Axelson (1986) The Impact of Culture on Food Related Behavior

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In this article, Axelson examines the cross-cultural differences in the way people consume their food, whether it be what they eat, how they obtain it, or even the factors motivating them to eat in the first place, looking particularly at "Sociodemographic Determinants," which he lists as income, household size, education, gender and age, wife's employment status, and ethnicity and race. Each of this factors varies from one culture to another, making them good markers in order to explain variations in "the way in which individuals or groups of individuals, in response to social and cultural pressures, select, consume, and utilize portions of the available food supply." (Axelson 1986: page number) also known as food-related behavior. All of these Sociodemographic Determinants shape the relationship between one and one's food. Income, household size, and wife's employment status are all economic constraints on a person's ability to obtain food, though this is approached as a fairly western idea, as certain cultures continue to hunt and gather in order to provide for themselves, making income a moot point, and preventing income from being a universal factor.

Axelson then puts these in a differing perspective, adding in the "Psychosocial Determinants" such as nutrition knowledge, attitude, and eating types, in order to contrast the restraints on obtaining food with those who willingly alter their nutritional habits. Yet again this seems to be presented through a western lens, as many underdeveloped nations, essential to getting a full-rounded view of the world, struggle to obtain food at all. Thus, the four groups of eating types Axelson determines, "finicky eaters, health-conscious dieters, diverse diners, and high-calorie traditionalists," are all absolutely irrelevant to anything but the most developed of nations, where food is always so readily available that people are given the chance to become picky, a luxury not seen in many places. good point

Though he does provide detailed lists of a plethora of differing factors affecting food habits seen within a culture, Axelson never lists any of these cultures in particular, making the article fairly ambiguous despite the fair amount of specification, as it is all done in the theoretical and never fully grounded in data. In his final summary, he essentially takes the easy way out, stating that very little is known for certain, and that nothing concrete can be decided at this time without further study. Moreover, he does seem to approach the topic with more of a western mindset. For instance, the affect of religious beliefs on food habits is never even mentioned, despite it's influence many cultures. In Burundi, for example, a large percentage of the people herds cows, but would never kill one, as the cow is sacred to them, and would only eat it if it died naturally. Due to this, meat is a scarcity for the people of Burundi, though cattle can be found in abundance. Thus, Axelson's article The Impact of Culture on Food Related Behavior does not seem to actually reach any conclusion, but becomes merely the presentation of a series of facts.

Good critical commentary.