


This article examined the gender differences with regards to how food and eating habits are approached among college-aged American students. The context of the study was the alarming rate at which obesity is increasing in the United States - the percentage of obese adults has nearly doubled since 1990. The study seeks to gain information relevant to helping college students avoid the obesity epidemic, especially given that behaviors related to food habits and eating are generally solidified during and shortly after the college years. The study compared gender and involvement in food decisions, specifically referring to deciding how much or what sorts of food men and women choose to eat and how much attention they pay to those food. This idea is viewed through the lens of social and cultural expectations pertaining to how food choices relate to masculinity.

The American sociocultural framework of gender places more emphasis for men on the rational mind and for women on the irrational body, meaning that there is a strong masculine compulsiveness towards not caring about food choices - the mentality of, "I'm a man and I need man food for my man-sized appetite!" Contemporary American culture places so much emphasis on female physical self-improvement and health-consciousness that it identifies health and healthy eating as a highly feminine activity, and thus actively discourages men from investigating proper nutrition or even from reading product labels.

The study sampled 358 college students at least 18 years of age with a questionnaire of behaviors and attitudes about food choices and eating habits. Between men and women there were some similarities, particularly that both genders did not consider organic content to be a significant factor but both felt cost of food to be equally important. It was found to be significant however that female respondents put much more importance on the healthiness, quality, appearance, taste, and label information of food than the male respondents did. It can be generally stated that Men basically generally care less about what they eat, and may even harbor some hostility towards involvement in food choices and eating with its association to dieting as a culturally feminine activity. These findings are in accordance with cultural notions about gender and expected body image and healthiness, generally that women are expected to worry more about fitness, body image, and health.

From reading this article I found it particularly interesting that the gender difference was so marked. I had expected a more slight difference, however it makes sense to me that women tend to be much more involved in food and eating habits. I understand that there is much more societal pressure on women to look good and be healthy, but I figured also that there was a pressure on men to be manly and muscular, which would mean being healthy as well - although maybe the pressure to be so isn't as clear and out in the open for men as it is for women.

Given that surprise, I think it would be especially interesting to replicate the study in different regions and maybe get some insight into other areas of the country - particularly those with varying ideas of acceptable male health and fitness as well as areas with different ideologies about food and eating. Furthermore, this would be interesting to look at in different age groups, both older and younger, and explore any generational differences in these ideas.