



Analysis of the Gender Stereotypes on Food Preferences

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Abstract. Food not only meets our energy needs, but also has a social function. It has strong impacts on perceptions of masculinity and femininity, conveys gender stereotypes, which will further influence our food choices. From the anthropological perspective, this paper makes a cultural description of food and its gender significance, and analyzes the deep logic behind it by analyzing the gender differences in human eating activities. These gender stereotypes may have a huge impact on food selection and design based on gender roles in the food industry, so as to withdraw from more targeted design of food favored by consumers in the future.

Keywords: Food · Gender stereotypes · Culture · Diet · Sign · Female · Male

1 Introduction

Food selection, as one of the activities closely related to survival, has been accompanied by human evolution throughout the long evolutionary history. Evolution involves a core pressure: survival and reproduction [1]. The survival function of food choice is clear, but its possible link to human reproduction has received relatively little attention. We know that although different foods can satisfy survival, there are always preferences in the selection process, and different weights are given to different foods. This suggests that food choices themselves may have value beyond survival. So does reproduction, or sexual selection, another important evolutionary factor shaping human psychology and behavior, play a role in this process?

Some literatures have shown that food selection and intake have a certain influence on people's perception of others' images. In many cultures, food choice and eating behavior play an important role in the expression of identity, communication, social interaction, and expression of socioeconomic status and gender roles [2].

Since the ancient times in China, there has been a saying that "food is the most important thing for the people" and "food is for men and women". Foreign studies have shown that people generally have the food-gender stereotype of "meat is masculine food" and "vegetables and fruits are feminine food". Thus how do food gender stereotypes affect perceptions of Chinese people and whether there is a gender difference is what we need to investigate. This study will focus on food gender stereotypes and their impact on character evaluation.

The results also showed that people are more likely to choose foods that are consistent with their gender roles, which has implications for more gender-specific food design in the food industry.

2 Analysis of the Gender Stereotypes on Food Preferences

2.1 The Introduction of Food Gender Stereotypes

Gender is an important innate characteristic of individuals and an important clue of group classification. Gender stereotype has always been a focus of stereotype research at home and abroad. Gender stereotypes are people's expectations, demands and general views of men or women in terms of behavior, personality traits, etc. In China, gender bias and taboos in eating are found extensively in "fairy thinking", which means "like produces like" [3]. For example, penises and testes of bull and seahorses are regarded in China as symbols of male sexuality, while red dates, placenta and cubilose are considered as special tonics for women. Partial resemblance between food and objects is considered to be a direct route to therapeutic effect. As a kind of "mythic thinking" metaphor, this kind of diet "like born like" symbol rhetoric widely exists in each civilization and society, although the traditional or the modern medicine is trying to, from the perspective of experience or scientific arguments as metaphor behind the effectiveness, and there is no denying that this kind of "like" is to take place between contact directly and primary basis. Besides, there are also some beliefs that red meat is masculine and vegetables or fruits are more feminine which is widely recognized across cultures [4]. Food is directly related to gender based on the symbolic metaphor of "like produces like", and based on the inherent physiological differences between food and gender, so that it becomes a symbol carrying gender significance. Food carries with it the biological significance of gender, in other words, food serves to define the biological differences between male and female bodies.

Many studies have shown that red meat is the most masculine food [5]. First, it may be because it represents aggressive, vigorous and powerful behavior, which may be related to the meat supplier [6]. In fact, the slaughterers are almost all male, and it is difficult to imagine a female slaughterer within a socio-cultural context [7]. Second, meat food is usually associated with strength and masculinity, which has a high degree of connection with the traditional concept of masculinity [8]. Thus, it has become the most masculine food.

2.2 The Analysis of Food-Gender Stereotypes

In this article, in order to investigate people's food-gender stereotypes and gender differences in the context of Chinese culture, 30 people (15 males and 15 females) participated in the survey. 15 participants (7 males and 8 females) were asked to write down 5 kinds of food that they thought men should eat and another 5 foods that women should eat respectively. After sorting out the data, 10 kinds of food that were mentioned the most frequently were reserved: cakes, milk tea, salads, red dates and cubilose for females; penises and testes of bull, seahorses, beer and red meat for males. The other 15 (8 males

and 7 females) were asked to judge whether the food they had retained from the previous session was masculine or feminine. Results showed that 86.1% of participants classified the foods by sex in exactly the same way as in the first phase. At the same time, we interviewed all the 30 participants, and 93.3% of them thought it was weird that people eat food opposite their gender, such as bull penises for women or cubilose for men.

In addition to the type of food selected by the eaters, the total food intake is also related to gender stereotypes [9]. Studies of food intake began with observations of dieters and people with eating disorders, which were predominantly female. Research has shown that the process of sexual selection results in different mating strategies for men and women. For women, body information is an important content that men pay attention to when choosing a mate, which also makes women pay more attention to their body and other external attractiveness information. Due to the strong link between a woman's body shape and her diet, it's likely that her food choices are also influenced by reproductive cues. Compared with males, females are more sensitive to body proportion, pay more attention to weight, are often less satisfied with their own body and have a stronger motivation to shape the ideal body [10]. Studies on food intake have been particularly prominent among females since the beauty standard of our society for women is slim, and being slim has become part of the female gender role, which is associated with lower food intake. Results of Chaiken and Pliner showed that women who ate less at meals were assessed as having more feminine traits and less masculine traits on both direct and indirect measures, compared with female targets who ate more at both meals [11]. However, the femininity of the male target was not affected by food intake. These results suggest that food intake may be associated with masculine and feminine traits, but not necessarily with the specific stereotype traits that make up the list of gender roles. Women who ate less food were rated as having more feminine traits and less masculine traits, and studies have shown that they are more likely to eat more feminine foods [12]. Dieting or controlling one's own eating is one of the common methods. In order to better manage their body shape, women often limit their intake of high-calorie foods and consume more fruits and vegetables. In daily life, women also choose more low-calorie foods and fiber-rich vegetables and fruits than men. The above characteristics of food choice of individuals of different genders are not only reflected in the relevant survey results, but also can be verified from the side by some experimental studies [13]. Of the 15 female participants, about 88% of them felt ashamed to eat too much food in front of men.

In addition, the appearance of the food changes with the style of service and the arrangement of the same food. Several studies have shown that food service and the interaction between food and cutlery may influence food consumption and evaluation. As a result, many chefs and culinary amateurs focus on the arrangement of food on the plate because they know that aesthetics can influence people's prayers about taste and deliciousness, and thus create a desire to eat it. A series of studies have shown that people enjoy identical foods more when they are arranged neatly on a plate than when they are presented in a messy manner. A clean and creative presentation elicits a better evaluation of the food than a messy and traditional presentation. In addition, the impact of dishes on eating behavior is not only reflected in visual perception, but also in the field of social cognition, affecting the perception of food gender roles. In summary, people

judge the gender stereotypes of food and eaters by the type of food and its portion size. To sum up, the context of the food, the plate on which the food is presented, and the roughness and elegance of the plate also affect perceptions of food gender stereotypes and people's perceptions Food choices.

3 Conclusion

In the context of Chinese culture, both male and female people held the food gender stereotype that “men prefer masculine food (such as penises and testes of bull, seahorses, beer and red meat), while women prefer feminine food (such as cakes, milk tea, salads, red dates and cubilose)”.

The reason why food has armed with gender differences and social stratification meaning of symbols, not only because of certain features of the food itself and sexes in physical contact with correspondence, but also involved in society and culture, which endow them with the connotation socially and culturally [14], this also makes food and gender have cultural significance while carrying physical connection. These judgments affect food choices. The results also showed that people are more likely to choose foods that are consistent with their gender roles, which has implications for more gender-specific food design in the food industry. This idea can also be used for reference by the food industry in the future to design more targeted food to attract consumers of different genders, so as to achieve better market results.

Food gender stereotyping is a new extension of stereotype research. This study is a preliminary exploration of food gender stereotyping of Chinese people, and there are still some problems and deficiencies that need further research in the future. Firstly, in terms of the objects and contents of the study, the objects of this study are mainly young people, whose cognitive ability is generally at a high level, and food preference and nomination also have the characteristics of The Times. In the future, relevant researches can carry out differentiated research on food gender stereotypes based on different ages and different groups. In terms of research content, this study focuses on “food gender stereotype and its impact on character evaluation”, while recent studies have shown that gender stereotype is formed in early childhood. For example, researchers have found that children at the age of 6 will accept stereotypes and affect their interests [15]. Therefore, in the future, it will be of great theoretical and practical significance to further explore the formation and evolution of food gender stereotypes in children from the perspective of age development. Secondly, research materials can be further refined. From the perspective of food materials, this study did not control for the health degree of food and the positive or negative nature of food words themselves. Different foods may trigger different life scenes, thus affecting subjects' evaluation of target individuals. These additional variables can be further controlled in the future to verify the conclusions of this study.

For the research group in this field, more attention is paid to adults, and there is a lack of research on children. With the development of national economy, overweight children also increase, the study of overweight children is particularly important. Margaret C. Campbell and Kenneth C. Manning found that activating children's stereotypes of cartoon characters (normal and overweight cartoon characters) influenced children's food

consumption [16]. However, the formation process of children's consumption stereotype is still unclear, and how to effectively convey a healthy consumption concept of food among children will also be a crucial direction of future research.

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