In the chapter, “The Nourishing Arts”, the authors depict the role of women in the preparation of food and the stereotyped view of the homemaker. While these views are changeable, proven by anthropology, and are changing in some cultures, women in France are still taking part in the tradition of being the meal provider.

Regarding this transformation from traditional to feminist belief the authors tell the story of a young progressive woman growing up attempting not to be pressured into the common role of the women who came before her. Growing up, she didn’t spend much time in the kitchen with her mother, but rather stayed in her room reading, imagining the ‘real profession’ she would someday have involving math or writing. She only discovered the importance and impact family meals had had on her when she experienced the impersonal dining halls at college. Yet, she remained stubborn in her thoughts of meal organization by women, being ‘elementary, conventional, and pedestrian’ (de Certeau, 2008, 68). The transition of thought came when she moved away from school and got her own apartment. There she found the fun, relief, and escape that cooking her own meals could bring. The problem arose that she lacked knowledge and sticking to her scholarly ways and avoiding the traditional feminine way she did not go to her own mother for cooking advice. Instead, she got a cookbook lacking any ‘femine’ touches to ensure that is was practical.

In reading this logic based cookbook she comes across words that spark her childhood memories of learned observed techniques, engrained senses that kept track of gestures, tastes, smells, sounds, and colors. This is when she finally accepts that she was raised to have a woman’s nature when it comes to cooking. She realizes that cooking can be a total body-freeing an relaxing experience. The act of creating meals from parts brings her joy and peace. While she is tempted to feel trapped and wants to escape from this traditional role, she considers that in doing something such as fulfilling a women’s job to cook, she is keeping alive a legacy. She begins to think of these techniques and recipes as a heritage that has been transmitted from generation to generation and thus wants her ancestors and the women before her to be remembered, as they had started such a strong tradition.

This new outlook brought a shift of view in terms of a typical woman’s role in meal preparation. These tasks must be taken at the value they are, small gestures that are very important, yet often taken for granted. When something is always around you it becomes the norm and the necessity becomes less evident. Socially and culturally household work is not often recognized and just expected to be done, usually by a woman. However, in France, the culinary arts are more respected and the importance of food incorporated with family is more stressed and evident. Yet, the work is still seen as that of lacking imagination, skill, and intelligence. But in reality, cooking involves a great deal of memory, skill, planning, timing, creativity, and intelligence. And in that sense a very good cook is highly respected yet generally ‘great chefs’ are men. This stresses the ambiguity in viewpoints on meal preparation and the role women play in it.

The role of women in meal preparation has been engrained into many societies for generations. It was decided culturally, which is the apparent case in France, as well as commonly in the U.S. However, the United States culture has proven to be ever shifting, commonly not fearing technology or being individualistic. Keeping that fact in mind, there is no doubt that in many American households the task of feeding the family has fallen on the man of the house, or is shared between partners. As societies grow and evolve, these views will undoubtedly continue to change.