

FOOD AND CULTURE

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The need to include cultural factors to explain behavior seems particularly obvious when it comes to food given an easily observed cultural diversity: People around the world eat very different things. Children are often first exposed to the diversity of cultures by the description of their stereotypical foods (e.g., “French people eat frogs and snails.”) and manners of eating (e.g., “Chinese people eat with chopsticks.”). And yet this diversity in food preferences and customs has been dismissed by cultural psychologists as superficial and trivial, as if focusing on it missed the point of meaningful psychological differences by focusing instead on distracting variation in tastes and practices. Acknowledging cultural differences in traditional food preferences and habits is sometimes discounted as “cultural tourism” (Aldridge, Calhoun, & Aman, 2000), and cultural psychologists warn against the fallacy that “multicultural understanding can be achieved through lessons about the food and festivals of minority groups” (Pattnaik, 2003), resulting in a superficial and stereotypical understanding of cultural differences.

So should cultural psychologists avoid the study of food as trivial? We will try to show that it would be a shame. Given the paramount importance of food in daily life, food can provide a valuable window through which to explore and understand cultural contexts. We propose that food is an important but understudied aspect of cultures, and is deserving of thoughtful analysis that goes beyond deriding fairs and festivals as a parody of multiculturalism (Rozin, 1996, 2007). Food is unique in that it ties the intimate, domestic, and familial with society at large, and with institutional and corporate forces that shape and are shaped by individual-level processes. It is also a great illustration of the fact that individuals in the modern world find themselves at the

confluence of many cultures, pushed and pulled in a force-field of cultural influences. When it comes to food, we are all multicultural.

This chapter consists of three parts. In the first part, we elaborate on our claim that food is a worthy object of analysis for cultural psychologists, likely to provide insights beyond those offered by more traditional objects of study in cultural psychology, and we sketch out how traditional models in cultural psychology can cast light on observed difference in the food domain. After this appetizer, in the next two parts we sink our teeth into the meat of the subject, and explore two ways in which we argue that food provides novel insights about cultural processes. In the second part, we discuss the fact that, when it comes to food, individuals exist at the confluence of multiple cultural influences and reflect on the consequences of this fact for conceptions of culture and universal multiculturalism. In the third part, we reflect on the role of institutions (e.g., corporations, government, media) in shaping the food culture of the global industrialized world, and what it means in the context of culinary multiculturalism.

APPETIZER: WHY STUDY FOOD AND CULTURE

Social scientists have long lamented that culture escapes any easy definition, and even cultural anthropologists, for whom cultures are the main object of study, are reluctant to pin it down except in very general terms. Markus and Kitayama, two of the pioneers of cultural psychology, good naturedly remarked (2003, p.281) that in their 1991 seminal review they managed to “write an entire lengthy article about culture and not define culture.” Social psychologists, when they tackle culture, seem to fear being reductionist, and worry that if they psychologize culture and make it merely a component of individuals’ mental life, they will miss the important fact that culture is necessarily shared and transmitted, or the fact that it is captured in institutions and artifacts that go well beyond individuals. This is why Kim and Markus (1999)

emphasize the “dynamic process of the mutual constitution of culture and the psyche” (p.797). Indeed, one first stab at the study of food and culture would be to start an inventory of the many cultural components that involve food: *knowledge and methods* (in the food context, this takes the form of knowing which foods are edible, ones that are tasty or not, scripts such as recipes and cleaning/cooking methods, the reification of these practices into texts, spaces -- kitchens, restaurants, stores, slaughterhouses, creameries, bakeries, etc. -- and tools for growing, cooking, consuming the food), *preferences and tastes* (in actual foods and ingredients, in table manners, in prized dishes vs. taboo foods, etc., all well documented in Paul Rozin’s reviews, e.g., 2007), and *social practices* (rituals and scripts about the proper production, preparation, ingestion, and excretion of food, again involving manners and taboos, but also being the embodiment and expression of values and concepts about purity, community, the proper place of men and women, adult and children, the public and private sphere, etc.; includes holidays, religious practices such as saying grace, taking communion, keeping kosher, observing Ramadan [see Johnson, White, Boyd, and Cohen, 2011], social scripts such as a first date, etc.). Though necessarily incomplete, such a quick flyover of the diverse landscape is a reminder of the difficulty of the task at hand, because of the vast breadth of components that make up a culture.

Food Cultures or Food-Related Cultural Practices

Because, as sketched above, food permeates so many dimensions of the cultural experience, we refer in this paper to food cultures, as in “the Chinese food culture.” But this is really only one aspect of a broader culture, so the Chinese food culture, for example, is a part of Chinese culture at large. Yet we believe it would be reductionist to refer instead to “food-related cultural practices,” as we believe that food relates to cultural elements other than practices (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, artifacts). As Saroglou and Cohen (2011) wrote about religion, food, depending

on context, is part of culture, constitutes culture, includes and transcends culture, is influenced by culture, shapes culture, or interacts with culture in influencing cognitions, emotions and actions. So we use “food culture” as short-hand for “those aspects of a culture that pertain to food,” keeping in mind that those aspects are not neatly quartered in one aspect of culture but are wide-ranging, and that a food culture and culture at large are mutually constitutive. Even the extent to which food is central to and constitutive of a culture is an interesting cultural difference that would deserve its own study. We think that there is analytical value in carving out the food dimension of culture specifically (and labeling it a food culture) because of our emphasis later in this paper on everyday multiculturalism. Food is perhaps the most accessible point of entry into a culture for outgroup members, and individuals in diverse societies routinely engage other cultures via food (i.e., engage in a foreign food culture even if they remain more oblivious to the larger culture it is nested in), be it through sampling dishes, learning recipes, buying ingredients, role-playing eating practices and rituals, using cooking tools, and even shaping their palates to enjoy initially unpleasant novel tastes (e.g., hot chili, raw fish, smelly cheese). Delineating “food cultures” as an object of study gives us insight into these processes of cultural sampling, which are less frequent in other cultural domains, simply because, as we discuss next, food is ubiquitous and exploring food options is encouraged among omnivores.

What’s So Special About Food

When compared to other objects of cultural construction, eating, as a worldwide behavior, and food, as a universal object of daily concern and attention throughout human history, both have some interesting unique properties that warrant being noted at the onset, as they in many ways motivate this chapter. First, food is ubiquitous. Humans are constant eaters, and satisfy this need several times a day at every age, which differs from the satisfaction of other

needs such as sex, which is not necessary for the survival of the individual, and engaged in much less frequently and not throughout the lifespan. Also, people eat publicly and often in social settings, which differs from the satisfaction of other needs such as sex, excretion (another food-related need), sleeping, or grooming. Compared to other animals who eat less frequently because they save energy with frequent sleep between highly specialized food-gathering attempts (felines), or even cease eating for whole seasons and curtail their metabolic needs via hibernation (rodents), humans require a constant intake of caloric input to sustain their uniform level of activity. Throughout history and in all parts of the world, food production, preparation, and intake have been central to all cultures, and have both defined and been shaped by other cultural elements. Food production has shaped cultures as surely as it has shaped landscapes and bodies.

Second, food highlights the interplay between culture and nature, in this case human biology. Foodstuffs physically interact with the bodies of individuals in a given culture to affect modal body shape, sexual ideals, health, longevity, etc. Different cultural groups look different in part because they are shaped by the foods they eat, which in turn are determined by an interaction between cultural elements and the availability of ingredients in the environment of that culture's historical evolution. Paul Rozin (e.g., 1996, 2007) has shown that the study of food cast light on important questions about cultural processes: for example, by documenting food universals and connecting them to the specific biological needs of an omnivore, he showed how such motives got transformed and integrated into cultural systems, and formed the substrates of cultural habits. Through cases studies of specific foods such as sugar, milk, chili powder, chocolate, and meat, Rozin provided new insights into the cultural formation and transmission of food preferences. He eloquently used the study of food as a way to reconcile and clarify the relationship between biological/evolutionary and cultural processes, and explore the familiar

nature-nurture question in novel and fascinating ways. We will not attempt to recapitulate Rozin's invaluable contributions to the field of food and culture in this chapter, and refer interested readers to his many excellent papers (e.g., 1996, 2007). Instead, our hope is to shed light on aspects of the study of food and culture that have traditionally received less attention, such as how individuals negotiate the interplay of multiple cultural influences in the food domain, and how macro actors battle to shape food culture in ways that serve their institutional interests.

Third, the study of food casts light on the reciprocal influences between cultures and the geographical and ecological contexts in which they developed and evolved (Diamond, 1997). Food production processes shape physical landscapes (fields, irrigation, wells, mills, pastures, cattle, etc.) as much as it shapes cultures. The foods historically available in an ecological environment have shaped and have been shaped by the knowledge, preferences, attitudes, and social practices of the individuals within a cultural context. Indeed, even the process by which food is produced impacts culture at a deep level. Dov Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz (1996) argue that populations which have historically relied on livestock and herding for food are more likely to have developed a "culture of honor" which prescribes violent retaliation against provocation (a cultural trait that would be functional in an economy where the main source of food and marker of wealth is so easily stolen) whereas populations which have historically relied on growing crops for food (as made possible by better soil or irrigation, as a result of geological history) are much less so inclined because the needs of agrarian production reward instead compromise and cooperation. Thus the means of procurement of food available in one's ecological environment, determined in part by geological (accidental) history, can affect the psychological make-up of a population because such cultural modules provide solutions to the

specific challenges of food production in this ecological/geological niche: geological accidents may make rich soils scarce, and herding a good option, while herding may in turn favor the development of a culture of honor, so that food effectively serves as the mediator between geology and psychology (see also Uskul, Kitayama, and Nisbett, 2008).

Fourth, humans are omnivores and exploration and variety-seeking is encouraged and rewarded. Children in many cultures are discouraged from being fussy about unfamiliar foods and encouraged to try novel tastes. As with other omnivore species, curiosity about novel foodstuffs (coupled with safety mechanisms such as the amazing ability to empty one's stomach even after ingestion, i.e., vomiting) enabled humans to quickly adapt to new environments with unfamiliar sources of nourishment. It is one reason why we will be arguing that humans are multicultural when it comes to food: because although plenty of food norms exist within one culture about which familiar foods are good and which are bad, there has always been a functional advantage in the food domain to openness and exploration, and to learning vicariously from what other (cultural) groups are eating. Because of the frequency of eating, and the fact that humans' omnivorous nature encourages variety-seeking and exploration in their diet, one individual's diet typically reflects multiple cultural influences in the course of the same week or even day, especially in a modern cosmopolitan society like the United States.

Fifth, food cultures are characterized by strong parental involvement for many years. Whereas other cultural influences are quickly abdicated to agents of socialization outside of the home, and in particular peer groups (Harris, 1998), food remains in many societies a mode of direct transmission of cultural tastes and practices within the familial sphere. Parents prepare or at least choose (or, increasingly in modern society, order, as we will discuss in the third section) the foods eaten by children and adolescents for many years, so that parents have a more direct

influence on these preferences and tastes (than say, on entertainment or even clothing, which parents have little involvement in manufacturing). Foods are communally shared at the dinner table, parents prepare lunches for children to take with them when they are apart, children learn to cook by imitating parents in the family kitchen -- and many of the traditions and holidays that celebrate and re-affirm a family's identity and hybrid cultural inheritance center on food (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Passover, Ramadan, Birthdays, etc.). Thus food culture is both intimately transmitted in the familial and domestic sphere and is also the locus where much of a family's culture and traditions are transmitted. This makes food an interesting place to study cultures because it brings to the fore the importance of families as groups that have their own subcultures and traditions, a unit that rarely receives much attention in cultural psychology.

In short, although it is easy to dismiss food as a trivial matter of sustenance and of superficial cultural significance, it is such a frequent and omnipresent activity, and it shapes physical reality in such tangible ways, that it cannot be ignored. Physical correlates can be observed both upstream and downstream of the focal act of ingestion: upstream, food shapes the economy, the organization of labor, and prototypical occupations (see the cowboy culture in the Southern/Western US), markers of wealth and status (dowries etc.), as well as the physical landscape cultures evolved in, from pastures to open-field crop growing; downstream, specific foods shape the lives and even the bodies of individuals who frequently ingest them, and even affects when they will die. Finally, we also noted that food is unique in that it is a domain where variety-seeking and a form of multiculturalism is encouraged, while we ended by noting the role of parental involvement and the central place of food as the repository of familial cultures.

Food Culture Reflects Well-Documented Cultural Differences

The relationship between eating and a food culture is bi-directional. Just like the foods available in a population's historical environment, the caloric needs associated with its climate and lifestyle (e.g., the need for hearty diets in cold weather), and the food conservation challenges associated with prevalent temperatures (leading to the development of cultural practices like the curing of meat with salt, and taboos against foods, e.g. pork, most likely to spoil in the dominant climate), to take but a few examples, have shaped its food culture, and thus culture as a whole, other aspects of its cultural make-up are expressed and enacted in the preparation and consumption of food, and especially in the social rituals associated with the consumption of food. So food culture both shapes and is shaped by culture as a whole. Humans typically eat food in social settings, and so common eating becomes the locus of much cultural transmission and re-enactment. This means that researchers should expect to find the cultural models already documented in other domains (e.g., independence vs. interdependence, see Markus & Kitayama, 1991) expressed in the food domain. Indeed, one version of the present chapter could simply document how well-known patterns in cultural psychology can be observed in the food domain, as they have been documented elsewhere. Though we chose another route for most of the chapter, we need to start out by acknowledging the ways in which the food domain does reflect well-known cultural differences as well as other contexts do.

Models of the Self and Table Manners

Cultural models of the self are expressed, for example, in the realm of table manners: how food should be served, shared and ingested is deeply rooted in the kind of cultural differences well documented by others, such as the distinction made between cultures where the self is construed independently of others, vs. cultures where the self is construed

interdependently (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In the interdependent cultural context of Japan, for example, the host chooses food for guests and serves them, as a way of making sure guests feel welcome and accommodated. Contrast this with the independent model prominent in Western contexts, like the United States, where hosts commonly tell guests to “make themselves at home” and choose whatever they would like to eat for themselves, and where the perfect host empowers every guest to express his or her idiosyncratic preferences (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). One of the authors, brought up in a French cultural context, grew up regaled with shocking stories of American exchange students helping themselves to the fridge whenever they felt hungry, and conversely of French exchange students in American families starving while they anxiously awaited formal family meals that never came – without ever thinking it appropriate to make themselves a sandwich at someone else’s home. It is important to stress once more that beyond just noting trivial cultural differences, this is a reflection of deeper conceptions of what it means to be a self, and that these conceptions both shape these manners and are also reinforced every time these manners are enacted.

Food also plays an important role in establishing and maintaining social bonds. The sharing of food is a major expression of solidarity and an indicator of close relationships (Rozin, 1996). The sharing of food can also signify shared values, as in the case of traditional meals that accompany celebrations or holidays. When sharing food, people may enact culturally specific rituals that center around the values or beliefs of the group. These food practices play a functional role by helping people address fundamental social motives, such as identifying and creating a bond among group members, signaling with-in group status, and preserving ingroup/outgroup boundaries (e.g., by keeping kosher, see Johnson, White, Boyd, & Cohen, 2011).

Food Taboos and Cultural Conceptions of Morality

Another domain in which food echoes cultural differences already well documented elsewhere is in the domain of food taboos (Rozin, 1997). In orthodox Jewish communities, the act of eating non-kosher foods, which are prohibited by Jewish laws, is considered a serious sin, as is the mixing of some kosher foods such as dairy and meat (Grunfeld, 1972, 1982). In India, certain foods are prohibited for members of some social castes, and it is considered immoral and impolite for members of these castes to eat these foods (Appadurai, 1981). Though secular contemporary Americans may initially think of their culinary world as relatively free of food taboos other than extreme ones (e.g., human flesh, excrements), in fact there are plenty of things that are taboo for American eaters that would not be taboo in other parts of the world: certain parts of the body (offal, bone marrow, brains, etc.) and some animals -- for example horse meat is still commonly eaten in many parts of Continental Europe, as is rabbit, both dishes that would be taboo to segments of the US populations who would give those animals the status of pet or service animal. Animals whose flesh is deemed appropriate to eat in some cultures are taboo in others. These taboos are powerful and can influence opinions of a person who has violated them even when the act occurred in a context where it was not taboo. This was apparent from the 2012 controversy over President Obama eating dog meat, a taboo act in the United States, when he was a boy in Indonesia, where it was not taboo at the time (Delaney, 2012).

Apart from national norms and practices, other cultural identities also influence what is perceived as taboo. Haidt, Koller and Dias (1993) asked respondents from various social backgrounds in Brazil and the U.S. whether it was wrong to eat a family dog after the dog was accidentally killed. High-SES individuals in both cultures were less likely to deem the behavior

immoral¹. Thus food taboos may be less enforced by educated members of Western societies, who strive for tolerance the respect of cultural differences, and who may thus be reluctant to rely on culture-shaped disgust as the arbiter of morality -- especially when no one is apparently getting hurt. Later work (Graham & Haidt, 2007) suggests that whereas conservative members of American society include things like purity and respect for tradition when determining right from wrong and are thus likely to focus their taboos on foods that they consider disgusting (e.g., offal) or violating religious edicts (e.g., pork for Jews), more liberal members of American society focus more exclusively on fairness and harm as criteria for morality, and are therefore likely to focus their taboos on foods that require animal suffering (e.g., foie gras), involve prototypical victims (e.g., veal), or victims who blur the boundary between animal and human intelligence (e.g., tuna when dolphins get hurt, or palm oil because of its impact on the habitat of great apes) - or that exploit poor farmers in other countries (see the popularity of “fair trade” products). Thus in the same way that table manners illustrate the well-documented differences between independent and interdependent models of the same, we propose that food taboos are likely to similarly recapitulate documented dimensions of morality.

As demonstrated by taboos, food takes on a moral dimension in many different cultures. Beyond these taboos, food choices can also interact with more broadly held cultural values to result in moral judgment. For example, in American cultural contexts, people view individuals who eat unhealthy foods more negatively than individuals who eat healthy foods, on both moral (e.g., virtuous, ethical) and non-moral traits (e.g., attractive, likable) (Steim & Nemeroff, 1995). Two cultural beliefs seem to underlie these negative moral judgments of individuals eating unhealthy foods. One, the “you are what you eat” belief, is commonly found across cultural

¹ In a food-related twist, the lower-SES American adults surveyed by Haidt and colleagues were identified as such by approaching individuals as they left a McDonald’s fast-food restaurant in downtown Philadelphia.

contexts (Frazer, 1890/1951; Nemeroff & Rozin, 1989), and stipulates that people take on the properties of the foods they consume – thus people eating bad food must be bad. The other belief underlying negative moral judgments is the Puritan ethic, an idea prominent in American cultural contexts. The Puritan ethic stipulates that people will ultimately be rewarded for self-discipline, and thus should be industrious, deny themselves pleasures, and avoid immediate gratification (Steim & Nemeroff, 1995). Conversely, individuals whose food choices are based on a moral principle (e.g., vegetarians) are sometimes disliked by the mainstream when mainstream members perceive such elective dietary restrictions to be an implicit indictment of their own eating habits, and resent that restricted eaters seem to think that they are morally superior to others (Minson & Monin, 2012).

Cultural Beliefs About the Relation Between Food and Affect

In addition to the “right” way to eat, and food taboos, we also learn from others in our cultural context about what foods should be offered in what occasion (e.g., in Italy, rice is a traditional gift for couples moving into their first home, as it represents fertility). Interestingly, these gestures of goodwill are often accompanied and supported by beliefs about the healing or mood-regulating power of foods for those who are ill (e.g., chicken soup in Judaism; Rennard, Ertl, Gossman, Robbins, & Rennard, 2000) or feeling emotionally distressed (e.g., chocolate; Heissman, 2012). These beliefs then shape preferences and behavior: A woman who reaches for a carton of ice cream when heart-broken may feel that her impulse is completely natural and self-generated, but these gender-stereotypic behaviors have been modeled in our cultural contexts and enshrined in cultural products like television [e.g., *Friends* (Season 3, 1996); *How I Met Your Mother* (Season 3, 2007)] and film [e.g., *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001); *Legally Blonde* (2001)] so that it was immediately clear when TV host Jon Stewart served a pint of Ben and Jerry’s ice

cream to actor Robert Pattinson on his talk show after Pattinson's highly publicized 2012 breakup – and comedic because it played against cultural gender stereotypes. Beliefs about the mood-altering nature of food go well beyond the animistic beliefs of traditional societies. Witness the enduring American cultural myth, puzzling to foreigners, that sugar makes children hyperactive. Multiple medical studies have shown this to be false (see Wolraich et al., 1995) – and yet this cultural myth endures, in part because the cultural expectations that American parents bring to sugar leads to self-fulfilling prophecies and confirmation biases.

Beliefs about the relationship between food and affect have deep significance for the cultural construal of its meaning and function and lead to important consequences in terms of public health. What is the meaning of food? What is it for? Is it a source of relaxation, enjoyment, and nourishment, or is it a source of stress, negativity, and fear? The answers to these questions vary greatly by cultural context, and the resulting attitudes toward food can powerfully shape our approach toward eating and subsequently affect our health. Rozin, Fischler, Imada, Sarubin, & Wrzesniewski (1999) explored attitudes toward food and the role of food in four broad cultural contexts: the United States, Japan, Flemish Belgium, and France. They noted that in the US, food was seen as of a source of worry and concern, and contrasted this with the French view of food as a source of pleasure and relaxation. This attitudinal difference was accompanied by higher consumption of fatty foods by the French: 96% of a sample of French adults (Drewnowski et al., 1996) obtained more than 10% of their daily calories from saturated fat, in stark violation of US dietary guidelines. However, this diet did not manifest itself in a worse physical health. In fact, cardiovascular disease occurs at a much lower rate in France than in the US, a fact that has been referred to as the French Paradox (Richards et al., 1981; Renaud & de Lorgeril, 1992). While research on the French Paradox had previously focused on searching

for protective elements in the French diet (e.g., red wine), Rozin and colleagues (1999) set out to explore differences in stress in relation to eating. In order to do so, each group was given a survey in their native language on the kinds of foods they ate, as well as their general attitudes toward and associations with food. In all areas of interest, American females were more worried about and dissatisfied with food, while French and Belgian males tended to view food most positively. Despite being more concerned about weight and diet, Americans tended to view themselves as less healthy eaters than members of other groups did. Of a range of factors that were asked about, the only one that predicted Body Mass Index was the Worry factor, a measure of how much participants worried about food. This research suggests that too much concern over food may be counter-productive, negatively affecting quality of life and having no or even negative effects on health. When we learn to view food as a source of stress and worry, we may focus too much on quantity and not enough on quality, freshness, and balance (Rozin et al., 1999; Pollan, 2008).

Identifying New Directions in the Study of Food and Culture

Until now we have discussed how differences between cultures when it comes to food reflect differences in models of the self, in conceptions of morality, and beliefs about affect and self-regulation. Although this was a natural place to start, we want to take this opportunity to add to the reflection on culture by going beyond pointing out how well-known cross-national differences (e.g., whether the self is defined more in independent or interdependent ways, Markus & Kitayama, 1991) are reflected in the food domain. Such an application of well-supported theories would no doubt expand their reach but teach relatively little new to the student of culture. Instead we want to use the domain of food and eating to explore two relatively (to our knowledge) little-discussed dimensions of culture, which are brought into sharp relief in

this context. Both arise from recent development in the study of culture that go beyond simple bipolar, unilinear dimensions in psychological make-up to emphasize many forms of culture (Cohen, 2009) and the mutual constitution of culture and the psyche through the reciprocal processes of cultural maintenance and transformation and of the formation of the psychological (Kim & Markus, 1999).

The two questions that we propose to explore in the remainder of this chapter are the following: (1) As cultural psychologists increasingly stress the importance of multiple forms of culture, what are the processes of everyday multiculturalism? Food and eating is an ideal domain to study this, because individuals' cooking and eating habits reflect on a daily basis a hodgepodge of influences, from the cultural mix of their ancestral lineage (e.g., Polish- and Italian-American parents), to regional influences (e.g., growing up in New Jersey), familial practices (e.g. a partner from the UK), as well as the multiplicity of cultural culinary influences and experiences available in contemporary American society (e.g., patronizing a Japanese restaurant, following a recipe in a French cookbook, watching a TV show on Mexican cuisine). How do these various cultural idioms contribute to a repertoire that an individual then draws on in her daily food experience, and how do individuals draw and contribute to cultural frameworks that are not their own but which they are familiar with? (2) The second question that we propose to explore comes from taking seriously the institutional aspects of cultures, and to point to the macro actors (e.g., government agencies, corporations, media, activist groups) who struggle to influence the discourse about food, and to define the cultural meanings of food as well as the legitimacy of cultural practices and understandings. This is a rarely-explored dimension of the cultural experience. Even though cultural psychologists have of course included media products in their empirical analyses (e.g., Kim & Markus, 1999), authors have not stressed much the

struggles for cultural influence driven by often conflicting interests, and the tremendous power wielded by some institutional actors, in particular corporations, through the medium of advertising, in shaping the food culture that suffuses modern society.

Though we will be treating these two questions in turn in the next two sections, they are not completely independent and we can also gain insights by looking at their intersection: indeed, the cultural elements that broader institutional actors attempt to introduce in society become part of the sometimes contradictory cultural repertoire that individual grapple with in their everyday multiculturalism. Because of the quotidian and personal nature of eating, its study reveals the interplay of micro cultural components ranging from family traditions (holiday rituals, the transmission of tastes and know-hows, as well as actual physical culinary tools) all the way to macro components such as large institutions (government agencies, the food industry) and cultural products (media and advertisement) contributing to and being shaped by food culture. It is also a particularly fruitful place to study how people juggle the multiplicity of culinary cultures that they engage in.

In contrast to other models in social psychology, the great strength of the cultural approach is that it acknowledges the dynamic process of the mutual constitution of culture and the psyche (Kim & Markus, 1999). Individual selves participate in and influence everyday practices, which in turn shape individuals. Messages from and changes within institutions also directly influence individuals, just as individuals influence institutions. In the rest of this chapter, we will examine different levels of the culture cycle from the unique vantage point of food, a universally important commodity with which our interactions and preferences are fundamentally shaped by cultural practices, beliefs, and ideas.

MAIN COURSE: WHEN IT COMES TO FOOD, WE ARE ALL MULTICULTURAL

While we have spent some time above illustrating how the food domain recapitulates the dimensions already documented by cultural psychologists, we now turn to something that we believe is more unique about food and eating. We propose that food provides a unique entryway into the multiplicity of cultural influences that any given individual shapes – and is shaped by – on a daily basis. Recent scholarship in cultural psychology (e.g., Cohen, 2009; this book; Markus & Connor, 2013; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012) has stressed the importance of going beyond broad national differences to identify the multiplicity of cultural influences within a given culture. As we see it, there are at least two important components to this critique: (1) First, going beyond the collectivist-individualist, independent-interdependent, or even East-West coarse-grained distinctions that have driven initial progress in cultural psychology (e.g., Triandis, 1990; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), cultural psychologists now increasingly stress the need to use more fine-grained distinctions within a given culture, such as religion (e.g., Cohen & Rozin, 2001), social class (e.g., Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012), or region (e.g., Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Kitayama, Ishii, Imada, Takemura, & Ramaswamy, 2006). (2) Second, and following from the first point, multiple forms of culture are not only represented within a country but also within an individual. Individuals participate, are shaped by, and shape multiple cultures. A Kenyan physician will be shaped and will be shaped by his nationality, but also his tribal ancestry, his religion, his profession, his social class, etc. To understand the role of culture in shaping cognition and behavior we must understand the interplay of these various cultural influences within any given individual.

A Complex Multiculturalism

Indeed, previous authors have acknowledged the multiplicity of cultural influences. Snibbe and Markus, for example, write that “individuals are never monocultural, as they are always interacting with multiple cultural contexts (e.g., contexts of gender, ethnicity, SES, region, and sexual orientation). Cultural contexts are therefore not monolithic: Unique combinations of cultural models intersect within individuals” (2005, p.704). Similarly, Cohen (2009, p.200) writes that “all people are in fact multicultural.”

When cultural psychologists talk about multiculturalism, or multiple identities of the same kind (most commonly national or ethnic identities), two cases seem to predominate. First they often look at individuals in transition between two cultures (e.g., immigrants), a case that has received extensive attention by sociologists under the heading of acculturation. This is the example of multiculturalism that Cohen has in mind when he laments that “the focus is almost always cultural transition between countries” (p.200), and argues that authors should start studying transitions between SES categories, regions, or religions. But the emphasis is still on transitions, and therefore on extraordinary and temporary situations, and on demographic exceptions. The second case of multiculturalism often studied in ethnic studies results from individuals with mixed heritages, such as children of biracial couples, or second-generation immigrants who are not strictly speaking in transition, being born where they live, but nonetheless struggle between the cultural influences they receive at home and the mainstream cultural influences of their home country (Guendelman, Cheryan, and Monin, 2011).

And yet we suggest that there is more to multiculturalism than immigrants and biracial couples. The food domain vividly illustrates that individuals in a modern society are the repository of a great number of cultural models and that they fluidly engage with and enact them

on a daily basis. It both provides a wonderful setting to show the value added by the new “multiple cultures” approach, and also provides a challenge for this approach. It seems so natural to apply the multiple culture approach to the food domain that this logic can be pushed further than in other domains, and in doing so, it may provide some insights into its limits. In particular, two big questions arise: (1) How far can we push the balkanization of cultural identities while not stripping the concept of its pragmatic utility altogether? and (2) Presented with a whole repertoire of cultural identities, practices, norms, preferences, and ways of being, how do individuals pick and choose which culture to enact at any given moment?

The Limits of Cultural Fragmentation.

Although there is a clear appeal to using a more fine-grained comb to study culture, it also raises some interesting conceptual questions about the limits of the fragmentation of culture, again of two kinds: First, what is the difference between a culture and an identity? Can every social identity be thought of as being based on cultural elements? Is there a male culture, a youth culture, a disabled culture, etc.? While it has been argued that a group can be thought of as having a culture to the extent that it shares values, roles, practices, norms, and self-definitions (Cohen, 2010), it is unclear what degree of shared cultural elements is necessary to claim a group has or makes up a culture. This risks reducing the usefulness of the concept. And second (which in a way is merely a rephrasing of the first question), how few people are sufficient to constitute a culture? What are the necessary components of a culture? This question may seem too abstract when we look at other cultural components like models of the self, or even language, but food and eating brings it to the fore, because so many culinary practices, tastes, and artifacts are developed and transmitted within families or even couples given the domestic and quotidian nature of the domain. Though they may echo the practices of the broader culture as a whole,

family cultures pertaining to holiday traditions, table manners, the preparation or layout of foods, etc., all have specificities idiosyncratic to a given familial context – and will also be central to that family’s identity, so much so that they will be re-enacted by children once they are adults themselves, in memory of those who passed away and in celebration of the commonality of the kinship group (i.e., Dad’s chicken soup recipe, served in Grandma’s tureen). They are not just family variants, or simply quirky idiosyncrasies, they are also variants that are central to people’s self-definitions, affective memories, nostalgia, definition of “home,” and which grown children are highly motivated to pass on to their own offspring as having special value and significance. These features give family traditions (e.g., holiday menus), norms (e.g., table manners), rehearsed practices (e.g., recipes), and physical artifacts (e.g., handed-down serving dishes) the weight of cultural components. Using the language and concepts of cultural psychology seems in our mind fruitful to understand people’s relationship with their complex family heritage – but at the same time this could read like a *reductio ad absurdum*, and does the balkanization of cultural groups into ever smaller units for analytical purposes strip culture of any useful content (besides making it much harder to study with the usual tools used by psychologists)? With this in mind, and to the extent that there is some value to our challenge, it makes it relevant to all kinds of other groupings and social identities. Isn’t there a cultural aspect to a departmental weekly happy hour which celebrates and perpetuates the department’s traditions around drinks and snacks? To the yearly barbecue block party where gossip is exchanged and neighbors reminisce about fond shared memories? To the daily snack time in a middle school section where group values are instilled and enacted? We spent some time on families here because they seemed the focal locus of food cultures, but food and eating provide a wonderful entryway to the question of what to make of cultures emerging at various levels of group sizes. Although we have focused here on

families in this section, we merely use this context as an illustration for a broader point. We use it as a challenge to proponents of the multiple culture approach, a challenge that becomes apparent when one starts analyzing the food domain. The first challenge for the students of culture is to identify the definitional boundaries that would preserve the usefulness of the concept of culture as it gets applied to smaller and smaller groupings.

Ubiquitous Multiculturalism

If one grants cultural status to familial traditions, practices, know-hows, norms, etc., then as families recombine by bringing together the recipients of two different familial cultural traditions, they create a new “pooling” or “unique combination,” and a unique familial culture develops and will be further passed on, mixed with others as the children marry, etc. Some elements will be overlapping (homophily after all guaranteeing that children are likely to wed spouses who share some cultural similarities), some will be blended in the new familial unit, while yet others will survive side by side. When it comes to food, individuals are thus the recipients of multiple familial/cultural heritages. This is most apparent when these family traditions reflect different ethnic heritages (e.g., as in the child of an Irish-Italian couple), but is also true to a degree even when obvious ethnic differences are absent because of the familial cultural variations that are cherished and transmitted with care even within one given ethnic or ancestral tradition. Even though such idiosyncratic familial cultural traditions may seem outside of the reach of conventional psychological methods, it seems fruitful to recognize their importance in the cultural make-up of individuals, and one value in studying food and eating is that it brings these components to the fore. Thus the second challenge raised is what to make of the multiplicity of co-existing and sometimes conflicting cultural influences that affect and are affected by a given individual.

A Uniquely American Experience?

All scholars presuming to make cultural claims need to question whether they are merely commenting on their own culture, and we are no exception. The cultural mosaic we have been describing is very much inspired by the reality of 2013 America, and the tensions and personal struggles revealed have greatest relevance in this culture. Indeed, the examples in this chapter come predominantly from the authors' host culture. The push in the literature to recognize the internal nuances of cultures is likely to legitimize such tendencies, as an informant from within any culture is best able to make such distinctions (and still retain the credibility of an outside observer in regards to the sub-group he or she identified), and investigators are likely to look increasingly inward to document cultural processes within their own culture. Though we recognize this possible shortcoming, we submit two comments. First, precisely because the processes we talk about are exacerbated in American culture, it makes it a wonderful place to start documenting them. And second, the forces we discuss (e.g., cultural mixing through migrational fluxes, top-down cultural impositions by powerful corporations and their media minions, familial vs. regional traditions, etc.) are increasingly present around the globe with the progresses of globalization through international trade, the internet, migratory fluxes, etc. In parts of the world still outside the reach of globalization, our analysis may have less purchase, but we propose that these parts are becoming increasingly rare.

Practicing Multiculturalism.

Acknowledging that individuals walk around as the recipients and enactors of multiple cultural traditions raises novel questions. The most obvious one is what will determine what cultural component comes online at any given moment to guide cognition and behavior. A second and related one is whether individuals who have been exposed to multiple food cultures

can be influenced by the cultural repertoires, practices, know-hows, etc., of cultures which they do not recognize as their own. We discuss these issues, which once again we feel are revealed by the study of food but go well beyond the food domain to inform all of culture, in this section.

Cultural Role-Playing

Why do European Americans request chopsticks at Chinese restaurants? Beyond tasting different foods, there is a component of cultural role-playing in the local culinary tourism that individuals engage in when dining at an establishment from another culture. Individuals want to sample the foods of different culture, and consume them in a way that models and reproduces the means (e.g., using chopsticks) and style (e.g., sitting on the floor) of eating prominent in that culture. It is unlikely that this is motivated by the belief that it will improve the gustatory experience, but instead seems to reflect a hankering for the “authentic” cultural experience, not unlike the tourist’s hankering to sample the genuine everyday life of the country she is visiting. Besides the dated Orientalism caricatured in our example, such cultural role-playing occurs in more subtle way throughout the food domain, whether individuals are trying to capture the Southern/soul food experience in a barbecue, an Italian dinner on pasta night, or a French menu and table layout for a fancy dinner. Any practice that does not directly improve the gustatory experience can be chalked up to such role-playing, and is intriguing from the point of view of the multiculturalism that we are discussing.

The intriguing question is how individuals relate to a food culture that they know well (even in stereotypic terms) but do not properly speaking belong to. A likely answer is that the repertoire of food cultures that individuals know enables them to enact the qualities that they stereotypically associate with each ethnic tradition, such as warmth and communality for Italian food, simplicity and elegance for Japanese food, etc. When the Italian-themed Olive Garden

restaurant chain advertised “When you’re here, you’re family,” it capitalized on the fact that most Americans recognize the stereotypical Italian family meal, drawn-out, loud and copious, as familiar and appealing. It bet on the fact that even Americans with no Italian heritage recognize this cultural model (depicted in countless movies) and are enough drawn to this fantasy of Tuscan *Dolce Vita* to drive to their local strip mall and dine under plastic replicas of grape-laden trellises. Along the same lines, the Italian chain Buca di Beppo proclaims on its website: “In the spirit of Italian culture, our dishes are served family style and are meant to be shared.” -- thus it offers not just a sample of Italian tastes, but also lets American diners engage in a foreign cultural practice that embodies and reaffirms communality, even when dining with acquaintances who are not family members.

The Influence of Cultures Other Than One’s Own

When individuals are not deliberately role-playing a different culture for the duration of a meal, they can still be influenced by the models of cultures other than their own, or by models offered by one of the multiple cultures that they are the recipients of. So what are we to make in our analysis of cultural models that may affect individuals who do not belong to that culture? Bargh, Chen and Burrows (1996) have shown that priming social categories can affect the behavior of individuals, even if they do not belong to this category: White participants primed with faces of African American acted more rude and hostile, suggesting that the stereotypes they held about members of that group were activated and affected their behavior. To what extent can cultures function in a similar way? How does knowing about Italian cuisine and culinary tradition affect the preferences and habits of a contemporary African American? Conversely, the mainstream food preferences of White America affect the eating habits of recent Asian

immigrants in multiple ways. What is the difference between these external cultural influences and the influence of cultures that one embraces as one's own?

A case that makes this issue salient pertains to the food preferences of ethnic minorities in the United States. For example, Oyserman, Fryberg, and Yoder (2007) investigated identity-based motivations and documented how racial minority students (depending on the study, a mix of Hispanic, Black, Asian, and Native Americans), compared to White students, were more likely to see health-promoting behaviors such as eating healthy foods as incompatible with their social identities, and instead as being typically White and middle-class. Making social class and ethnic identity salient resulted in low-SES, minority students reporting more health fatalism and less engagement with health promotion. These minority students are obviously well aware of the mainstream middle-class White cultural model and relationship to food, so this example reveals already the interesting tensions between the cultural models that people know about and the ones that influence their behavior. Here the rejection of the majority cultural model can lead minority members to suboptimal health habits, even though they are recipients of the mainstream cultural model too.

Viewing unhealthy behaviors as consistent with a valued group identity may be contributing to recent trends in life expectancy (Olshansky, Antonucci, Berkman, Binstock, Boersch-Supan, Cacioppo, Carns, Carstensen, Fried, Goldman, Jackson, Kohli, Rother, Zheng, & Rowe, 2012). Between 1990 and 2008, despite well-documented improvements in longevity for most Americans, alarming disparities persist for Black Americans as well as less educated Whites, who have actually had their life expectancies reduced in this time span. As researchers struggle to understand what factors are contributing to these trends, such as decreased access to

healthcare and increased suicide rates, cultural factors that promote unhealthy food choices should also be included.

Distancing From One's Own Culture

Food and eating provide many of the visible markers of a culture and therefore may be an easy trigger to capture cultural differences. Indeed, eating habits are a strong and automatic way to prime cultural stereotypes about others. Macrae, Bodenhausen and Milne (1995) showed participants a video of a Chinese woman either eating noodles with chopsticks or putting on makeup, and then presented them with a lexical decision task. Participants who saw the chopstick version were faster than unprimed control participants at identifying words related to the Chinese stereotype (e.g., calm), but slower at identifying female-relevant words. Such primed stereotypes can also affect the self. In Ambady, Shih, Kim and Pittinsky (2001), the math performance of Asian girls improved after coloring a picture of Asian children eating with chopsticks. The simple cultural practice of eating with chopsticks thus encapsulated for both outsiders and for participants in the culture much more than its significance in the food domain and instead summoned a whole cultural stereotype with real consequences in terms of perception and performance.

Because of the significance of food preferences and eating habits in identifying someone as coming from a minority culture, individuals who, contrary to Oyserman et al.'s participants, long to be accepted by the mainstream but fear rejection because of their cultural heritage may downplay their food culture to fit in. Cheryan and Monin (2005) showed that many Asian Americans reported feeling such "identity denial," e.g., through oft-asked benign-sounding questions such as "Where are you *really* from?" It follows that a group who want to affirm its belongingness to an overarching common identity would do so by espousing mainstream food

preferences and downplaying ethnic cultural preferences and habits. Guendelman, Cheryan and Monin (2011) found that a majority of a sample of Asian Americans (68%) reported that some ethnic foods they ate at home growing up would have made them embarrassed if seen by White Americans (vs. 27% for White Americans). Next, Asian Americans threatened in their belongingness (e.g., by being asked if they spoke English) were three times more likely to report American staple dishes as their favorite (instead of Asian dishes) than when not threatened – and were also more likely to order and actually eat American than ethnic food in the laboratory. The foods ordered to affirm an American identity also had more fat and calories, explaining a possible mechanism for why the obesity rates of second-generation immigrants are similar to those of White Americans. If second-generation immigrants feel compelled to demonstrate their American identity, it seems that ordering less healthy dishes that seem American is one means of doing so.

Others' Food Choices Can Be Threatening to the Self

In Western culture, the food-related judgments of others extend beyond the general healthiness or unhealthiness of one's diet. Vegetarians report being pestered by others about their dietary choice, saying that their diet seems to bother meat eaters (Adams, 2003). Resentment toward vegetarians can be found on cultural products like T-shirts (e.g., "Nobody likes a vegetarian") and bumper stickers (e.g., "Vegetarian: Sioux word for lousy hunter"). Indeed, Western meat-eating participants put down vegetarians relative to non-vegetarians on potency (Monin & Norton, 2003), a measure relating to a person's perceived strength or agency. As discussed previously, further research has demonstrated that negative attitudes toward vegetarians are related to how much people expect vegetarians to see themselves as morally superior to non-vegetarians, and supporting this interpretation, when people imagine being

morally reproached by vegetarians, they rate vegetarians more negatively than when moral judgment is not anticipated (Minson & Monin, 2011). In the context of our discussion of multiple cultures, and following our description of tensions between minority and mainstream food cultures, it is noteworthy that the vegetarian culture is resented by a portion of the mainstream who see it as a reproach of mainstream practices.

When it comes to food, individuals in modern societies are effectively multicultural. Migratory movements and greater tolerance for outgroups results in individuals with mixed cultural heritages even within the mainstream (e.g., upper-middle class Whites in the USA), while the experience of culinary exploration of ethnic foods and cultural role-play when it comes to food is common enough for modern individuals to raise questions about the place of a dominant culture and how it relates to this multiplicity of influences, tastes, and practices. We next isolate the influence specifically imposed on individuals by large-scale actors such as governments, corporations, and the media.

A RICH DESSERT: INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS AND FOOD CULTURE

Much of our analysis so far has focused on individual or small-group cultural processes, like the way people prepare and serve food, and the sharing of food among family and friends. However, as industrialization and globalization increase, a tension between these everyday experiences with food and the institutional processes that influence them emerges. While people identify, claim, and feel familiar with the individual and small-group processes, the cultural cycle also includes the institutionalization of these practices (Markus & Kitayama, 2010).

Acknowledging the multiple food cultures that individuals juggle in modern society would be naive if it did not recognize that not all cultural messages and frameworks are created equal. In particular, everyday lives in media-soaked, digitally-hyperconnected industrialized

societies are shaped not just by existing cultural elements but also by actors who joust at the macro level to dominate the representational space, define meanings, constrain behavior, and legitimize ways of being that serve their agenda. Without subscribing to conspiracy theories or even Marxist sociology, it is useful to recognize the increasing role of centralized government and corporations in crafting and molding culture, as facilitated by mass media. Although such cultural criticism may sound like it harkens back to the leftist critical analysis of the Sixties, it is given a new relevance at a time where TV commercials follow us everywhere, whether we are pumping gas, sitting in an airplane, waiting at the doctor's, or just paying for groceries. The ubiquity of cheap LCD TV monitors ushered a world of constant representational bombardment that cannot be ignored as a major cultural input for individuals in industrialized societies. And this is not even mentioning the encroachment of commercials in the home via constant TV viewing, or in every private moment via smartphone advertising. Individuals typically underestimate the influence of such ubiquitous background messages, which directly contributes to their pernicious effectiveness as individuals do not put up adequate cognitive barriers or reduce exposure (Wilson & Brekke, 1994).

The food domain is a particularly interesting arena to study this struggle for the representational space because the financial interests at stake are so transparent at the very top, yet can shape choices at the most individual, domestic, intimate level. When a woman alone in her apartment indulges in a square of Dove chocolate, this seemingly personal decision is at the confluence of decades of institutional messages (e.g., television advertisement) about how women can regulate their mood with chocolate, images associating female sensual pleasure with Dove candy, as well as countervailing narratives about idealized body shapes and the guilt associated with indulging in a sugary and rich food like chocolate. These messages, which

constitute the culture this woman is reacting to just as much as the prescriptions transmitted by her parents and peers, often come from less benevolent sources with their own agendas. We think it is useful to acknowledge the role of these forces in shaping culture, and that this is particularly apparent in the food domain. Here we depart somewhat from the cultural psychologist's mantra to consider the mutual constitution of various cultural levels to focus more on top-down processes, mainly for analytical purposes – though it would be interesting to consider that acknowledging reciprocal processes does not necessarily mean that both sides are on equal footing: it is possible that institutional actors affect individual cultural representations more than individuals are able to affect what values and representations are embraced by institutional actors².

Much of our analysis in this section relies on examples in the media, because social psychology has not traditionally spent much time analyzing the role of institutional actors, in part because it is poorly equipped to do so both conceptually and methodologically. Cultural psychologists have already connected media representations with individual-level cultural representations (as in Kim & Markus, 1999, or Moscovici, 1961), but they have more often described these processes as a self-reinforcing echo chamber than resulting from a deliberate agenda serving the interest of a group, agency, or corporation. We think the food domain illustrates that it is sobering to take a less benign look at this processes. We illustrate the importance of institutional actors in shaping cultural representations by focusing on government agencies and corporations.

² Food meanings are imposed by those in power. A good reminder of this is captured in the English language, after the Norman conquest of England, the Anglo-Saxon words used to refer to farm animals (ox/bull, sheep, pig/swine, chicken) by the herders who grew them were replaced once the meat was served at the dinner table of the farmers' masters by words of Norman origin (beef, mutton, pork, poultry) and much closer to present-day French (boeuf, mouton, porc, poulet). To this day this reflection of the military domination of one cultural group by another remains enshrined in the English words used to refer to meat.

Government Agencies: Promoting a Healthy Culture?

One first institutional actor is the government. Agencies strive to comply with their mandate by shaping the discourse on food and changing behaviors in a way that serve their constituents. In a multi-agency context as large as the US government, the fact that various agencies serve different needs can lead to countervailing influences that are then reflected as contradictory components of the food culture. The most salient contribution of the US government to the discourse on food is perhaps through the Surgeon General, the National Institute of Health (NIH), and the Department of Agriculture. Such bodies have regularly raised the alarm in recent year about the rise in the number of individuals classified as overweight or obese (about 69% of the adult US population in 2010 according to the Center for Disease Control), and have pledged a “war on obesity” manifest in many government initiatives. One cultural artifact that results from these efforts is the “food pyramid” published by the US Department of Agriculture in 1992 and 2005, attempting to guide individuals towards the proper amount of food groups to ensure a balanced diet, and recently replaced by the nutrition plate diagram called MyPlate (www.choosemyplate.gov; see Neuman 2011).

At the same time, government agencies pursuing goals other than public health also have an impact on food culture that can defeat the goal of promoting healthy diets. For years, the food pyramid was the source of controversies suggesting that it results from a confluence of institutional interests, and in particular that lobbyist for food and agricultural producers’ professional associations carried undue influence in the place given to foods that may serve their interests better than the average eater’s health (Reyes, 2008). When the Obama administration released the new MyPlate scheme under the First Lady’s patronage, the Harvard School of Public Health unveiled an alternative prescription, with the chair of its Department of Nutrition

going on record to lament that MyPlate “mixes science with the influence of powerful agricultural interests, which is not a recipe for healthy eating” (*HSPH News*, 2011).

Such conflicts of interests abound in the federal food policies that trickle down with very real consequences on the landscape that makes up the American food culture. Controversy arose around the idea that food stamps could be used to buy junk foods, such that in effect the federal government was subsidizing the health-damaging diet of its poorest population (Ludwig et al., 2012). Another example of unanticipated negative shaping of a food culture is when the federal government started handing out wheat flour to some Native American populations in reservations to supplement their diet (Miller, 2008). Because wheat flour was not a staple in Native American cooking, this led to the creation of frybread, a type of flat dough that is fried in oil or lard and is particularly unhealthy, contributing in some small part to the poor diet in this population, and possibly to its high rates of obesity (Story et al., 1999). Yet another setting where special interests and conflicting government goals clash is over food lunches. The behind-the-scenes struggle between federal agencies striving to fund the program, food and beverage industry giants such as Tyson or Archer Daniels Midland, parents and activist pressure groups, and local school administrators determines what lands on the 187 billion plates served every year to American schoolchildren (Haskins, 2005), with obvious cultural repercussions for the imprinting of these children when it comes to what constitutes “normal” food. The American public got a glimpse of this representational struggle in 1981 when the Department of Agriculture suggested to cut costs by counting pickle relish and ketchup as the vegetable portion of the five required school-lunch food items. The backlash against this suggestion led to its quick retraction (and reinstatement of \$1 billion in funding that the Reagan administration was trying to cut out of the program) but it is just an extreme case of the kind of high-stake skirmish that

affects what schoolchildren will encounter as normal fare every day, and will come to embrace as normative of their culture.

Institutions are influenced by culture, as in the case of setting up government subsidies to support the growing of foods that are needed and well-liked. For example, the establishment of corn subsidies in the U.S. predates the Great Depression, and initially helped to guarantee that farmers could make a living selling corn, thereby ensuring that corn would be available for sale, thus filling a public need. However, institutions also help shape culture by determining which foods are readily available and affordable. For example, returning to corn subsidies, on which the US government spent approximately \$7 billion dollars each year (more than twice as much as for any other subsidized crop; USDA 2006 Fiscal Year Budget) until the federal subsidy expired in 2011. The artificially low cost of corn products versus other forms of sugar (due to government subsidies) resulted in the replacement of sugar with high fructose corn syrup in many products and foods. Although the health effects of replacing glucose with fructose are still under investigation, many Americans are wary of high fructose corn syrup, so much so that in 2010 the Corn Refiner's Association applied to rename high fructose corn syrup "corn sugar" (another representational gambit) though this was rejected by the Food and Drug Administration (Perlman, 2011). Even if high fructose corn syrup is identical to other forms of sugar, the massive subsidies to corn and the replacement of sugar with corn syrup allows corporations to offer sweet and unhealthy foods at a much cheaper price, starting a vicious circle that contributes to the current obesity crisis.

One of the most striking misalignment of special interests came in the form of a particularly cheesy pizza pie served by Domino's in 2010. The Department of Agriculture, which releases the MyPlate guidelines and publically decries obesity rises, at the same time funded an

organization called Dairy Management to promote the interest of the dairy industry by helping Domino's develop a new line of pizzas with 40% more cheese, chipping in for a \$12 million marketing campaign, praising Taco Bell's quesadillas for using eight times more cheese than other items on the menu, and supporting an advertising campaign touting the unfounded claim that people could lose weight by eating more dairy products (Moss, 2010). While this undoubtedly resulted from a good-faith effort to protect the livelihood of the Nation's dairy farmers, it is noteworthy because the tangible consequences of this deliberate decision to protect the interests of one group trickles down to determine the food landscape of millions of Americans, affecting what options are available, what flavors and portion sizes are deemed acceptable and attractive, and thus shape cultural representations as surely as they shape the bodies and health outcomes of millions of Americans.

Corporations and the Media

Whereas the ambivalent influence of government agencies in defining the American food culture may surprise some readers, the role of corporations, and in particular of large agribusinesses and food and beverage giants is more commonly recognized. The Federal Trade Commission found that in 2004 American children saw an average of fifteen TV ads for food products every day (Holt et al., 2007), and this has surely increased in the 10 years since as TV and media have become ubiquitous. As we argued above, this makes up for a large part of the cultural fabric that these individuals grow up with, and the food meanings and culinary referents that they in turn will be transmitting, in terms of desirable foods, modes of eating, portions and styles of food. As an example, a series of 2013 Chef Boyardee TV ads features children getting home from school to an empty house and heating up canned ravioli after performing a raucous dance routine in the kitchen, while a voice over says "It's your time" ([boy ad](#), [girl ad](#))— and to

those viewers who may be deterred by the fear that parents or peers may disapprove of eating a bowl of ravioli as an after-school snack, the power of such social pressures is played down with the grammatically shaky punchline: “Chef don’t judge.” Thus the cultural message is that prescriptive norms may be of little importance, and in fact that they may be overly judgmental. Interestingly, such message of rebelliousness and youthful independence is completely at odds with the cultural message portrayed at the same time on [the official Chef Boyardee website](#), most likely targeted at parents, and which touts the communal message that “dinner tastes better when you cook it together” to clips of loving children helping their mothers cook dinner with ConAgra Foods products (and mum about the fact that they snuck a bowl of ravioli before their mom came home).

Just as the ketchup-as-vegetable example above was the tip of the iceberg revealing the fight over the construal of foods to satisfy multiple interests in the government context, extreme examples of attempts at manipulating representations by corporations reveal a ubiquitous effort at manipulating cultural meanings to serve the interests of large corporations. When Ferrero advertised its Nutella spread as made with “simple quality ingredients like hazelnuts, skim milk, and a hint of cocoa,” and presented it as part of a balanced breakfast, many parents embraced this representation of the child-pleasing spread as a healthy food. It was thus a surprise to some of them when they later realized that its main ingredients were palm oil and sugar, with 100 calories per tablespoon, or as one parent who started a class-action lawsuit against the company puts it in court documents, that it was “the next best thing to a candy bar.” Ferrero ended up agreeing to a \$3 million settlement, and changing its packaging and advertising to avoid the confusion, but it stands as an example of a company pushing the envelope of representations to increase sales of its product. Note that even if Ferrero were to protest that it never tried to mislead the public, from

a cultural analysis standpoint it is worth noting that this is how the product was construed by many in the population as a result of this marketing campaign.

Just like commercial messages attempt to shape the perception of foods, they also try to change the practices of eating, at times by pushing back against the conventions of the prevailing culture. This is done either by suggesting new ways of acting, or, more often, by attempting to license existing practices that individuals may engage in with some degree of guilt or fear of social censure. We already described the “chef don’t judge” campaign as an example of an encouragement to break cultural norms to serve immediate gratification (and the long-term interests of ConAgra Foods). Similarly, Mexican-themed food chain Taco Bell’s 2007 “fourthmeal” campaign centered around late-night eating, and implying that a fourth large caloric intake was appropriate by calling it a meal. When nutritionists criticized the chain for promoting eating a fourth meal late at night as normal or appropriate, Taco Bell insisted that this behavior was already popular among young people, and their campaign merely gave it a name (White, 2007). While the existing eating habits of some may have inspired the campaign, Taco Bell’s goal also seemed to be to encourage others who had never gone for a “fourthmeal” to do so, and legitimized this behavior for those already engaging in it. In one commercial, a man commandeers a DJ’s microphone in a crowded club to announce, “Everyone’s a fourthmealer. Some just don’t know it yet.” Similar messages have since been taken up by other fast-food chains, like McDonald’s 2012 “nocturnivore” campaign, which offers breakfast beginning at midnight (Tuttle, 2012), and Jack-in-the-Box’s “munchies meal” box, marketed for late-night binges. While campaigns like these may be fulfilling a need for those already looking for late-night food, they are also shaping the ideas of those who never previously considered late night food, sending a cultural message about appropriate eating times and practices.

All-night dining also reflects the overwhelming abundance of food in Western industrialized societies, and in the U.S. in particular. Campaigns promoting a fourth meal present a sharp and chilling contrast with similarly ubiquitous campaigns in North Korea promoting the idea of having only two meals a day because of dramatic food shortages (Demick, 2009). And yet all-night dining should not be considered simply as a symbol of the opulence of the richest nation on earth, as such food services also cater to the many people forced to work multiple jobs at odd hours of the day to make ends meet in American society, and who thus cannot necessarily take their meals at traditional hours. Besides, it is only made possible by a restaurant industry that relies on poorly-paid, low-skilled workers working long hours, and on a cuisine relying on prepackaged and frozen ingredients, easy-to-follow systematized preparation procedures, and heavy reliance on salt and fat for flavor.

The availability of certain foods is also worth mentioning, as it strongly affects the food culture of social groups, and is also to a large degree controlled by the business decisions of large corporations. Thus nutrition and public health experts have lamented the appearance of “food deserts,” urban areas with little access to the fresh and affordable foods necessary for a healthy diet, which predominantly affects isolated individuals such as single mothers, children, or the elderly in poor neighborhoods (Beaulac et al., 2009; see also Stephens, Markus, and Fryberg, 2012). Instead of relying on cultural staples for sustenance, individuals in such environments often have to rely on fast-food restaurants or convenience stores, and consume a particularly unhealthy diet. Processed foods may come to replace produce as ingredients in recipes, as in the cultural oddity called a “Frito pie,” where cheese and canned chili are added to Fritos corn chips, sometimes right in the bag.

The fast-food industry does not only influence what and how people eat, but also how they think and behave more broadly, even in domains unrelated to food. For example, fast food has become a multi-million dollar industry, and is present in varying degrees all over the world, as evidenced by the McDonald's arch being ranked as one of the most globally recognized cultural symbols (Schlosser, 2001). However, the pervasiveness of fast food shapes far more than our waistlines, and instead seems to be cognitively associated with a general quickening of the pace of daily life, so much so that simple exposure to symbols of fast food can lead to individuals becoming faster. Zhong and DeVoe (2010) found that even unconscious exposure to fast food symbols (e.g., McDonald's arch) increases reading speed. Furthermore, thinking about fast food leads people to prefer other time-saving products (e.g., high efficiency detergent, a 3-in-1 skincare solution) (Zhong & DeVoe, 2010). Most strikingly, exposure to fast food symbols reduced people's willingness to save and led them to prefer immediate gains over future returns—a strategy that ultimately puts their economic interests at risk (Zhong & DeVoe, 2010). Thus, the pervasiveness of fast food and its culture of time efficiency and immediate gratification have important implications for our preferences and behaviors.

Broader Social Trends and Reciprocal Processes

While we have focused above on top-down effects to illustrate the secret war for consumers' and citizens' plates waged by large corporations and government agencies to serve their interests or those of their constituents, food culture also involves corporations and the media in less obviously top-down ways. One of the major trends in American food culture in the last decades is the outsourcing of food preparation, and the increased reliance on precooked meals, processed dishes, and eating out (Kant & Graubard, 2004). As a result of busier lives and women working outside of the home more, eating out, or bringing commercially-prepared food

home, has become an increasingly-embraced practical alternative to actual grocery shopping and cooking. This is a vicious circle as young adults starting their own homes now sometimes have had limited exposure to cooking parents and are thus less likely to have picked up rudimentary culinary skills themselves. Though the commercial outsourcing of food preparation certainly serves the interests of large restaurant chains and processed food producers, it is likely that this trend follows from broader sociological trends that are outside corporate control and that they have at best adapted to cash in on it.

A number of intriguing counter-cultural elements have emerged in reaction to this trend of increasingly outsourcing food preparation. First, several social movements reacting to the prevalence of unhealthy, chemically-enhanced fast-food have gained more prominence: the slow-food movement, vegetarians/vegans and others who eschew animal products, new consumer appetite for organic or fair-trade agricultural product, and an increased mindfulness for the humane treatment of farm animals. As the population as a whole is slowly moving away from the actual preparation of food, a high proportion of the public is reacting by embracing increased purity over ingredients. As food distribution channels and production processes become increasingly distant and nebulous in large corporations, a large chunk of the population is turning to more proximal distribution channels to have a more intimate, direct experience with their food and retain a modicum of control over and knowledge about its origin. The success of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), in which individuals buy a share or membership from a farmer and receive a box of seasonal produce each week delivered directly from the farmer is another example of individuals trying to bypass large institutional actors to reclaim a more intimate relationship with their food.

Another response to the recession of cooking as a daily chore is to elevate it to the degree of entertainment. Cooking shows have multiplied on American television, and although a segment of the audience may be watching to pick up tips or recipes, they seem increasingly produced for entertainment value, with the epitome being the cooking competition, originally imported from Japan (*Iron Chef*) but now cloned repeatedly (*Top Chef*, *Chopped!*, *Cupcake War*, etc...). TV chefs have become celebrities in their own right, and cable channels devoted to displaying food preparation have enjoyed mushrooming viewerships. In contrast to fashion, music, or visual art, cooking would seem *a priori* to make for bad television, as it can be neither smelled nor tasted onscreen. So there is something particularly fascinating about millions of viewers eating take-out or microwaved dinners while watching intricate dishes being prepared that they will never enjoy. Some writers have discussed this apparent fetishization of the visual appearance of food and its preparation as “food porn,” and the parallel seems appropriate. There is a decoupling in modern American culture between on the one hand the base act of food ingestion, which falls to new lows every time a “munchy box” is sold late at night by a teenager working at Jack-in-the-Box to be chewed mindlessly while sitting in the driver’s seat, and on the other hand the most sublimated depictions of food preparation, idealized when a smiling chef is filmed on a terrace overlooking a Hawaiian bay discussing the proper way to whisk a *mayonnaise*. Again this is a trend that clearly involves corporations and the media industry in particular, but although we think it is worth discussing here, we did not want to imply that it is driven by top-down processes, though of course corporations benefit from this public love-story with food porn as they can advertise their products to an already salivating audience.

In this third section we have explored the role of large institutional actors in shaping food culture. We have argued that such an analysis is useful to consider for cultural psychologists

more generally. Besides recognizing the mutually constitutive processes between various levels of the cultural matrix, it can be productive not to be naïve about the interests at stake in this mutual constitution, and the fact that the actors with the power and resources (e.g., corporations and public agencies) have more than their share of influence in shaping the American food culture. We tried to illustrate this with several examples, and then we discussed some reciprocal processes that involve these institutional actors but were not as clearly instigated by them, such as the reduction in home cooking and the countercultural movements that followed, as well as the more puzzling phenomenon of food porn which elevates cooking as a spectacle and as an object of sublimated fascination.

We realize of course that much of the analysis in this section again applies predominantly to the American (U.S.) context. Our claim, as before, is that the trends seen in the U.S. are likely to be observed in some version in other industrialized countries, and that the spread of American cultural products, media, and restaurant chains throughout the global economy guarantees that many of the trends we discuss will be exported to other parts of the World.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this chapter we have considered what cultural psychologists stand to gain by studying food and eating. In the first section we acknowledged cultural differences in table manners, food taboos, and affective associations with food, which we connected with familiar models of differences between cultures. This recognized that cultures differ in their treatment of food, in systematic ways. The remaining two sections did not look at difference between national cultures but instead exposed and problematized the multiple cultural influences faced by any given individual in modern society. The first section raised the issue of universal multiculturalism, by proposing that familial cultures matter a great deal, and by acknowledging that individuals in

modern society are showered with various cultural representations, not all coming from their own home culture, and yet are somehow integrated. In our third section we exposed the role of institutional actors, in particular how government agencies and food- and beverage-producing corporations struggle for influence in shaping the culture because of the very large financial interests at stake. While not wanting to start conspiracy theories, we also think it can be productive to be realistic about the power of these actors in shaping our cultural landscape and thus our world. In closing, we reiterate our claim that cultural psychologists have much to gain by studying the food domain and we more modestly propose that they consider incorporating in their analyses some the questions and directions that we have sketched out here.

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