas about food and to stop thinking like a foodie but more like a critically engaged food scholar?

Celebrity chef Ferran Adrià (1962–), one of the most well-regarded and innovative chefs at the turn of the twenty-first century, put it succinctly: "If you think about it well, you create well" (Ouzounian 2014). In an increasingly complex society, where food is front and center of many socioeconomic and geopolitical issues, the more prepared we are, trained in problem-solving and critical thinking, the better position we will be in to deal with these challenges. In a twist on Adrià's words, this textbook takes on the idea that you should create while you think. This book is not meant to be the end-all to Food Studies texts. Far from it. In fact, it is humbly meant to introduce the reader to some topical thematic issues in Food Studies today. The activities and themes are meant to encourage exploration and discussion in a multisensory fashion, to launch into further inquiry and work. This book sets out to organize your Food Studies *mise en place.*

We will examine the many dimensions of Food Studies, using key themes to explain how Food Studies is interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, sensory, and also experiential. Built in to each chapter are case studies and hands-on activities to help understand key concepts in Food Studies. Each chapter also offers suggestions for further reading and exploration. Through this approach, the expectation is that you will become aware that there are many approaches to the study of food, and that humans continue to negotiate their relationships to and with food and the meaning of food in their lives. Ultimately, I want students to learn not only about Food Studies, but also about practicing Food Studies and experiencing food. To begin this journey, I have one simple

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## Instructor's note

This textbook is meant to be a tool to support experienced and novice instructors alike. The purpose is to help encourage instructors incorporating hands-on experiential activities into their instruction. "Active learning,"

"experiential learning," and "peer learning" sound like popular academic buzzwords. Certainly, the trend has been toward incorporating more student centric instruction. Research has shown that active learning can lead to



improved learning outcomes and better material retention. Yet, I've heard other instructors grow reticent at incorporating hands-on activities for fear of it turning into all style with little substance. Others worry about the prep time it takes to organize these activities. Instructors with large class sizes worry about space and the number of students as an impediment. And so forth.

But if we were to think about it in terms of its definition, active learning is simply "anything course-related that all students in a class session are called upon to do other than simply watching, listening, and taking notes" (Felder, Celanese, and Brent 2009: 2). When framed in that way, active learning can be a low-stakes endeavor. Giving students just a few minutes to consider the material in a different way can be an effective teaching strategy. Adopting hands-on activities does not mean sacrificing. It means supplementing and enhancing. Activities can be adopted or modified as necessary and, if you feel comfortable, go and create your own. The idea is to give students the opportunity to approach an issue or problem from a different angle.

Each chapter includes several hands-on activities for use, and discussion/ reflection questions. These class activities have been tested and tweaked in my classrooms and in those of my colleagues, who teach in a variety of educational environments around the world, ranging from culinary colleges to research universities. They have been tried in a variety of disciplines engaged in the study of food. These activities can be done without a kitchen, or can be modified as homework. The chapters also include food for thought— contemporary issues worth highlighting that show a concept in action that can serve as a launching point for further discussion. Essay prompts are also incorporated into the book to be modified into assignments or assessments. Lastly, this book is also meant to be used in conjunction with other texts and resources: Food Studies textbooks, ethnographies and monographs, case studies, news articles, websites, and videos. Each chapter includes a list of further resources. This book is written for the student reader, but also contains instructor's notes throughout to provide pointers and hints to navigate this unique approach to Food Studies.

## Discussion questions

1. What led you to take a class on Food Studies? What attracted you to

this subject?

2. Describe the food issues that concern you. Explain why they are of concern.

urse?



FOOD STUDIES

## 1 Activity: Food Studies scavenger hunt

ew to the field of Food Studies often have not considered how plinary, multidisciplinary, and broad-ranging the field can be. also overlook the fact that Food Studies concerns impact them To help students gain perspective, send them on a campus- ger hunt in small groups. Each group should be responsible for ferent items. Students must document that they found the item hoto with their phones. After completing the scavenger hunt, uld return to the classroom to discuss how food issues are also es. The items will vary depending on the campus, but below is f items suitable for most campuses.

- l sold in the campus grocery store/mini-market
- uneaten in the student dining hall
- e items thrown in the regular garbage can
- nachine selling processed foods and sugary drinks
- ll serving an "ethnic" dish
- lub advertising free food to attract members

*Discussion questions*

cessful were you in completing the scavenger hunt? Did you complete this activity? Why or why not?
you think these scavenger hunt prompts were chosen? How ey connect to broader Food Studies issues and themes?
ght you add to this list of scavenger hunt items? What Food related issues have you noticed on campus?

## 2 Activity: Defining your food knowledge

does your food knowledge come from? Ponder over your ledge of food, considering where it comes from, how it is

1.1 Activity: Food Studies scavenger hunt

Students new to the field of Food Studies often have not considered how interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and broad-ranging the field can be. Students can also overlook the fact that Food Studies concerns impact them on campus. To help students gain perspective, send them on a campus wide scavenger hunt in small groups. Each group should be responsible for searching different items. Students must document that they found the item by taking a photo with their phones. After completing the

scavenger hunt, students should return to the classroom to discuss how food issues are also campus issues. The items will vary depending on the campus, but below is generic set of items suitable for most campuses.

• Junk food sold in the campus grocery store/mini-market • Food left uneaten in the student dining hall
• Recyclable items thrown in the regular garbage can
• Vending machine selling processed foods and sugary drinks • Dining hall serving an "ethnic" dish
• Student club advertising free food to attract members

*Discussion questions*

1. How successful were you in completing the scavenger hunt? Did you expect to complete this activity? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think these scavenger hunt prompts were chosen? How might they connect to broader Food Studies issues and themes? 3. How might you add to this list of scavenger hunt items? What Food Studies-related issues have you noticed on campus?

## 1.2 Activity: Defining your food knowledge

Where does your food knowledge come from? Ponder over your knowledge of food, considering where it comes from, how it is transmitted and preserved, and how this body of knowledge has been constructed.

• How did you learn to prepare food?
• How did you learn to consume food?
• What constitutes a healthy diet?
• How do you acquire your food (e.g., supermarket, farmer's market, campus dining hall)?
• Where does your food come from? How do you know this information? •

food knowledge?



INTRODUCING FOOD STUDIES 9

ur broader community (e.g., school, clubs, social
in forming your food knowledge?
od knowledge evolve upon taking this course?

• What role did your broader community

(e.g., school, clubs, social organizations) play in forming your food knowledge?

- How might your food knowledge evolve upon taking this course?

*Instructor's note*

This can be adapted into an essay assignment to be completed as homework.

# Further resources

## *Food Studies organizations*

Agriculture, Food, & Human Values Society (AFHVS) is an international organization engaged in the cross-disciplinary study of food, agriculture, and health, https://afhvs.wildapricot.org.

Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS) is the world's largest association devoted to promoting the interdisciplinary study of food and society, www.food-culture.org.

Canadian Association for Food Studies promotes critical, interdisciplinary scholarship on Food Studies in Canada, http://cafs.landfood.ubc.ca/en.

## *Documentaries*

*Cafeteria Man* (2011) is a documentary on chef Tony Geraci's efforts to create food reform in Baltimore's school system.

*Chef's Table* (2015-) is a documentary series on some of the world's most renowned chefs. Each episode features the story of an individual chef. *Eat: The Story o f Food* (2014) is a multi-part television series produced by National Geographic on the history and culture of food.

*El Bulli: Cooking in Progress* (2010) is a documentary on celebrity chef Ferran Adrid's creative process as he and his team develop menus and dishes for his famed El Bulli restaurant in Spain.

# Note

1 See http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/29/this-may-be-the last-presidential-election-dominated-by-boomers-and-prior-generations/

ft_16-08-26_generationsdefined_2016_silentgreatest/.

## Further resources

Albala, Ken (2013). *Food: A Cultural Culinary History* (DVD). Chantilly: The Great Courses.
Belasco, Warren (2008). *Food: The Key Concepts.* Oxford: Berg.
Estabrook, Barry 2012. *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit.* Kansas City, Missouri: Andrews



# 1

# From Foodie to Food Studies

## Introduction

Food is one of the most meaningful and personal topics to study because

everyone knows something about food. Alongside shelter and procreation, food is one of the essential requirements to sustain life. Psychologist Abraham Maslow calls food one of the basic physiological needs that all humans have. Even though we must eat (to date, no human has yet learned to photosynthesize and live off sunlight, water, and air), we do not all eat in the same ways or for the same reasons. Humans have immense variation in what they eat, based on availability, geography, biological needs, ecological concerns, social and cultural factors, as well as individual taste preferences. What we also see is that the idea of edible versus inedible has evolved over time and different groups of people have very distinctly different ideas of what is acceptable as food or not. From babies to grandparents, we all need to eat to survive and we all have our responses to different types of food. We all have our own ideas and opinions about what is the best way to grow food, cook it, eat it, and share it. This is why food is an endlessly fascinating subject. There are an infinite array of topics and issues within its broad remit.

Many of you might consider yourselves interested in food, maybe even food-obsessed. That is, perhaps, one of the reasons why you were attracted to a book on food. Some of you might enjoy cooking or gardening. Perhaps you watch food shows and follow certain celebrity chefs. Others of you might even write about food by blogging or posting on social media. Perhaps you even follow Michelin rankings and the San Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants list. A few of you might even call yourselves "foodies." In fact, many people nowadays consider themselves "foodies" (or "food nerds" or "food-obsessed" or "gastronauts" or other similar terms).



Being a "foodie" seems like the norm among college students today. Yet the term "foodie" came into popular usage only sometime during the 1980s. Several people stake a claim on ownership for coining the term, including former *New York Times* critic Gael Greene and British food writers Paul Levy and Ann Barr. They published *The Official Foodie Handbook (Be Modern— Worship Food)* in 1984, laying down parameters of good taste for the upwardly mobile and hungry. By their assertion, a foodie is simply "a person who is very very very interested in food" and who "consider[s] food to be an art, on a level with painting or drama" (Barr and Levy 1984: 6). Foodies, as they note, are everywhere, often hidden in plain sight. Foodies "look like anybody else" (Barr and Levy 1984: 6).

More recently, sociologists Jos6e Johnston and Shyon Baumann (2010) have added that foodies are more than people who love food. They contend that foodies describe themselves as "well-informed, discovery minded, discerning consumers (and most often producers as well) who lead food-focused lives and present themselves to others as uncommonly passionate about food" (Johnston and Baumann 2010: 67). In fact, foodies probably include "everyone else" nowadays. Market research seems to match our perceptions that young people today are into food. Advertising agency BBDO found that half of m illennial they surveyed describe themselves as "foodies" (BBDO Atlanta 2013). If their survey speaks for the larger population, that would mean roughly forty million young people would identify with this label. We can assume that for the next generation, gen Z (born in 1999 to the present), the cohort now entering higher education, being into food is no longer a trend but simply a part of life.

So how did we become a food-obsessed culture? This can be attributed to changes in popular culture. For those born in the 1990s and early 2000s, being interested in food or being food obsessed has been the norm during their lifetimes. Many hallmarks of foodie culture—food television, instant access to food content and media, and the rise of media-friendly food personalities (who are distinctly different from celebrity chefs)— date back to the 1990s. Food Network was launched in 1993, making a whole slew of stars household names. Alton Brown's *Good Eats* show premiered in 1998, while Rachel Ray, before she became a talk show personality, first had a cooking show on Food Network in 2001. Anthony Bourdain, who seems ever so pervasive nowadays, first published his memoir *Kitchen Confidential* in 2000, a no-holds-barred tell-all of the seedy underside of the restaurant industry. This led to a series of food and travel shows, starting with *A Cook's Tour* (2000). He has been making television shows for nearly two decades.

Food programming is also prime time and ever-present. Celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay's show. *Hell's Kitchen,* airs at 8 p.m., a prime network hour. *Top Chef* and *Masterchef,* two other competitive cooking shows, also held prime slots during their runs. For those who stream their content

of watching through traditional networks and cable, food programming is accessible at any time. Scroll through the series lists on Netflix, Amazon, and other streaming services and there are endless documentaries, series, and films about food.

The internet has also made food accessible and sharable in ways that it previously was not. Instagram.Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat connect people throughout the planet to foods and new food trends instantaneously. Yelp and other user-driven review platforms make everybody a potential food critic. The old standard of waiting for a food writer to make their pronouncements about the best place to eat, and their careful awarding of stars based on standardized criteria, has given way to user-driven content updated by the millisecond. Blogs and other social media platforms allow everyone to become a food writer, publishing content on their terms in their own time. All of these factors have contributed toward a foodie culture, allowing consumers to feel like they are part of an ongoing dinner party every day of the year.

Perhaps you dislike being labeled as a "foodie" and reject this food obsessed culture. Maybe you would like to distance yourself from this term. You would not be alone. In fact, many foodies avoid calling themselves as such even if they fit the cultural patterns and taste preferences of foodies. Even if you dislike the term, you may exhibit some foodie behavior and you may consider yourself someone who loves food more than the average person. After all, you have made the decision to read this book on Food Studies. Even if you push back against this label, there may still be elements of it you identify with. As a group, foodies also tend to value certain aspects of food. Johnston and Baumann identify that (1) local, organic, and seasonal food, (2) ethnic foods and exotic flavors, and (3) gourmet, specialty, and artisanal ingredients as being essential to foodie consumption habits and identity are especially important to foodies and today's food-obsessed culture (2010).

In spite of our food-obsessed culture, calling oneself a foodie is still something a bit garish, perhaps even vulgar to declare publicly in many social circles. This label is often rejected because it is "associated with snobbery and the faddish trend-setting of elites" (Johnston and Baumann 2010:49). It is true that foodie culture has tended to privilege the gastronomic and gourmet aspects of food culture and smacks of elitism. This reticence toward foodieism is present in many societies. In

contemporary England, "an intense interest in food is regarded by the majority as at best rather odd. and at worst somehow morally suspect—not quite proper, not quite right" (Fox 2014: 420). Dwight Furrow suggests that "good taste" is "widely perceived as an indicator that one lacked genuine American virtue" (Furrow 2016: 2).

American politicians have been slammed and criticized for what they will and will not eat, as a metaphor for whether they can truly represent America and its values. To illustrate, former US president Barack Obama has been famously

called a "foodie president" for his embrace of good food (Johnson and Jacobs 2015), his dinner choices meticulously documented through social media. The food-loving crowd has given him and former first lady Michelle Obama props for embracing celebrity chefs, dining out at some of the hottest restaurants in America, encouraging mindful eating habits among the nation's children and families, and even putting an organic garden in the United States. The same practices that have earned the Obamas praise have also drawn criticism for being out of touch with working people, and elitist. During a campaign visit to rural Iowa in 2007 before his first presidency, Obama famously was captured asking, "Anybody gone into Whole Foods lately and see what they charge for arugula? I mean, they're charging *a lot o f money* for this stuff" (original emphasis, Zeleny 2007). Arugula (also known as rocket), is a dark, bitter salad green, and Whole Foods is an upscale supermarket known for its natural and organic products and high prices. It is also jokingly referred to as "Whole Paycheck" in regard to its cost. Both arugula and Whole Foods are seen as markers of an elite, upper-middle-class lifestyle, especially in a state without a Whole Foods and where the people are more commonly known for being "corn-fed" and identified as "blue collar" or as America's workers.

Religion also offers some clues regarding American reticence to fully embrace food. Gluttony, after all, is one of the seven deadly sins in Christianity. The medieval theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) even documented five ways to commit gluttony:

1. *Laute*—eating too expensively
2. *Studiose*—eating too daintily
3. *Nimis*—eating too much
4. *Praepropere*—eating too soon
5. *Ardenter*—eating too eagerly

Incidentally, *ardenter—the* sin of eating too eagerly—is considered the most serious of the five types. This is something that many foodies and food lovers could be accused of.

This unease with food is meaningful. In the Protestant tradition, too keen an interest in food may be constructed as sinful. The film *Babette's Feast*

(1987) illustrates this belief. The film tells the story of two elderly and pious sisters in nineteenth-century Denmark. Daughters of a priest, they live an austere life and are served by Babette, a refugee from Paris who had escaped the French revolution. Babette wins the lottery one day and uses the entire proceeds to cook an extravagant French feast for the sisters and their friends. The guests, worried about the potentially sinful nature of the dinner, agree



to dine without commentary on the food. It is revealed, through the story, that Babette was once a chef at a renowned restaurant in France. Throughout the film, a keen interest in food—and the enjoyment of it—invokes the sinful pleasures of the earthly world, of the flesh, which run counter to Christian teachings and edicts.

These views toward food as potentially sinful persist in Christian societies. Puritan values of simplicity, self-reliance, and asceticism shape some of our food views today. Food scholars have suggested that these

Puritanical values have shaped American eating habits (Levenstein 1988, 1993; Stearns 2002). Regional fare in New England, in keeping with Protestant views toward functionality rather than pleasure, tends to be relatively bland and unspiced. This plain fare also borrowed from the food habits of the English settlers that colonized the land. This type of food also became the basis around which American nutritional science was designed. Nutritional science, which emerged in the nineteenth century, tended to focus on educating people on "what was good for them" rather than accommodating to "what they liked" (Levenstein 1980: 370), reverberating Christian teachings about the morality of simple eating. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the rise of industrialization and the start of industrial food processing, many new foods were introduced to the market. These items were based on nutritional science and selling the masses what was good for them, and sought to temper heated emotions through blandness. The thought was that the mind and body could be regulated through proper eating. This belief was driven mostly by faddism and some pseudoscience. Graham crackers and cornflakes are two foods that come to mind, the result of this nutritionism. An invention of Presbyterian minister Sylvester Graham, the graham cracker was thought to help reduce sinful desires and to stop masturbation. Cornflakes, now a breakfast staple, was developed by John Harvey Kellogg, a Seventh-day Adventist from the nineteenth century. Kellogg promoted his ideas throughout the United States, encouraging the consumption of bland natural foods and denouncing meat consumption, claiming it would lead to a deterioration of mental faculties and the arousing of animal passions. The wrong diet, he claimed, could cause any number of health problems ranging from depression, headache, fatigue, to mental illness, moral deterioration, and violence (Kellogg 1888).

There are, of course, foods that are sinfully good, so to speak. Consider food names that suggest excess or temptation. Devilled eggs, an egg dish made of hard boiled eggs cut in half and filled with mashed egg yolk and seasonings, or Devil's food cake, a type of rich chocolate cake, both invoke the sinful nature of rich foods. These names play with those tropes of food as sin. However, these

Warren Belasco counters this argument that our Puritanical heritage has held back our relationship to food by questioning, "Whose Puritan heritage?" reminding us that not everyone descended from the same Protestant tradition (Belasco and myself included) (Belasco 1999: 28). To his point he adds, "Considering the environmental impact of this country's unrelenting consumerist self-indulgence, perhaps we need more Puritanism, not less" (Belasco 1999: 28). In a similar vein, writer B. R. Myers proposes a "moral crusade against foodies," noting that "gluttony dressed up as foodie-ism is still gluttony" (Myers 2011).

Thus, it is only relatively recently that the enjoyment of food and the proclamation of calling oneself a "foodie" would even be considered a positive label, a badge of honor among certain social groups rather than a source of sin. In some cases, this labeling is being retroactively applied to historical figures, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin, who author Dave DeWitt calls the "founding foodies" (DeWitt 2010) and who he credits for revolutionizing American cuisine during the early days of the nation. It is unlikely that the founding fathers would have called themselves foodies, but they exhibited many behaviors that, through a contemporary lens, would be considered in alignment with foodie habits and a keen interest in food, including growing their own food, brewing their own beer and distilling their own spirits, and serving the finest gourmet meals inspired by culinary trends

in Ranee and abroad. (It should be noted that many of these activities were propped up through slave labor, a fact that some foodies would perhaps like to overlook in this food-centric history of their American heroes.) As we have become more comfortable with celebrating the pleasures of food in the United States, it has also opened us up to think critically about the food we take in.

As described earlier, an interest in food used to suggest gluttony or concern only on the gourmet aspects of food. But contemporary foodies have sought to distance themselves from gourmets, who only want the so-called best food. Today, foodies are more omnivorous in their tastes and interests. In addition to being interested in ethnic foods and new flavors, increasingly, people also want to know about their food origins and consider the ethical and moral issues of food—including environmental sustainability, fair labor practices, and living wages for workers. Journalist Mark Bittman calls this "the new foodieism," proclaiming that "to care about food is now to care about the future of this country" (Bittman 2017). Foodies today are just as likely to take on social justice issues like fair wages and sustainable agriculture as they are

likely to tackle discussions of the best *padThai* in town. Perhaps these are the issues that drove you to Food Studies.

Or you might reject the "foodie" label, eschewing the term and all of its cultural, social, and economic connotations. You may find the term to be elitist. Perhaps your interests are in the lesser seen and less glamorous parts of



food. You may care about fair labor and food justice. You are concerned about where your food is from and about your health. Perhaps you worry about living wages for food workers, about environmental waste, or health and nutrition. These are what we may call the "hidden costs" of food, the impacts and the results of our decisions to produce and consume food in the way we do.

You are not atypical. Many of my former students became interested in food and cooking, and later food activism, because their childhood was defined by the lack of quality food. It was not the glamorous,

Michelin-starred side

of food that got them interested, but they wanted to learn to cook because it meant they would have something to eat. Some took up home economics or vocational "vo-tech" culinary classes in middle and high school because their parents and other caregivers weren't around to cook meals for them. Students of mine have written about childhoods where they were fed slop in school cafeterias and were inspired to do something about it. Others spoke about their experiences growing up in poverty and receiving food assistance, and how difficult it was to have nourishing meals while growing up terribly economically and food insecure.

Furthermore, the food industry has caught on to this shift in consumer attitudes. Alison Pearlman notes that a blend of "morality and materialism" (Pearlman 2013: 144) has been adopted by brands catering to foodies. Food marketing now extends its pitch beyond the quality of the food to highlight the conscientiousness of the product. Labels like local, sustainable, non-GMO, fair trade, cage-free, grass-fed, heirloom, heritage, and ancient are just as much of sell to consumers today.

It suffices to say that nowadays foodies are also interested in the morality of their eating choices: they eat what they preach. Mass market books like Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006), Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2001), Raj Patel's *Stuffed and Starved* (2008), Barry Estabrook's *Tomatoland* (2011) have even become required reading on many college and university freshman reading lists. Food documentaries like *Food, Inc.* (2008), *Forks Over Knives* (2011), *Super Size Me* (2004), *Cooked* (2016) also regularly appear as part of classroom and community discussions. This is a clear cultural shift to thinking about food in a broader sense.

While we seem to be concerned with food issues, there are also many contradictions in our foodie culture. While we've never had such a food-obsessed generation, many of the forty million millennial foodies do not always practice what they claim to preach. Of the 1,000 millennials surveyed by advertising firm BBDO, 60 percent eat fast food at least once a week (BBDO Atlanta 2013). Fast-food establishments have long been considered the antithesis of "good" food, in terms of labor practices, production and cooking techniques, health impacts, and cost. Yet, those who call themselves foodies regularly partake in this type of food. This

Millennials are one of the most financially insecure generations to come of age in recent times. As a whole, they have higher student loan debt, poverty and unemployment, and lower levels of wealth and personal income than previous generations at the same stage of their life cycle, despite being better educated (Pew Research Center 2014). As a culture, we claim to enjoy, value, and derive a level of unprecedented pleasure from food. Yet, we don't (or can't) always put our money where our mouths are.

These examples point to why food is complex and why when examining food there is often more than what meets the eye and the belly. Regardless of where your interests in food lie, what we can quickly ascertain is that there is always a story beyond the plate. For those of you who are interested in food, who might be lumped into the category of a "foodie," being interested in food is not the same as probing deeper and engaging with the issues that underlie ever-beautiful photos of homemade mac 'n cheese on Instagram or the stories behind every heirloom carrot at the farmers' market. We need to ask, What is going on beyond the plate?

My point here is that being a foodie or interested in food issues is not quite the same as going deeper into the field of Food Studies, although foodies can be a subject of study in the field of Food Studies (see Johnston and Baumann 2010; V^squez and Chik 2015; Furrow 2016). Having a strong food obsession is also a good position to begin thinking more thoughtfully about the food system. This unease with food, given its associations with sin and gluttony, may also account for, at least in part, why Food Studies has been slow to establish in academic and broader public consciousness. Americans have begun to relax, and even embrace, food as something to enjoy, as well as something enjoyable to study. After all, food is "fundamental, fun, frightening, and far-reaching" (Rozin 1999).

Being a foodie or concerned about food issues is a good springboard toward Food Studies. What separates someone casually interested in food from a Food Studies scholar is the systematic way in which Food Studies looks at food. We are not simply interested in gourmet or the best-tasting food, what we might call the study of gastronomy. But we look at food more broadly, and try to question, investigate, and understand how food shapes our relationships; to other humans, to our society and culture, to the land, and other sites where we can have affiliation and draw meaning.

## What is Food Studies?

Warren Belasco's seminal book, *Food: The Key Concepts,* posed the question, "Why study food?" (2008: 1). Given the intense interest in food nowadays.



it is seemingly more apropos to say "let's study food" and consider which aspect of food we want to engage with.

Food Studies is an academic discipline that studies the relationships between food and the human experience (Miller and Deutsch 2009: 3). Food Studies deals with a variety of topics, disciplines, theoretical approaches, and incorporates a variety of methodologies. While food has been written about since the invention of the written word, it has not been systematically studied and recoded until relatively recently. Food Studies started reaching critical mass during the 1990s, when academic departments and academic journals and conferences devoted to the subject became normalized. Food Studies is thought of as categorically separate from culinary arts and hospitality, as well as food science, nutrition, agricultural sciences, and other subjects that deal with the study of food itself. Although, increasingly, the lines are blurred as culinary arts programs, home economics classes, and hospitality programs are incorporating Food Studies courses and Food Studies principles in their teaching; nutrition courses take on the cultural aspects of health and wellness; and food scientists consider psychological responses to food; these and other traditional disciplinary boundaries are being crossed.

Because of its broadness, it can be difficult to define what Food Studies is. Even among Food Studies scholars, there is often discussion as to what constitutes Food Studies. Berg, Nestle, and Bentley remind us that "scholars investigating food topics have not yet reached complete agreement on what it should and should not include" (Berg, Nestle, and Bentley 2003:16). To this, Miller and Deutsch add that Food Studies is "diverse as food itself" (Miller and Deutsch 2009: 8).To avoid being essentialist and reductive about definitions, it is easier instead to consider the broadness of Food Studies.

It is more helpful to understand what it includes rather than erect boundaries as to what it is not. Food Studies is loosely divided into two camps—those focused more on the production and distribution issues, what we might call *food systems.* A food system involves all activities, infrastructure, social institutions, and cultural beliefs within a social group across the stages of the production, processing, transport, and consumption of food. Increasingly, scholars have expanded the definition to consider what happens in the life "after" a product is consumed: where the waste goes and what is made of it (e.g., whether is recycled, composted, or sent to a landfill). How these individual components

work together and how relationships between these components are formed are important to defining a food system. While the point of a food system is to "provide nutrition to keep us all alive" (Hesterman 2011: 4), yet food systems vary greatly in terms of their size, efficiency, and success, depending on the structure of each society and its needs. They also impact a society's social and environmental well-being. What people



eat shapes the food system. Conversely, the food system also shapes what people eat.

Less commonly, food system is also used to refer to the means of food acquisition in a society. Sometimes this term is used as a synonym for subsistence system. Food acquisition systems will be covered later in Chapter 3.

Other scholars turn their attention toward consumption, in what is often termed *food culture.* Those who focus on food culture are often interested in understanding the foodways of an area or group of people. *Foodways* are "the study of what we eat, as well as how and why and under what circumstances we eat" (Edge 2007: 8). It considers "the beliefs and behaviour surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food" (Coumhan 1999: 2). Foodways are focused on the consumption of food and how these food-related behaviors mark membership in a community, group, or society. Foodways consider how food events impact consumption habits, as well as the foods themselves. Foodways are "rich ground in which to explore the construction and presentation of identity, including issues of creativity, function or use, traditionality, competence, change and continuity" (Kaplan 1984: 11).

This term grows out of its connections with folklore and folkways. The first recorded use of the term dates to the Great Depression in the United States. Under the New Deal, a program of civic revitalization following economic decline during the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized a series of programs intended to record the folklore and folkways of everyday Americans, particularly rural and underserved communities. This type of popular anthropology captured the eating habits and practices of everyday Americans. Later, the term foodways was only popularized during the 1960s through the work of folklorist Don Yoder, who used it to replace "folk cookery." Foodways are meaningful because they reflect complex, long-term interactions between humans, their nutritional needs, ecology, and historical changes. The circumstances by which we eat are never accidental, and reflect a long series of actions related to our need to meet our nutritional requirements.

*Gastronomy* is sometimes used as a synonym to describe Food Studies. This term takes from the ancient Greek words of *gastro* and *nomos,* meaning stomach and laws that define or "the laws of the stomach." Gastronomy is popularly described in dictionaries as "the art and science of good food." Put another way, gastronomy is about the rules of what we might consider good food. The term came into popular use through a poem by Joseph Berchoux on "Gastronomie" (La gastronomie ou Lhomme des champs a table) (1801). The term gastronomy is often linked to Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin and his work on taste. His book *The Physiology of Taste(La Physiologie du Gout)* (Brillat-Savarin 2009) laid down the rules of



himself was a gourmand, known for pursuing the best ingredients, cooking, and meals. As a result, the term and the study of gastronomy is often defined as trying to understand what is "the best" or "good" food—the practice of identifying, choosing, and eating good food. *Larousse Gastronomique,* the French culinary bible, points out that "true gastronomes, while appreciating the most refined products of the culinary art, enjoy them in moderation; for their normal fare, they seek out the

simplest dishes, which are, however, the most difficult to prepare to perfection" (Montagn6 2001: 547). Naturally, gastronomy has tended to favor haute cuisine and elite practices, although this is no longer entirely the case. For instance, there are degree programs focused in gastronomy (such as at Boston University), which has considered more than just matters of good taste.

Although Food Studies is roughly split between food systems and food culture, Marion Nestle points out that these lines are becoming increasingly blurred and these divisions can be, at times, artificial (Nestle 2010). Increasingly, food scholarship has been trying to connect consumption and food systems. A solid example is Margaret Gray's *Labor and the Locavore: The Making o f a Comprehensive Food Ethic* (2013), a recent volume that reveals the cracks in consumer knowledge about their consumption habits. Gray contends knowledge of food workers cannot be divorced from the broader food system.

As Food Studies has expanded as an academic discipline, the canopy of its umbrella has also expanded. At its start. Food Studies often housed in humanities and, occasionally, social science departments. Nowadays, Food Studies subjects are taught in all manners of institutions: culinary schools and colleges, medical schools, and even business schools.The field of Food Studies is inherently interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. Scholars often rely on methods, approaches, and themes from other disciplines in order to study and analyze food. Food Studies is also multidisciplinary: history, communications, anthropology, geography, environmental studies, and other subjects sit next to one another in a way that is uncommon at most academic conferences. Books on food also run the gamut of approaches: historical, cultural, behavioral, biological, and socioeconomic. In addition, culinary, gastronomic, and medical approaches also add to the study of food. We should remember that "Food Studies researchers are not constrained by the methods and approaches of any one discipline, and they enjoy the freedom to study what they like in whatever way seems most appropriate" (Berg, Nestle, and Bentley 2003:17). But this flexibility and freedom can also be misunderstood by those outside the field. "Because this flexibility may be perceived as unfamiliar or lacking in rigor no matter how excellent the quality of work, the academic study of food itself, as opposed to studying food within a traditional discipline, is established in only a

Regardless of your interests in Food Studies, what makes the study of food so enjoyable is that you already know something of it based on your experiences eating, drinking, and existing on this planet. What makes food worthy of study is that every single human, and the cultures and societies they are parts of, has had a slightly different experience of food. This volume takes the stance that Food Studies is both, and will engage with Food Studies from a range of disciplines and perspectives. The hands-on nature of this book also adds in the experiential or applied component of Food Studies, remembering to keep the food in Food Studies.

## Food communicates

We begin our foray in to the field of Food Studies by thinking about what we know in terms of food. We start by considering food's ability to say things—to communicate information about ourselves, as individuals, and about our wider group affiliations, as well as our social and political beliefs. Communication is the process of sharing and transferring ideas, feelings, and information through verbal and nonverbal means. Spoken language, eye contact, body language, and written information are ways of sharing thoughts and knowledge. Successful communication involves much more than transferring information. The information needs to be understood—in the same ways—by both the transmitting and receiving parties in order for it to be considered a successful act of communication.This process can involve invoking emotions or speaking through themes that resonate with the recipient.

Scholars consider food a form of communication because it is a means by which we share information with each other. As pointed out by Roland Barthes, food is a

> system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior. Information about food must be gathered wherever it can be found: by direct observation in economy, in techniques, usages and advertising; and by indirect observation in the mental life of a given society. (Barthes 2008:22-4)

In other words, food enables us to share and transfer ideas, feelings, and information through verbal and nonverbal means. Food helps express personal and group identities, as well as cementing social bonds. In a

similar vein, anthropologists Claude L6vi-Strauss (1969) and Mary Douglas (1972) have added that food can be viewed as a type of language because food serves as a type of "code" that expresses



will reveal "different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries" (Douglas 1972: 61). Annie Hauck-Lawson coined the term *food voice* to capture the ways in which food communicates. This term refers to the ways that food serves as a "dynamic, creative, symbolic, and highly individualized" channel of communication (Hauck-Lawson 1992: 6). Food expresses an individual's view of themselves and of their society and culture, revealing insights about community, economics, gender, and other aspects of identity. Food speaks and it has a lot to say.

Food comes in a wide range of voices, "solo, ethnic, gender, old new, traditional, spiritual, harmonious, or discordant" (Hauck-Lawson 1992: 7). Deutsch and Murakhver (2012) illustrate the concept of food voice by describing different scenarios. They write, "If I invite you over for dinner and offer you oysters, champagne, and filet mignon, what is the food saying differently than if I offered you spaghetti and meatballs? And how would the food voice change if the spaghetti were homemade?" (Deutsch and Murakhver 2012: xii). Food tells others something about you.

Food can speak volumes when someone isn't allowed to raise their voice. In "Bad Sauce, Good Ethnography," Paul Stoller and Cheryl Olkes (1986) describe their encounter with Djebo, a Songhay woman living in Niger. Djebo is the wife of the youngest son of Adamu Jenitongo, one of the most knowledgeable healers in all of western Niger. Stoller and Olkes have come to meet with Adamu Jenitongo, and they are welcomed into his home. As the youngest female, Djebo is tasked with cooking dinner for Stoller and Olkes and prepares good food, especially fine sauces, as a show of hospitality, over the course of many days. Growing annoyed with this task, the quality of her sauces decline until she prepares a disgusting sauce that clearly projects what she isn't allowed to communicate through words.

Furthermore, food's ability to elicit reactions and conjure old memories makes it an especially successful instrument in communication. Consider the 2007 animated film *Ratatouille.* The protagonist, Remy, is a passionate food lover and aspiring cook. He also happens to be a rat. Over the course of the film, he befriends humans who enable his dream of cooking in a restaurant. Ultimately, he is faced with wooing a jaded food critic named Anton Ego. Remy's dish of ratatouille wows the critic, as it launches a bittersweet flashback to his youth dining at his mother's table. That a distant memory and nostalgic feelings can be conjured through food is something that we can all relate to.

*Ratatouille's* flashback scene is reminiscent of a famous passage from Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (Proust 1934). While on a visit to his mother's village home, the protagonist Swan has an encounter with a

time. Upon dipping the cake in his mother's tea. he recalls boyhood memories of his aunt, her home with its smells and decorations, and the village as it once looked, long ago. Both of these anecdotes, one from popular cinema and one from literature, are examples of food memories. *Food memories* capture the connection between food and emotion.

Anthropologist David Sutton's research on Greeks living in the islands of Kalymnos provides insight to the importance of .food as a connection to the past through food memories (Sutton 2001). Residents of the Kalymnos who have moved away remember fondly and nostalgically the tastes of home. Food becomes the physical, tangible way of interacting with feelings and past moments. Happy memories are described as "sweet as honey." Things that taste good are reminiscent of orange. Family members also go to great lengths to bring back feta, a white salty cheese that is a foundation of the diet, to their locales.The taste of feta from home is paramount to the stuff they can find in local supermarkets in their new locations.

Food memories can also lend a sense dignity in times of desperation. *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women ofTerezin* (De Silva 1996) illustrates the power of food and memory. This book, based on a manuscript of seventy recipes, is a remarkable testament to the human character. They originate from the women of Theresienstadt concentration camp near the Czechoslovak town of Terezin. These recipes were written in the context of utmost desperation and hunger, and in defiance of the Nazi regime that imprisoned them. They capture these women's tastes and identities and their reflections of better, happier times of the past and also hopes for future dinners in a world beyond. It was the cookbook of remembering.

The emotional charge of food extends beyond the art forms of film and literature. Good poetry also transcends time and space, and captures an aspect of the human experience. Food is a particularly powerful and evocative subject for poets, as it is a topic to which all humans can relate. Consider the poetry of Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), the most famous poet of Edo Japan. Stop and read aloud this haiku, a form of syllabic-based short poetry.

> in the morning dew
> spotted with mud, and how cool—
> melons on the soil1

What type of imagery does this poem generate? What situation is presented? How does it make you feel as a reader? Though written over 300 years ago, BashO's poem resonates with readers today because you

can envision yourself in that scene, admiring the sweetness of a melon



Now muse upon the words of American poet William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) in "This Is Just to Say" (1938).

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

(By William Carlos Williams, from THE COLLECTED POEMS: VOLUME I, 1909-1939, copyright ©1938 by New Directions Publishing Corp. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp)

Ask yourself the same questions as before.

What type of imagery does this poem conjure? What scenario is presented? What emotions does it raise? Though composed in markedly divergent time periods and context, both poems resonate with readers today. Basho's serene description of melons brings the reader to a gentle morning in the garden, while Williams's revelation about the plums can be read in different ways. Who hasn't enjoyed the sweet taste of forbidden fruit? Or conversely, experienced anger after discovering that your treats have been pilfered by another?The emotions elicited by Basho and Williams are familiar and seemingly timeless. By connecting people through shared experiences, food is an effective vehicle for communication. Food Studies, by its nature, is subversive and challenging. It asks, and sometimes demands, that we consider multiple perspectives and worldviews. To begin, we need to first understand what food is saying, how food communicates. Food has the power to communicate attitudes, values, beliefs, and customs— and to identify who you are, as well as who you are not. To borrow from that age-old line, "you are what you eat (or don't eat)." It has the ability to support prevailing ideas in a society or to subvert them. What does food say about who we are? What does the narrative suggest? How might things



## 1.1 Activity: Food and poetry

Food and poetry are a natural pairing as both elicit emotions, engage the senses, and help create a sense of shared understanding. Food also communicates. How might you communicate your emotions and experiences through poetry? In this exercise you will write a food-themed poem that engages the senses to consider how food, the senses, and emotions intersect.

*Directions*

1. Pick a food experience or memory from your own life that could also be universal—a moment that others could relate to or understand. Take inspiration from Basho and Williams.
2. Take a sheet of paper and divide it into five columns. Name each column after one of the senses: sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste. 3. Think about how you could describe that experience through the senses. For instance, the nutty-burnt smell of brewed coffee. The meltingly soft texture of a warm cookie just pulled out of the oven. The hiss fizz sound emanating from a can of soda.
4. Look through your list and think about how you could weave these descriptions together into a poem.
5. Compose your poem by writing at least one line per sense. Think of how the words, phrases, and descriptions can link together to elicit an emotional response.

*Instructor's note*

Encourage your students to share their poems with their classmates. Poetry is meant to be shared and enjoyed out loud. The poems can also be completed as homework and later shared in class.

# The stories we tell (or don't)

Foods themselves carry stories—about their origins, cultivation, values, and properties. How these stories are told is meaningful, because they become the basis for establishing a food's identity and role in a society, and perhaps even the source of its value. Pu'er tea, a type of aged, prized tea grown in China's southwestern Yunnan Province, is the stuff of mythology. Collectors bid on prized vintages. Different producers' products carry different premiums. Connoisseurs talk about the taste of the tea, and how it reflects the



between man and

nature. In a story about pu'er tea published by National Public Radio (NPR), Max Falkowitz, food magazine editor, writer, and publisher, offered these statements about the beverage. "Pu'er offers a narrative and emotional thread over the course of time and brewing the leaf again and again. You're not just drinking tea; you're participating in a story" (Neimark 2017).

What is interesting is that similar comments have made about cheese, wine, and any number of other products where ecology, environment, and human interaction intersect to produce a food product. What is prized about these food or beverages is not just the item itself per se, but what is fetishized, recalled, and passed on are the stories—the *narratives.*

Why would people care about how the tea is grown, the conditions under which it was aged, who produced it, and how the taste of the tea captures all of these aspects (and more)? Colleagues of mine at the Culinary Institute of America who specialize in wine and beverage service, who are trained sommeliers (individuals who are educated in and prepare wine for service), comment that selling wine is selling a story. We can draw a parallel between these stories and religious rituals. These stories help create a sense of social solidarity or "we-ness," a feeling of belonging within a group of people. Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1976) contends that religions help create this sense of "we-ness" through repeated rituals, storytelling, and reinforcing a narrative.

Similarly, in food, the repetition of rituals, the common storytelling, and reinforcement of a narrative help create the perception that there is something *special* or unique about a food product or a food experience. Consider the role of restaurant reviews in framing our expectations for an eating establishment and the food. Restaurant reviews rarely focus solely on the food—they describe the *experience.* Osteria Francescana, ranked the number one restaurant in the world in 2016 by the San Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants list, is run by a chef named Massimo Bottura. In a *New YorkTimes* profile of Bottura, written a few months after he had been awarded the distinction of being the best in the world, they described his food as such:

> Bottura's mind is like a butterfly net that swings to and fro in the hopes that a stray beauty will land in its mesh. Potential inspiration hovers everywhere. A dessert called "Oops I I Dropped the Lemon Tart" arose from a moment, years back, when Takahiko Kondo, one of Bottura's closest kitchen allies, accidentally smashed a sweet on the pastry counter. Bottura decided that it gave the dessert exactly what it had been needing. A dish called "An Eel Swimming Up the Po River" is somehow representative of a collision between an odd squabble in Italian history and Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash's duet on "Girl From the North Country." (Gordinier 2016)

This description— "mind is like a butterfly net," a dish that sounds like a squabble between legendary musicians and legends of history— brings the



reader in and presents a certain vision of the chef and restaurant. If the reporter had adopted more mundane prose such as "his mind is nimble" and his dish is "full of argumentative contrasts," this is far less engaging and creates a different narrative.

In the food world, actors are increasingly taking control of their own narrative and controlling the way others see their work and efforts. Consider the number of social media accounts, websites, curated Instagram feeds that show you a particular vision of a food world. But some groups seek to challenge and disrupt the usual narrative. Take Conflict Kitchen. Conflict Kitchen challenges its diners to think about current events in a different way. Conflict Kitchen rewrites the narrative of current events and global affairs through food. It challenges diners to rethink what they know by first engaging with their stomachs.

## 1.2 Food for thought: Conflict Kitchen

Conflict Kitchen was located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It is, in its simplest terms, a take-out restaurant. But its social and educational mission is so much more. Founded in 2010, Conflict Kitchen uses food to communicate: to educate Pittsburghers about countries, cultures, and peoples most Americans know very little about but often hear about in the news and social media. The restaurant team, led by cofounders Jon Rubin and Dawn Weleski, and culinary director Robert Sayre, work with members from the ethnic community featured to develop menus, record their stories, and to craft a responsive menu. The foods and cultures of Afghanistan, Cuba, Iran, the Iroquois (the Haudenosaunee Confederacy), North Korea, Palestine, and Venezuela have been featured on its rotating menu, which changes several times a year based on geopolitical events. Conflict Kitchen also hosts public events, performances, discussions, and workshops to engage discussion and educate about geopolitical events. Even the food wrapping and packaging becomes a site of engagement—food wrappers are decorated with art reflective of the featured community on the menu and often contain informational material or stories from that community. See www.conflictkitchen.org for more information.

# Writing (and rewriting) the food narrative

Stories, tales, and folklore are part of our ways of communication. Stories seek to inspire, transmit lessons about morality, safety, and ideology, and become part of how we see ourselves as individuals or as members of a society. We are told these stories and later repeat these tales.



W hat is useful to analyze about stories is not the story itself—the mundane facts, details, characters, times of day involved. What Food Studies scholars are interested in analyzing is the narrative, or how the story is told and why it is told in that manner. The story and resulting lessons will change depending on who is telling the story and what perspective the story is being told from. Increasingly, the food world has embraced the use of storytelling and narrative to sell products, to convey a mood, or to resonate with their customers in advertising. Consider the rise of "artisanal" food in the early 2000s (see Leitch 2003;

Meneley 2004; Wilk 2006; Trubek 2009; Paxson 2012; Cope 2014). Suzanne Cope (2014) suggests that this rise of artisanal food could be considered a rejection of industrialized, homogenized, mass marketed food. Specially crafted pickles, cheese, chocolates, and spirits became the antidote to big food, especially in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis when consumers sought to reengage with smaller economies of scale. Consumers sought to spend their money at small businesses, supporting independent entrepreneurs instead of major corporations. Making these specially crafted items also served as an avenue for independent entrepreneurship and business during a recession, when jobs were low and unemployment was at a high. Pursuing a business in making artisanal products was especially driven by middle-class, educated twenty- and thirty somethings living in or near urban centers as a way to exercise individual agency and control.

While artisanal foods are intended to refer to small-scale and small-batch products, suggesting a shortened food chain between producer and customer, the term has since been co-opted and used by major food companies as a marketing buzzword. McDonald's offers an artisan grilled chicken sandwich, which is a "grilled chicken breast sandwich made with 100% chicken breast filet that has no artificial preservatives, flavors or colors and perfectly marinated for juicy flavor. Layered with crisp leaf lettuce and tasty tomato, and topped with a vinaigrette dressing, all on our delectable artisan roll" (McDonald's 2017). Starbucks offers artisan breakfast sandwiches, while Panera promotes that its bread is made by bakers who "work each and every day, hand-shaping and scoring the dough to bring you freshly baked bread every morning and throughout the day" (Panera Bread 2017). These uses of the word "artisan" and "artisanal" are divorced from their small-batch, independent roots. But to consumers, they may invoke a level of quality that is not what is being provided to them.

Narrative also shines through when marketers try to connect with consumers by being cool. One of the most popular characters in advertising is "the most interesting man in the world," a character created to sell Dos Equis beer. The "m ost

seventies. Commercials featuring this character show his exploits around the world as a younger man, which include winning the Olympics, freeing a bear from a trap, and winning a staring contest against his own reflection. The commercials include the line "I don't always drink beer, but when I do, I prefer Dos Equis."2This character has become the stuff of viral videos and internet memes, and has helped increase sales of the beer worldwide.

To conclude, this leads us to ask, what will be the next chapter in food? What are the stories that have been told? What has yet to be written? For students of Food Studies, this means thinking about what narratives within the large field of Food Studies you are connecting to. Or perhaps are seeking to change and rewrite the script.

## 1.3 Activity: Retelling the story

To consider the importance of narrative in storytelling and the representation of food, in this assignment you will consider the proverbial "other side." You will be rewriting a popular food slogan from a different perspective. This activity will allow you to consider how food communicates and how different actors in the food system would want to communicate different ideals and values.

### *Companies and Slogans*

McDonald's—I'm Lovin' It
KFC—Finger Lickin' Good
Burger King—Have it Your Way
Hardee's—Where the Food's the Star
Taco Bell—Think Outside the Bun
Subway—Eat Fresh
Wendy's—It's Way Better Than Fast Food. It's Wendy's
Chili's—License to Grill
Applebee's—It's a Whole New Neighborhood
Papa John's—Better Ingredients, Better Pizza

### *Actors in the food chain*

Restaurant worker
Restaurant manager
Company CEO
Customer—fixed income senior



Customer—high school student
Customer—busy single parent
Health inspector
Farmer/food producer

*Directions*

1. Choose a food slogan from the list above.
2. Rewrite the slogan from the perspective of a different actor. 3.
Read out loud and share with the class.

*Discussion questions*

1. Who is the original slogan selling to? Who is their target audience? What values or ideals are featured in the original slogan? Whose perspective is being featured?
2. Describe the perspective you took on. Why did you choose to adopt this role? How would you characterize your actor?
3. How does the slogan shift when told by a different actor? What values and ideals were you attempted to communicate in the new slogan?

## 1.4 Activity: Analyzing community cookbooks

Community cookbooks are cherished recipe collections of a group.They are often humble, user-submitted recipes of family favorites. Community groups produce and share these items as a way to celebrate their identity and sometimes also to raise funds for the organization or a charity. Community cookbooks say a much about who a group is—through the types of recipes, the ingredients featured, and even the narratives cookbooks

provide, as these documents often contain stories, information about the group's history and organizational mission, and even advertisements from local businesses. Studying community cookbooks allows scholars to analyze how food communicates values, identities, and ethics, in addition creating a cohesive identity through something tangible.

*Directions*

1. Gather a variety of community cookbooks. See the instructor's note below



2. Consider the creator of each cookbook. Then ponder over its intended audience.
3. What messages does each cookbook send? What is the dominant narrative, if there is one? What visual and textual clues does the cookbook send about the community?
4. Does your cookbook present the image of a unified community? Does it suggest that the community has been scattered?
5. Does the community even matter to your particular community cookbook?

*Instructor's note*

Local libraries, church groups, and civic groups often have collections of community cookbooks. Current and vintage community cookbooks can be purchased from local organizations or online. Thrift and second-hand stores, as well as public library sales, are good places to source these cookbooks.

*Further resources*

Bower, A. L. (1997). "Our Sisters' Recipes: Exploring 'Community' in a Community Cookbook." *The Journal of Popular Culture,* 31(3), pp. 137-151.

Cotter, C. (1997). "Claiming a Piece of the Pie: How the Language of Recipes Defines Community." *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories,* pp. 51-71.

Longone, Janice Bluestein (1997). "'Tried receipts': An Overview of America's Charitable Cookbooks." In Anne L. Bower (ed.), *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

The Mennonite Community Cookbook is a compilation of mid-twentieth century recipes from Mennonite communities across the United States and Canada. Mennonites belong to an Anabaptist Protestant sect of Christianity and are recognized as an ethno-religious group. In certain regions of the United States, they have developed distinct foodways and cultural habits. http://mennonitecommunitycookbook.com is the online home of this community cookbook.

The University of Southern Mississippi operates the online Mississippi Community Cookbook Project. This project aims to collect, digitize, and

study Mississippi's culinary heritage, http://mscommunitycookbooks.usm.



# Summary

• Foodie culture is part of mainstream culture.

• W hile food is popular as a mainstream subject. Food Studies is not the same as being interested in food.

• Food Studies can be split into food culture and food systems. • Food com m unicates; it tells stories.

## *Discussion questions*

1. Describe your strongest food memory. Why has this remained with you? How has this impacted your life?

2. Reflect on the poems by William Carlos Williams and

Matsuo Basho. Can you think of another timeless, transcendental food experience? What feelings or emotions might your food experience communicate?

3. What stories have you heard about the food system? What might you want to investigate to better understand the food system?

## Notes

1 This version of Basho's haiku on melons was translated by Makoto Ueda. It was published in his *Basho and His Interpreters: Selected Hokku with Commentary.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.

2 Seth Stevenson, writing for *Slate,* explains the appeal of the "most interesting man in the world" (Stevenson 2009).

## Further resources

Cramer, Janet M., Carlnita R Greene, and Lynn M. Walters (eds.) (2011). *Food as Communication, Communication as Food.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Feed Me a Story is a collective created by Theresa Loong and Laura Nova. Their work captures food stories and focuses at the intersections of oral history, food,

odies who live to

ents the stories of
southernfoodways.

Books

# 2

# Defining

# Food: Meals, Morals, and Manners

What is food? This seems like a silly question, but it is raised here with serious intent. What do you consider food? How do you know that something is food as opposed to non-food? How might your understanding of food differ from others around you? How might your understanding of this term be impacted by environmental, ecological, geographic, economic, cultural, and political factors?

The simplest answer to the question "W hat is food?" is that "food" is anything that can be consumed for its nutritional content to sustain life. Prosper Montagn6, editor of the famed *Larousse Gastronomique,* a canon on French food and gastronomy first published in 1938, points out that food is a "substance eaten to sustain life; as part of a well-balanced diet, it promotes growth and maintains health" (2001: 507). Often, the items consumed are done so to provide nutrients and calories, and serve as source of energy and potentially fuel growth.

Now if food were simply about calories and survival, then there would likely be little to no need for this textbook and courses on Food Studies. This book would perhaps, instead, be focused on nutrition, foraging, horticulture, the food supply chain, or other topics directed related to the "feeding" aspects of food. If food were merely about calories and survival, then why have humans expended such efforts over food? In fact, it might be more efficient, practical, and even cost-effective to ingest just powders and pills instead of spending time, labor, and effort in growing, producing, shopping, cooking, plating and presenting, serving, and eating food.



But as food scholars have astutely noted, food is so much more than fuel. Once we start looking at the particulars of food, we quickly determine that

people care about what they eat. People care about how their food looks. They care about the way their food tastes. They assign value to different foods and beverages. These factors seem to suggest that food is seemingly more of an intellectual and social exercise, not merely a biological one. We don't feed, we *dine.VJe* care about what we ingest and place value on what we will and will not eat (and how we will produce, prepare, cook, and consume it). Thus, we realize that there is a huge range as to what humans consider food, and a lot of differentiation and value is placed on what we consider to be "good" as opposed to "bad" food.

Anthropologists have noted that humans define themselves on their propensity to eat—and not eat—certain foods. Legendary gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's famous saying, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are," infers that class, status, religion, gender, geography, and environment are part of the plate as much as the foods that fill it. As Barbara Haber points out, you must "follow the food" if you want to understand how a society works (Haber 2005: 65). Thus, what one considers food varies depending on biological, socioeconomic, cultural, ecological, and environmental factors. Agricultural and food acquisition practices also impact what one considers food. That is why there is a huge range of what people eat, differing from place to place, culture to culture. Even within delineated society or culture, there are huge variances if we look at the habits of one person versus another.

To begin our inquiry into what is food, this chapter is organized around three principles. In this chapter, we will explore the symbolic value placed on food through the principles of meals, morals, and manners. If we look more closely at what people are eating, and have eaten throughout history, we find that food is often about more than acquiring nutrients and filling the belly. As the old saying goes, "Animals feed, while humans dine." That is to say, humans have ideas about what they will and will not eat, beliefs about the quality of the food, and practices related to how best to cook, serve, and eat food. Humans place immense symbolic value on what they ingest. For humans, food can be thought of as a combination of ideals and practices regarding meals, morals, and manners. Right food is as much scientific judgm ent as it is moral decision. As humans we "discipline our desires, our appetites and our pleasures" at the table (Coveney 2006: i). This leads us to ask how and why humans have put such effort into regulating their food consumption. These efforts suggest that food is not simply an act of biological feeding, but eating the so-called right food also weighs in scientific judgment and moral decisions.

# Meals

For the overwhelming majority of the planet's creatures, the answer to what is food is straightforward. Most animals have limited diets and fall neatly into the category of either carnivore or herbivore. But for omnivores, the issue of food is a bit more complex. *Omnivores,* the "all-eating" creatures like humans, bonobos, pigs, can eat from a wide range of food sources. As "flexible" eaters, omnivores can devour both meat and plant foods, so long as they are not poisonous.

The ability to eat both meat and plant foods provides an evolutionary advantage for humans and other omnivores. Because we can eat so indiscriminately, humans are able to meet their nutritional needs more easily than specialist eaters who can eat only plants or flesh. Given the wider range of options available, humans were less vulnerable to environmental conditions and food stocks. Unlike specialist eaters, who are tied to a specific type of food, humans could more readily replace or supplement one food item with another if stocks were low, if disease wiped out a species, or if climate conditions made it difficult to acquire that food. Humans were able to adapt to a variety of new food sources and incorporate them into their diets, thus expanding the quality and range of their nutritional intake. As a result, humans were able to migrate and inhabit different parts of the planet, in part because of their ability to consume a wide range of foods and adapt their taste preferences to accommodate local availability.

Humans have the added advantage of being "superomnivores" (Allen 2012), as we have the widest access to the greatest number and type of foods. Of course, there is no one perfect food. Humans must eat a variety of foods in order to sustain life, to achieve a balance of the necessary vitamins and nutrients. Overreliance on one type of food can cause an imbalance, leading to malnutrition, poisoning, or perhaps even death.

Our omnivorousness has served us well, as it also helped fuel the growth of the human brain. Our brains are approximately four times the size of chimpanzees. Humans have relatively large brains, but size is not the determinant of function. Human brains are also capable of complex thought and planning— something that distinguishes us from chimpanzees and earlier hominins. For proper function, the human brain utilizes approximately 20 percent of an adult's caloric intake. Our brain size is the result of our diets. Some researchers speculate that early humans had varied and rich diets (see Sahlins 1988). They argue that the hunter-gatherer lifestyle allowed early humans to experience a range of foods and to develop a broad palate for different foods in order to survive. Our ability to eat a wide range of foodstuffs

was furthered by the fact that we also developed many tools to process our food. We will return to tool use again in Chapter 5.

Although we might call ourselves omnivores, we clearly do not eat everything. Every single person on the planet has boundaries and preferences as to what they will and will not eat and these boundaries are often informed by the wider society around them. Thus, humans face what scholars have called *"the omnivore's dilemma"* (Rozin 1997; Pollan 2006; Armelagos 2010). In theory, humans can eat a wide range of foods, yet in practice they clearly choose not to. Part of this dilemma has been driven, at least until the relatively recent past, with the start of domestication around 10,000 years ago; prior to that, humans were entirely dependent on wild food sources. The ability to control our food supply through agriculture is one of the factors that has made us superomnivores, as we were able to enter into "synergistic or coevolutionarly relationship(s)" with other species (Allen 2012). Were able to actively and conscientiously select certain plants and animals, breed them to preferences and needs, and spread them throughout the world. No other creature has been capable of expressing such control over their food sources and surroundings.

Nowadays we are omnivores not just for survival, but by choice. Because humans are presented with such a wide range of choices, we put parameters on the possibilities. Consciously and subconsciously we group the food and drink we encounter into categories of "good" versus "bad." Broadly speaking, we have preferences, aversions, fears, and taboos.

Our preferences are shaped by cultural factors and biology, as well as taste preferences and availability and ease.

Some of these boundaries may be biological. Our senses and ability to perceive sweet, salty, bitter, sour, and *umami* (savory) serve biological purposes.These are the five basic tastes, which evolved to help our ancestors survive. Survival was a matter of taste. Taste and smell are linked to the involuntary nervous system and emotions. Humans developed preferences for specific tastes, which helped them to survive as a species. The taste for sweet is something common in many mammals. The preference for sweetness is linked to the need for energy. Humans and other mammals begin life by consuming mother's milk, which is a rich source of proteins and sugars (carbohydrates) in the form of lactose. Salt is necessary for nerve function. Sodium ions help spur nerve impulses in addition to supporting other cellular functions. Bitter signals the presence of toxins or poisons. Our ability to perceive sour is considered an adaptation to detect spoilage or unripe food. *Umami,* a Japanese term describing the taste of savoriness, signals the

## 2.1 Food for thought: Cravings—nature or nurture?

Scientists used to think that food cravings stemmed from biological needs—specifically, nutrient deficiency. The now-debunked specific hungers theory suggested that humans craved certain tastes and flavors to regulate homeostasis, to maintain sufficient and consistent concentrations of minerals in the body. For instance, a craving for salt suggests a sodium deficiency, while a craving for beefsteak might suggest a deficiency in iron or a strong craving for cheese might suggest a need for calcium. While animals need to regulate homeostasis, this does not appear to be the case for humans.

Human preferences for salt pose a challenge. Biologically, humans need salt to function and our tongues have the ability to perceive salt through our taste buds. Salty is one of the basic tastes. Humans

crave salt and modern humans consume far more than they need. About 1.1 to 3.3 grams per day is plenty, yet Europeans and Americans eat many times that amount and sometimes suffer the consequences in the form of hypertension, heart disease, stroke, and other so-called lifestyle diseases. Yet there are human societies that have lived without meaningful added salt consumption, such as indigenous Australians and indigenous North American groups like the First Nations and the Inuit. Their salt intake was derived through animal proteins.

This complicates our understanding of taste: that the discussion is not simply nature or nurture, but sometimes a discussion of both.

*Further resources*


Mystery of the Senses: A NOVA Miniseries (1995), (TV Program) PBS.

Shepherd, G. (2011). *Neurogastronomy: How the Brain Creates Flavor and Why It Matters.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Spence, C. (2015). "Multisensory Flavour Perception." *Cell,* 16(1), pp. 24-35.

Stuckey, B. (2012). *Taste What You're Missing: The Passionate Eater's Guide to Why Good Food Tastes Good.* New York: Simon and Schuster.


Our likes and dislikes of certain foods may sometimes be attributed to biological differences. Cilantro (or coriander leaf) is a popular herb used in Mediterranean, Mexican, and Southeast Asian cuisines and draws strong reactions from eaters.

consider it to taste green, citrusy, and fresh. This difference in perception may be put down to genetic differences in smell receptors; those who dislike cilantro are likely missing receptors that allow them to smell the fresh, citrusy scents of cilantro. This impacts smell perception and decides whether or not one enjoys cilantro. Biology can also shape whether certain foods are safe. For instance, someone with a life-threatening allergy to peanuts would be unlikely to eat a peanut butter cookie or a Thai red curry peanut sauce, no matter how delicious it smells.

Preferences and avoidances cannot be put down to biology alone. It is also important to keep in mind that taste preferences and avoidances are highly social and are learned.That is to say, each and every person carries w ith them ideas about food that are informed by individual likes and dislikes as well as their broader culture, or society's ideas about food. One's version of "normal" is also dependent on the worldview they come from and what they were taught to consider acceptable as food. Take, for instance, the American preference for "fresh meat." Americans are one of the highest consumers of meat around the globe, consuming approximately 270.7 pounds per person each year. In fact, many cultures have a "special esteem for animal flesh" and use "meat to reinforce the social ties that bind campmates and kinfolk together" (Harris 1998:27). The taste for meat has a biological basis, as humans crave protein.

What varies is the type of meat humans choose to consume and how. The most popular type and cut of meat in America remains boneless, skinless chicken breast, sold in Styrofoam trays wrapped in layers of plastic wrap. This meat is sold as "fresh," is kept in chilled refrigerated cabinets, and is divorced from its original animal source. There are no signs of bone, skin, feathers, or other evidence of animal life. The breasts in that package may also come from several different chickens, each from different farms many miles away from the supermarket where it is being sold. By contrast, in other societies, "fresh" may have a different meaning. In China, while supermarkets are part of the local foodscape, consumers generally avoid buying fresh food items there. Instead, many still prefer to visit wet markets. Good w et markets sell live chickens, which are held in cages or pens. To buy a chicken, one goes to the chicken vendor (each vendor often only sells one type of protein) and pick the chicken you desire. The vendor then slaughters the chicken on site (sometimes they do you the courtesy of going into a back room, if available). The butcher drains its blood, plucks the feathers, and even chops up the chicken into pieces, if requested. The chicken still feels warm when you pick it up in the plastic bag holding its flesh. This, to a discerning Chinese eater, is "fresh"—an animal killed just before consumption.1

Due to different governmental regulations and social ideals for food

consumption and food safety "fresh" chicken means two different things



in China versus in the United States. To illustrate why group boundaries are also important, ask yourself this. Would you be able to purchase a freshly slaughtered on premise chicken from a supermarket in the United States?The answer is likely no. The closest example to this is buying a live lobster from a fish tank, although this practice is becoming less common as some animal rights activists have protested against it on the grounds of animal cruelty.

Thus, our ideas of what is "natural" or "normal" to eat is also highly informed by the society and the environment we grow up in. Breakfast, as American parents are told and children are expected to believe, is the most important meal of the day.2 American breakfasts are often composed of foods that are only eaten at this meal time— cereal, pancakes, waffles, or, for more gourmet meals, dishes like eggs benedict. In other societies, what's served at breakfast may be very similar or even the same as what appears on the menu at another mealtime. Or breakfast may be a passing thought, a little something to break the fast but

more substantial meals are served at midday. This is evidenced in the language used to describe different means. In French, *petit dejeuner* means the little breaking of the fast, or breakfast. Lunch, *dejeuner,* is the "breaking of the fast." Breakfast is of middling importance in France, perhaps a little bread and some coffee, at times accompanied with a little fruit or yogurt.

Americans also enjoy snack foods, a bite of something to eat between meals to stave off hunger. A normal snack for American kids after school may involve fried potato chips, sugary cookies, and other industrialized, processed foods.The practice of snacking is unfamiliar to many other cultures around the world. In France, for instance, eating between mealtimes is a relatively new invention, a habit adopted from the Americans. In fact, the French term for snacking is *"le snacking" a* Gallization of the English term "snacking."

Avoidances also involve the role of culture and environment in influencing dietary preferences and habits. Religious practices also impact dietary habits, including proscribing rules about that which is forbidden or taboo. Lev. 11:7-8 points out that pigs have divided hooves and do not chew the cud. An observant Jew who follows kosher dietary laws would be unlikely to partake of a pepperoni and cheese pizza. Pepperoni is made of pork, which is forbidden for consumption. Kosher dietary laws also prohibit the mixing of milk and meat, in this case represented through the presence of pepperoni and cheese. Likewise, an observant Muslim (a follower of Islam) would likely eschew pork. Observant Muslims follow *halal,* or that which is lawful, and avoid things considered *haram* (unlawful). The Qur'anic verse 5:5 deal with slaughter, pointing out the proper way to kill animals and dictating what is appropriate for consumption – what is *halal*.



## 2.2 Food for thought: Eat what bugs you

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) stresses

that eating insects is important to help our future food security. Though many accustomed to Western diets may balk at insects, they have been part of our diets since our hunter-gatherer days. Entomophagy continues to be regularly practiced in parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America by roughly two billion people. Producing insects requires significantly less land, water, and resources, and also results in less environmental pollution in the farm of animal waste and greenhouse gases, than producing animal proteins. Scientists note that eating insects can provide a relatively inexpensive, nutritionally rich form of protein that is less stressful on the planet (see Food and Agriculture Organization 2013).

While bugs have been on the menu in places like Thailand, Mexico, and Zimbabwe for quite some time, they are also finding their way onto the American palate and not just as novelty items meant to titillate and scare. Protein powders made of ground-up insects are all the rage, appearing in nutritional shakes, cookies, chips, and even energy bars. Restaurants are also purposefully featuring bugs on a menu as tasty treats (Gordmier 2010). The growing popularity of bugs shows how taste preferences can change over time.

*Further resources*

Chapul Cricket Protein Bars www.chapul.com.
Exo Protein Bars www.exoprotein.com.
Dicke, Marcel (2010). Marcel Dicke: Why Not Eat Insects? (Video file). Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/marcel_dicke_why_not_eat_insects.

Since the earliest days of our species, humans have been m a constant battle against nature to control our access to and supply of food. Our evolution over the millennia has taken into account our responses to the environments around us. Our earliest existence as foragers (also known as hunter-gatherers) made us largely vulnerable to the world around. In lesser developed societies and in food insecure environments, the choice and range of foods available can be limited. Given the wide range of foods available to humans, we have also developed a series of rules, habits, and customs around food to regulate our eating habits. These have resulted in food classifications and rules, both formal and informal, guiding the way we cook. These rules are socially [illegible] in biology but on a society or

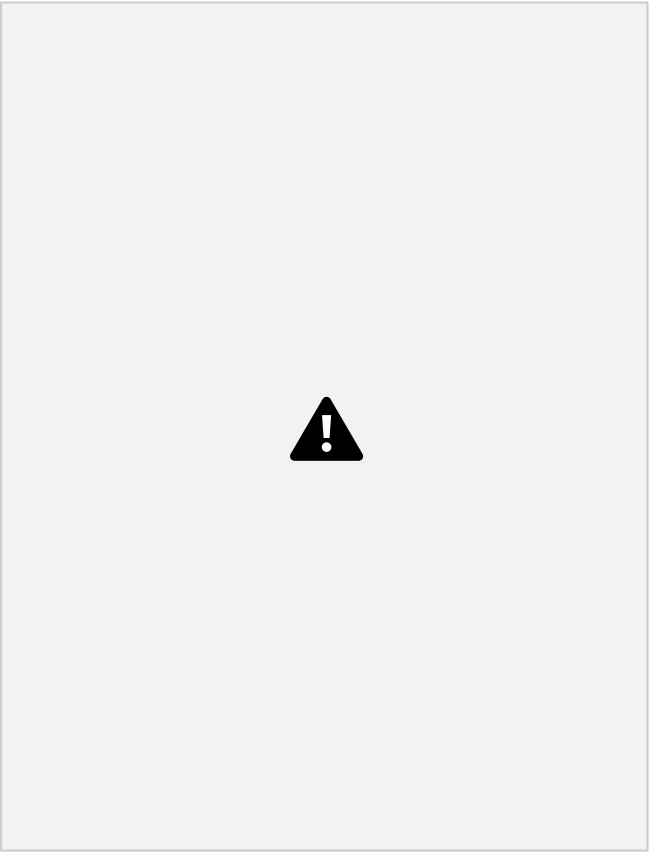


FIGURE 2.1 *Grilled starfish for sale at a street vendor Beijing, China. Photo courtesy of the author.*

culture's ideas of palatability. Anthropologist Mary Douglas reminds us that "dirt" is simply matter out of place" (Douglas 1966). That is to say, there are no universal laws or rules about what is "dirty" or "bad." But instead, humans socially construct the rules as they see fit based on their society's norms, customs, and cultural practices, as well as considerations of the ecology and surrounding environment (see Figure 2.1).

Evidence of these rules can be seen in *cuisine.* The term cuisine is has its roots in the Latin word *coquere.* meaning to cook, and *cocina,* the place for cooking—the kitchen. *Cocina* eventually morphed into *cucina* (Italian), *cocina* (Spanish), and *cuisine* (in French), *kuche* (in German), and *kukhnya* (Russian). In popular use, the word cuisine often is conflated with high-end, fancy, expensive, gourmet food. The definition in a standard English dictionary is also reductive, taking it to mean food cooked in a certain way or as a style or method of cooking representative of a place, country, or region. These are

certainly aspects of cuisine, but in the field of Food Studies, the term cuisine takes on a broader definition.



Food scholars have debated over how to define the term cuisine. Warren Belasco provides one of the most commonly employed definitions. A cuisine has five components composed of a set of "basic foods" selected from broader environment of available edibles, "manipulative techniques" or a distinctive manner of preparing food, "flavor principles" or a distinctive way of seasoning dishes that also becomes representative of group identity, manners and etiquette regarding the acceptable behaviors surrounding consumption, and lastly, the food chain, an infrastructure of how food moves from the place of origin or production to the consumer (Belasco 2008: 20-3)

To the definition of cuisine, anthropologist Sidney Mintz adds another key element: community. He reminds us that

> what makes a cuisine is not a set of recipes aggregated in a book, or a series of particular foods associated with a particular setting, but something more. I think a cuisine requires a population that eats cuisine with sufficient frequency to consider themselves experts on it. They all believe, and *care* that they believe, they know what it consists of, how it is made, and how it should taste. In short, a genuine cuisine has common social roots, it is the food of a community—albeit often a very large community. (Mintz 1996: 94-96)

Mintz's key point is that cuisine is far more than dishes or cooking, but it is about people producing and reproducing this food because they have feelings and assign value to it. As Stephen Mennell points out, "Ways of cooking become woven into the mythology and the identity of nations, social classes and religious groups. People take sides, and exaggerate differences" (Mennell 1985: 3).

Cuisine is often associated with the world of the elite. High-end and fancy cooking is what food scholars call "haute cuisine" (see Goody 1982, Trubek 2000; Ferguson 2004).This type of cuisine is often heavily rule bound, codified in recipes and texts, and highly structured, and is often, although not always, the purview of professional cooks (see Figure 2.2). Culinary institutions like the Culinary Institute of America train students in haute cuisine methods. This type of cuisine is reflective of the tastes of an elite socioeconomic group, as well as those who are trained in its tastes to serve them.

Cuisine takes on different meanings and can become the flag, so to speak, of a people. National cuisines stand in for national identity and cultural

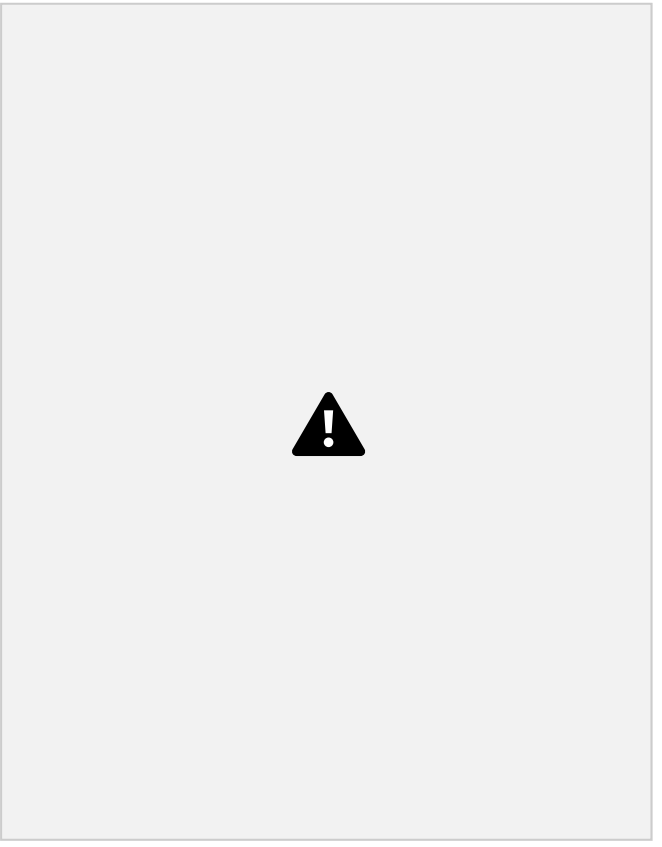
homogeneity, both imagined and real. Cuisines have become more important with the formation of the modern nation state. To illustrate, Italian cuisine (along with Mexican and Chinese) is one of the most popular types of food in America. Yet what we consider to be Italian cuisine only began to emerge in the nineteenth century following the unification of Italy in 1871 (see Capatti



Montanari 2003; Helstosky 2004). Previously the peninsula was composed of different kingdoms, each highly distinct from the other in terms of language, culture, and, of course, food. Arjun Appadurai notes that national cuisines are invented; that communities can be formed through the formation of a national cuisine (Appadurai 1988).

National dishes themselves represent values and may represent specific communities within a nation. Many nations pride themselves on having a national dish- Belgian waffles are strongly associated with the small European nation of Belgium and sushi with Japan But national dishes can also change over time Fish and chips, and more recently, Chicken Tikka Masala (CTM) has taken over as the "national dish" of England. CTM is a dish of roasted marinated chicken cooked in a spiced curry sauce. Its origins are debated, but it was likely invented by a British Bangladeshi cook in the United

Kingdom. This shift from fish and chips to CTM is meaningful, reflecting migration.



F IG U R E 2 .2 *A duck press used*
(Canard a la pressed *a complex dish representative o f classical French*

multiculturalism, and new sensibilities of who the British think they are (and want to say they are).3

National cuisines are about identity (creating and reinforcing a community through food), as well as differentiation, a statement proclaiming "our" food is not like *their* food and thus we are not like them. Sometimes nations fight over who invented or owns a dish. For instance, the fight over the rights to *hummus*4 via the "hummus wars," a series of competitions between Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine were never just gastronomic statements but were ways of expressing geopolitical dominance in a tense Middle East.These countries competed to produce the world's largest bowl of hummus and also bickered over who is the true inventor of the dish (see Ariel 2012; Avieli 2016).

Thus leads us to our second parameter regarding food: morals. Food is not neutral but instead carries ideological and symbolic weight. Tastes are acquired and appetites are civilized through morals and manners (Elias 1978; Mennell 1985).

## 2.3 Activity: Menu analysis

Examining menus is one way to learn about what a society or group considers or considered food. Whether historic or current, menus serve as a time capsule representing the tastes, values, and ingredients—the cuisine of a moment. Menus are one of many primary sources food scholars use to study food.

Primary sources are documents or objects that were created during the time under study. They provide insight on a particular event. Food-related primary sources can include original documents like cookbooks, menus, recipe cards, restaurant reviews, and diaries; creative works like paintings and art; as well as relicts and artifacts like cookware, pottery, and even buildings such as kitchens in historic homes.

This activity focuses on menus. Food scholars are increasingly turning their attention to historic menus to understand the lives and eating habits of people in the past. Chefs and restaurants also consult menus, as inspiration for their contemporary menus.5 Major menu collections exist at The New York Public Library,The Culinary Institute of America Menu Collection, and The Los Angeles Public Library, among others.

*Discussion questions*

- Describe the document. Consider the size, shape, color, physical characteristics, and the content it contains. Consider the paper quality, font, illustrations, and the feel of the document. How big is the menu?



• Who was the creator(s)? Who was the audience(s) of these documents? • What is the cuisine served? How do you know? Look at the clues provided.

- What does the document tell us about social class and status? Use listed prices, prices adjusted for inflation, menu items, ingredients, and so on as clues
- What might these documents have meant to the historical actors who created them or encountered them?
- What kind of beliefs about the past might they provide evidence for (or against)?
- How do we know your analysis is correct?

• What information does the menu leave off? What questions remain? • What do meals of the past tell us about what we considered "edible"? How has this changed?

*Instructor's note*

This activity can be turned into an essay assignment. This activity works best with paper menus, but can easily be conducted with online menus and digital collections. This activity can work with a range of menus across place, time, and space or can also be modified to focus on a theme (e.g., diners, menus from the 1950s, airline menus).

*Further resources*

Greenstein, Lou (1994). *A La Carte: ATour of Dining History.* Glen Cove, NY: PBC International.

Heimann, J. (2011). *Menu Design in America*. *A Visual and Culinary History of Graphic Styles and Design 1850-1985.* Kdln, Germany: Taschen Wright, W. and E. Ransom (2005). "Stratification on the Menu: Using Restaurant Menus to Examine Social Class." *Teaching Sociology,* 33(3), 310-316.

*Some notable menu collections*

Cornell University Library
https://rare.library.cornell.edu/collections/food-wine/menus.
The Culinary Institute of America
http://ciadigitalcollections.culinary.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16940coll1.
The Los Angeles Public Library



The New York Public Library

http://menus.nypl.org.
US Navy Department Library—Menus from Ship to Shore
https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/manuscripts/rn/menus-from ship-to-shore.html.
This collection focuses on naval menus and is a site to explore themed menus.

# Morals

When I ask my students about some of the best food that they've ever eaten, invariably many of them will mention the food of maternal figures: mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. Grandmothers hold a particular place in the construction of food. People often have a tendency to equate grandmothers (and other family elders) with goodness, nurture, and other feminine qualities of empathy and care. Popular imagery and writings reinforce these stereotypes of cooking as a form of maternal care. As of this writing, a brief search on Amazon, one of the world's largest booksellers, reveals that there are 709 cookbooks with "grandma" in the title.There are also 209 cookbooks with "grandmother" in the title. Grandpa is far less popular, w ith ninety-one listings, and "grandfathers" only have nineteen references. Clearly, the terms "grandma" and "grandmother" evoke certain feelings about food, nurture, and care.

Grandmothers remain potent in popular discourse, especially among food advocates like Michael Pollan, because they evoke morality. Take, for instance, journalist and food writer Michael Pollan's now-infamous advice. In his book *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual* (2009), he declares that people shouldn't "eat anything their great grandmother wouldn't recognize as food" (2009: 7). This is his second rule, following his first: "eat food," by which he means avoiding what he calls "edible foodlike substances" and "industrial novelties" (2009:5).

But what if your grandmother was none of the above? W hat if your grandmother was a terrible cook? In my own family, my maternal grandmother was a horrendous cook. My step-grandfather was actually the gourmand of the family, and would spend hours pouring over cookbooks and reading newspapers for food inspiration. He'd even special order cookbooks from Hong Kong, hot off the presses, so he could stay afloat with food trends. My grandmother was not to be trusted in the kitchen. Things were always underdone and under-seasoned, dishes were never washed properly, and food was never "clean." She even once started a small kitchen fire.

So what's your grandma or great grandmother like? Does she fit the

romantic stereotype created and reinforced by food writers like Pollan?



Perhaps she was more like mine, who could not be trusted in the kitchen. Maybe you never met your grandmother and don't have any memories to fall on. Pollan's rule to eat like your great grandmother invokes nostalgia and romanticism for the past, overlooking the sometimes cold realities. What if your great grandmother's food was simply awful? What if she struggled to have enough to eat?

My maternal great grandmother lived in rural China, was illiterate and had bound feet, and married at fifteen in an arranged marriage, carried out from the family home in a sedan chair on her wedding day. That fateful journey, which took her from her girlhood residence to her new marital home, was the farthest she had ever traveled in her life. Her life, which spanned the first half of the tw entieth century, was punctuated by wars, revolutions, famines, and bad harvests during late imperial and early Communist China. My mother recalls my great grandmother preparing meals for the family: a simple fare of rice, vegetables, and, once a month, a little meat. Under the planned economy of Communist China, all of these items were strictly rationed by the state government. Because my great grandmother's mobility was limited by her bound feet, she sent my mother and uncle to buy food as part of their chores. On one occasion she mixed up the expiration date on the family's ration tickets, and they were left to scrounge and make do with what they had until the next month’s allotments were doled out. My great grandmother hobbled to the government office to plead her case to exchange her expired tickets for new ones; to have them take pity on an old woman. My mother still recalls this experience w ith sad bitterness, about the difficulties of this time period. Needless to say, I have no rose-tinted feelings about my great grandmother's life, food, or her diet.

Food scholars caution us to be careful with Pollan's glib claims (Laudan 2001). While sound bites from Pollan are certainly catchy, they are divorced from historical and sociopolitical context. Historian Rachel Laudan reminds us that Pollan and others celebrate culinary luddism— the slow, old, romanticized foodways of a bygone time, "a past sharply divided between good and bad, between the sunny rural days of yore and the grey industrial present" (Laudan 2001:36). Built into his claims is an assumption that everyone’s great grandmother would have had gastronomically rich diets. That their dinner tables would have been wonderfully decorated and stomachs always full and content. It is easy to disrupt this narrative by returning to facts and grounding ourselves in historical context. My point here is not to critique the use of grandmothers in food discourse but to show how morality is an important part of defining food.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, there has been a growing interest in old foodways. This is evidenced in the rise of Slow Food, an international organization

the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from and how our food choices affect the world around us" (Slow Food International 2015). There has also been growing interest in farming as an occupation among young people in the United States (see Mitchell 2015). There has also been a return to traditional food-making practices such as baking your own sourdough, baking your own bread, and preserving food. This has been described by food scholars and commentators loosely as a return of artisanal food (Cope 2014), which could be interpreted as a moral statement against the seemingly globalized, industrialized food system.

Historian Rachel Laudan calls this the rise of culinary luddites (Laudan 2001). Culinary luddies invoke romantic, nostalgic notions of the past in their culinary creations. Words like artisanal, craft, small batch, handmade, homemade, independent are moral judgements. Laudan points out that this food movement presupposes that "food should be fresh and natural has become an article of faith" (Laudan 2001:36). As we can see, nostalgia about what food was is an expression of morality. It presupposes that the past held a better way of eating.

Laudan cautions against this rose-colored view of the past, reminding us that "natural was something quite nasty" until the recent past (Laudan 2001: 36). What concerned Americans at the turn of the twentieth century was food contamination—adulteration through human hands. Harvey Levenstein points out that food that we, today, consider to be "good" and "natural"—foods like milk—were often adulterated and dangerous to consume (Levenstein 1980).

People have long been concerned about eating what is "right." As the example above suggests, eating the right stuff is also a conversation about morality, for eating something socially incorrect might garner judgment. Today's food campaigners use morality to push and cajole the public into better eating habits. British celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, who has worked to improve school food, has been met with lots of resistance. The parents of the schoolchildren whose meals he was trying to reform pushed back—they didn't like being told their food was wrong because it felt like an attack on *them* (Hollows and Jones 2010; Warin 2011).

# Manners

Imagine that you have won a contest and are invited to dine at a nice French restaurant. As you take your seat at the table and place your order, you notice

of you. To your left,



he places a fork, on the right, a knife and spoon. There is also a water glass and, perhaps, also a plate for bread and a knife for butter. Today, this is what one has come to expect for a "proper" and "nice" meal in a Western-style restaurant. But if we were to travel back in time to Renaissance Europe {c. 1300 to 1700) and were invited to dine at the illustrious table of some lords and ladies, we would find ourselves at a loss on how to conduct ourselves properly.

For one, we would have to "BYOK"— bring your own knives.Today, while it is acceptable in some restaurants to BYOB (bring your own beverages), often a special wine or premium liquor, or to BYOB at a casual gathering among friends, such as a barbecue or community potluck, we would never be expected to bring our own utensils to a party or to a restaurant. But during medieval and Renaissance Europe, everyone carried their own personalized eating knife in a sheath. The practice of BYOK remained firmly in place until the seventeenth century, after which hosts began to supply table knives and the shape of the knife

was modified to be less threatening. These new smaller, single-edged table knives were joined not long after by their new mate, the fork. Though archeological evidence suggests there were fork-like objects used in early civilizations, the fork as we know it today was not widely accepted in Europe until around 1700. Forks allowed diners to eat without contamination—without sullying their fingers or spoiling the food with theirs—and thus safely abiding by the new standards of manners. This anecdote illustrates how manners and the concept of acceptable behaviors at dinner table have evolved over time. Our ideas of "good taste" at the dinner table are not simply about what tastes good from an alimentary sense, but what is good from a social sense—what is seen as classy as opposed to trashy.

Manners are part of the food rules, spoken and spoken, in a society. *Food rules* are cultural classifications or folk taxonomies. These rules have little or nothing to do with nutrition or health, but often fit greater ideas of what a group of people considers to be acceptable. When looking at the food rules of any given group, we quickly realize that the rules vary widely and can be, at times, arbitrary. What is good to some is bad to others.

Manners have been a source of anxiety and can lead to political snafus. A famous incident in 1939 helps illuminate this point. With Europe on the brink of World War II, the United States sought to create closer diplomatic ties with Great Britain. Then president Franklin D. Roosevelt and first lady Eleanor Roosevelt invited King George VI and Queen Elizabeth for a diplomatic visit to the United States, including a trip to their country home in Hyde Park, New York. The Roosevelts famously served hot dogs to the royals at a country picnic, despite worries from various advisors that the meal was far too informal for such



The menu for the infamous picnic on June 11,1939

Virginia Ham
Hot dogs
Cold turkey
Sausages (hot)
Cranberry jelly
Green salad
Rolls
Strawberry shortcake
Coffee

Beer
Soft drinks
(Anon 1939)

For most Americans, this seems like a perfectly delightful menu that one might find at a casual picnic on a nice summer day. But for the visiting British royals, the etiquette of how to consume these items was befuddling.

The *New York Times* and the American public were seemingly charmed by King George Vi's willingness to dive right in. Headlines on the next day's front page proclaimed, "KINGTRIES HOT DOG AND ASKS FOR MORE; and He Drinks Beer with Them" (Belair Jr. 1939). News reports from that era note the king enjoyed his the American way, eating his hot dogs w ith his hands and fingers, while his consort chose to attack hers with a fork and knife.

Today, this story seems so innocent, but imagine if the picnic had not gone well. What if the British had rejected the meal? What if they had been offended at its simplicity? How might the American public have viewed the British if they did not embrace this occasion? Though this seems like but a footnote in time, historians often credit this hot dog incident as an important moment in shaping Anglo-American relations. Shortly after this picnic. Great Britain declared war on Germany and entered into World War II. Later in the war, in part due to the alliances forged during this visit, Americans also entered the war in support of our British allies.

This excerpt from history leads us into examining the importance of manners. Rules about how to eat shape our behavior around the dining table and are also a reflection of one's moral character and values. Despite being taught a new set of rules on how to enjoy a cuisine, the royals at this dinner were hesitant about jumping in. After all, doing so would be an act of consciously undoing and unlearning everything one has been taught about "proper" public behavior.

Proper etiquette, or following the right code of polite behavior in society, is important because it signals to others that you belong. The Emily Post [illegible] iate behavior in America,



considers the following to be the top ten table manners. Table manners have evolved over centuries to make the practice of eating with others pleasant and sociable. W ith so many table

manners to keep track, keep these basic but oh-so-important table manners in mind as you eat:

1. Chew with your mouth closed.
2. Keep your smartphone off the table and set to silent or vibrate. Wait to check calls and texts until you are finished with the meal and away from the table.
3. Don't use your utensils like a shovel or stab your food.
4. Don't pick your teeth at the table.
5. Remember to use your napkin.
6. Wait until you're done chewing to sip or swallow a drink. (Choking is clearly an exception.)
7. Cut only one piece of food at a time.
8. Avoid slouching and don't place your elbows on the table while eating (though it is okay to prop your elbows on the table while conversing between courses, and always has been, even in Emily's day).
9. Instead of reaching across the table for something, ask for it to be passed to you.
10. Take part in the dinner conversation.

(Anon n.d.)

Now contrast Emily Post's rules for proper American dining with those given for Chinese dining. Hsu and Hsu write (1977: 304):

> The typical Chinese dining table is round or square, the ts'ai [side dishes) are laid in the center, and each participant in the meal is equipped with a bowl for fan, a pair of chopsticks, a saucer, and a spoon. All take from the ts'ai dishes as they proceed with the meal.

At the Chinese table, toothpicks are also provided at the table. It is not rude to pick through one's teeth at the table, as long as one covers one's mouth with the opposite hand.

It is important to note that the types of table manners written down in etiquette books are normally guidelines for public consumption. In the private sphere, often diners take on more informal rules. The things that would be

unacceptable in a polite, public setting may be perfectly permissible, maybe even encouraged in private at home. Table manners are, in fact, "social agreements," devised to avoid violence at the dinner table (and elsewhere) (Visser 2015).

Table manners became important in Europe during the Renaissance for these reasons. Returning to an earlier discussion of the knife and the fork, both of these cutlery items were introduced to the table as ways to regulate behaviors—to promote a new sensibility about civility and manners. Codified rules, such as those presented in etiquette books and manuals, regulate public behavior and are part of the "civilizing process." Status-anxious individuals throughout history have been conscientious about learning the proper behavior to fit in.

Consider a scene from the film *Tampopo* (1985). In one vignette, a group of well-to-do ladies who lunch are taking an etiquette class. The instructor, a coiffed woman, gently instructs the group that the proper way to eat Italian pasta is with a fork and spoon. She adds that noodles should be eaten without making a sound. This is difficult for some of the women because of what they had been taught as children. In Japan, it is customary to slurp noodles loudly to show appreciation for the dish. The camera cuts away to a table with a solitary Western male diner and he is slurping and eating animatedly. The women begin happily slurping away at their pasta and reluctantly the instructor joins them.

Renaissance diners were concerned with proper eating behaviors as a reflection of their self-fashioning and proper morality. Scholars of Japan note that women in Japan today still take lessons on proper etiquette and eating, anxious about their status (White 2001). This practice is also common in the West. Many business schools in the United States send their soon to-be graduates to mock lunch interviews. These classes teach young people how to conform to social norms of civility and acceptable behavior. In these classes, people learn things like which forks to use with what meal, where to set the bread, and also what foods should be appreciated hot and which ones cold. For instance, *gazpacho,* a cold tomato-based soup from Spain, and *vichyssoise,* a cold vegetable soup from France, should be appreciated lightly chilled. The old wives' tale often goes that some bright-eyed job seeker failed their interview because they sent the soup back to the kitchen to be reheated, not realizing that this soup is meant to be served chilled. This suggests that manners are not simply about eating properly, but also showing the right status and cultural knowledge. Not knowing that *gazpacho* and *vichysoisse* are chilled soups suggests one is d6class6 (and perhaps not a "right fit" for the

type of organization whose management would appreciate such dishes). Eating right is about showing you belong.



Proper eating is such a concern that it is a school subject in many countries around the world. The French are probably the most associated with the concept of lunch as a lesson. Students are taught how to set a table, dine, and appreciate food. Learning how to eat properly is also learning how to fit in to society. Of course, formal manners and etiquette are not held in the same esteem across all societies. Etiquette and manners appear to be more important in societies where there is a regular food supply. Anthropologist Alan R. Holmberg notes that among the Siriono, a seminomadic hunting and gathering indigenous group located in the forested regions of Bolivia, acquiring food is the main priority. In regard to eating habits, "People eat when they have food . . . Eating takes place without etiquette or ceremony. Food is bolted rapidly as possible, and when a person is eating he never looks up from his food until he has finished . . . The principal goal of eating seems thus to be swallowing the greatest quantity of food in the shortest possible time" (Holmberg 1977: 157).

## 2.4 Activity: Explaining the rules

Imagine you are on the committee to welcome international students to your campus. These students have not spent any time in the country prior to arrival and most of their knowledge about local customs and foods are from popular movies, social media, and internet videos. What are some things they should know about the unspoken food rules? What might you tell them about the unofficial rules about how we eat, the things that are seemingly normal to those who grew up in this country but are never written down in guidebooks.

A few unspoken American food rules from my students include:

- Beverages come with free refills.
- Cold beverages must be served with lots of ice.
- The five-second rule: food dropped on the floor can usually be eaten if it's picked up within five seconds.
- It is acceptable to drink coffee all day long.
- Dinner is usually served at around six p.m.

*Directions*

Brainstorm your own list of American food rules. Write these down on a
entire group to see.



*Discussion questions*

1. How many rules did your group come up with? Was there agreement about the rules?
2. Did the rules cluster around themes or issues (e.g., the use of silverware versus the use of hands)?
3. Consider ranking the rules. What would be the most important? What would be the least important? Explore what the rankings reveal about American eating habits.

## 2.5 Activity: Historic recipe interpretation

One way to think about how meals, morals, and manners converge to

become food is to look at recipes and dishes of the past. Historic recipe interpretation is a fun and thought-provoking activity. Students are pushed to assess their knowledge

base, rethink their biases, and appreciate food in a different way when they are asked to recreate it and experience the past first hand.

*Directions*

1. Identify a series of recipes and a time period for study. Listed below are some collections of historic recipes.
2. Before cooking the recipes, read them several times over and decide on some ground rules. How faithful to the time period will you be? What is an acceptable level of substitution for ingredients, techniques, and methods? Will you simply be " inspired" by historic recipes or are you aiming for full historical accuracy?
3. Do your research on how the food would have been served and presented, as well as consumed. Consider how the final consumption setting might influence the preparation.
4. During cooking, record everything. Include cooking times, amount/ volume prepared, what techniques were used, how things were cut and prepared, and so on.
5. Everything subjected to interpretation should be recorded and discussed. For instance, if there is an ingredient listed that can't be found and something else was substituted, record the substitution. If a recipe gives a general instruction like "put in pot and boil," record what size pot, how much water was added, what temperature was it boiled at, and so on.



*Discussion questions*

1. Before cooking: write down your thoughts on the food. What might you imagine the food tasting like? Looking like?
2. After cooking: consider how you approached the recipes. How true were you to the historical moment and context?
3. After cooking: how was it working with primary sources? What challenges did you face?
4. After cooking: what did you think of the food? How did it taste? What was familiar about the food? What was unfamiliar or foreign?

*Instructor's note*

This activity can be conducted with any number of time periods, but one that is especially rewarding for students to consider is ancient Mesopotamia.

Most have no idea what the world's oldest recipes taste like. Because they have no reference point from which to judge, students are asked to put aside the assumptions. This activity can also be modified into a homework assignment if there is no easy access to a communal kitchen.

*Further resources*

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Bott6ro, J. (2004). *The Oldest Cuisine in the World: Cooking in Mesopotamia.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hess, K. (ed.) (1995). *Martha Washington's Book of Cookery.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Simmons, Amelia (1996). *American Cookery.* Bedford, MA: Applewood.

# Summary

• Food is much m ore than fuel.

• Food is meals, morals, and manners.

• Humans are superom nivores— w e experience the omnivore's dilem m a o f w ha t to eat.

• W e put param eters on our food consumption, based on biology, culture, geographical access, as well as taking in our preferences, aversions, fears, and taboos.



• Food habits can—and do— change over time.

• Cuisine and national dishes are used as identity markers. •

Food takes on the tone of morality.

• Humans have ideas about how to eat and enforce these rules as a way of showing inclusion/exclusion in a group.

## *Discussion questions*

1. Who was your great-great grandmother? Consider the details of her life. What would her life been like? Where did she live? What would she have eaten? Would you want to eat what your great-great grandmother ate?

2. Do you experience an omnivore's dilemma? What are your preferences, aversions, fears, and taboos regarding food? What are your boundaries?

3. How has your social environment or culture influenced your views of what you consider food?

# Further resources

## *Documentaries and videos*

*Great Depression Cooking with Clara* is an online cooking show featuring 94-year-old Clara, who came of age during the Great Depression (1929-1939). She reflects on the tastes, recipes, and memories of her life. Her life stories provide a glimpse into what one's great-great grandmother might have eaten, www.greatdepressioncooking .com.

*Make Hummus Not War* (2012) is about the *hummus* wars in the Middle East as different countries sought the title of the inventor of *hummus. Hummus* became a metaphor for other geopolitical struggles in the region.

*Townsends* is a YouTube channel devoted to eighteenth-century American living. Its videos show historic reenacting of cooking, technology, and lifestyles of the era. https://www.youtube.com/user/jastownsendandson/.

*The Victorian Way* is a YouTube channel produced by English Heritage, a charity that cares for historic sites across England. This channel has a series of videos reenacting the daily work and cooking of Mrs. Avis Crocombe, head cook at Audley End House in Essex during Victorian England. https://www. [redacted]Xbo7htq2lCUPqEPPGuc.



# Notes

1 The Japanese reverence for *ikizukuri,* a method of

preparing and serving sashimi from live seafood, is another example of "fresh" that would be considered reprehensible to diners unaccustomed to this practice.

2 See Anderson (2013) and Carroll (2013) for more on the invention of breakfast as the most important meal of the day.

3 Chicken Tikka Masala has even become a metaphor among politicians for describing contemporary multicultural Britain. See Cook (2001). 4 *Hummus* is a popular dip made of mashed chickpeas, sesame paste *[tahinil,* olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and garlic.

5 Some modern restaurants use historic menus for inspiration. Two well-known examples include Dinner by Heston Blumenthal, who takes inspiration from historic British recipes (Dinner by Heston Blumenthal in London and Melbourne is a well-regarded Michelin-starred restaurant headed by British celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal. This restaurant is inspired by historic dishes of Britain's past and the menus even cite the sources of inspiration, such as the *Forme of Curye,* a collection of medieval English recipes from the fourteenth century purportedly from the chief master cooks of King Richard II. Their approach to historic foods is inspiration as opposed to reenactment. www.dinnerbyheston.com. See www.dinnerbyheston.com), and the Four Seasons Restaurant in New York City, whose menu is a tribute to the original Four Seasons Restaurant, the home of the "power lunch" (see http://thegrillnewyork.com).

# Further readings


Arndt Anderson, Heather (2013). *Breakfast: A History.* Lanham: Rowman& Littlefield.

Brillat-Savarin, Jean Anthelme (2002). *The Physiology of Taste, or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy.* Mineola: Dover Publications.

Douglas, Mary (1997). "Deciphering a Meal." In Carol Counihan and EsterikVan (eds.), *Food and Culture: A Reader.* New York: Routledge.

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Harris, Marvin (1985). *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Levi-Strauss, Claude (1978). *The Origin of Table Manners.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pollan, Michael (2006). *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals.* New York: Penguin Press.

Visser, Margaret (1987). *Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos, of an Ordinary Meal.* New York: Grove Press.

Visser, Margaret (1991). *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution,*

*Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners.* New York: Grove Weidenfield.

# Food, Identity, and Culture

Humans are an incredibly diverse species, with great variations in biology and physiology. People have tried to understand and explain these differences since the earliest of times. In this chapter, I focus on four areas of variation: kinship, gender, race, and ethnicity. Kinship, gender, race, and ethnicity are four examples of a *cultural ontology* or taxonomy, a system of classification and evaluation. Many academic fields are interested in these systems of categorization because these categories provide insight on power, access, and social relations.

Kinship, gender, race, and ethnicity also make up some of the most important parts of our social identities: how we see the world as well as how the world sees us as individuals (or as members of a group). What we see in discussing kinship, gender, race, and ethnicity is that it is not simply about defining the terms but also considering how these terms carry with them power and privilege. Furthermore, food becomes a framework for understanding these different systems of classification and evaluation, as well as providing evidence for how these ontologies impact everyday life. Anthropologist Audrey Richards pointed out that food has the greatest determination over the nature of our social groupings and the form of our activities (Richards 1932). Food and beverages can be coded with messages about who one is, where they're from, their gender, and other aspects of one's identity. As this chapter will elucidate, food can be used to bind ties or reinforce divisions. They can be used to create affiliation and belonging, or to



## Kinship and

# commensality

Humans are social beings. For many of us, our families serve as the first point of socialization into the world. Through our families, we learn how to act and function in our given societies. They are the ones who feed, clothe, shelter, and hopefully nurture us into the people we are today.

A *family* is a group of people who are related in some way, either by ancestry or "blood" (*consanguine*), or marriage *(affine).* It can include parents, stepparents, children, stepchildren, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, spouses, siblings-in-law, parents in-law, and children-in-law. Living among *nuclear family,* composed of parents and their children (and possibly stepparents and stepchildren), is the likely arrangement you were born into and grew up in.

But why would humans bother to care for their young, to transmit their knowledge and values to them? Anthropologists examine how these relationships are formed and why they persist. They recognize that these relationships are essential to human survival, as they establish networks of support and aid for access to food, shelter, clothing, and other necessities. Moreover, these relationships also reflect social ideas and values.

*Kinship,* how family members define their affiliation w ith one another, is socially constructed. That is to say, it is based on learning, and varies from culture to culture. Systems of kinship reflect cultural values. For instance, if you grew up in the Western world, you likely lived among your nuclear family. In contrast, grandparents, parents, and children often share a home as an extended family in many other parts of the world. Fictive kin also play a role in families. Individuals who claim no consanguinal (blood) or affinal (marriage) ties yet are important to the family are called *fictive kin.* You may know them as the family friend who is like an uncle or aunt, or someone close to you that you consider a brother or sister. Though not all kin live together, its members may gather from time to time.

Holidays and celebrations are occasions for reuniting kin members, and food is often involved in festivities.Therefore, an important part of kinship bonding is *commensality,* the act of eating and sharing food together. Commensality can strengthen social bonds and create unity.

## 3.1 Activity: Cooking stone soup

Ofone *Soup* is an old folktale that begins with the story of several

travelers.  O th is group of travelers enters a village with nothing more



on their back and an empty cooking pot. The curious villagers gather to greet the visitors, who promise to share tales of their adventures in exchange for food. The villagers are unwilling to share their food. The travelers shrug off the villagers' indifference and say they will make stone soup instead, which is made by taking a stone, placing it in the pot, filling it with water, and cooking it over a fire. The travelers proclaim they would be happy to share their soup with any villagers, but that it would taste better with some additional garnishes and vegetables. The curious villagers begin to contribute different items: a bit of seasoning, a few vegetables, each adding something to the communal pot. Finally, the stone is removed from the

pot and a delightful soup is shared by the travelers and villagers—an act of *commensality.*

## *Equipment*

Heavy saucepan or soup pot
Cutting board
Knife
Wooden spoon or silicone spatula
Stone or large rock (cleaned free of debris)

## *Directions*

1. Gather a variety of ingredients. Get creative with the theme of your stone soup. Stone soup can be made with vegetable peelings and food trim, leftovers, and ugly vegetables.
2. Place the stone or rock in a heavy pot. Add ingredients and fill the pot with water. Cook until the soup reaches your desired taste and consistency.

## *Instructor's note*

Stone soup can only be made through the efforts and contributions of a group. This can be assigned as a homework exercise by encouraging students to get their "contributions" from roommates, friends, relatives, neighbors, and so on.

It is probably easier to stick to a meatless version of stone soup for sanitary and cultural reasons. Meat scraps are more difficult to deal with (and carry a higher risk of food-borne illness). Some religions have prohibitions against certain types of meat (e.g., pork is especially problematic).

If done in a classroom setting without kitchen access, consider making stone soup over a hotplate, slow cooker, or an InstaPot. Start the soup at beginning of class and end class by sending everyone off with a serving of stone soup.

*Discussion questions*

1. The story of stone soup is often used to illustrate the concept of commensality. Explain why.
2. What ingredients does your stone soup feature? Where did these ingredients come from? What stories do the ingredients tell?
3. Who helped fill the pot? Who ended up dining from the communal pot? What might this suggest about your social networks and who shares food?

Family commensality has been idealized in popular culture. Consider the classic Norman Rockwell (1943) painting, *Freedom from Want.* In this painting, extended kin gather together at a holiday table. Fine china and a crisp white tablecloth adorn the table, around which happy faces await in anticipation. Standing at the head of the table is the matriarch holding a perfect golden brown roast turkey. Behind her is the patriarch, his hands hovering over a pair of carving utensils, ready to cut and provision meat to his eager kin.

The popularity of this painting suggests it serves as an ideal of kinship and commensality. Television families like those on the sitcom *Modem Family* and the long-running animated comedy *The Simpsons* have parodied this scene. Artists have recreated countless renditions of this painting with Disney characters, comic book superheroes, and celebrities. But do your family celebrations resemble this painting? Does your family look like the one portrayed? Or is this only a romanticized vision? The pervasiveness of this scene speaks to the idealization of family commensality in broader culture. Family meals have been put on a pedestal and championed as the proverbial glue that holds a family together. Eating a cooked meal at home suggests intimacy. In Western societies, family dinners have been celebrated as an important event for family cohesion (DeVault 1991; Ochs, Pontecorvo, and Fasulo 1996; Grieshaber 1997; Kendall 2008), for they suggest the presence of a "proper family" (Douglas 1972). A quick search on Amazon's US site for the phrase "family dinner" returns over 2,000 hits, with book titles like *The Family Dinner: Great Ways to Connect with Your Kids, One Meal at a Time* (David and Uhrenholdt 2010); *Dinner: A Love Story: It all begins at the Family Table* (Rosenstrach 2012); *Dinner: The Playbook: A 30-Day Plan for Mastering the Art of the Family Meal* (Rosenstrach 2014)—titles that play into the notion that home-cooked meals eaten in a domestic setting

are important.

Everyday wisdom suggests that home-cooked meals eaten together would promote positive socialization and commensality, with adults helping socialize children as they transition to adulthood and adult discussion. Food advocates like Michael Pollan (2008) heavily champion family dining, focusing on its importance



to the nuclear family. He writes, "The shared meal elevates eating from a mechanical process of fueling the body to a ritual of family and community, from the mere animal biology to an act of culture" (2008: 189). For Pollan,

commensality is especially important for families. He argues that eating dinner together every night is the best way for children to learn how to interact with the wider world. Indeed, there is evidence to support claims that family dinners are useful for socialization (Ochs and Shohet 2006; Sterponi 2009; Blum-Kulka 2012), may promote better dietary habits and health (Gillman et al. 2000; Neumark Sztainer et al. 2004; Taveras et al. 2005; Hammons and Fiese 2011), and help keep children from adopting high-risk behaviors (Fulkerson et al. 2006).

Many social commentators and academics have lamented the decline of family meals, tracing the source of contemporary social ills back to this activity. It is not simply the decline of the meal that is being mourned, but what it symbolizes and suggests— certain moralities and beliefs about our societies and ourselves. Eating together is suggestive of "purity" and "order"—an intact family that is harmonious (c.f. Douglas 1972).

For all of our romanticization of and interest in family meals, it is important to note that eating together is far more complicated than it sounds. It has become a source of stress in different ways. For those families already eating meals together, but perhaps on-the-go, there is the issue of time. Researchers contend that it is not simply the act of eating together that is meaningful, but that families need to spend at least a specific amount of time together for those bonds to make an impact. The amount, of course, varies depending on the research. Another consideration is that census data suggests that the nightly family meal is simply unachievable for some. To put it in context, living alone has become more widespread, with approximately thirty-two million one-person households in America. Single-parent households account for 9 percent of families in the United States. Gathering around the dinner table as a nuclear family headed by tw o heterosexual parents and their children is not possible (or perhaps even desirable) for a significant number of Americans. It reflects an aspirational fantasy rather than the reality of everyday life and the constraints of managing different schedules (c.f. Charles and Kerr 1988).

It is important to remember that "fam ily" is a falsely monolithic concept (DeVault 1991: 15) and w ith it we assume certain moral overtones about what a family *should* be rather than what families are. For instance, this aspirational fantasy overlooks social changes to what it means to be a family, including families headed by tw o same-sex parents. Furthermore, there is an assumption that families are harmonious, when research shows that families may be sources of dysfunctionality. Eating together may be undesirable, as the dinner table may be a place of tension and conflict rather than respite and bonding. It is important to remember that family meals may involve eating food you dislike w ith relatives you don't particularly care for (Bove, Sobal, and

Rauschenbach 2003; Bove and Sobal 2006).



Scholars remind us that there has been anxiety about the so-called decline of family meals for quite some time. Sociologist Anne M urcott questions this decline, making a point to separate the perceived threat from something that is felt to be lacking (Murcott 1997: 37). Additionally, Jackson et al. reminds us the myths of the family meal have persisted for decades, if not centuries (Jackson, Olive, and Smith 2009). To illustrate, Britons in Edwardian England before World War I were already worried about the decline of the family meal and what it meant for changing social mores. These worries persist in contemporary headlines today.1 It appears that our present concern about the decline of family meals is not a new panic, but an old one that is ongoing.

Furthermore, there is an assumption that everything eaten at the family dinner table will be home-cooked, perhaps lovingly made from scratch by a family member. Yet as social norms, work patterns, and product availability have changed, the boundaries of what constitutes a family meal have been expanded. Eating together may involve incorporating convenience or even fast food products. Swedish families often choose to dine at McDonald's, as this fast food establishment serves as an ersatz home and, therefore, meals served there constitute "proper" family meals. For parents of young children, this is one of the easiest ways to maintain the ideal of family dining, and has expanded the boundaries of what "family" and "hom e" mean in modern Swedish life (Brembeck 2005).

Those whose eating practices differ from the rest of their family may find that they are ostracized at the dinner table. Folklorist LuAnn K. Roth observes that vegetarians are initially perceived by their families to b e " unpatriotic, un-American, and even downright un-family like" for rejecting meat (Roth 2005: 188). And, of course, we assume that families like one another or that family dinners always go smoothly. There is an assumption that everyone will simply eat what is at the dinner table, an imagined commensality that is often perpetuated in popular culture. Dinner tables can actually be intense sites of conflict. Family dinners are subject to negotiation, as parents may have to cajole, beg, probe, praise, and bargain with their children to get them to eat (Ochs and Shohet 2006). Generational conflicts also come to a head at the table, where different sets of values and ideologies can clash, leading to a "contested table." Simone Cinnotto's work on Italian Americans notes that younger Italian Americans and their immigrant parents clashed over values and beliefs, but also through food. He points out that younger Italian Americans in East Harlem, New

York, in the early twentieth century were likely to dismiss their parents' food habits as "embarrassing expressions of an inferior culture," and "immigrant foodways were symptoms of ignorance, backwardness, and poverty" (Cinotto 2013: 29).

It is important to remember that the act of eating together, participating in family commensality is not necessarily just about furthering social connections, promoting positive eating habits, or encouraging positive social behaviors.



For some, eating together is about survival, first and foremost. As mentioned previously, it is important to remember that family can be a falsely monolithic concept (DeVault 1991:15), which fails to take into account the diversity of family and household arrangements today. "Family," as implied in the romanticized and idealized interpretation of the term, discussion of family meals, implies a nuclear family headed by tw o heterosexual parents. This Standard North American Family (SNAF) shapes people's ideal views of family life and has formed the dominant narrative of what we

consider family life to be (Smith 1993). It has also created anxiety among those who do not confirm to this model and becomes a yardstick for measuring their own families (Hertz 2006; Nelson 2006). Instead, other scholars contend that it is important to remember that a " 'family' is not a naturally occurring collection of individuals; its reality is constructed from day to day through activities like eating together" (DeVault 1991:39).

Family may in fact span several generations and even include fictive kin. In some cultures, a multigenerational family is the preferred form residence and support. Among some households it may be a way of bringing closeness between different generations of kin. But among others, different generations and types of kin, fictive and real, living together may form a coping mechanism. Poorer families are more likely to live together as a coping strategy. Multigenerational households in America are more likely to be in poverty. Forming a multigenerational family serves as a coping mechanism. It can offer a safety net for people to live and eat together, as it creates a network of social and financial resources by pooling them together. Among the urban poor, fictive kin also play an important role in family survival (c.f. Stack 1975). Sharing resources like food among a broader network of fictive kin is a noted coping strategy. Socioeconomic realities have real implications for kinship and commensality.

Eating together also creates family ties among LGBTQ2 families, which often do not follow the SNAF model. Scholars who analyze "nontraditional" family structures contend that food help create family. Among lesbian and gay families, Christopher Carrington contends that it is the shared feeding work that denotes family rather than kinship structures. That is to say, "the work of preparing and sharing meals creates fam ily" rather than kinship ties alone (Carrington 2008).

Ultimately, for all the uproar about the loss of family meals, researchers have found that the family meal has not disappeared, but perhaps has been reconceived. In Britain, eating out in restaurants has increased, but home cooked meals are still integral to daily eating habits. Alan Warde and Martens (Warde and Martens 2000: 107-8) found that 82 percent of those surveyed report cooking a main family meal every day. While dining out, the same respondents (72 percent) reported that they were usually doing so with family members. W hat w e can establish is that family and kinship are important defining aspects of identity, and food, particularly the act of dining together as a family, stands in for notions of morality, family, and kinship.



## 3.2 Activity: Kinship and commensality

Researchers use kinship charts to understand social relations between family members. Kinship charts are similar to family trees in that they capture lineage and descent. However, there are specific symbols and signs to denote different types of relationships (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2). The purpose of this exercise is to reflect on who you consider kin, and what role these kin members had in feeding and nurturing you—and, also, to consider your role in feeding and nurturing your kin members.

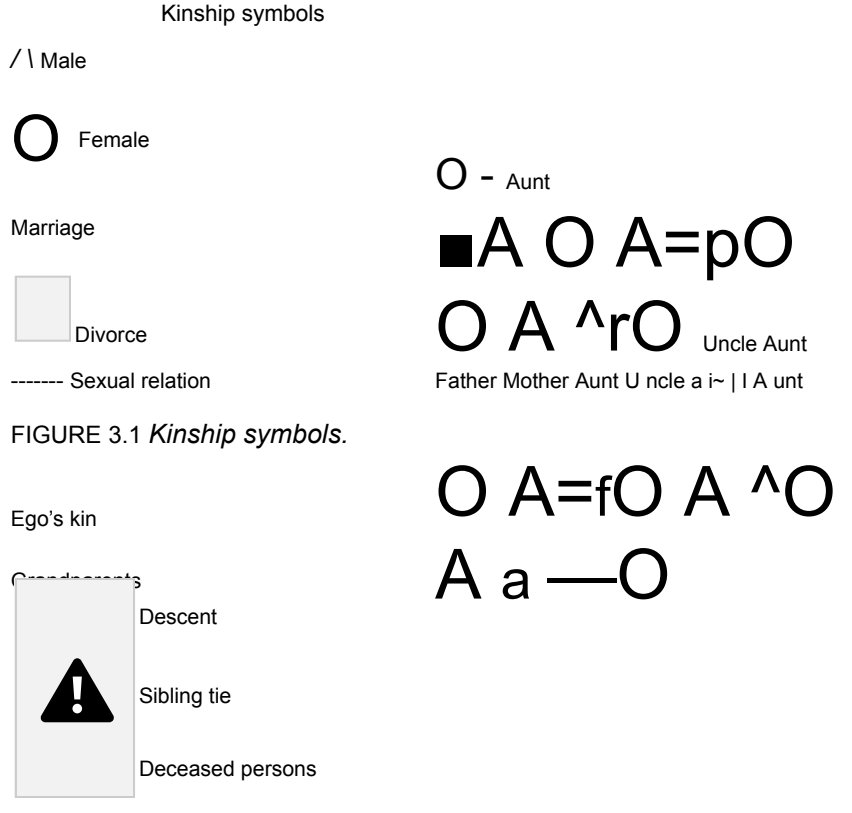


FIGURE 3.1 *Kinship symbols.*

*(y /^ )* G randparents
Cousin Sister Ego W ife B rother C ousin

A O A O

Nephew Niece Son Daughter



*Materials*

Paper
Colored pens, pencils, markers, or crayons
Ruler

*Directions*

1. Start by drawing yourself, the ego, on the kinship chart. Color "your" symbol. From there, add in the rest of your kin by following the symbols listed above. Make sure each generation of kin is aligned at the same level. Draw straight lines to denote relationships between individuals. A sample chart is given here for reference.
2. Once your chart is complete, grab two different

colored pens. Don't pick any colors that have already been used.

3. Pick a color and shade everyone who fed you. It is up to you to interpret what "feeding" means. This can range from heating up leftovers in a microwave to cooking you an elaborate holiday feast.
4. Pick another color and mark everyone who you fed. It is up to you to interpret what "feeding" means.

*Discussion questions*

1. Who do you consider family? How far are you able to trace your kin? 2. Who were the people responsible for feeding you? How do you define feeding?
3. Who did you feed? How do you define feeding?
4. Are there any overlaps between the two?
5. What types of feeding did each person do? Were they ordinary events (e.g., breakfast) or special occasions (e.g., Christmas, birthdays)? 6. What impact does generation have on feeding and eating roles? 7. What role, if any, did fictive kin have in feeding you?

*Further resources*

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# Sex and gender

Next, we move on to consider gender. Sex and gender are also important aspects of identity. *Gender* is differentiated from biological *sex.* Sex is often used to refer to both biologic sex (male, female, or intersex), as well as sexuality. Nowadays, it is more common to hear the term gender used to refer to male, female, or other gender identities.

Biological sex refers to the chromosomal makeup of a person. Under most circumstances, one either possesses tw o X chromosomes, making them female, or one X and Y chromosome, making them male. In some circumstances (about 1.7 percent of all human births), one m ight possess XXY chromosomes and will be an intersex person.

Gender differs in that it is the cultural and historically invented categories and concepts assigned to people based on their physical makeup. Those who are born biologically female (XX) are expected to act in socially defined "feminine" ways, while those born biologically male (XY) are expected to act "masculine." While gender has a biological aspect, what is expected of you based on those biological aspects is the social idea of gender. There are no "natural" gender roles, but rather they are socially constructed. In other words, gender is a "performance" (Butler 1990; Moore 1994). "Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (West and Zimmerman 1987: 132). Thus, what is considered "fem inine" or "masculine" varies considerably from place to place, through different time periods, and as social norms evolve. What is constant is that there is pressure in all societies to conform to expected gender roles and identities, particularly if a society has especially rigid gender norms.

These gendered expectations appear to have been part of human social organization since our earliest times. Researchers studying our early human past explain that gender expectations even impacted our early societies. Even among early primates, they suggest, sex and gender shaped the roles people took on in sustaining everyday life. The *sexual division o f labor* was present in these early societies, as men and women took on different roles and contributions (Washburn and Lancaster 1968; Gurven et al. 2009; Zeanah 2004). How labor is divided affects not only household subsistence but also society as a whole. During our earliest existence, humans acquired food through hunting and gathering (what is also termed foraging). Males were expected to hunt for food, while females collected raw foods, cooked, and also took care of their offspring.

The sexual division of labor might have arisen out of necessity. But it is distinct from biological determinism, which it is often confused w ith sexual

division of labor. *Biological determinism,* a theory that biological differences between males and females lead to fundamentally different capacities, preferences, and gendered behaviors, shape popular discussions about gender and perpetuate the notion that gender roles are rooted in biology as opposed to cultural expectations. Biological determinism has helped perpetuate the notion that men and women are fundamentally different and suited only toward specific tasks, when archeological and historical records suggest that what each society conceives of as appropriate tasks for each gender has been subjected to change. Even among hunting and gathering societies, it was not always the case that only men

hunted. Yet this pattern that men participated in hunting (and eventually, "public" work outside the home), while women took on gathering, cooking, and childcare or domestic activities, continues to shape discourse in many societies today.

Food production, food acquisition, meal preparation, and the practices of food and eating are realms where gendered ideas rise up and are contested. Frances Short reminds us that "power relations and gender roles are established, acknowledged, and represented at the dining and kitchen table" (Short 2006: 3). The w ork of anthropologists George Murdock and Catarina Provost (1973) helps illustrate the extent to which gender impacts the way we eat. Their systematic study of household food provisioning in 185 cultures concluded that, overall, food work is primarily a female activity. Moreover, women were the primary cooks in 97.8 societies. Murdock and Provost found there were only four societies in which cooking was spread equally between males and females or was considered a predominantly male activity. Thus, "feeding others is women's work. Women collect, prepare, and serve our daily bread. So doing, they care for us. The acts of feeding and caring, as connected to each other as earth to water, maintain and sustain the family" (Stimpson in DeVault 1991: viii).

One pattern we see clearly in the scholarship on food in the West is that the majority of cooking and feeding responsibilities are women's responsibilities. Even when employed outside of the home, women do the vast majority of household chores. Returning to the kinship structure discussed in the previous section, w ithin a family or kinship structure, you may notice that there are certain members that take on more of the "feeding" or "caregiving" role. Among many American families, the heavier burden of buying food, cooking it, and cleaning up often falls to the female members of the family. In households headed by a heterosexual couple, the majority of domestic tasks, including "feeding," falls on the shoulders of the head female member. This is interesting given the rise of women's economic roles outside of the home. Although increasing numbers of men are becoming stay-at-home dads, opting to take on a dom estic role, while more women work, their numbers remain in the minority. More significantly, many husbands and wives perceive this to

be a "fair" arrangement—that women continue to take on a "second shift" of domestic work on top of their work outside of the home (Gillman et al. 2000). In lesbian and gay families, feeding tasks fall to the less economically dominant partner (Carrington 2008).

Thus, the term "work" seems appropriate to describe the activities necessary to feed and maintain a household. Sociologist Marjorie DeVault describes it as "feeding work," and it can be just that: w ork and drudgery (DeVault 1991: 38, 55). Moreover, this work is largely "invisible" (Matthews 1987). That is to say, this type of work is discounted as trivial even by the women who participate in it, and is largely overlooked despite its enormous importance to everyday life and the maintenance of a family. Furthermore, cooking involves more than simply getting food to a table. It is "servicing other family members and expending large amounts of energy to ensure that their likes and dislikes were satisfied when preparing those m eals" (Endrijonas 2001:169).

But it is also important to remember that cooking can also be a form of pleasure and pride among women. It is undeniable that cooking demands incredible amounts of temporal, economic, physical, and emotional labor. Social mores in the early twentieth century also dictated that women embrace their homemaking abilities as part of their feminine responsibilities (see Shapiro 2009).

Though the lion's share of feeding work has been women's work, this is not to say that men do not cook or participate in food preparation. Quite the contrary. Men *do* participate in cooking and food work, but often in different ways and to different degrees. Allen and Sachs are careful to point out that women derived power by serving as the gatekeeper of the household's food provisions (Allen and Sachs 2012), to which McIntosh and Zey add that though women are the gatekeepers, men "control their enactment" (McIntosh and Zey 1998: 126). Furthermore, Sobal contends "family meals are masculine means" as "men's food preferences dominate family food choices" (2005:142).

Richard Wrangham reminds us that there is an important division in cooking: the type of cooking (2009: 148-55). That is to say, men's cooking tends to be public and women's cooking tends to be private and domestic. Women's cooking is done for the family and, as described above, is part of the everyday "drudgery" of running a household economy. This type of cooking tends to be "invisible" and in a private sphere, the home. By contrast, male cooking is done for the community and is public. DeVault attributes to the Industrial Revolution the rise of separate spheres in the West, which placed emphasis on men's work as earning wage outside the home and women's work as "transforming wages into

goods and services needed to maintaining the household" (1991:15).



This division in cooking and the recognition of cooking as labor may be attributed to broader cultural systems and views. Anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo contends that "w hat is perhaps most striking and surprising is the fact that male, as opposed to female, activities are always recognized as predominantly important, and cultural systems give authority and value to the roles and activities of men" (1974: 19). While her comments are not universally true, they are noteworthy because they do comment upon a wide range of societies and their gender divisions. In particular, Rosaldo noted that in many societies, there are clear divisions between the "domestic" or "private" sphere and the "public" one. She suggested that women are typically relegated to private or domestic spaces like the household, in part because of essentialist views about their gender and women's "nurturing" natures. While w om en are relegated to private or domestic spaces, they are also kept away from public spaces, which are left under the purview of men. These public spaces are also more economically and politically important. Indeed, professional cooking— the public, visible, wage-earning type of cooking— is often considered a masculine domain. *Time Magazine's* November 18,2013, cover drew backlash from many readers around the globe. Splashed across the cover was "The Gods of Food: Meet the People Who Influence What (and How) You Eat." The three cover figures were American chef David Chang (best known for his Momofuku empire), Brazilian chef Alex Atala (of D. 0. M. Restaurant), and Danish chef Rene Redzepi (of Noma Restaurant). The magazine's list of "13 Gods of Food" included no female chefs, although it did name four w om en leaders in the global food world.

In my own ethnographic w ork in Cantonese cooking schools in the city of Guangzhou, China, I found that women were not discouraged necessarily from becoming professional cooks. But they were ghettoized into specific types of professional cooking. W omen were encouraged to take up dim sum (Cantonese snacks and pastries) cookery because instructors believed their small hands, delicate fingers, and artistic nature would make them more naturally inclined toward this type of work. Women were also encouraged to take up W estern cookery because the *batterie de cuisine* of pots and pans were lighter and seen as m ore refined and "civilized" than the heavy carbon steel woks used in Cantonese cooking. Similar tropes have also persisted in the West about wom en's participation in professional cookery—that women

are better suited to pastry w ork rather than savory cooking because of their small physical features and artistic sensibilities. However, trends are changing as women are increasingly enrolling in culinary colleges, often at a higher rate than men.3

Though food scholarship has tended to focus more on women's experiences and food, increasingly, scholars are turning their attention to the subject of masculinity and food (Beardsworth 2001; Deutsch 2005; Holden 2005; Julier and



Lindenfeld 2005; Parasecoli 2005). Notably, food can be a site of anxiety and display of masculinity. As described above, men's participation in cooking tends to be more public. To this I add that men's involvement in feeding is also more ceremonial. When I was a college undergraduate, I studied abroad in Geneva, Switzerland, for a semester. My French instructor took on the role of explaining cultural rules in addition to language rules in her course. One of her steadfast rules was that *croissants* (a type of French pastry) were only consumed on Sundays and that it was the father's job to go out and buy them from the local *boulangerie* (bakery). She explained many other rules, but this one stuck with me—that the act of buying pastries (what some might gender as a "feminine" act given that food shopping and sweets are often gendered as feminine activities) was strictly a male activity in France.

This rule is reminiscent of some of the cultural rules in America about the father's role in food. The father or the dad is the one who "brings home the bacon." He is also the "breadwinner." Popular media representations also suggest that dad's food work involves mixing drinks and cocktails or barbecuing for a crowd. Dad might also roll up his sleeves for specific meals or a "festal signature dish," such as making breakfast in bed for his wife and mother of his children on her birthday, Mother's Day, or some other special occasion and making breakfast for his family on Sundays (Adler 1981). And it is almost always the father in a heterosexual family who rolls up his sleeves to grill or barbecue, perhaps wearing a "kiss the cook" as he flips burgers for a hungry crowd. What scholars of masculinity note is that men do not take on these roles easily. Jonathan Deutsch's work on firemen in the United States reveals how men react when they take on stereotypically feminine tasks. He surveyed this group of men who are domestic cooks, "who feel a need to and choose to cook" (Deutsch 2005:91). His informants, all firemen at Engine 3000, are involved in feeding the firehouse "family." When cooking and doing feeding work, Deutsch points out they are "performing"—acting in ways that reinforce their identities as men. From using profanity to "masculinize" the "women's work," to speaking in falsetto in a sexualized, female-like voice, and using food and other kitchen items to "dress" in drag, their choice in language, acts, and humor are used to maintain their masculinity while doing food work.

## 3.3 Food for thought: ManCan

Food companies have used gender-based anxieties to sell food. Consider the product ManCan (see http://www.mancanwine.com). Wine is often heavily coded as a feminine beverage (Velikova, Dodd, and Wilcox 2013). To alleviate some of the anxieties around drinking wine, the company ManCan