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A Cross Cultural Gendered Analysis of France's and the United States Dietary Guidelines

A. Niki Yerkes

Abstract: New information about how Americans should eat comes from health food suppliers, vitamin suppliers, government agencies, fitness experts, doctors, and also the government in the form of dietary guidelines. In this paper I argue that the U.S dietary guidelines are not the product of objective, neutral scientific inquiry, but rather, are a product of a long legacy of culturally constructed moral values with roots in the "Cult of Domesticity." This legacy has been documented in the Victorian era and has continued into the current day. I discuss the history of national dietary guidelines of then compare and contrast current U.S and French guidelines to show the culturally constructed gender ideas manifest in food guidelines. I note also the food politics that exist within the guidelines in the United States which favor dairy, corn, and meat. From my analysis it can be discerned that the current U.S food guidelines are constructed upon morals, gender ideology, and politics and are not necessarily what is healthiest for the population as a whole. This is not in comparable with other countries, like France, where a differing notion of gender and food practices prevails.

Introduction

Every day Americans are met with new directives regarding how one should or should not be eating. These directives come from health food suppliers, vitamin suppliers, government agencies, fitness experts and doctors. The concern about nutrition stems from continued problems with vitamin deficiencies, disease, and overall obesity-related health problems. According to the USDA (2013), "[the current dietary guidelines] provide authoritative advice about consuming fewer calories, making informed food choices, and being physically active to attain and maintain a healthy weight, reduce risk of chronic disease, and promote overall health." In this paper I argue that the U.S. government's dietary guidelines and goals are a legacy of culturally constructed moral values generally referred to as the "Cult of Domesticity," rather than being a product of objective, neutral, scientific inquiry. Specifically the U.S guidelines have culturally specific gendered aspects that originated in the Victorian Era and persist today. While nineteenth-century industrialization was a widespread phenomenon, residents of the United States conceptualized this transformation of the work and domestic worlds in highly gendered terms.

I will illustrate the cultural and gendered biases by comparing the United State's current dietary goals and guidelines to those of France, whose history of notion about gender is distinct from the US. Additionally, I will show the gendered aspects of the Victorian era and how they tied into gender ideals seen in the process of industrialization. The current guidelines also have a measure of food politics embedded in which are also discussed. If adult human dietary needs are scientifically shown to be similar the world over, one would not expect to see national differences in dietary guidelines and goals. First, I will begin with a review of anthropological literature on the topic of food and gender.

The Anthropology of Food

Anthropological research areas involve the relationships of human populations or social groups and their environment, the symbolic construction of cultures, and social relationships and social structures of societies (Messer 1984). There have been many reviews of the food aspect of culture, including but not limited to, diet as a part of the study of health the environment, to the intellectual background and methodologies of nutritional anthropology. All of these reviews according to Messer (1984), "have provided the framework for food analyzing, how food systems operate and how they change, particularly under the impacts of new food production and food processing technology, and in many instances, a growing delocalization of food supply and consumption patterns." The cross-cultural aspects of food and diet have been extensively researched through a large sub-field of anthropology called the Anthropology of Food or Foodways and its subsection Nutritional Anthropology. Foodways is concerned with the relationships of food, culture, and society while Nutritional Anthropology focuses more closely on the study of nutrients and nutritional status (Levinson and Ember 1996:3).

Foodways is ever changing due to, agribusiness, supermarket chains, national and international regulatory agencies, media, consumers, and the large numbers of people who grow, process, prepare and/eat their own or others food. Therefore, it is near impossible to define but includes; food in relation to physical and supernatural worlds, socio-cultural issues, food politics, the movement of food (Chung 2009), (Messer 1984) the ecological and market availability of food, sociocultural classifications of foods as "edible" or "inedible" as well as rankings of "preferred" or "less preferred" and the rules for distribution, nutritional and medical consequences of particular cultural consumption patterns, including patterns of food sharing, plus food systems and food policy studies (Levinson and Ember 1996).

Within the narrower field of Nutritional Anthropology, studies are carried out on food intake and patterns of food use, nutritional implications of the patterns, human growth patterns are also factored in to determine if there is physiological adaptation or genetic aspects within the ecology or social history of certain populations. Research on these significant practices starts with the question, "What is the impact of X on nutrition?" (Levinson and Ember: 1996) There are also questions within Nutritional Anthropology that come up with regards to belief structures and nutrition that focus on the link between idea systems and nutrient intake. The research question begins with, "What is the relationship of X to Y? Examples of inquiries in this area include whether males and females should eat differently.

Food can be a significant marker in a culture's identity with relation to social relations, family, kinship, class, consumption, gender ideology, and cultural symbolism.

Gender Roles

It is not clear on why human males and females differ beyond reproduction. There are consistent physical, behavioral, and personality differences that can be seen cross-culturally. This can generally be attributed to the male and female ideas beginning from cultural experiences and expectations not necessarily biology. Anthropologists have been making inferences as to the cause of cultural constructions of gender for many decades (Levinson and Ember 1996).

There are consistent patterns of divisions of labor by gender that have been explained by differences in physical capacity (Murdock and Provost 1973), a woman's compatibility with childcare (Brown 1970), an economy of effort hypothesis (White et al 1977), and expendability (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988). All of these are plausible but the assignments based on gender are made by assumed differences not necessarily scientific reasoning (Levinson and Ember 1996).

Females are generally the principle caregivers, males rarely cross-culturally care for infants. Infants are usually nursed therefore the economy of effort hypothesis is efficient. Additionally, it would be safer to nurse at or near the home which may explain why women did the housework, which carries over into today's gender ideals. Young children after weaning are usually taken over by other relatives, like siblings, so that the woman can more efficiently perform other household duties (Levinson and Ember 1996).

Food, Culture, and Gender

Eating is central to social relationships because at meal friendships are created and bonds are strengthened amongst family members thru the sharing of food, tastes, values, and pieces of ourselves. The experience is usually a positive one but when there is negativity social relationships and eating can be dysfunctional. Food is also an economic activity by being a product and mirror of organization of society in both a broad and intimate way. An examination of Foodways reveals notions of sex and gender and power relations. Every group is unique in the way Foodways shapes its community, personality and family.

Foodways contributes to the understanding of personhood across cultures and historical periods. Loose structure and organization across the population, through variations or themes are constant. People recognize their distinctiveness through food because their food systems are usually related to the local environment of the population (Counihan 1999). Food has many meanings within a culture that include, food and power and food, sex, and gender (Counihan 1999) which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Food has a long standing tradition of being power in the most, "basic, tangible, and inescapable form," because the is, "no more absolute powerlessness than hunger" (Arnold 1988, Lappé and Collins 1986). Class, caste, race, and gender hierarchies have been historically maintained through control and access over food and the dominant culture's ability to impose said rules on others. A person's place in a social system is determined by what, how much, and with whom that person eats. In stratified societies hunger strikes the disadvantaged like women, people of color, the mentally ill, the handicapped, and the elderly. The relief goes to the groups with the most power first and the poor get poorer because they sell their resources to the rich in order to get food (Counihan 1999).

In many cultures eating is equivalent to a sexual and gendered experience throughout life. Eating with another person implies intimacy and kinship just as intercourse does. The consequences of eating or being sexual with someone who does not meet the requirements or is untrustworthy can be extremely negative. These ideas result in rules of who a person can and can not eat or have sexual relations with. When food is scarce some cultures exchange it for sexual liaisons. Additionally, maleness and

femaleness in all cultures are associated with specific foods and rules often exist to control the consumption of those foods (Counihan 1999).

Patriarchal power in Western society has been embodied in meat consumption. Women have been equated to nature and thus animals and must be subordinate. Power relations amongst the genders mirror food. Men are working and therefore get to decide and judge the food purchased and prepared by women (Adams 1990, Charles and Kerr 1988, Devault 1991). Food is often a medium of exchange and the responsibility of the women to purchase and prepare food. However, responsibility does not equal control.

A survey of American college students revealed there are still gendered notions of food today. Female gendered food items are considered "light" foods like salad, chicken, and yogurt. Male gendered food items are considered "heavy" foods like beef, beer, and potatoes (Adams 1990). These ideas manifest as power and lead to males being seen as powerful and women being seen as weak. In America, gendered ideas of food lead to females fearing fat because of the high standards they are held to and it sometimes results in issues like poor self-esteem, lack of confidence, and restrictive eating, like Anorexia. Anorexics starve themselves in order to achieve physical and spiritual perfection, similarly to the females of the Victorian Era.

Victorian Dietary Ideals

One of the most significant examples of the conception of sex and gender is found in the Victorian era. Victorian dietary ideals stemmed from much broader cultural ideal of gender and morality. This era was captivated by demur females who were in control of their sexuality and appetite. Sexual development was seen as being linked to appetite and in order to maintain an ideal image women were to carefully control what they ate. Stimulating foods were seen as a sexual catalyst and thus should be kept from maturing females. Some examples of these foods include meat, chocolate, and coffee among many others. The foods in which women were reserved to were "delicate foods." These foods included, fruit and jelly, a snip of roll, and wrens leg on toast (Counihan 2008).

As expected there were consequences from eating so little that range from gastric discomfort to difficulty swallowing. These symptoms were largely associated with chlorosis and dyspepsia. The women diagnosed were usually emaciated, very pale, and sunken eyes, and sometimes had a greenish tint to their skin. This image of females became the ideal in respect to beauty. The restrictive appetites and clothing (corsets) just furthered the extreme view of femininity. Women were supposed to be seen and not heard, purely decorative. This body type exemplified basic moral character, intelligence, sensitivity, and high social status. Women who could afford to remove themselves from the food process (eating and preparation) were privileged individuals making food restriction a class marker (Counihan 2008).

Women who could not keep their appetites in check with respect to stimulating foods like meat were seen as socially aggressive and assuming the male role. Males did not have to adhere to the dietary ideal as their digestive systems were considered "quartz crushing machines," and needed coarse and solid foods." They needed coarse foods to sustain themselves (Counihan 2008).

History of National Guidelines

The very first dietary goals came from Sweden in 1968 and were transferred to English four months later. The practical recommendations included a calorie reduction, total fat reduction, saturated fat reduction and polyunsaturated fat increase, sugar reduction, and an increase in vegetables, fruit, potatoes, skimmed milk, fish, lean meat, and cereal products (Truswell 1987). These recommendations according to Wretling (1967) were to combat the fact that mechanization had reduced physical labor. Empty calories needed to be replaced because people were not meeting the recommended daily allowances (RDA's). However, this first addition of dietary goals was challenged by nutritionists because relationships were not proved and were politically motivated, consequently promising the public too much. It was also argued that diets should be individually prescribed by a doctor because it was unwise to tamper with everyone's diet. Finally, goals for obesity and water fluoridation were not addressed, pediatrics was neglected (Truswell 1987).

Recommended daily allowances are defined as (Truswell 1987: 1060), "levels of intake of essential nutrients considered in the judgement of the Committee on Dietary Allowances of the Food and Nutrition Board on the basis of available scientific knowledge, to be adequate to meet the known nutritional needs of practically all healthy persons." The first set of RDA's was brought forth by the League of Nations in 1937, the second set was the first edition of the US National Research Council's RDA's in 1943 (Truswell 1987). In 1936, the League of Nations stated RDA's could not be limited to the amount required to prevent disease because people needed guidelines for the optimum diet. As with the current recommendations unresolved questions were not addressed.

The same recommendations for adults could not be used for infants being breast fed or formula fed. Other problems included that the RDA's did not advise on fluoride, dietary fiber, and essential fatty acids. RDA's deal with energy requirements, 10% is supposed to be from protein but where were the other 90% attributed? Carbs, fats, alcohol? Additionally, there were many areas of bilingualism within the RDA's. For instance, in the US milligrams and Kcals/calories were used. In Europe, millimoles and Kcal/mega joules. There was a large need for a universal nutritional language.

According to Truswell (1987), there were still major problems into the 1980's. These problems were the goals and guidelines; needed to be seen as an objective review of the best available evidence, protocol was needed for structured updates, there was terminology confusion between RDAs and guidelines, the guidelines could not apply to the entire population, there needed to be some sort of ranking of order of importance, there needed to be more care in the use and meaning of the words (avoid, limit, reduce), guidelines should not be an excuse to judge individual foods, and there was a need to understand how the public is translating and applying the guidelines to their everyday lives.

The United States of America

Gender

In the 1950's white men dominated the workplace. Since then federal laws were put in place banning discrimination however, leadership positions are still predominantly white males. In the 1970's, women demanded equality in the workplace. Gaps in compensation, social norms and leave policies still exist that keep the inequalities ever present. The easiest place to see the problems in with unpaid work. Women are still

expected to be mothers and fulfill household duties, while men bring home the money. Women suffer with trying to juggle household work, the children and a job. Parental leave and childcare options are minimal barely helping a working mother in any respect.

Paid parental leave in the United States is only offered in California, New Jersey, Washington D.C, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and New York. The states do not offer equal maternal and paternal leave. Maternity leave occurs in California (6 weeks at 55% pay), New Jersey (6 weeks at 66% pay), Washington D.C (unspecified), Puerto Rico (8 weeks at 100% leave), Hawaii (unspecified at 58% pay), and New York (unspecified at 50% pay). Paternity leave only occurs in California (6 weeks at 55% pay) and New Jersey (6 weeks at 66% pay). Unpaid leave for both sexes is up to 12 weeks per the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (Fass 2009). Childcare can be provided by just about anyone and is rarely funded in anyway by the government.

Meals

Meals are broken up into breakfast, lunch and dinner. Breakfast is milk and cereal, bagels, or toast. Larger breakfasts consist of eggs, bacon, and hash browns. Lunch is spent at work or school and consists of sandwiches, soup, or salad. Dinner is the largest meal of the day and also when the whole family sits down together. The female is expected to take the responsibility of purchasing and preparing the food. Busy schedules makes it more and more difficult to make time to prepare a meal. Thus, mothers are opting for pre-prepared frozen dinners, pizzas, and restaurants. There is no doubt that this is contributing to the negative health impacts occurring in the United States (Gale 2009).

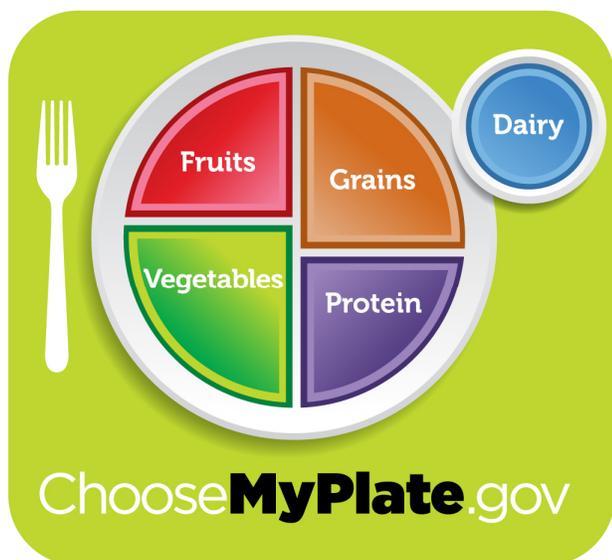
Current U.S Dietary Guidelines-My Plate

In the United States a large percentage of the population is overweight but undernourished. This occurs because most people are not involved in the food

production process causing people to not understand what they are eating and why. Instead of understanding food, people cut out fattening food or avoid certain foods entirely. Modern concerns in respect to diet and food is humans have largely ignored portions of protein, essential fatty acids, and vitamins. Hence, the need to for dietary guidelines and goals.

The current guidelines or “My Plate” is described by the USDA to be promoting a healthy diet that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free/low-fat milk; lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, and nuts. This diet should be low in saturated and trans fats, sodium, cholesterol, and added. Additionally, the My Plate feature is said to aid Americans in making smart food choices from a variety of food groups by finding a balance between food and physical

Figure 1: My Plate Graphic



Source: USDA 2013

activity, getting the most nutrition out of the calories being consumed; all while staying within daily caloric needs.

My plate itself (Figure 1) is a color-coded picture of a dinner plate designed to assist consumers in making responsible dietary choices. Each color marks a different food group, red for fruit, green for vegetables, orange for grains, purple for protein and blue for dairy. According to the illustration half the plate should be fruits and vegetables, half should be grains and protein, and it should be served with a serving of dairy (milk). The USDA breaks down the guidelines and each of the food groups. The advisements include building a healthy plate, cutting back on foods high in solid fats, added sugars, and salt, eating the right amount of calories for you, and being physically active in your way (USDA 2013).

Building a healthy plate means to ensure that the foods on the plate are foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean proteins. All of these foods are said to contain the nutrients needed for a healthy lifestyle without the consumption of too many calories. The vegetables should vary in color and types. The amount of vegetables recommended ranges from 1-3 cups depending on age and sex. Fruits varies from 1-2 cups (USDA 2013).

Table 1: Daily Amounts of Fruit and Vegetables

| | Age | Daily Recommendations (Fruit) | Daily Recommendations (Vegetables) |
|----------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Children | 2-3 years old | 1 cup | 1 cup |
| | 4-8 years old | 1- 1.5 cups | 1.5 cups |
| Girls | 9-13 years old | 1.5 cups | 2 cups |
| | 14-18 year old | 1.5 cups | 2.5 cups |
| Boys | 9-13 years old | 1 cup | 2.5 cups |
| | 14-18 years old | 2 cups | 3 cups |
| Women | 19-30 years old | 2 cups | 2.5 cups |
| | 31-50 years old | 1.5 cups | 2.5 cups |
| | 51+ years old | 1.5 cups | 2 cups |
| Men | 19-30 years old | 2 cups | 3 cups |
| | 31-50 years old | 2 cups | 3 cups |
| | 51+ years old | 2 cups | 2.5 cups |

Source: USDA 2011

* “These amounts are appropriate for individuals who get less than 30 minutes per day of moderate physical activity, beyond normal daily activities. Those who are more physically active may be able to consume more while staying within calorie needs (USDA 2011).”

Skim or 1% milk has the same amount of nutrients and calcium as whole and 2% but has less fat and calories. There is no recommendation as to how much dairy should be eaten. According to the USDA, if a dairy alternative is needed calcium fortified soy products are a good option (USDA 2013).

Table 2: Daily Dairy Recommendations

| | Age | Daily Recommendations |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Children | 2-3 years old | 2 cups |
| | 4-8 Years old | 2.5 cups |
| Girls | 9-13 years old | 3 cups |
| | 14-18 year old | 3 cups |
| Boys | 9-13 years old | 3 cups |
| | 14-18 years old | 3 cups |
| Women | 19-30 years old | 3 cups |
| | 31-50 years old | 3 cups |
| | 51+ years old | 3 cups |
| Men | 19-30 years old | 3 cups |
| | 31-50 years old | 3 cups |
| | 51+ years old | 3 cups |

Source: USDA 2011

The grain recommendation is 3-8 cups again depending on age and sex with at least half of grains should be 100% whole-grain. The ingredients on the back of products should be inspected as “wheat” products to ensure that 100% whole grain flour is used in them not enriched white flour. Lastly, protein choices should be lean and varied with seafood being included twice weekly. The portions vary from 2-6.5 ounces depending on age and sex. Beans are a natural non-meat source of fiber and protein for vegetarians (USDA 2013).

Table 3: Daily Recommendations for Grain and Protein (USDA 2011)

| | Age | Daily Recommendations (Whole Grains) | Daily Recommendations (Protein) |
|----------|-----------------|---|--|
| Children | 2-3 years old | 3 oz. equivalents | 2 oz. equivalents |
| | 4-8 Years old | 5 oz. equivalents | 4 oz. equivalents |
| Girls | 9-13 years old | 5 oz. equivalents | 5 oz. equivalents |
| | 14-18 year old | 6 oz. equivalents | 5 oz. equivalents |
| Boys | 9-13 years old | 6 oz. equivalents | 5 oz. equivalents |
| | 14-18 years old | 8 oz. equivalents | 6.5 oz. equivalents |
| Women | 19-30 years old | 6 oz. equivalents | 5.5 oz. equivalents |
| | 31-50 years old | 6 oz. equivalents | 5 oz. equivalents |
| | 51+ years old | 5 oz. equivalents | 5 oz. equivalents |
| Men | 19-30 years old | 8 oz. equivalents | 6.5 oz. equivalents |
| | 31-50 years old | 7 oz. equivalents | 6 oz. equivalents |
| | 51+ years old | 6 oz. equivalents | 5.5 oz. equivalents |

Source: USDA 2011

* “These amounts are appropriate for individuals who get less than 30 minutes per day of moderate physical activity, beyond normal daily activities. Those who are more physically active may be able to consume more while staying within calorie needs (USDA 2011).”

Many people eat foods with too much solid fats, added sugars, and salt (correlates to high blood pressure). All of these ingredients add calories to food that are unneeded. The USDA advises to drink water instead of sugary drinks, have fruit for dessert, and drink 100% fruit juice in lieu of fruit-flavored drinks. Additionally, to combat the amount of salt in a diet compare spices, herbs soups, bread, etc. and choose products with lower salt content. Finally, foods that make up major source of saturated fats like cakes, cookies, ice cream, pizza, etc. should not be everyday foods. Lean cuts of meat or poultry, fat-free/low-fat dairy and cooking oils not fats should be substituted for every day use (USDA 2013).

Eating the right amount of calories is different for every person depending on their lifestyles. Staying within a personal calorie limit can help maintain healthy weights. Finding that caloric limit is possible on the USDA website or there are many other websites and apps that dedicate themselves to aiding people in maintaining and losing weight. Once a number is known a person can think before they eat something, avoid oversized portions, use smaller dishes, and stop eating when satisfied not full. The USDA also advises to cook at home. If one does eat out, lower calorie options should be chosen. If one begins to write down what they eat it makes it easier to keep track of how much food is being eaten. Finally, limiting alcohol to 1-2 drinks a day will cut empty calories out of diets (USDA 2013).

Finally, the last recommendation is to be physically active. Even if only 10 minutes of physical activity at a time can be managed. Every little bit adds up. It is

important for parents to be active and eat right not only for themselves but to set a good example for their kids. Kids tend to follow example better than they do with words. Starting a healthy lifestyle early is much easier than changing habits as an adult (USDA 2013).

Critiques

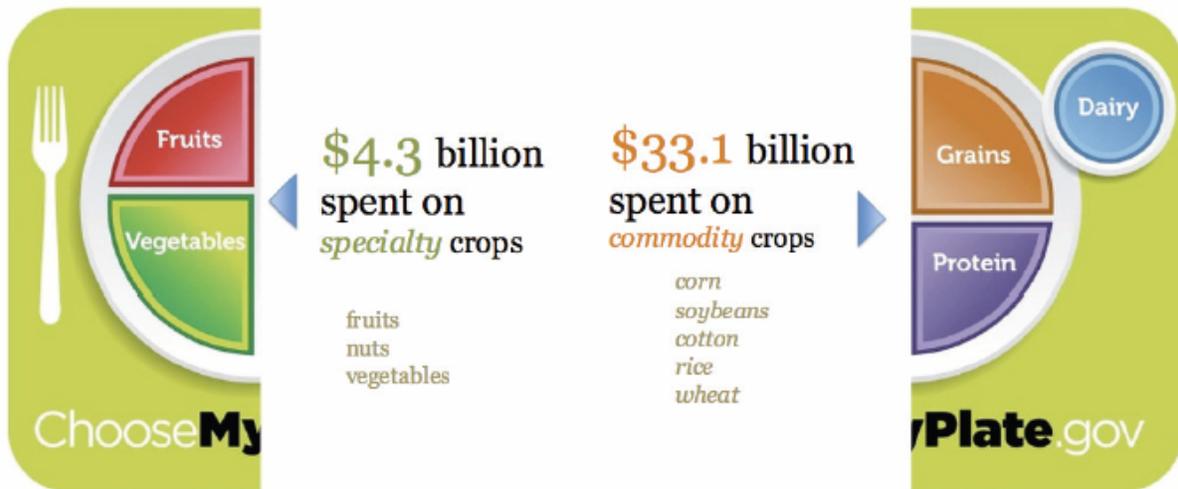
The current graphic representation of, “My Plate,” improves upon the former, “My Pyramid.” The representation shows half of a plate with fruits and vegetables. However, it fails to distinguish between whole and refined grains, the need to vary proteins, and it is still very high in dairy consumption. Progress has been made but people should rely on multiple resources for information on how they should be eating. Recommendations for the reformation of the guidelines (Willet and Ludwig 2011) are; making the guidelines a responsibility of one group like the CDC or IOM, ensure adequate funding for a scientific review, conduct all stages of development, and base recommendations on foods not nutrients. There are some troubling findings dealing with the current guidelines and “My Plate.” There is a troubling obesity epidemic combined with nutrient deficiencies that is resulting in what appears to be decreasing the life expectancy of the population of the United States. However, when the new revisions of the dietary guidelines they received less than stellar amount of air time in television media. The educational influence among the public is limited but the guidelines do have a major impact on diet. This impact occurs because school lunch programs and food assistance programs must adhere to the guidelines. According to Willet and Ludwig (2011), there are many issues that the new guidelines address appropriately but there are also some missed opportunities.

When the government gets involved with the dietary guidelines the problem becomes worsened or at best stagnant. The move away from subsistence agriculture toward subsidized cash crops has increased the reliance on purchased food, increased malnutrition, and increased the amount cash people need to buy food. There now exists a correlation between income, dietary diversification and a groups nutritional well-being (Popkin 2009). The current food guideline from the USDA that recommends adequate nutrition for most people. The problem is the government subsidizes grain, meat, and dairy to a much higher extent than fruits and vegetables. This makes the cost of purchasing fruits and vegetables much higher than that of the later, making it difficult to afford to eat healthy.

As you can see from the graphic Figure 2, Fruits and Vegetables including nuts are given 4.3 billion dollars in subsidies and Protein, Grain, and Dairy is given 33.1 billion dollars. That’s approximately a 7.6:1 ratio. This makes the cost of purchasing fruits and vegetables much higher than that of the later, making it difficult to afford to eat healthy. Due to this there now exists a correlation between income, dietary diversification and a groups nutritional well-being (Popkin 2009). More food politics include the fact that limitations are not clearly stated. There a certain companies that would not appreciate a blatant statement like stop consuming so much pop, red meat, and sugar even though these have been shown to correlate to obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. This should be headline worthy information but it’s not.

Throughout the recommendations there is a division between gender and age. To most age would make a lot of sense because obviously a 2 year old and a 22 year

old would not need the same amount of nutrients. However, there is much contention about the differences between genders. Per the USDA, the recommendations are suitable for most people who are getting less than 30 minutes of exercise per day, not athletes. There is no evidence that men and women should be differentiated in respect to for example, protein. In addition, dairy has been linked to ovarian and prostate cancer



(Bishoff-Ferrari 2011). Within the Figure 2 there is also a gendered division that is also seen. The highest amount of subsidies go to meat, the “male” food. The reason I single out protein is; corn is the main grain commodity, the cows eat corn and provide us with red meat and milk, which is the main dairy recommendation, and the chickens eat corn and provide white meat. It’s all connected.

The progress in the system itself included the placement of systematic reviews and increased transparency of the process. The progress in regards to food and nutrients included an emphasis in consuming more vegetables, beans, fruit, whole grains, and nuts. There are also suggestions to replace some red meat with fish, which was not an issue until the late 1970's with the introduction of the Atkin's diet (Pollan 2006). Other signs of progress include recommendations to; replace trans fats and saturated fats with unsaturated fats, and focus was put on total caloric limits not just calories from fat. To further improvements there are recommendations on how doctors can get people to consume healthier foods and get active (Willet and Ludwig 2011).

Figure 2: Graphic of Food Politics

It is understood that it is difficult to develop clear scientific guidelines and only recently have studies examined food and clinical outcomes associated. A small group of experts with a time limit have to cover a vast amount of information that is constantly changing and likely inconsistent. However, there were some missed opportunities with the most recent revision (Willet and Ludwig 2011). These issues include:

- The 35% limit on calories from fat may undermine the quality of federally funded nutrition programs.
- Three daily servings of milk are recommended despite evidence that it may not protect against bone fractures and it may in fact increase risk of ovarian and prostate cancer (Bishoff-Ferrari 2011).
- An increase in whole grains is recommended but it is also stated that half of the grains can be refined adding to unnecessary calories and metabolic consequences.
- The quality of carbohydrates is not stressed.

Overall, the increase of intakes are clearly defined but the decrease of certain food items are hidden or

Source: Illinois Stewardship Alliance

obscure. The new focus regarding a reduction of solid fats and added sugar is not clear. However, industries would not appreciate if a reduction in red meat, butter, cheese, and sugar were the recommendations. The limitation of sugar-sweetened beverages can be found deep within the reading for the same purpose. This should be headline worthy recommendations. These products directly contribute to obesity, diabetes, heart disease, gout, and dental caries (Willet and Ludwig 2011).

France

Gender

Since the French Revolution in the late 1780's, women have been considered an asset in the workplace. There are however, gaps in compensation, social norms, and leave policies that differ between genders that keep the inequalities present. There have been great strides toward equality but the easiest place to see the problems in with unpaid work. Women are still expected to be mothers and fulfill household duties, while men bring home the money. The women who suffer the most are those who have a family and a full time job. Options like parental leave and childcare options have made

the task more palatable (Windebank 2001, Baldock and Hadlow 2004, Brayfield et al. 2010).

Parental leave differs between genders, maternity leave allows a woman to take up to 16 weeks off of work. If the child is the third child or more she is granted up to 24 weeks off work. In both cases the woman is paid her full normal salary. On the other hand, paternity leave only allows for a man to take 2 weeks off work but still pays the full salary (Fagnani and Boyer et. al. 2010). In addition, there are many childcare options that are often subsidized by the government. For example, nursery options are for infants to three year olds. These programs are funded by regional and local organizations and a small parental fee. Childcare and Preschool is often ran by certified pediatricians and funded through government initiatives (Morgan 2006, Revillard 2006, Windebank 2007, Brayfield et al. 2010).

Food

The French are renowned for the elaborate and well prepared cuisine that has a wide variety of produce and seafood. Each region is known for its own specialty. In general, there is breakfast, a mid-morning snack, lunch, and dinner. Breakfast is usually coffee with milk and croissants. The mid-morning snack is bread, sausages, or paté. Lunch is the most elaborate meal of the day often containing 3-4 courses. Dinner is often light and consists of soup or cheeses, salad, or leftovers. In France, there is emphasis on the aesthetics of the meal and taking time to enjoy the food presented (Gale 2009). This allows for adequate time to fill on salad and soup portions which equate to less calories than the servings of later courses (Lake 2010).

Current French Dietary Guidelines

The French guidelines are in the form of a staircase (Figure 3) that is accompanied by nine rules. The National Program of Nutrition & Health (PNNS) created the French Ministry of Health and the National Institute of Prevention and Health Education has defined the nine rules that correlate to the staircase. Each step of the staircase correlates with a number of servings a person should eat in that food group. Starting at the bottom is protein with 1-2 servings, then 3 servings of dairy, on the fourth step is grains, and at the top of the staircase is five servings of fruit and vegetables and water. Additionally, a magnifying glass houses products that should be consumed in limited amounts like fat, sugar, and salt. The rules are further explained. The PNNS guidelines have been successful. By 2005, 75% of the public health actions planned were accomplished or in progress (Dooren and Kramer 2012).

Fruits and vegetables should be consumed in at least five 80-100 grams servings per day in all forms including freshly pressed juice. Dairy should be consumed in three servings a day in the form of yogurt (125g), fresh cheese (60g), cottage cheese, or one glass of milk. Starchy foods including bread, cereals, and legumes should be eaten with each meal. These foods are preferred to be complex carbohydrates and whole grain. Meat, fish, and eggs (100g) should be consumed once to twice a day with fish being served at least twice a week. Fat products like butter and cream should be limited. Cooking with vegetable oils, oily fish, and nuts are preferable due to the little amounts of fat. Sweet and salty (less than 8g/day) products should be limited (Dooren and Kramer

Figure 3: French Guideline Graphic



Source: Dooren and Kramer 2012

As for beverages, water should be drunk as much as needed during and between meals. Herbal infusions can be used as an alternative. Tap water is as healthy as mineral water. Alcohol should be limited to two glasses per day (wine, beer, champagne) for women and three for men. There are no gendered divisions seen anywhere else in the dietary guidelines. More than the recommended serving increases the risks of illness. As for physical activity, it is recommended that adults seek 30 minutes per day and children/adolescents one hour per day (Dooren and Kramer 2012).

Table 4: French Daily Recommendations

| Age | Protein | Grains | Fruit and Vegetables | Dairy | Alcohol |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| Everyone | 1-2 times per day, ~3.5-7.0 oz | At each meal according to appetite. | 5 servings per day, 14.0-17.5 oz/day | 3 Servings per day | ----- |
| Children and Adolescents | ----- | ----- | ----- | 3-4 per day | ----- |

| Age | Protein | Grains | Fruit and Vegetables | Dairy | Alcohol |
|-------|---------|--------|----------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Women | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- | 2 servings per day |
| Men | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- | 3 servings per day |

Source: Dooren and Kramer 2012

Critiques

The PNNS guidelines are general and leave a lot of room for interpretation. The guidelines suggest fruits and vegetables can be used interchangeably. More comprehensive guidelines recommend 2-3 servings of each and to vary the types in order to get all the benefits possible out of a diet. The starches are not limited which could lead to a high intake of calories. The serving of meat, eggs and fish is also a problem. There is a large difference on the impact of health and the environment between seven and fourteen servings of 100g a week. Finally, the recommended salt limit in France is high in relation to surrounding countries guidelines. Most countries are set at a limit of 6g of salt/day and the World Health Organization (WHO) is set at 5g/day (Dooren and Kramer 2012).

The guideline itself has no gender divisions except where alcohol is concerned. This is further evidence to the larger social process of a gender equality movement. As stated previously, women have been valuable in the workplace since the late 1780's. This arguably led to the equality seen amongst the rest of the culture. Age is another division that is not made except where dairy is concerned. According to Pollan (2006), this is because the French have strong cultural food practices. There may not be a need for a complex and in-depth set of dietary guidelines. The example used in Ominvore's Dilemma (2006), is that a Koala does not need to be told what to eat, they just know that a Eucalyptus tree is it's source of food. The French have their style of meal and food. They do not need to be told what to eat.

France vs. United States

Gender

Gender in France and the United States is similar in multiple ways but also very different in the way each respective country handles the similarities. Women in each country still suffer from gaps in compensation and are expected to take care of household duties with respect to children, cleaning, and food preparation. However, France has dealt with these gender inequalities in very different ways than the United States. Women are given longer maternity leave that is subsidized with their entire salary for the time they take of work (up to 24 weeks). Men are given the same privilege but the time they take off of work is shorter. This represents the idea that the woman's time in the household is valued much more than a man's time.

In contrast, in the United States women did not gain legislation for equality in the workplace until the 1970's. Paternal allows up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for both men and women. This equates men with women but does not allow for time for the woman to complete her expected household duties like the time given in France does. Women in this case are in no way compensated for their time but are still expected to juggle it all, a job, the family, and the home. Perhaps, the French have just had longer to contemplate equality and the importance of family.

Meals

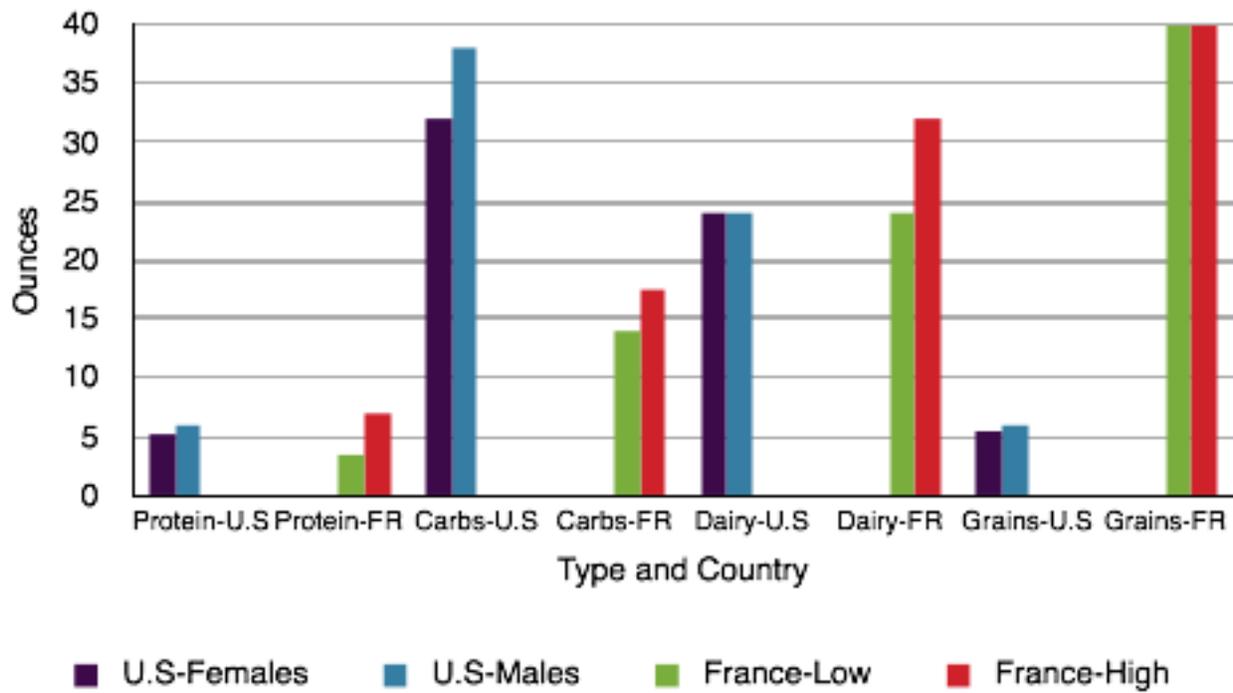
While comparing France and the United States in respect to their food and meals differences and similarities are noticed. Each country has a meal that is considered the largest meal of the day. In France this meal is lunch and in the United States this meal is dinner. The meals are handled differently. In France, lunch can last anywhere from three to four hours with multiple courses of smaller portions. The meal is about experiencing flavors, family, and the beauty of the meal. This would be a very feminine meal in comparison with dinner in the United States where the meal is generally quick with few courses. Traditionally, each country does eat their most important meal of the day with family. However, in the United States this meal is frequently rushed in its preparation because of the lack of time women have to prepare it. This is leading to more meal being pre-prepared or eating out in restaurants. In France, time is made these large meals with extended lunch hours at work or work provides the meal.

Dietary Guidelines

Figure 4 is a graph of comparisons between France and the United States Dietary Guidelines. In my analysis for the United States I took the median amounts recommended for the adult age group as a whole for each gender and then converted cups to ounces. For France I plotted the high and low ends of the range. The most important piece of information is that France does not make the distinction between sexes in its dietary guidelines at all. The United States differentiates based on age and sex all the way through in the guidelines as can be seen in previous graphs. In order to account for measurement discrepancies between the guidelines I converted everything to ounces to make the data more clear.

The recommendations for protein in the United States is 5.5 oz. women per day and 6 oz. for men per day. In France, the recommendation for protein is 3.5-7oz. per day. The recommendations for fruits and vegetables (carbs) in the United States is 32 oz. per day for women and 38 oz. per day for men. France's range is 14.5-17 oz. per day. The dairy recommendation in both countries are 24 oz. The extra serving in France is an adolescent recommendation of an extra serving a day but it is not necessary. Grains are very different. In the United States the recommendation is 5.5 oz. for women and 6 oz. for men. Grains in France are not limited and the carbohydrates are viewed differently but they actually recommend more servings of fruit and vegetables. The real difference in gender between the two countries occurs in the workplace and transfers over to the home and food.

Figure 4: Guideline Comparisons Between the U.S and France



In addition from Figure it can be seen that of all the food groups the USDA recommends fruits and vegetables (female food) as the most necessary foods. This represents a power struggle among the genders that still remains. There is a value put on females but its not readily supported. France does not seem to put as much value on fruits and vegetables in respect to this graph but on there graphic which was seen in Figure 3 fruits and vegetable are at the top of the serving recommendations. The reason for the discrepancy is a flaw in France’s guidelines. The guidelines do not differentiate between vegetables and fruit while the United States guidelines do. The protein intake is about the same but is at the bottom of France’s serving staircase. This process and the value France puts on a meal with respect to time and aesthetics seems to be working because the country is healthier than the United States. This can be see in obesity related deaths.

Source: Dooren and Kramer 20112, USDA 2013

Obesity Related Health Statistics

| | United States | France |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Nutritional Deficiencies | 1.1 | 2.3 |
| Diabetes | 16.8 | 9.6 |
| Cardiovascular Disease | 178.8 | 122.8 |

Table 5 is a table of obesity related deaths in 2004, from the World Health Organization (2004). The stronger statistics are the death from diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The fact that the French are healthier but still eat “bad” food is sometimes referred to as the “French Paradox” (Rozin 1999). The truth is the French are simply eating a wider variety of healthier foods, and valuing an at home family meal.

Conclusion: Why it is Important to Consider Gender in the Guidelines

Food is essential to human life with respect to meaning, societal roles, and culture. Humans have constructed a relationship to nature through Foodways by defining themselves, and their social world. The most important relationship is the distribution and consumption of food to family, friends, the dead, and gods (Counihan 1999). In the United States, the relationship in respect to gender and politics is flawed and creating serious health concerns. Progress has been made but people should rely on multiple resources for information on how they should be eating because of the government subsidies and gender ideology.

Source: World Health Organization 2004

Gender division have a long standing history of being in place and dictating how women and men eat, which has been documented with consumption in the Victorian Era. There was no scientific evidence then of the need for men and women to be eating differently and there is not any scientific evidence for it now. Meat (male food) and dairy remains highly subsidized despite health concerns associated with excess consumption of them. The divisions of male foods (meat) and female foods (fruits and vegetables) in respect to government subsidies are apparent in Figure 2 and have caused nutrient deficiencies. Finally Counihan (1999) states, “**Social and Cultural uses of food provides insight to the human condition.**” Men and women are not equal in the most basic of life necessities, food. If both sexes are not equal in the fundamentals, we can not hope to be equal in a lot of other respects as well.

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