

Food Traditions and Its National Identity

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ABSTRACT

Preparing food and sharing it with friends and family has long been an important aspect of eating. However this practice is increasingly becoming an individual act. The food choices made by people, either as individuals or as a group, can reveal views, passions, background knowledge, assumptions and personalities. Food choices tell stories of families, migrations, assimilation, resistance, changes over times, and personal as well as group identity. Food studies challenges researchers to delve into the common daily occurrence of eating and find deeper meaning in this every day practice. Throughout most of history, bonds and shared cultures have been created when meals are prepared and shared. We need to bring the importance of tradition back into food. Therefore this review articles will alight how food can be used as a cultural product, and its impact on social cultural group etc.

Keywords: Food tradition, National identity, Nutrient, researchers

INTRODUCTION

Food plays an irrefutable role in our lives. Not only do we need it for sustenance but also for providing a significant impression of who we are as products of communities, families and even heritages [1]. Food, like language, exists as a vehicle for expressing culture. One grows up eating the food of their culture and it becomes a part of who they are. It operates as an expression of cultural identity and becomes a medium for various important social interactions. We associate food with particular places and experiences and it is present in all important life events marriages, graduations, first dates, and festivals and even in seemly insignificant moments of daily Abstract [2]. This paper examines how social interactions influence eating behaviors and identities. It analyzes the influence of peer groups in identity formation, focusing specifically to their food identities. Sociological and anthropological perspectives suggest that underlying social relations can help in explaining collective food and eating patterns in humans. Discourse Analysis is used to analyze the conversation and discussions within multiple focus groups to see how the notion of food identity is cultivated. The food choices made by

people, either as individuals or as a group can reveal an abundant amount of information about them; their views, passions, assumptions and ideologies. Food choices tell stories of communities, tribes, families, the adaptation, resistance, changes over times, and personal as well as peer identity. By closely examining the reasons for our food choices, we come closer to understanding ourselves and the society [3]. This research also explores the link between eating identities and dietary intake and demonstrates the relationship between healthy identity and better dietary intake. This could help in designing messages and policies to promote healthy dietary behaviors. Food is central to our sense of identity and is strongly linked to our memories; our histories and small pieces of information about a person's food choices can reveal views, passions, background, knowledge, assumptions and personalities. The idea of food is never reducible to what appears on a plate; it is an omnipresent aspect of society that can be conceptualized in a multitude of ways and this research aims to explore the relationship between eating identity type and the affinity for

particular foods, food groups, or eating patterns [4].

Food And Identity

[5] coined the term food habits (also known as food culture or food ways) to describe the manner in which humans use food, including everything from how it is chosen, acquired, and distributed to who prepares, serves, and eats it. They stated that the significance of the food habits process is that it is unique to human beings. They pondered why people spend so much time, energy, money, and creativity on eating [6]. A familiar saying that epitomizes the idea of food and identity is, "You are what you eat." This expression addresses two of the questions considered in the research: What does the food on my plate signify? and How do food practices contribute to personal identity? These questions address the concept of food as a cultural signifier and encompass fields as diverse as literature, anthropology, sociology, and history [7]. Research shows that the relationship between the foods people eat and how others perceive them and how they see themselves is remarkable. [8] surveyed individuals about their perceptions of themselves as consumers of food and how they viewed others based on their dietary habits. The researchers listed foods which were distinctive to five different diets: fast food (pizza, hamburgers, and fried chicken), synthetic food (Carnation Instant Breakfast, Cheez Whiz), health food (yogurt, protein shake, and wheat germ), vegetarian (bean sprout sandwich, broccoli quiche, avocado, and brown rice), and gourmet food (French roast coffee, caviar, oysters) [9]. They learned participants in the study associated different personality types with the food choices made for each of the five diets. People who eat fast food and synthetic food were classified as religious conservatives who often wore polyester clothing. Health food personalities were characterized as antinuclear activists and Democrats [10]. Vegetarians were likely to be perceived as pacifists who drive foreign cars. Gourmet food eaters were seen as individuals who were liberal and sophisticated. These

stereotypes were established through self-descriptions and personality tests which were completed by individuals whose diets fell into the five categories.

Food as an expression of identity is apparent in the experience of going out to eat. [11] suggested that restaurants serve more than food. They strive to satisfy nutritional and emotional needs in their clientele. When deciding where to dine out, consumers may consider a variety of factors, such as, the menu, atmosphere, service, location, and cost or value of the meal. It was found most restaurants cater to specific types of customers and that the same diner may choose a venue based on current needs [12]. For instance, in the parent role, a quick, inexpensive restaurant with a playground is a good choice. That same diner may choose a business club which features a conservative setting for a work-related meeting. A candle-lit bistro with soft music and bottles of wine would be appropriate for a romantic evening out with a significant other. Ethnic restaurants hold an allure to clients as well. They appeal to natives of the homeland represented by offering familiarity and authenticity in foods served. For those who do not share the ethnicity of a dining establishment, the experience allows them to explore the novelty of a different and maybe even unfamiliar culinary adventure. Psychological needs intertwine with social factors when foods are used more for the meaning they represent more than the nourishment they offer or provide [13].

Cultural Identity

Culturally speaking, in essence, what one eats defines who one is and is not [14]. This statement addresses the third question asked in the research, what are examples of how food and food habits contribute to the development and transmission of culture? Culture is defined as the beliefs, values, and attitudes practiced and accepted by members of a group or community. Culture is not inherited; it is learned. The food choices of different cultural groups are often connected to ethnic behaviors and religious beliefs. [15] addressed the

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influence of food habits on an individual's self-identity by stating, "Eating is a daily reaffirmation of [one's] cultural identity". Many people affiliate the foods from their culture, their childhood with warm, good feelings and memories. The food is part of who we are and become. It ties us to our families and holds a special worth to a person. Foods from our culture, from our family often become the comfort foods we seek as adults in times of frustration and stress [16]. As an Italian American, the author began to consider how her heritage, handed down through the food on her plate, signified who she has become today. During the seminar held in Naples, Italy, a focus of the lectures was an examination of how "Italian" food and the "Mediterranean diet" are marketed and have affected the socioeconomic reality of the region. During a lecture, the author asked about food traditions in Italian families. She learned a custom was the Sunday dinner. Every Sunday, the matriarch of the family prepared a large pot of spaghetti. The entire family then gathers together to eat pasta and enjoy each other's company at Nana's (Grandmother's) house [17]. The author is a second generation Italian American. As a child, every Sunday morning her father (first generation Italian) and sometimes her mother (nonItalian) made spaghetti. It was a family tradition. Dear old Aunt Julia would come by precisely at dinner time with a hot loaf of bread (another Italian tradition is bring bread as a gift when invited for dinner) and the family ate and laughed and shared stories with one another. The warm buttered bread and a big salad were always served with the spaghetti. The memory as well as the spaghetti was delicious [18]. This memory, connected to family's heritage and culture, confirmed to the author that food is much more than nutrients. There were emotional connections, a sense of belonging, and ethnic pride found in the food on the author's Italian plate. Cultural identity, however, is not restricted by the specific foods one associates with a given ethnic or racial group. One's social class, standing in the community, and

Lawrence and Tushman profession are signifiers of culture as well. For instance, in American society there are norms and standards which are followed in social settings when dining. The proper use of food and behaviors connected with civilized eating habits, also known as manners or etiquette is an expression of group membership [19]. In the United States a certain set of appropriate dining expectations exist for a variety of dining occasions. One does not speak with a mouth full of food, especially during formal dining occasions. Certain conversational topics would be inappropriate to share at the dinner table. Sharing a meal with another person connotes equality and is a way to show acceptance of one another professionally and personally.

Food as a Cultural Product

Meals are social constructions that differ across cultures and one of the particular ways we remember various cultures is through their food [20]. Who hears 'Italian food' and doesn't think of pasta, or American food and hamburgers, or Mexican food and tortillas, or Indian food and curries, France and croissants? Each community or country's cuisine reflects its history, lifestyle and beliefs. The national cuisines incarnate the dietary wisdom of populations and their respective cultures. The proverb, 'You are what you eat' epitomizes the idea of food and identity and the process of choosing and consuming food encompasses psychological, social, economic, cultural, and biological factors, all of which play a role in the cultivation of identity surrounding consumption of food [21].

Food and its Impact on Social Groups

Food has a powerful impact on people and groups in our society [22]. One can be perceived as likeable, attractive, more practical and analytical if the food on his plate is considered to be "good". People want to eat what those they admire eat. We are constantly persuaded by the need to be accepted for our food choices. We use familiar expressions related to food to express delight, sorrow, meaning, stature, etc [23]. Popular sayings like, you're the apple of my eye, to spill the beans, easy

as pie, to put all eggs in one basket, and cry over spilled milk. A person's social status can be determined looking at his food and restaurant selections. A diet of rice and brown bread implies poverty, whereas lamb steak connotes wealth. A five-star restaurant is where one of wealth and abundance dines, whereas a normal chain restaurant is where one of middle class eats. The structure of society is closely related to status foods and the cultural 'tastes' are rooted in education and social class [24]. Bourdieu identifies

Culture, emotions, and bonding are all integral parts of preparing and eating a meal. We are at risk that our busy lifestyle. Work pressures and in some cases economic problems are causing us to overlook the importance of social eating. We need to make social eating more of a priority in our eating habits. The connections that food can create between people are too valuable to overlook. The findings of this research will benefit the arena of communicative research by building a bridge between the interpersonal and health communication fields. This research will continue to build

CONCLUSION

Lawrence and Tushman three types of taste corresponding to class and education. The first being legitimate or highbrow tastes which was linked to higher classes and education levels; second being Middle-brow tastes which was common to middle class and lastly lowbrow tastes which was indexed to the lower strata of the society [25]. Food, thus, has a symbolic role in determining social power and status relationships and it retains its ability to act as a mechanism of identity formation [26].

upon previous studies while concurrently increasing the credibility of the findings. Understanding the role of food in social structures and how individuals correlate food with different societal norms can help influence eating behaviors and promote better nutritional policies and eating behaviors. Many individuals do not think twice about the food that is on their plate but when one is questioned about their food choices, they are made aware of these mundane and monotonous behaviors and it would introduce many new ideals surrounding food identity.

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