THE USDA FOOD PLATE WEBSITE:

CULTURALLY CONSCIOUS OR COLORBLIND?

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

by

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San Marcos, Texas
May 2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have accomplished this project without the support from my academic and personal network. I am thankful, Dr. Balzhiser, for your tireless commitment to making this project my own, valuable contribution to the field. To Dr. Jackson and Dr. Williams, I thank you for your guidance and counsel throughout the process. I am also indebted to my graduate peers who acted as sounding boards and cheerleaders as needed.. I am also thankful to my family for their unwavering dedication to me during this project. To my husband, thank you for giving me grace and taking on extra responsibilities so I could work longer. To my mom and dad, thank you for the infinite tangible and intangible encouragement to keep going. Finally, I'm thinking to God, who brought us all together to make it happen.

This manuscript was submitted on March 8, 2012.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Because eating is a matter of individual and cultural identity, dictates about eating are bound to have profound consequences. In her book "Food, Health, and Identity" Patricia Caplan (1997) explains that beginning in the 1960's as structuralism took hold, researchers began to look at food systematically. They proposed that food is symbolic and analogous to language. Further research sought for the "grammar" of food, demonstrating the systems of meals and foods within a day, a year, and a holiday. Current theorists coming from a postmodern perspective have moved to talking about food and people's subjectivities, or their multiple identities shaped by individual factors such as self-labeling and larger cultural and political forces. Along the same lines, social scientist Claude Fischler explains that the very nature of humans as omnivores dictates that food choices speak to our identities based on our "beliefs and representations" (275). Caplan synthesizes these perspectives by stating that, "food is never 'just food' and its significance can never be purely nutritional. Furthermore, it is intimately bound up with social relations, including those of power, of inclusion and exclusion, and as well as with cultural ideas about classification…the human body and the meaning of health" (p. 3). In other words, no matter the current theoretical

climate, food is always recognized as an important component of personal and cultural identity. One way that the intersection of food and identity becomes a rhetorical concern is when technical documents dictate diet recommendations. In "Counting on Dinner: Discourses of Science and the Reconfiguration of Food in the USDA Nutrition Guidelines," Jessica Mudry proposes that in transforming technical, scientific information about food into easy relatable prose for its audience, the USDA has altered the way Americans view food. She argues that the USDA created a numerical, ideological approach to food she terms "nutritionism." The quantification of food has lead people to believe that "the real nature of food is found in its numerical properties" rather than other factors such as seasonality, taste, and sustainability (350). Ignoring those once-important factors in favor of enumeration results in a belief that the pyramid is objective, which people find believable. However, if the USDA limits itself to only a scientific approach to food, they do their diverse audiences a disservice by ignoring important cultural aspects of eating.

Mudry's research ended with the second-to-last pyramid design in 1992 that included suggested serving sizes for each food group. Since then, two more food guides have been released. The USDA began creating food guides in 1916 when it won the responsibility against the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Nestle 65). The food guides changed throughout history to accommodate the scientific and economic climate in the U.S., until 1979 when the USDA was mandated to update their recommendations every five years ("A Brief History"). Historically, they have updated the logo at every interval as well. The

most current food guide system is a plate that displays appropriate food group ratios for each meal, with the assumption that viewers are eating three square meals a day. I elaborate on the history of the USDA's food guides later in this chapter.

In light of Mudry's findings about the prior food guide system, I wonder, does their new guide and website value cultural ways of eating? As a means of exploring this question, I intend to conduct a critical analysis on the USDA's newly released choosemyplate.gov website. I will analyze each page that describes elements of the plate with examples of each category and the relevant sub-pages. Scholarship about the relationship between culture, food, and identity and eating patterns and health concerns of Asians, Latinos, and African heritage cultures will inform my application of Thomas Huckin's guidelines for critical analysis.

Of the possible documents to select for my interests in culturally sensitive, food-related technical documents, I chose the USDA's choosmyplate.gov website because it is a document from a governing authority with a history of troubled relationships with people of color, as elaborated on below, making it a relevant choice. For just one example of the USDA's prior injustices with non-Anglos, look to the 1999 case Pigford v. Glickman in which the courts sided with Pigford, a Black farmer, in a class action discrimination suit against the USDA. The Pigford v. Glickman case awarded an estimated total of three to four billion dollars in loan forgiveness to Black farmers with evidence of racial discrimination from the USDA. The case began because Pigford felt the USDA was consistently

discriminating against him in farm loan opportunities, which eventually cost him his house. Despite the promising sound of this case, "Pigford won, but Black farmers lost" (Cohen, 2008). The USDA was not aggressive in responding to filings from Black farmers and relatively few Black farmers received support in the filing process; as a result, 81,000 of the 94,000 Black farmers who filed with the USDA were rejected for compensation. It appears that despite the importance of this case, the USDA still systematically oppressed Black farmers. When the Senate voted to re-open the case and to extend the deadline, then Senator Obama stated that "For far too long, this country's hardworking Black farmers were discriminated against by our own government, and this legislation offers a chance for us to continue righting those wrongs" (qtd. in Cohen, 2008). This prior bad behavior of the USDA warrants looking closer at their relationship to people not a member of the dominant culture.

Research Questions

Taking the USDA's prior actions together with the importance of food and identity results in a rich soil from which my research grows. The choosemyplate.gov website is an extension of the USDA and a site for demonstrating increased sensitivity to minorities since prior incidents such as the Pigford v. Glickman case. Considering these points and my research interests, the following questions guided my study:

- As a government agency, has the USDA taken appropriate measures by accounting for cultural relationships to food?

- Does the USDA's new guide, MyPlate, and website demonstrate that the USDA values cultural ways of eating?

To answer these questions, I conducted a critical discourse analysis of 27 web pages on the choosemplate.gov website. The analysis is co-grounded in literature about Asian, African diaspora cultures, and Latino foods, approaches to food, and health profiles that I outline below in this chapter. I overview the web pages' purposes and contents generally in chapter two and explain which mechanisms of Thomas Huckin's critical discourse analysis I employed. In chapter three, I relay four themes from the findings of the analysis and discuss their significance in chapter four.

Findings in Brief

After analyzing the websites, I found four predominant themes:

- The USDA consistently omits commonly eaten foods from Asians, African heritage, and Latino cultures on their lists of "Commonly eaten [insert food group name]." These omissions are most prevalent in fruit and vegetable groups and least common on the grain and oils pages.
- The USDA foregrounds many images of foods on their site. Some of the images exclude the cultures of my analysis because they are not foods that are commonly eaten in Asia, African diaspora cultures, or Latin America. However, most of foregrounded images are relevant to some of those cultures, and some foods images are relevant to all three cultures. Still, only one foregrounded image on

the pages I analyzed is of a food that is traditionally eaten by another culture that Anglo Americans also eat.

- Finally, the USDA disrupts coherence of the website because they categorize some foods differently than Asians, people of African heritage, and Latinos typically do. The USDA categorizes foods based on their nutrient qualities, which ignores the cultural, scientific, or taste-based groupings that other cultures value.

In the next section of this chapter, I survey the literature that explains the importance of analyzing public documents for their rhetorical functions, the intense relationship between food, identity, and culture, the USDA's process for creating a guide and a brief history of their guides, and finally the eating habits of the three cultures I focus on.

Literature Review

The following discussion situates my study and guides my observations and analysis. First, I relay a piece of current conversation between Patrick Moore, Emily Thrush and the co-authored article by Jennifer Ramirez-Johnson, Octavio Pimentel, and Charise Pimentel that extends my earlier statements about the importance of applying multicultural rhetoric to technical and government documents. Following the discussion, I will move to a brief history of the USDA's many Food Guide Systems over the years. Because the MyPlate logo is so recent, I explore the scholarship authored by the USDA that explains their process for making changes from the Pyramid to the MyPyramid logo. Understanding the process between those logos will fill-in for the yet-to-be-

published information about the move from the MyPyramid to the current MyPlate logo. To complement their consumer research, I draw on two multi-culturally focused studies conducted on MyPyramid after its release. The academic conversation about rhetoric and technical documents and the USDA's history are not logically related. Instead, they are twin pillars of my research; in order to understand my method, motivation, and inclusion of research on prior food guides, both must be understood. A third pillar of my research to color my analysis is scholarship on the complex relationship between food, identity, and ethnicity, and the eating patters and health concerns of Asians, Latinos, and people of African heritage.

Multicultural Rhetoric and Technical Documents

In his article "Instrumental Discourse is as Humanistic as Rhetoric," Patrick Moore claims that technical communication can be instrumental or straightforward and without rhetorical bend. While he acknowledges a rhetorical aspect of some technical communication, he advocates a "socially useful and humane" instrumental discourse that is not rhetorical (2). Moore proposes that some communication simply serves the intended purpose without any byproducts worthy of rhetorical inspection. Moore's example of instruction applies here to the USDA food guidelines that instruct people what to eat. Moore says that instructions require "no persuasion" and that these instructions do not warrant further investigation (2). In fact, he dismisses those scholars who "seem anxious about the ethical implications of their subject" (1). Still, I remain "anxious about the ethical implications" of the USDA's MyPlate project, and research by others

by Thrush and the co-authored piece by Johnson, Pimentel, and Pimentel warrant this concern.

In "Multicultural Issues in Technical Communication" Emily Thrush powerfully counters the notions set forth in Moore's article. She opens her argument by offering staggering figures that demonstrates increased diversity in the United States workforce and claims "those who sell their skills communicating for a living need to be prepared to meet the new challenges and take advantage of the opportunities" this mixed culture provides (415). Part of this challenge is understanding that language, born in culture, affects meaning. Given Thrush's argument and a rhetorical understanding of language, communicators need to address the challenges of communicating with the diverse sub-cultures in the United States. Professional communicators cannot write the document assuming that readers are Anglo and middle class, which would limit the meaning of the text for readers from other backgrounds. Instead, they need to ensure their product is appropriate for diverse readers. Thrush posits that technical communicators should agree to raise awareness of different communication strategies, avoid evaluating other cultures against our own standards and trying to impose our culture on others (416). The USDA's position of power raises the level of responsibility they have to not impose their perceptions of Anglo culture onto the various sub-cultures in the United States. The USDA's choosemyplate.gov website is a clear site for her call for specialized communication to the diverse cultures within our country.

Jennifer Ramirez-Johnson, Octavio Pimentel, and Charise Pimentel's "Writing New Mexico White: A Critical Analysis of Early Representations of New Mexico in Technical Writing" provides a practical example of Thrush's implications. The authors demonstrate how a technical document was successful at its overt objective of communicating information, but the document failed to accommodate their culturally mixed audience as Thrush advocates. Specifically, they analyzed technical documents written by the New Mexico Bureau of Immigration (NMBI) from Jenny Gordon's logics of privileging whiteness. The documents published by NMBI were created to draw in white settlers to New Mexico despite the heavy presence of Natives. They succeeded on that front. However, looking at these documents through whiteness theory lead the researchers to see that the pamphlets consistently took advantage of the Natives to privilege whiteness. For instance, when describing the Natives, the NMBI grouped several tribes' lore into one tale and heavily altered the language to appeal to Anglos with a Christian background, which undermined the oral traditions of the Natives and ignored the important differences between tribes. The logics of whiteness theory demonstrated that as a technical document, the pamphlets were successful because they drew in Anglo settlers, yet they were ethically corrupt because of their rhetorical treatment of the Natives. In the same way, I propose that while the USDA's website may seem successful at its objective, communicating their standards for nutrition, their documents may marginalize or misrepresent certain cultures in the Unites States.

Food and Identity

Most people understand intuitively that everyone holds a connection between culture, food, and identity. Scholarship, too, supports this idea. For instance, Carole Devine et al. recommend that health officials consider minority cultures' ethnic ways of eating. Devine et al. interviewed 86 individuals who were white, black, and Latino in their article "Food Choices in Three Ethnic Groups: Interactions of Ideals, Identities, and Roles" in order to "understand how ethnicity was interpreted, expressed and enacted, through food choices" (86). They state that "understanding of the cultural context of food choice can enhance dietary counseling" (91). One way they envision enhanced nutrition counseling is that increased understanding of ethnicity "can assist in providing culturally appropriate strategies for realistic dietary change," enhancing the counseling by increasing the likelihood of dietary change (92). The assumption here is that abandoning ethnic ways of eating in the name of health may be too difficult to achieve, so creating recommendations specific to ethnic ways of eating would increase compliance. As if they were aiming their message at the USDA, they even urge, "Consideration of the dynamics involved in ethnic food choices can increase the cultural sensitivity of *food system interventions*" (92, emphasis mine). Because the USDA's Food Guidance Systems is the most visited nutrition resource on the web (Haven and Britten 253), their urging is especially relevant to my research. The following literature demonstrates the strength of the relationship between food and culture. Throughout the following scholarship about food and culture, three themes emerged: 1) Food selection is a way to reconnect with

"home" or ancestors, 2) eating culturally traditional foods is a way of representing allegiance to one's ethnic identity, and 3) an outsider consuming culturally iconic foods acts an acceptance of the food's culture of origin, a way to build bridges between dominant and minority ethnicities.

Home

This section of research demonstrates that food connects people with their home cultures or heritages. For instance, in a selection of case studies about identities and food consumption at home, sociological researcher Gill Valentine draws out the value eating culturally appropriate meals to connect to hoe for a Pakistani family living in Britain. Valentine interviewed the Habib family, a family from Pakistan, which consists of a husband and wife with two young children. Both the parents consume traditional Pakistani foods for their meals, such as curries and chapatti, but the children are more diverse in their eating habits. Although the children eat the traditional food served by their mother, they prefer western junk food. Valentine comments that for the parents

> …this food (the ingredients, method of preparation and the way it is eaten—on the floor) provides an important connection to their… homeland and articulates their cultural identity as Muslims. They want their children to maintain this cultural identity, to acknowledge the family is rooted in another place—Pakistan—through the food they eat at home. (519)

Surprisingly, the Habib family values food above language for maintaining their Pakistani culture, as evidenced by the family's choice for English spoken at home.

Valentine's case study demonstrates that consuming a diet from the homeland is an essential aspect of maintaining identity in a foreign environment.

Similarly, researchers Helen Vallianatos and Kim Raine share that "food is an essential component of maintaining connections to home" (356). Vallianatos and Raine met with focus groups of thirty-six Arabic and thirty-eight South Asian women located in Canada to discuss food and identity formation. Based on their interviews with the women, the researchers stated that food is an essential element in the "maintenance and propagation of ethnic identity" (365). They offer that "the function of food as a symbol of ethnic identity is demonstrated by the importance women placed on being able to purchase food elements necessary for their cuisines" (365), mourning the unavailability of some essential ingredients to home cooking. These limits caused the women to feel symbolically isolated; though their isolation decreased significantly once ethnic grocers opened in their area.

The mothers all expressed desires for their children to prefer traditional cuisines, but they also tried catering to their children's desires for pizza, spaghetti, and similar western foods items. Still, even these items are "not without adjustment" as the mothers use spices and sauces more familiar to their pallets (368). The researchers conclude, "the importance of traditional cuisine and foods rests not only in their physical attributes, but in how they satisfy emotional needs. They serve to connect with oneself, to recall the foods, tastes, and people of 'home'" (369). These findings repeat the sentiment of food as essential way to connect with one's roots.

The research of Vallianatos and Raine, and Oum demonstrates the strength of the connection between food, culture, and identity for Asians in particular. In all these articles, maintaining a traditional diet is a core component of staying connected to one's cultural heritage and maintaining that identity, in some cases even above language. What's more, accepting or rejecting food from someone else's culture can be interpreted as an acceptance or rejection of the culture, not just the food.

Expressing Cultural Identity

If eating culturally appropriate foods is a way to connect with ones roots, then eating is also the visible outgrowth from those roots, demonstrating the cultural inner reality to others. For instance, Devine et al. noted the importance of food in expressing ethnic identity: "Expressing ethnic identity through food was often mentioned as being important by members of minority cultures" (89). In other words, eating is an important form of self-expression for minority ethnicities. Furthermore, the ethnic perspectives of food "were often revealed when participants contrasted ethnic food traditions with other norms," (89). Eating foods in line with one's culture is so important to cultural and familial identities that participants reported when health conditions require departure from their ethnic diets, the result has painful "personal and social consequences" (88).

Indeed, in "What Does it Mean to be Mexican? Social Construction of an Ethnic Identity," Yolanda Nieman et al. report one repeated comment from Mexican participants was the importance of Mexican food's role in celebrations and family. In describing food at birthday parties, one respondent described the

abundance of food at Mexican celebrations and declared “not just a little birthday cake,” which is an implied comparison to the perceived, relatively small role food plays in Anglo’s birthday parties (53). In other words, this participant is claiming that Mexican food at social functions is an aspect that sets Mexicans apart from other cultures. Furthermore, “Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that being Mexicano was a source of pride for them and facilitated a sense of belonging and that it was important to pass this pride on to their children” (53). Taken together, these observations portray the importance of food in constructing a Mexican ethnic identity, distinct from dominant white culture, as well as preserving it for future generations.

Reinforcing the idea of food as a means of expressing cultural identity, Carolyn Rouse and Janet Hoskins note that “for African American Muslim women perceptions of food act as metaphor for an evolving gender, race, class, and citizen identity politics” (228). Their article “Purity, Soul Food, and Sunni Islam Explorations at the Intersection of Consumption and Resistance,” records their 11 years of ethnographic research of African American women who converted to Islam. Although Islam restricts certain foods that are historical elements of soul food, most notably pork products, the women did not abandon their ethnic practice of soul food, but they instead incorporated the new dietary restrictions of Islam into their cooking tradition and used their cooking to connect with other women in the mosque. This demonstrates that eating a historically rich diet is not as passive action of repeating history but an active decision to “articulate their relationship to a number of ideological domains including race,

class, gender, nation, and Islam" (228). Again, this research fortifies the idea that food choices are part of individuals' and communities' tools for demonstrating their allegiance to ethnic identities.

Building Bridges.

A short story from *The Collected Work of Langston Hughes: The Later Simple Stories*, volume 8, poignantly portrays food as a mediator between African Americans and whites. In his work, two characters are discussing the recent integration, what the implications are, and if it will be successful. One character, Simple, offers a story to further the conversation:

"You heard, didn't you, about that old colored lady in Washington who went downtown one day to a fine white restaurant to test out integration? Well, this old lady decided to see for herself if what she heard was true about these restaurants, and if white folks were really ready for democracy. So down on Pennsylvania Avenue she went and picked herself out this nice-looking used-to-be-all-white restaurant to go in and order herself a meal."

"Good for her," I said.

"But dig what happened when she set down," said Simple. "No trouble, everybody nice. When the white waiter come up to her table to take her order, the colored old lady says, 'Son, I'll have the collard greens and ham hocks, if you please.'

'Sorry', says the waiter, we don't have that on the menu.'

'Then how about the black-eyed peas and pig tails?' says the old lady.

'That we don't have on the menu either,' says the white waiter.

‘Then chitterlings,’ says the old lady, ‘just plain chitterlings.’

The waiter said, ‘Madam, I never heard of chitterlings.’

‘Son,’ said the old lady, ‘ain’t you got no kind of soul food at all?’

‘Soul food? What is that?’ asked the puzzled waiter.

‘I knowed you-all wasn’t ready for integration’ sighed the old lady, sadly as she rose and headed toward the door. ‘I just knowed you white folks wasn’t ready.’ (230).

Although this is work of fiction, Langston Hughes tried to capture the experiences of African Americans for his readers. This work demonstrates the importance of not merely allowing black folks into traditionally white establishments, but welcoming the culture African Americans bring with them, including their food. This sentiment parallels assertions made by Young Rae Oum’s about Koreans and Kimchi.

Postcolonial researcher Young Rae Oum posits that food is a currency for acceptance or rejection of cultural identity. Oum states that Americans who try and/or accept *kimchi*, which is frequently used as an icon of Korean food, are seen as friendly, but “By the same token, rejecting Korean foods and *kimchi* often amounts to rejecting Korean culture or the race as a whole” (109). This statement has clear implications for the choosemyplate.gov website—an exclusion of Korean foods from the website could be interpreted as a rejection by Korean American readers, a sign that Americans do not welcome Korean culture in the Unites States, especially in light of America’s history of hybridizing and othering Korean foods.

Oum explains that American cookbooks claiming to present "authentic" Korean cuisine for Korean Americans try to fit Korean recipes into American ways of eating, which is another way of rejecting Koreans. To illustrate, Korean meals, based on Oum's research, aren't analogous to America's main dishes and side dishes, despite the attempts in cookbooks to do so. Instead, Korean meals have a core of rice, *kimchi*, soups, and sauces with a collection of diverse accouterments. For instance, a typical meal might provide a fresh, marinated vegetable dish, a lightly cooked vegetable dish, and a broiled fish or meat dish in addition to the core components listed above. Despite attempts made by American cook books, the core components cannot be classified as the main dish because they are considered bland without the accouterments; at the same time, the accouterments are not the main dish because they would not be eaten without the rice and *kimchi*. Additionally, traditional Korean cookbooks still describe the medicinal properties of spices, which is not valued in American tradition and is therefore absent from American Korean cookbooks. This demonstrates that these cookbooks attempt to blend Korean food with American ways of eating and valuing of food.

In addition to American cookbooks trying to hybridize Korean cuisine with American cuisine, research about Koreans and eating have classified Korean food as smelly, unhygienic, foreign, and generally "lacking" compared to American standards. Just as logics of privilege are blind to what they take for granted (whiteness), the cookbooks similarly take for granted that people of other cultures will adapt to American ways of eating: "Korean women who were

married to American [soldiers], who cooked "American food" so well for their families, were not curious boundary crossers, but the American husbands who overcame their fear and tasted *kimchi* were" (111). In other words, Asians are expected to adapt to the "normal" American way of eating, yet those who try Korean food are going above and beyond the call of duty give up "normal" eating to accept Korean foods. Both Oum, a researcher, and Langston Hughes, a voice for African Americans, articulate that acceptance is deeper than skin color; it's also an acceptable of one's cultural markers, such as food choices.

Cultural Approaches to Food

Although I will not be interacting with them directly, each ethnicity I discussed earlier are subjects of my research because understanding their ways of eating and health concerns are critical to analyzing the cultural sensitivity of the USDA's choosemyplate.gov website. To make my analysis as salient as possible, it is necessary to broadly describe each ethnicity's commonly eaten foods, meal structures, approaches to food, and health trends. This can cannot be done completely or thoroughly because diet is complex, individual, communal, and contextual. Covering diet definitely throughout time and across pockets within those cultures is a matter reserved for books. Instead, I will portray a limited perspective of Asian, Latino, and African heritage eating. This will provide enough information on which to base the research without relying on stereotypes or elaborating outside the bounds of this project.

Asian Eating and Health Profile

Asia is a vast region of the world, which makes generalizing about the food of Asia for the purpose of analysis difficult. To help limit the scope of representation without decreasing the quality of methodology, I have chosen to focus on the eastern and southeastern Asian countries. According to the 2010 Census Data, just over 80% of Asian Americans claim a Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, or Korean heritage. Because of this representation, I will relay eating patterns, approaches to food, and primary health problems from China, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Korea, the Asian countries primarily represented in the United States.

Food Consumption

Oldways, a non-profit organization that partners with academic groups, provides "credible" and "reliable" information based in "science and culture" about old ways, or cultural traditions, of eating. In their broad discussion of Asian food, as seen in Figure 1, they share that rice remains a staple in Asian countries alongside soy products. Indeed, most sources about Asian cuisines begin with a discussion of rice. In addition to the volumes of rice and noodles consumed, Oldways suggests that vegetables, nuts and legumes, and fruit further characterize Asian diets. Seafood and eggs are common sources of protein. Dairy is rarely, if ever, consumed outside of India and Mongolia, which distinguishes Asian cooking from many other cultures around the world. When cooking, Asians typically use vegetable oils. Meats and sweets are eaten less frequently. Additionally, Professor of Anthropology Penny Van Esterik adds, "it is

impossible to overstate the importance of fish and fermented fish products to Southeast Asian diets" (23). As seen the left, Oldways has compiled a list of commonly eaten foods, by category, in across Asia.

In contrast with typical breakfasts in America, Asian breakfasts rely on leftovers and savory dishes more frequently than sweet ones: "The idea that certain foods are specifically and only breakfast foods is foreign to rural China" (Leppman 88). The most commonly eaten breakfasts in rural and suburban China are savory rice gruels from rice leftover from the night before and rice with vegetable and/or meat side dishes, like any

Vegetables and Tubers:

Cabbage, carrots, chilies, daikon, eggplant, galangal, kumquats, leeks, lemons, lemongrass, lettuce, lime, lotus rot, peppers, kale, kombu, mushrooms, mustard greens, pineapple, pumpkin, scallions, seaweed, snow peas, spinach, sweet potatoes, taro root, turnips, water chestnuts, yams

Fruits:

Apricots, bananas, cherries, coconut, dates, dragon fruit, grapes, kiwifruit, longan, lychee, mandarins, mangoes, melon, mangosteen, milk fruit, oranges, papaya, pears, pineapple, rambucan, tangerines

Grains:

Barley, breads (example include dumpings, chapatis, mantou, naan, roti), buckwheat, rice, millet, noodles (examples include soba, somen, rice, udon)

Fish and Seafood:

Abalone, clams, cockles, crab, eel, king fish, mussels, octopus, oysters, roe, scallops, sea bass, shrimp, squid, tuna, whelk, yellowtail

Poultry and Eggs:

Chicken, duck, eggs (chicken, quail, duck)

Nuts, Seeds, and Legumes:

Almonds, beans (adzuki, edamame, mung, soy), cashews, hazelnuts, lentils, miso, peanuts, sesame seeds, tofu, tempeh

Herbs and Spices:

Amchoor, asfoetida, thai basil, cardamom, chiles, clove, coriander, curry leaves, fennel, fenugreek, garlic, ginger, ginseng, kafir, lime leaves, masala, mint, parsley, pepper, scallion, star anise, turmeric, wasabi

Figure 1: Staples of Traditional Asian Diets

other meal; less common are savory pancakes or fried breadsticks and only the wealthy, suburban families eat a more westernized sweet breakfast of yeast bread or cake with milk, usually soymilk (Leppman 87-88). The focus on rice-based dishes that are similar to meals eaten at other meal times is seen across Asia (Gallagher). Lunches frequently consist of leftovers from dinner taken to work, or noodle based soups; the noodles can be made primarily from wheat, rice, and mung beans (Van Esterik 66). Dinners are the most complex meals based around rice with several other components, which frequently include fresh or marinated vegetables, stir fry, curries, soup, grilled meats, and seafood (Van Esterik 69).

Food Attitudes

Asians have a long history of blending food with medicine. Scholar Van Esterik states "there is a clear continuity between medicinal and culinary use of herbs and other forest products. Ginger, coriander root, turmeric, pennyworst, and aromatic woods, for example, play important roles in both medicinal and culinary systems" (32). The pungent, aromatic spices that distinguish Asian foods are not only culinary capital but a sign of their belief in the power of natural foods to cure ailments. In addition to seeing food as medicinal and nourishing, Asians also value harmony in their meals. They are known for a balance of "hot, sour, salty and sweet" (Van Esterik 32). Additionally, balancing textures with fresh, pickled, grilled, and steamed foods is important. Van Esterik states, "the harmony is tastes and textures…is the basis of the complexity of Southeast Asian cuisines" (39). Finally, there is a spiritual element to food, especially in rural areas. In rural regions and where temples are easily accessible, the best food of the morning is

often given to Monks and "perhaps linked to Hindu rituals where sweets are important temple offerings, sweets symbolizes all that is rich and joyous in the world" (62). All of these perspectives about food paint a picture of food as more than the sum of its nutritional parts.

Health Concerns

The World Health Organization classifies the most common causes of death by countries' income category, as defined by the World Bank. According to this data, most Asian countries are middle income, some are low income, and only Japan is ranked as high income (World Bank). Based on these rankings, nearly 40% of deaths in China, the Philippines, and Vietnam (middle-income countries) are caused by Ischaemic heart disease, stroke and cebrovascular disease, pulmonary obstructive diseases, and lower-respiratory infections, in descending order of prevalence. In Korea and other low-income countries, lower respiratory infections, Diarrhoel diseases, HIV/AIDS, Ischaemic heart disease, and Malaria account for approximately 38% of deaths ("The top 10"). Essentially, heart disease is common across Asia, with middle-income countries and also suffering from stroke and lower respiratory infections. Cancer and dementia are nearly absent in these countries and lower-income countries die more frequently from diseases like Malaria and HIV/AIDS compared to their Asian counterparts.

Latino Eating and Health Profile

Accurately portraying food information for Latinos in the U.S. is problematic. First, like with the term "Asian," the terms Hispanic and Latino cover vast nationalities: Central and South Americas, certain Caribbean islands,

and even people from Spanish descent. Further complicating the matter, according to the Census Data, Latinos in the U.S. hail from all over these regions in relatively small amounts. To illustrate, the top six most represented countries only accounts for 13.2% of all Latinos in the U.S. To relay information about the countries comprising 80% of Latinos is counterproductive to the goals of limiting the scope for this project. In light of Latino's distribution, I will relay information about the top two representative countries, Mexico and Puertco Rico, which constitute 10.3% and 1.5% of Latinos in the U.S. respectively.

Food Consumption

Vegetables and Tubers:

Cabbage, carrots, cassava, chard, chayote, chilies, eggplant, garlic, jicama, kale, lettuce, maize/corn, peppers, potatoes, pumpkin, onion, okra, spinach, yams, yucca, zucchini

Fruits:

Acai, agave, avocados, bananas, breadfruit, cocoa, caimito, chirimoya, coconut, custard apples, grapefruit, guanabana, guava, lemons, limes, mangoes, melons, oranges, papayas, passion fruit, pineapple, plantains, pomegranate, prickly pear, pumpkin, quince, sapote, sopadillas, starfruit, sugarcane, tamarind, tangerine, tomatoes, tomatillos

Grains:

Arepas, Amaranth, Breads, maize/corn, pasta, quinoa, rice, tortillas

Fish and Seafood:

Abalone, clams, cod, conch, crab, crayfish, mussels, octopus, sea bass, shrimp, squid, whelk

Poultry, Eggs, Cheese, and Dairy

Chicken, duck, geese, guinea fowl, squab, turkey, eggs (chicken, quail, duck), cheese (examples include asadero, cojita, minas,

Figure 2: Staples in Traditional Latin American Diets

According to *Oldways*, Latinos' diets are built on a base of grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables with animal products supplementing those dishes (Oldways), as seen in Figure 2. Anthropologists Janet Long-Solis and Luis Alberto

Vargas explain that historically Mexico rested in an "agricultural triad" of corn, squash and beans which grew well together, enriching the soil, and increasing food production (31). In addition to those foods, the Spaniards introduced meat and dairy, wheat, and refined sugar (Long-Solis and Vargas 31). Modern Mexico has three food groups: cereals, fruits and vegetables, and legumes and animal products. Sweets and fat are not included in their food guide (Food and Nutrition).

According to Long-Solis and Vargas, meals in Mexico vary greatly by region, socioeconomic status, and ethnic identity. One common element is that most meals have tortillas and a chili sauce. The "urban poor" in Mexico have beans at every meal but may only eat two meals a day (88). Those with more money have more frequent eating schedules that vary significantly from American mealtimes. For instance, Long-Solis and Vargas depict a morning with only a hot beverage before work, followed by a later breakfast around 10:00. Perhaps the greatest departure from American meals is that the main meal is in the later afternoon and that a much later evening meal is light and may consist of leftovers, fruit, or sweets.

Food Attitudes

Mexican Indian cultures value a hot/cold system of food and health. They believe that foods like "chili peppers, garlic, onion, most grains, and expensive cuts of meats, oils, and alcohol" are considered hot and therefore appropriate for treating colds. Similarly, foods that are considered cold, such as "vegetables, tropical fruits, dairy products, and inexpensive cuts of meat" are used to treat hot illnesses, like fevers ("Food and Nutrition"). Diva Sanjur, a professor of

Nutritional Sciences, notes that ideology of food extends from Mexico to Puerto Rico as well, and that both cultures see food as "intimately involved in the general conception of health and disease" (44). Still, Sanjur notes that this view of balancing one's condition with hot/cold foods may becoming "backward" or "old-fashioned" to younger generations of Latinos (47).

Health Concerns

Because Mexico is a middle-income economy (World Bank), the World Health Organization's income-level statistics described above for middle-income Asian countries also applies here: nearly 40% of deaths in Mexico are caused Ischaemic heart disease, stroke and cebrovascular disease, pulmonary obstructive diseases, and lower-respiratory infections, in descending order of prevalence. Puerto Rico is a high-income country, meaning that that approximately 38% of deaths are cased by Ischaemic heart disease, stroke or cerebrovascular disease, trachea, bronchus, or lung cancers, Alzheimer and other dementias, and lower respiratory infections.

Eating and Health Profile for People of African Heritage

People of African heritage are part of what is called African diaspora cultures, places where large populations of Africans have (been) relocated, including those in the United States of America, the Caribbean, and South America. Characterizing this group's foods is perhaps the most difficult of the cultures surveyed so far because of the incredible diversity within this group. These cultures not only retain some foods from their African heritage, they also adapt to their localities, which have distinct approaches to food. To illustrate, a

person of African Heritage from Jamaica might not recognize the foods prized by African Americans. *Oldways*, a non-profit organization dedicated to minimizing the prevalence of convenience foods by educating people about traditional diets, has created a list of commonly eaten foods in African diaspora cultures, but characterizing the health concerns and ways of evaluating food in those disparate cultures poses a unique challenge. These challenges are too great to absolve in the scope of this project. However, I mitigate the concerns by relying on *Oldways*' existing conceptualization of African Heritage foods and describing approaches to eating and health concerns of one diaspora culture, African Americans.

Food Consumption

According to *Oldways*, "African Heritage meals are based on an abundance of colorful fruits and vegetables, especially leafy greens; tubers like sweet potatoes; beans of all kinds; nuts and peanuts; rice, flatbreads and other grain foods" (Oldways), as seen in Figure 3. Urban and community studies specialist William Frank Mitchell adds the importance of meat and animal products to this list. Mitchell quips that African American cooks have been known to "do more with less," which is seen in their use of every part of pig and chicken products (33). For instance, the innards and feet of chickens are also used for flavoring and consumption. Although many African Americans abstain from pork products now for religious and health reasons, pork meat and it's smoked byproducts are used for flavoring traditional dishes, such as slow cooked black-eyed peas, greens, and stews. Mitchell additionally emphasizes the historical

importance of lard in African American cooking and baking. Oil, rather than lard, was popular in West Africa, but in America, African Americans took to using rendered pork fat. Due to health concerns, vegetable shortening is typically used in place of lard, and peanut and vegetable oils are more frequently used in cooking.

Leafy Greens:
Beet greens, callaloo, chard, collard greens, dendelion greens, kale, mustard greens, spinach, turnip greens, watercress
Vegetables:
Asparagus, beets, brussels sprouts, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, eggplant, garlic, green beans, lettuce, long bean, okra, onions, peppers, pumpkin, radish, scallions, squahses, jicama, zucchini.
Starches and Whole Grains:
Amaranth, barley, couscous, fonio, kamut, maize/corn, millet (pearl and finger), rice, sorghum, tef, wild rice
Tubers:
Breadfruit, cassva, plantains, potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams, yucca
Beans:
Black-eyed peas, broad beans, butter beans, chickpeas, cowpeas, kidney beans, lentils, lima beans, pigeion peas
Nuts, Seeds:
Benne seeds, brazil nuts, cashews, coconuts, dika nuts, groundnuts, peanuts, pecans, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds
Herbs, Spices, and Homemade Sauce Ingredients:
Apple cider vinegar, annatto, arrowroot, bay leaf, cinnamon, cilantro, cloves, coconut milk, coriander, dill, ginger, mustard, nutmeg, oregano, paprika, parsley, peppers, age, sesame
Fish and Seafood:
Bream (or porgy), catfish, cod, crappie, crayfish, dried fish, mackerel, mussels, oysters, perch, prawns, rainbow trout, sardines, shrimp tuna
Oils:
Coconut oil, olive oil, peanut oil, sesame oil, shea butter
Dairy (if tolerated):
buttermilk, yogurt

Figure 3: Common Foods from African Heritage Cultures

Still, lard holds a place for special meals, exceptional flavor, and traditional charm (33-34). *Oldways* offers a list of foods commonly eaten by people of African heritage is seen above.

Meals for African Americans are similar to many Americans in that they are largely influenced by time constraints, Mitchell reports. With little time for many responsibilities, African Americans typically consume a quick breakfast of

coffee, “a toaster pastry or microwave pancakes, hot or cold breakfast cereal, or a modified full breakfast with eggs, toast, and juice” or donuts on the go (59). Additionally, many children eat breakfast at school, providing access to a breakfast meeting USDA standards. Lunch is the most varied meal of the day, according to Mitchell, because it represents a respite for African Americans during the workday. This meal, eaten away from family, is a time to explore new foods or enjoy classics favorites alone or with diverse colleagues. This meal is also the most likely meal to be skipped or missed. In contrast, dinner is the focal meal of the day and typically blends convenience with tradition by using canned, frozen, or otherwise processed elements to speed the meal without losing traditional elements and dishes. Weekend meals, although frequently rushed like weekday meals, are commemorated with large home-cooked meals such as hash browns, pancakes, shrimp and grits, and other classic meals, whenever possible.

Food Attitudes

When making food choices, African Americans value cultural categorizations of food and convenience, like most busy Americans. Nutrition education scholars Eliza B. Lynch and Shane Holmes demonstrate how African-American women of lower socioeconomic status view food in their article “Food Group Categories of Low-income African American Women.” They found that participants sorted food into the following groups: junk foods, fruit, dairy and milk products (in which participants included eggs), vegetables, meats, breads, and starches. The researchers concluded that these categories reflect the function of these foods in low-income African Americans’ diets. Mitchell elaborates this

perspective by stating, “African American consumers evaluate food purchases by the same criteria as other Americans: quality, value, taste, and history” (23). While historically African Americans transformed cheap ingredients into “delicious meals” through intense preparations, today African Americans seek the same cultural tastes with convenience, buying more processed and already prepared ingredients so dinner is on the table faster (Mitchell 23).

Health Concerns

Because African Americans are part of America, they see the diseases noted by the WHO in high-income countries, as noted with Puerto Rico, meaning that that approximately 38% of deaths are cased by Ischaemic heart disease, stroke or cerebrovascular disease, trachea, bronchus, or lung cancers, Alzheimer and other dementias, and lower respiratory infections. Mitchell affirms that for African American communities in particular, heart disease is the most prevalent killer and hypertension and diabetes are especially prevalent in black communities. Additionally, while colorectal cancer decreased over a decade for Americans of European heritage, the rates remained steady for African Americans (97).

The USDA Food Guidance Systems

One aspect of America’s eating identity is the succession of the infamous Food Guidance Systems the USDA has been publishing since 1916. The Food Guidance Systems have gone through seven iterations before the current MyPlate logo was enacted. The first system in 1916 was a pinwheel with seven food-group segments that advocated no portion sizes and was criticized for

complexity. Since that complex beginning, the USDA has worked to simplify their recommendations to fewer food groups and altered designs for interest and clarity. The first pyramid shaped design was introduced in 1982. This design showed a base of grains followed by fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, and a small amount of fats and sweets at the top. This design, provided food group recommendations, calorie ranges, and advocated variety within those food groups.

In 2005, the USDA began looking at updating the Pyramid. To best determine the replacement for the Pyramid, the USDA hired a marketing firm to conduct focus group research with card sorting tasks in Baltimore, MD and Chicago, IL. The USDA says that participants were selected to be nationally representative in age, sex, socioeconomic status, and race. Yet, despite the mention of race, their research did not discuss making any specific efforts toward a multicultural understanding of the Food Guidance System, and their method and discussion prioritizes age, socioeconomic status, and literacy about multicultural concerns. Specifically, they state that "The graphic itself was the subject of additional rounds of testing, to ensure that specific audiences—children and low-literate and low-income adults— could understand and relate to its messages," but they do not make a mention of ensuring U.S. citizens from other cultures could relate to it (124-125). The racial representation of the final sample is 69% Caucasian, 14% African American, 9% Hispanic, and 8% "Other" (citation), which does not align with the 2010 census report of 63% non-Latino white, 12.6% Black, and 16.3% Latino. Furthermore, the questions used in the focus group made no effort to look at potential logos and slogans specifically from a

cultural perspective, only answering broad questions about which logos were more or less effective. So while their research was statistically sound and consumer focused, they lacked any mention of a specific effort for a multicultural understanding. By not directly addressing cultural interpretations, they limited their ability to create a logo and website that is culturally sensitive.

Filling in this gap, researchers not affiliated with the USDA have looked at the MyPyramid logo from various multicultural perspectives and offered specific recommendations for the USDA to implement in their next design. For instance, Linda Heuhauser, Rebeccah Rothschild, and Fatima Rodriguez conducted a literacy, cultural, and linguistic analysis of the MyPyramid website and held that the USDA should revise the for other cultures in the United States. The researchers specifically mention that the only language the MyPyramid website is available in other than English is Spanish, and the Spanish page contained no cultural tailoring to Hispanic cultures. These researchers concluded their article with specific recommendations for the USDA. They recommend that the USDA "include text and graphics that reflect cultural diversity" and that the website "be adapted into more languages over time" (223). These recommendations speak directly to diversifying the cultural relevancy of the USDA's website.

In addition to this research, Eliza B. Lynch and Shane Holmes talked with low-income African American women to have them categorize food groups. After receiving the groupings, the researchers compared the food groups African American women and the food groups listed in MyPyramid for overlap. They

found that when overlap existed, the justifications for the food groups were different for the African American women and the USDA. As mentioned above, low-income African American women categorized foods items into the following categories: junk foods, fruit, dairy and milk products (in which participants included eggs and butter), vegetables, meats, breads, and starches whereas the USDA has categories only for fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, and protein foods. These findings suggest that the food groups in MyPyramid are un-relatable to many low-income African American women, making it hard to implement their suggestions. Indeed, Lynch and Holmes made specific recommendations to the USDA to frame their nutritional model in terms of culturally relevant "social/functional dimensions" (164). Despite the suggestions by both of these researchers, in the same journal the USDA published their research, the current iteration of the Food Guidance System seems to have ignored their observations.

CHAPTER II: METHOD

Because culture, food, and identity are so tightly interwoven, what people eat and how they eat not only represents their cultural identity but is also an active construction of it. Eating is not just a pleasurable or life-sustaining activity but also one of personal significance. In light of relationships between cultural ways of eating and identity construction the USDA's choosemyplate.gov website is a rich source for analysis. As a federal agency, the USDA's guidelines for eating may be perceived as governing eating and for this reason provides grounds for determining what messages it sends to Asians, people of African heritage, and Latinos about eating, and, as a result, identity. Such an examination is especially warranted given the USDA's troubled history with non-Anglos, introduced in the first chapter, regarding financial discrimination against black farmers. Together, these highlight the importance that the USDA create a culturally sensitive food guide. This is especially true when the USDA is perceived as a politic authority. Indeed, to ascertain what messages the USDA's choosemyplate.gov website is sending to Asians, Latinos, and people of African heritage, I conduct a critical discourse analysis of the choosemyplate.gov web pages that describe the food groups.

Critical discourse analysis, as Thomas Huckin describes it, is appropriate for answering my research question because it is a "close, detailed inspection of

texts" that "combine[s] rhetorical theory and social theory" to "address contemporary societal issues," including "omissions" and to expose "ideology, power" and "manipulation," through close textual analysis (2). This method applies to my research situation because I am looking at a text, the choosemyplate.gov website, from a rhetorical, epistemological, and cultural perspective for both what is there and what is missing. Furthermore, because the website is published by a government organization, Huckin's methodology of exposing ideology and power is especially appropriate. Huckin provides four categories of analysis: word/phrase level, sentence/utterance level, text level, and higher-level concepts. I will elaborate on their application below. This critical analysis as guided by eating and health profiles of Latino, Asian, and African heritage cultures reveals the USDA's (in)sensitivity to sub-cultures residing in the Unites States.

The Site of Analysis: Web Pages

The website choosemyplate.gov changed three times since I began the project. The initial webpage had the MyPlate logo centered on the home page. Sections of the plate linked to pages about that selected food group. The second iteration appeared nearly the same, but users could toggle between English and Spanish. I base my analysis on the third iteration. This version is radically different. The home page no longer displays the MyPlate logo as the focal point. Instead, each slide on the focal slide show contains MyPlate logo in the upper right hand corner. To see the food groups, users must click a link on the top navigation bar titled "MyPlate." After clicking on the navigation bar to select the

plate, the displayed webpage lists each food group along with a navigation sidebar that lists each the food group by name, as seen in Figure 4. In addition to the food groups, there is a link titled "Oils." "Oils" is not on the MyPlate logo and was not included in earlier iterations of the website I described above. However, it is listed now because "they [oils] provide essential nutrients. Therefore oils are included in USDA food patterns."

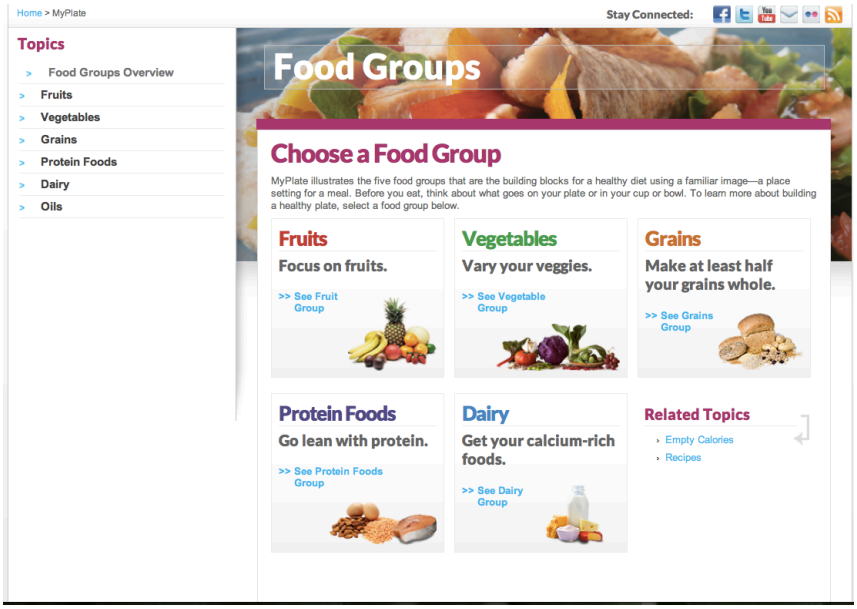

Figure 4: USDA Food Group Introduction Page

Once a food group is been selected, several sub-pages expand in the side bar. My analysis includes a total of 27 pages. The base pages are the titled, "Fruits," "Vegetables, "Grains," "Protein Foods," "Dairy," and "Oils." Although variations exist between categories, the sub-pages generally explain how to calculate a serving, elaborate on key points about that food group, and identify health benefits of nutrients of that group. All sub-pages include the key consumer message on the footer. Four of the sub-pages are nearly identical in form and content, so I will discuss those four types of sub-pages together noting any minor variations and then address unique pages individually. Finally, I will address oils last because its pages are so different from the sub-pages of the other groups.

First Subpage: What's in the _____ Group?

The first page of each food group is a page titled with the question "What's in the [insert food group's name here] Group?" Each page contains some images of the foods in the group at the top of the page: pineapple, orange, and strawberries for Fruits, tomatoes for Vegetables, sliced whole wheat and white breads for grains, a bowl of bean chili with cornbread for Protein Foods, slices of cheese for Dairy, and a plastic bottle of yellow oil for Oils. Each page contains a brief definition of that group, a "key consumer message" and a list of commonly eaten foods in that category.

Second Subpage: How much is Needed?

Every food group on the plate has a sub-page titled "How Much is Needed?" that provides a link to a chart for how much food is needed daily based on age, sex, and weight. This page also reiterates the key consumer message from the previous page.

Third Subpage: What Counts as a Serving?

Fruit, Vegetable, and Dairy sub-pages ask "What Counts as a Cup?" while the Protein Foods and Grains pages ask "What Counts as an Ounce?" Each of the pages offers a broad sweeping description of how to calculate serving size for each food group. Each page also contains a link to a chart with a list of types of foods encountered in the group and what counts as a serving for each. For example, the fruit page lists how to calculate whole fruit, dried fruit, fruit juice, and other fruit products. The only exception is the dairy page, which has the chart pasted into the webpage rather than a link.

Fourth Subpage: Health Benefits and Nutrients

Each food group has a page that details the health benefits of eating foods in that group and the nutrients found in that food group. The Fruit and Vegetable "Health Benefits and Nutrients" pages are nearly identical in content, speaking about fruits and vegetables simultaneously. The Grains' sub-page follows the same format, but the Protein Foods and Dairy groups differ slightly from the first three. The Protein Foods' and Dairy group corresponding sub-pages are titled "Nutrients and Health Implications." These pages provide a disclaimer about avoiding foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol. On the Protein Foods group, that warning is a disclaimer before discussing the "Health Benefits" and then reiterated under the section "Nutrients." After the nutrients, there are two more sections, one explaining the importance of eating at least eight ounces of seafood a week, and the other about the benefits of eating nuts and seeds in particular. The "Nutrients" section on the sub-page for Dairy similarly warns against consuming foods high in fat and also recommends eating skim or low-fat dairy products.

Fifth Subpage: Tips for the Food Groups

The Fruits, Vegetables, and Whole Grain sections have pages titled "Tips to Help You Eat [insert food group name]." These pages offer some meal suggestions and tips to make eating those foods cheaper, more convenient, and more appealing to children. The Protein Foods and Dairy have sub-pages titled "Tips for Making Wise Choices." Under Protein Foods, that sub-page addresses selecting lean proteins, suggests varying protein sources, provides pointers about reading food labels, and outlines rules for safe handling of protein foods. Under

Dairy, the sub-page lists common ways of consuming more dairy, such as using skim milk instead of water in condensed soups, outlines safety guidelines, and suggests alternative sources for nutrients for those who choose not to consume dairy.

Unique Pages

Under the Vegetable section, a page titled "Beans and Peas are Unique Foods" contains a lengthy description of why beans and peas are included in both the vegetable category and the protein foods category. This page also explains how to determine when beans and peas count for which category, providing some specific examples based on a 2,000 calorie diet. The Protein Foods section also contains a unique sub-page. This sub-page, titled "Vegetarian Choices," outlines some options in the Protein Foods group that vegetarians commonly choose and provides a link to another webpage on the chooseyplate.gov website with more information about choosing a vegetarian diet.

Oils

The section is titled "Oils." The first page, "What are Oils?" outlines common sources for oils and warns against trans-fat and solid fats. The sub-page "How are Oils Different from Solid Fats?" differentiates types of fats and asserts that fats high in saturated fats and cholesterol increase the risk of heart disease. "Why is it Important to Consume Oils?" reassures readers that oils contain vitamin E and essential fatty acids, while simultaneously warning against consuming too many calories from calorie-dense oils. The page titled "What's My Allowance?" explains that most Americans get enough oils in certain foods they

already eat and that others can easily consume their allowance by substituting oils in place of solid fats. Finally, this sub-page provides a link to a chart with more specific recommendations based on age, sex, and level of activity. Similar to the pages about serving size mentioned above, the page "What Counts as a Teaspoon" provides a link to a chart with commonly eaten sources of oil and how much counts as a teaspoon serving.

All of these pages, outlining what counts as the food groups with directions about portions, information about nutrition, and tips tailored to each food group, constitute the pages for my analysis.

Procedure for Analysis

I conduct a critical discourse, as described by Thomas Huckin in "Critical Discourse Analysis and the Discourse of Condescension" for my analysis of the aforementioned web pages. Huckin covers four levels of analysis to focus research. The main levels with their components are listed below:

- Word/Phrase level analysis: classification, connotation, metaphor, presuppositions, modality, and register.
- Sentence/utterance level analysis: transitivity, deletion, topicalization, register, politeness, presupposition, insinuation, and intertexuality.
- Text level analysis: genre, heteroglossia, coherence, framing, extended metaphor, foregrounding/backgrounding, omission, and auxiliary embellishments.

- Higher-level analysis: This level includes no concrete components for analysis. Instead, it centers on the ideologies of the text and the motivations of the speaker(s).

While all of these elements are valuable in analysis, I have selected for my analysis those that I anticipated would yield the most useful and interesting results from a cultural perspective. For just one example, "register" which looks at the "linguistic style of discourse" (Huckin 8) may be useful for determining what kind of discourse position the USDA projects, it would not reveal the level of sensitivity the web pages have for other cultural ways of eating. Below I list which tools I implemented and how I applied them to the website.

Cultural Analysis of Web Pages

At the word/phrase level for a cultural analysis, connotation, metaphor, and presuppositions suit my analysis. Connotation of words means, not surprisingly, a word's cultural or historical meaning that goes beyond a dictionary definition (Huckin 7). For instance, although "house" and "home" have similar dictionary definitions, "home" connotes a personal relationship with the structure that the word "house" does not. On the web pages, I evaluate whether or not the connotations of words on the choosemyplate.gov website have cultural implications that someone from another cultural heritage might read differently. For instance, although to eat "healthy" means to eat foods that are good for your body, certain cultures might have different connotations about what that word means in practice. Metaphor is more than a way to present one idea to clarify another (7). For instance, the common phrase "artery clogging fat" draws on an

analogy likening the human body to plumbing. However, not all cultures compare the human body to a machine. I look for metaphors like that one used on the website that demonstrate an alternative approach to food from the cultures I reviewed. Presuppositions "assume the truth of the statements in which they are found" (7). For instance, the statement "Beef's high fat content counts against your daily maximum of empty calories" presupposes that animal fat is worthless beyond its caloric contribution. I look at the web pages for presuppositions about meals or approaches to food that may be contradictory to or ignorant of the aspects of cultures I overviewed in chapter 1.

Topicalization, presupposition, insinuation, and inter-textuality are the sentence-level mechanisms of my cultural analysis. Topicalization is when a writer places a part of a sentence at the beginning to foreground it compared to the rest of the information in the sentence. For instance, the sentence "Many children are subjected to unhealthy meals" topicalizes "many children." Presupposition can occur at the sentence level as well as the word or phrase level when. This occurs when the sentence as a whole presupposes something rather than phrasing within that sentence presupposing something, as described in the prior paragraph. Insinuation takes presupposition one step further because it requires specialized or previous knowledge about the topic to understand the underlying message, whereas presupposition only requires knowledge of language. For instance, only an audience that is keeping up with race politics will understand that the statement "Only teachers without accents will be hired" is actually insinuating that Latino teachers will not be hired. Inter-textuality is

borrowing phrases and common language from other sources, which includes "saying, aphorisms, or other fixed phrases" (9). If borrowed-language is used, I evaluate the phrase's cultural relevancy and whether or not it is exclusive to other cultures.

At the textual level of analysis, coherence, framing, extended metaphor, foregrounding, backgrounding, and omission are applicable for my cultural analysis. Coherence is "ability of the text to hang together" and signals the background knowledge required of the reader (10). Looking at coherence will reveal to the analyst can determine "what kind of background knowledge the text is evoking" (10). I look for what knowledge is required to understand the text and how that might be off-putting to people from other cultures. Framing is the "slant" or "spin" given to information (10). The frame of a topic exposes the underlying approach or way of thinking about that topic, so I look for frames that are limited or possibly singular, which exclude other ways of approaching food. Similarly, extended metaphor moves beyond sentence level metaphor described above and contributes to coherence and framing throughout the text. Foregrounding is the emphasis placed on elements of the document, whether by physical size or grammatical placement, in a way that distracts from or minimizes what information is in the background. The inverse of foregrounding is backgrounding, which diminishes information by its contrasting position to foregrounded images and information. For foregrounding and backgrounding, I look at how the intersection of the placement of images/ information on the page with their cultural meaning. Omission, is noting the absence of something from

the document that should be there. For omissions, I look for omissions in the lists and examples of the choosemyplate.gov web pages where cultural elements or foods from the *Oldways* lists should be.

Analysis of Images

In addition to these textual features, Huckin outlines auxiliary embellishments, which are visuals, sound effects, and other non-linguistic aspects of the text that can "make a quick and powerful impression" (10). The choosemyplate.gov web pages have the auxiliary embellishments of images and charts on nearly every page. I apply Huckin's earlier levels of analysis to the images by looking at the images' parts in addition to the whole. Specifically, taking the former Food Pyramid as an example, the entire Pyramid is analogous to a textual level analysis because it is the whole entity. The base section of the pyramid, about grains, is comparable to the sentence level analysis because images within that section work together to create a greater meaning than the individual images by themselves would. Following this line of logic, the individual images in the grains section, such as a loaf of bread or pasta, are like words because they have individual meaning that work together with other individual images to create more complicated meanings. Essentially then, an image or chart can be broken into its elements to work with Huckin's earlier mentioned themes.

Limitations

I recognize that several factors limit the findings of my study. While I selected the most prevalent minority cultures in the Unites States to make

compelling research, surveying that many cultures proved exceptionally difficult. Ethnic labels on the census such as "Asian" cover so many countries that accurately conveying commonly eaten foods, health concerns, and approaches to eating is nearly impossible. In light of this reality, I look closely at countries from each ethnic category seen most commonly in the United States, but I recognize that this does not necessary generalize to people from the rest of countries and cultures within each ethnic group.

On top of this concern, conveying African diaspora cultures is especially challenging. At first I considered including African American eating as part of my analysis, but this proved problematic on several fronts. First, I was aware of the incongruence in my trio: Asians and Latinos are considered foreign whereas African Americans are not. Indeed, Asians and Latinos are continually immigrating to the United States, but African Americans by definition as decedents of slaves, are already in the Unites States. However, I could not overlook the history of discrimination blacks have faced, so I determined to include that culture for analysis regardless of the obvious differences between these cultures. However, this decision was complicated when I began to research commonly eaten foods for these cultures. As I stated in the prior paragraph, characterizing the foods of all three ethnic groups has been the greatest challenge of this project. I discovered that *Oldways*, the non-profit organization dedicated to education about traditional diets, completed a portion of this task for Asian and Latino diets. They also had a compilation about African Diaspora cultures, which is different from my original intent of African American culture. However,

changing my focus from African Americans to people of African heritage allowed me symmetry in the three cultures for study.

Still, this is not a perfect solution. As mentioned in chapter 1, even more so than for Asians or Latinos, depicting African diaspora cultures is exceptionally difficult because people from African heritage have adapted to their unique localities in South America, the Caribbean, and the United States, for instance. My choice to draw on the foods list from *Oldways* about foods in African diaspora cultures but to focus on approaches to eating and meals by African Americans specifically splits my findings. Any findings drawn from the *Oldways* list are reasonably generalizable to people of African heritage; however, any findings based on my depiction of African American eating may only be partially generalizable to people with African heritage in other parts of the world. These limitations are important to keep in mind when evaluating the findings from this research, but they do not obviate the findings entirely. Based on this methodology, the findings can still speak to the USDA's treatment of alternative approaches to eating and highlight the need for further, focused research on this topic.

CHAPTER III: FINDINGS

I conducted a critical discourse analysis, as described in the prior chapter, of a portion of the USDA's choosemyplate.gov website that introduces the new MyPlate logo and its subpages that explain the food groups as well as oils, which was added after the website's initial roll out. I analyzed these pages based on the literature about the eating and health for Asians, Latinos, and African heritage cultures as a framework. I used the analysis to answer my primary research question, Does the USDA's new guide, MyPlate, and website demonstrate that the USDA values cultural ways of eating? From the cultural analysis, four themes emerged: the USDA 1) omits culturally relevant foods from lists

of "commonly eaten" foods, 2) foregrounds images of foods that are and are not culturally relevant 3) presupposes what are common meals consumed by website users, and 4) disrupts the web pages' coherence because of cultural differences in classification. In this chapter, I will present the results and explain how these themes emerged from the analysis.

Omission

The most dominant theme that emerged is that the USDA omits frequently eaten foods from other cultures in lists of "Commonly eaten" foods. As described

in chapter two, each food group and oils have a page explaining what foods countfor that food group and an extensive list of "Commonly eaten" foods in that group. When I compared the lists onthe choosemyplate.gov website with the lists provided by *Oldways* for Asians, people of African heritage, and Latinos, I found major discrepancies. Below, I enumerate the foods that were listed by *Oldways* but were not on the choosemyplate.gov website by food group and culture. As you will see, most of the omissions occur in the fruit and vegetable sections despite the fact that they and the oils page are the only sections that list simply the items in the group and not the products that feature them as the other food groups do. I have italicized foods that were eaten in more than one culture to highlight what foods are missing that are relevant to multiple cultures.

Fruit

- Asian: *coconut*, *dates*, dragon fruit, longan, lychee, mandarin, mangosteen, milk fruit, rambutin
- African heritage*:* baobab, *dates*, figs, guava, horned melon, *tamarind*, *pomegranate*
- Latino: acai, agave, bread fruit, cocoa, caimito, chirimoya, *coconut*, custard apples, guava, guanabana, passion fruit, plantains, prickly pear, *pomegranate*, pumpkin, quince, sapote, starfuit, sugarcane, *tamarind*, tangerine, tomatillo

Vegetable

- Asian: bamboo shoot, bitter melon, *chilis*, daikon, galangal, kumquat, lemongrass, lotus root, kombu, *scallions*, seaweed, snow peas, yams, adzuki beans, and mung beans
- African heritage: beet greens, callaloo, *chard*, dandelion greens, *garlic*, long bean, *scallion*, radish, jicama, broad beans, butter beans, pigeon peas
- Latino: *chard,* chayote, *chilis*, *garlic*, jicama, yucca

Grains

- Asian: dumplings
- African heritage: tef, kamut

  Latino: arepas

Proteins

- Asian: edamame, adzuki, mung, abalone, cockles, eel, king fish, roe, *whelk*, yellow tail
- African heritage: brazil nuts, benne seeds, dika nuts, crappie, dried fish, perch, prawn, broad beans, butter beans, cow peas, pigeon peas
- Latino: guinea fowl, squab, quail eggs, abalone, conch, *whelk*, brazil nuts, pine nuts

Oils

- African heritage: Peanut oil

In addition to these omissions, the web pages also omitted other kinds of food items valued in these cultures. Specifically, neither the MyPlate logo nor the choosemyplate.gov web pages accord value to herbs and spices used in cooking. While it could be easy to dismiss those elements as purely seasoning, other cultures value those items as food. For instance, as mentioned in chapter one, Asians in particular value the medicinal properties of spices and herbs. The USDA not including spices and herbs makes it seem that Anglo Americans typically view seasoning as a mere flavoring of the meal, something to make it tastier, and not a source of calories or nutrition. In contrast, Asians would not cook a meal without herbs and they value their nutritional and medicinal properties. In other words, they see herbs and spices not as edible flavoring, but as food. From this perspective, not addressing the place of herbs and spices in diet is omission.

Foregrounding Iconic Foods

On each food group page and its accompanying sub-pages, at least one but sometimes several images accompany the text. The images are sometimes of individual items of food, sometimes of meals or particular dishes. An example of what this looks like is seen in Figure 2. Based on Huckin's analysis, these images are foregrounded compared to the rest of the text, highlighting certain foods listed and generally representing that page. Many images were of food items eaten by multiple cultures, but many images represented foods that are not commonly consumed in Asian, African heritage, or Latino cultures. The findings here are mixed.

Figure 5: Banner and Foregrounded Image from the Grains Pages

The fruits, vegetables, grains, and oils pages had the most images that represented multiple cultures, but many images were not representative of foods eaten by these cultures. Before explaining how this theme emerged, let me describe the systems of images on the website. Each food group has a banner with a collection of food images that is shown on every sub-page for that food group, seen as grains in Figure 5. The banner appears atop every grains sub-page. Additionally, each sub-page has at least one image foregrounded next to the text, seen as the bowl of oatmeal next the text in Figure 5.

On the fruits section, the banner that is atop every fruit sub-page showcases one fruit common for Asians, people of African heritage, and Latinos (oranges), two fruits listed only for Asians (pear and kiwi), only one listed for African heritage cultures (grapes), and one that is not listed for any of the three cultures (apple). However, the foregrounded, lone image for the "What's in the Fruit Group?" is three forks with a chunk of pineapple, slice of orange, and strawberry on top of it. Pineapple and oranges are common in all three cultures whereas strawberries are traditional for African heritage diets. This image is in contrast with the banner because two out of the three images represent foods eaten by all three cultures and no foods appear that none of the cultures eat.

To demonstrate more fully how these images did and did not relate to cultures, see Figure 6. This figure lists all the fruits that appear throughout the fruit pages and identified how many times they appear throughout the fruits

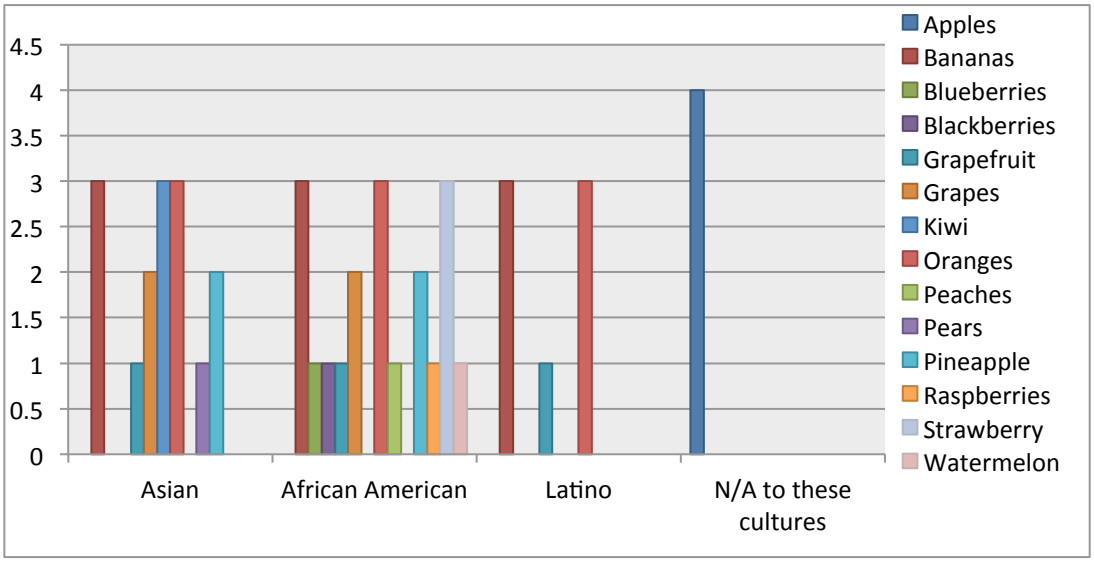

Figure 6: Fruits Images as Related to Cultural Relevance

subpages, thereby demonstrating how well the USDA represents these cultures.

The numbers on the Y-axis depict the frequency with which the USDA pictures the food on the website. The X-axis represents the culture being represented. The colors correspond to the fruits relevant to the identified cultures. As demonstrated, the USDA shows only three fruits relevant to Latinos. While African heritage diets are well represented in terms of fruit, this is not represented through frequency. Also, the most frequently pictured fruit, an Apple, is not a traditionally eaten fruit by any of the three cultures.

The vegetable group continues the pattern began in the fruits section. The vegetable pages have a banner that shows one food representing African heritage and Latino eating (tomatoes), two representing Asian and African heritage eating (leafy greens), one food item listed only for Asians (leeks), and one eaten by all three cultures (eggplant). However, as seen in the analysis of the fruits pages, not all images are relevant to one of these cultures. For instance, on the "Health Benefits and Nutrients" page, a picture of celery with peanut butter and raisins excludes people from all three cultures who do not traditionally consume celery. Additionally, the "Tips to Help You Eat Vegetables" page features a picture of whole-wheat penne pasta with broccoli and tomatoes, a dish that isn't traditional in any of the three cultures. In this way, the vegetable pages repeat the pattern of the fruits page: some images represent foods that are relevant to all three cultures, others to only some or one of those cultures, and some images that are not relevant to any of the three cultures.

Breaking from the pattern, the grains group contains many relevant images of foods but also has more images of foods not relevant to Asians, African

heritage cultures, or Latinos. The grains banner depicts some raw grains that have not been turned into products, except for two nondescript loaves of bread. While bread is common in all three cultures, they all prepare breads differently, and so these images may still be not as relatable to these cultures than they otherwise might. One of the raw grains that the USDA pictures is oats, which is not on the lists of commonly eaten foods for any of the three cultures. Oats represent grains again on the "How Much is Needed?" page through an image of a bowl of oatmeal. Not only is the grain oatmeal not relevant to these cultures, but eating hot cereal for breakfast is also not common for most Asians or Latinos, which makes it even less relevant. One image, a plate with four divisions, features slices of bread, raw penne pasta, uncooked rice, and uncooked cereal flakes, but Asians and Latinos do not commonly eat the penne pasta or cereal flakes, though cereal is familiar for African Americans. Additionally, on the same page, the picture of popcorn is irrelevant to Asian cultures. The remaining images picture bread, which is generally relatable to all three cultures.

The oils and protein foods sections are more relatable, but protein foods still contain some culturally irrelevant images. Similar to the fruits and vegetables groups, the protein foods banner contains one food that is not commonly eaten by any of the three cultures (salmon), one that is eaten by Asians and Latinos (almonds), one that is eaten by Asians and people of African heritage (lentils) and one food eaten by all three food groups (beef). However, salmon is the foregrounded image on the "How Much is Needed?" page in addition to the

banner on all Protein Foods sub-pages, which makes salmon doubly foregrounded.

The images for oil, however, are bland enough that a reader is hard pressed to even identify the oil let alone relate to it. The banner is a large drop of oil and the "What are Oils?" page depicts a plastic bottle with no label filled with a pale yellow liquid that could be a number of different vegetable oils. A Latino friendly Avocado is depicted on the "Why is it Important to Consume Oils?" page and the "What's My Allowance?" page simply shows empty measuring spoons. The only other two images showcased is a variety of nuts, which is relatable to all three cultures, and mayonnaise, which was not addressed in the *Oldways* lists or research of commonly eaten meals from chapter one.

The dairy section is in stark contrast with the earlier sections because nearly every image is irrelevant to all three cultures, but the images mostly exclude Asians and people ofAfrican heritage. As discussed in chapter 1, African Americans and Asians do not traditionally consume dairy, so the entire category is exclusive, save for the sections discussing alternatives, such as fortified beverages and cereals, canned fish, and leafy greens. The banner for the dairy pages is a glass of milk next to a jug of milk, alongside yogurt and an orange cheese. As mentioned earlier, African Americans and Asians do not traditionally consume any of those foods. Furthermore, every cheese listed by *Oldways* for Latinos is an white colored cheese, so the orange colored cheese on the banner is not immediately relevant to Latinos, either. This pattern is extended on the "What's in the Dairy Group?" page. This page foregrounds an image of Swiss

cheese, not eaten by any of the three cultures. The only image to not exclude Asians and African diaspora cultures is a picture of leafy greens next to the section discussing alternatives for those who do not regularly consume dairy. However, when I began my research the only alternative listed on previous version of the site for dairy was fortified soymilk and no pictures of greens were shown.

Generally, the banner images for each category foreground foods eaten in Asian, African diaspora cultures, and Latin America but usually include one or more foods that are not. The notable exceptions are the oils and dairy pages, which are at odds with each other. The oils page is vague enough to relate to all the cultures, but the dairy pages foreground images that are not culturally accessible for many Asians and people of African heritage..

Presupposing Common Meals

The third theme to emerge was the USDA presupposing what meals the readers are already eating. They made these assumptions in order to provide tips to make eating foods from these groups easy and to demonstrate how to calculate serving size. Assumptions about meals to make eating certain foods easier are seen on the pages titled "Tips to Help You Eat [insert food group name]." Assumptions about commonly eaten foods are seen on the charts on the choosemyplate.gov website that depict serving size. Without an explanation for the choices, the charts list some commonly eaten foods in one column, what counts as a serving in the next column, and common portions and their correlative

servings in the final column provides. However, based on the descriptions of foods eaten and common approaches to meals described in chapter one, many of these presumptions prove false for traditional Asian, Latino, or African heritage diets. In this section, I provide examples of this theme to demonstrate how the presuppositions work and how they are seen the site.

On the pages providing tips for eating more from food groups, the USDA assumes that readers eat certain foods regularly, such as breakfast cereals, yogurts, and salads. For example, the "Tips to Help You Eat Fruits" page states, "At breakfast, top your cereal with bananas or peaches; add blueberries to pancakes; drink 100% orange or grapefruit juice. Or, mix fresh fruit with plain fat-free or low-fat yogurt." This recommendation for easier consumption of fruits assumes that readers already eat breakfast cereal, pancakes, and/or yogurt at breakfast. However, these foods are not traditionally breakfast foods for Asians or Latinos. Instead, the literature states that rural farmers in Mexico and urban manual laborers typically eat hot savory meals for breakfast. Urban Latinos commonly have a hot drink until they enjoy a later breakfast, which could include savories meals or cereal and sweets. Asians typically consume leftovers, soups, or a savory rice gruel topped with vegetables and proteins. Later on the same page, the USDA suggests, "At dinner, add crushed pineapple to coleslaw, or include orange sections or grapes in a tossed salad," which also assumes coleslaw and tossed salads are a mainstay on readers' tables. Like the above example, coleslaw and tossed salads are not traditional fixtures of Asian, Latino, or African American diets.

This pattern of presumption is continued through the other food groups. On the "Tips to Help You Eat Vegetables," the suggestion to "Shred carrots or zucchini into meatloaf, casseroles, quick breads, and muffins" presupposes that readers are already regularly preparing meatloaf, casseroles, quick breads, and muffins. However, baking is not common in Asia so none of these recommendations are appropriate for Asians (). While Latinos do prepare kinds of sweet breads, they do not typically make casseroles (). On the same page, the text reads, "Include chopped vegetables in pasta sauce or lasagna" which assumes readers currently make pasta sauce or lasagna, which are foods traditionally eaten by the three cultures I focused on. Also on this page, the suggestion to "Use pureed, cooked vegetables such as potatoes to thicken stews, soups and gravies" presumes that readers already make soups, stews, and gravies, which is relevant to these cultures.

On the "Tips to Help You Eat Whole Grains" page under the category of "As Snacks," readers should "add whole-grain flour or oatmeal when making cookies or other baked treats." This implies that readers consume cookies and baked treats as snacks; however, Asians do not typically snack between meals. Traditionally, baked treats are part of the last meal of the day for Latinos. The sources I reviewed did not address snacking for African Americans. Another suggestion of this page is to "Try rolled oats or a crushed, unsweetened whole grain cereal as breading for baked chicken, fish, veal cutlets, or eggplant parmesan." This suggestion is to substitute a typical choice of coating meat in white bread crumbs with whole grain options, which assumes readers already eat

breaded, baked meats. However, as mentioned above, baking is not a popular cooking style for traditional Asians so this does not apply to them.

In the "Tips for Making Wise Choices" in the dairy section, the idea of cereals for breakfast, introduced in the fruit section, is fortified here by the statement, "Add fat-free or low-fat milk instead of water to oatmeal and hot cereals." Again, the presumption is that readers are eating oatmeal or other hot cereals for breakfast. As discussed in chapter one, this is not traditionally the case for Asians, African Americans, and Latinos. Another assumption on that page is that readers consume canned, condensed soups: "Use fat-free or low-fat milk when making condensed cream soups (such as cream of tomato)." While this was not specifically addressed in the literature about cultures and food, it appears that Latinos and Asians are more likely to prepare their own soups than buy processed soup. For African Americans, the literature stated that children usually eat lunch at school and adults frequently eat lunch out. This is not definitive, but there is room for speculation at least these may not be commonly consumed in these cultural ways of eating.

The Protein Foods departs from this pattern because the USDA assumes that most readers are eating enough protein foods but need to make wiser choices, which seems consistent with the three culture's dietary patterns. The USDA's corresponding page titled "Tips for Making Wise Decisions" assumes that readers are eating fatty cuts of meat, that they may consume fried meat, and that readers are not already consuming fish, nuts, and beans as regular sources of protein. For instance, they state, "Broil, grill, roast, poach, or boil meat, poultry, or fish instead

of frying," which assumes readers are frying meat at least some of the time. In this case, their assumption is accurate, as all three cultures typically fry some food. However, Asians, Latinos, and people of African heritage eat a high consumption of beans and nuts, which is contrary to the assumption that readers do not typically vary their protein choices.

Coherence with Food Groups

The final theme that emerged was potential confusion due to different ways of viewing food groups. Huckin describes coherence as the background knowledge required for a text to "hang together," which is applied here because understanding the recommendations and examples hinges on understanding the food groups the way the USDA does. The USDA categorize foods based on their nutrient content, not based on cultural designations. Based on the *Oldways* lists of commonly eaten foods for Asians, African diaspora cultures, and Latinos, some discrepancies exist. Specifically, tomatoes, avocados, limes, lemons, and pumpkin were placed into different categories by the USDA than by Asians, Latinos, and by people of African heritage.

Asians grouped lemons and limes with vegetables whereas the USDA listed them as commonly eaten fruits. African heritage cultures and Latinos grouped avocados and tomatoes with fruits, their scientific designation, but the USDA grouped them with vegetables. Tomatoes are even pictured three times throughout the vegetable pages, further reinforcing the difference in categorization. Finally, whereas the USDA, Asians, and African diaspora cultures

grouped pumpkin with vegetables, Latinos grouped pumpkin with fruits. Because of the different viewpoints, coherence is compromised and potential confusion exists.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

My critical discourse analysis of the USDA's chooseyplate.gov web pages exposed four themes. By way of overview, first, the web pages consistently omitted foods commonly eaten by Asians, people of African heritage, and Latinos on each food group's list of "Commonly Eaten" foods. Second, while the images on the website frequently included foods that are relevant to those cultures, the images tended to foreground images that are eaten by multiple cultures or foods that are not eaten by the cultures of my study, in a way that seems like any representation is coincidental. Third, the website made assumptions about what dishes and meals the readers currently consume in order to make suggestions for adding in healthy foods. Finally, the fourth theme is that coherence on the web pages is potentially compromised for Asians, Latinos, and people of African heritage who group some foods differently than the USDA does. This chapter discusses what these themes might mean, how they might impact readers of the web pages, and elaborates on the possible cause of these themes.

Omissions and Foregrounding: The Balance Between Brevity and Blindness

Inclusion by a governing agency is especially important considering the systemic struggles people of color face with government agencies

and the difficulty they often experience trying to cross our social and literal borders. For instance, in their forthcoming article "The Double Occupancy of Hispanics: Counting Race and Ethnicity in the U.S. Census," Charise Pimentel and Deborah Balzhiser explain how complicated the relationship between the government and Latinos is:

> Even currently, when we live in a supposed postracial and colorblind era, Hispanics must contend with numerous racially charged, anti-Latino issues: immigration policy, an ever-expanding border fence, language rights, access to social services, and segregation. Hispanics also experience ongoing inequities in education, health care, housing, the judicial system, and the job market. (14)

These kinds of social injustices hold true for other minorities as well. Whiteness scholar George Lipsitz asserts that "if African Americans had access to the nutrition, health care, and protection against environmental hazards offered routinely to Anglos, seventy-five thousand fewer of them would die each year" (78). Similarly, Linda Wray argues that the lower-life expectancy of minorities in the U.S. can be attributed to "their disproportionately higher rates of poverty, malnutrition, and poor health care" (qtd. in Lipsitz 78). These sources paint a quick but powerful image of the discrimination faced by minorities in the U.S. and emphasizes the importance for the USDA to be not just culturally sensitive but to influence change regarding malnutrition. How the USDA approaches minority cultures is especially relevant. If minorities' health is jeopardized by

environmental racism, if their language is controlled by the states, and they are denied what is routinely offered to Anglos, being marginalized by the USDA by the choosemyplate.gov website only compounds the problems. While the USDA's food guides assume that readers' food choices are individual, not mandated, they are still making suggestions from a position of authority. Additionally, if those suggestions are not culturally relevant or accessible, the likelihood of follow-through is minimal.

The omissions from the web pages were quite extensive, especially for fruits, vegetables, and protein foods. A full list of the omitted foods and the corresponding cultures is listed above, in chapter 3. Omitting recognizable foods could send the message that non-Anglo readers are not the USDA's intended audience. If readers come to the site and do not see foods that are familiar to them, they are excluded in ways that other users, presumably Anglo Americans, are not. The omissions are unjust then, for excluding people from other cultures from the website despite their status as citizens and because the omissions reaffirm the status of Anglo American culture as the dominant culture. It may even contribute to continued nutritional deficiencies because people are less likely to use the site if they don't see themselves there.

In examining the results, it might be that the pattern of higher rate of omissions in the Fruits and Vegetables and Protein Foods pages is because grain, oil, and dairy categories are limited by the lower number of consumable products

in these categories as to compared to fruits, vegetables, and proteins. To illustrate, there are only a handful of grains species humans consume, of which rice and wheat dominate globally. Kinds of oils are similarly limited. Dairy is the most extreme example of this principle because it is the only food group that consists entirely of derivatives of two foods: cow's milk products and fortified soymilk. Because these food groups have a smaller pool of possibilities, the USDA's examples can cover a greater proportion of the whole than the examples for broader categories. In contrast with these limited groups, fruits, vegetables, and protein foods are nearly endless in possibilities and vary more significantly around the globe. Because of these groups' vast variations, USDA might conclude that covering commonly eaten foods by major cultures residing in the U.S. would defeat the point of having a concise list that gives readers the general idea of a food group.

Still, not having foods from their home cultures could be ostracizing if not demeaning to readers coming from other cultural ways of eating. As discussed by Oum in chapter one, Koreans see *kimchi* as a representation of themselves and their culture, so Americans who do not try *kimchi* are rejecting Korean culture and Koreans generally. Of course, the USDA does not have the opportunity to physically try *kimchi* as token to welcome Koreans in the U.S., but featuring *kimchi* on the website under a list of commonly eaten foods could be a significant step toward helping Koreans feel valued by the U.S. Although *kimchi* is a dish,

not an individual food, and Oum's discussion for Koreans in particular, this demonstrates how important it can be to minority cultures for the dominant culture to accept iconic foods from minority cultures.

Similarly, foregrounding certain food items is problematic because the images spotlight certain foods from the text, which may be exclusive or discriminatory. Even more succinctly than the list of "Commonly eaten" foods, these images end up representing what this food means. People who are illiterate, a concern of the USDA's based on their research methodology discussed in chapter 1, may not be able to read the text and will rely entirely on visuals to understand the main point. However, if they do not see foods that are culturally relevant to them, they may have trouble following the guidelines. With the exception of the dairy group, which consistently excluded Asians and people of African heritage, every group contained some images of foods commonly eaten in Asia, African diaspora cultures, and Latin America but also contained images not commonly eaten by these cultures. This mixture seems laudable because multiple cultures are represented, but the lack of polarizing results does not mean there I ignore critique.

I noticed that while many food images were relevant to the three cultures I focused on, such as picture of oranges, I did not find visually foregrounded images of foods that are iconic for any of the cultures. The only exception is an avocado pictured on an oils sub-page. Whereas the other foods are all consumed

by Anglo Americans and are also eaten in other cultures, Avocado is considered a Latino food that is also eaten in America. To truly be multi-culturally sensitive, the USDA should foreground more images that are iconic for these other cultures rather than selecting images that happen to be relevant for multiple cultures. Foregrounding only images that are common across multiple cultures seems to put all cultures on a level playing field, but actually only puts minority cultures on a level field and ignores the privilege accorded to Anglo American foods on the website.

Similar to my point above about the prevalence of foods eaten by the dominant culture on the website that are also eaten by other cultures, I wonder if what is apparent diversity is an accident. For both the omissions and the foregrounded images, identifying no unique foods from on the website and presenting only foods eaten by Anglo Americans and other cultures makes me wonder if their apparent efforts are actually coincidental. When some foods are commonly eaten in America and in other cultures, such as pineapple and chicken and wheat, could the apparent inclusion of these cultures have resulted from designers or other groups at the USDA basing the images of the foods they eat? Or did the USDA simply select commonly eaten foods for Anglo Americans that happen also to be eaten by outside cultures? Without specific, unique foods to these cultures listed it is difficult for readers to discern if the USDA makes

purposeful efforts to include other cultural ways of eating in the lists and images on the web pages.

In spite of the importance of these observations, representing iconic foods poses a problem for professional communicators and web writers. The space for images on the site is so limited that the burden of choosing images unique to certain cultures may overwhelm the space opportunities. Despite the challenge, practitioners should be aware of the rhetorical implications of selecting images that will foreground certain foods and elements of the text. While I am looking at the images from a cultural standpoint, the web writers may prioritize other factors such as visual impact or nutrition content above cultural inclusiveness. This essentially comes back the timeless tension between theory and practice. From my academic standpoint, I can easily critique this website for its cultural implications. However, those in in the professional world, with deadlines approaching and high expectations from employers, may have other pressing factors to consider. Bridging these two sometimes disparate concerns is not simple and no single recommendation suits every situation, but the choosemyplate.gov website highlights one potential outcome from these kinds of decisions.

When You Assume…

The third theme is that the USDA made assumptions about what dishes readers currently consume in order to make convenient suggestions for adding healthy foods to those meals. However, when these presumptions were compared

to the literature from chapter one, the web pages' presumptions were usually not applicable to other cultures. For example, suggesting readers put sliced fruit on their bowls of cereal in the morning presumes readers currently consume cereal for breakfast, which is not the case for Asians or Latinos. This is perhaps the most significant theme because it doesn't just not represent or include other cultures, it assumes that the readers will fit into a certain way of eating, in this case, Anglo, middle-class, American eating based on "nutritionism."

This concept is parallel to the ways in which Richard Dyer describes Whiteness as a "normal" in his article "The Matter of Whiteness." Dyer contends that white people see themselves as "the human race" without the baggage they/we typically associate with race (11). Specifically, he claims, "As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people" (10). Just as whites see whiteness as the norm, so do American Anglos see Anglo American ways of eating as normative.

In other words, this perspective of whiteness as normal is analogous to seeing American cultural ways of eating as normative, a standard, expected, and in that way invisible. Just as whiteness becomes invisible to Anglos and only other races are raced, so American food is invisible as a way of eating and only other cultural ways of eating are labeled as ways of eating. The USDA's expectation that others eat the way that Anglo American do does not allow for

other cultural approaches, so they omitted them. The USDA failed to acknowledge other cultural ways of eating because they do not acknowledge that their standard is also cultural. Dyer's argument applied to the USDA's MyPlate means that making presumptions about dishes readers are currently eating based on Anglo, American ways of eating may not be seen as abnormal to its Anglo creators because the Anglo American way is the "normal" way. Tips and suggestions for eating food that accounts for other ethnic perspectives would be unnecessary work, extending from the basics to which all deviations can return.

Dyer extends a solution for racial inequality that can be extended to the choosemyplate.gov web pages as well. To absolve the invisible dominance of whiteness, Dyer states that "whiteness needs to be made strange" (12). In other words, equality between races is impossible until Anglos people stop seeing themselves as a non-raced human norm. Applied to the choosemyplate.gov web pages, the USDA needs to make Anglo, American eating as "strange" to themselves instead of taking it for granted. This means that the USDA has to acknowledge that despite their reliance on science, their approach to eating is still culturally shaped. Once they understand the cultural basis of Anglo, American eating on their web pages they can begin to loosen its dominance and welcome other cultural ways of eating.

In practice, the USDA could apply this recommendation by clearly acknowledging and including other cultural ways of eating in the elements of their

site that currently assume Anglo, middle-class eaters. For instance, on the lists of commonly eaten foods, the USDA could list foods that are unique to other cultural diets. Similarly, foregrounding images of foods that prevalent in other cultures would make Anglo foods one of the options instead of the assumption. Furthermore, the USDA should suggest including food groups into meals and traditions seen in other cultures. Anglo readers might be more likely to explore other cultures, thus making their Whiteness strange, if they are already expecting to make new habits in order to be healthy.

Coherence of Groups

The final theme I elaborated on is that the USDA and these cultures classify certain foods differently. Specifically, the USDA categorized tomatoes, avocados, limes, lemons, and pumpkin differently than Asians, Latinos, and African heritage cultures did, according to the lists from *Oldways*. While this relates to coherence because coherence is disrupted for readers who see a tomato pictured on the vegetable page, it also related to the assumptions discussed above.

Essentially, the USDA is assuming that readers already group foods into the same categories that USDA does or that they will accept the USDA's groupings when the categorizations are contrary to the reader's own thinking.

Essentially, the USDA is assuming that readers see foods the same way they do or that they will accept how the USDA categorizes these foods. Their assumptions probably stem from Dyer's contentions about one's own, dominant

position becoming normalized. The USDA's categorizations are normalized in such a way that they do not see their categorizations are a cultural construction that excludes other cultural constructions of food.

Potential Explanation for Cultural Blindness Exhibited in the Above Themes

These findings are significant because they demonstrate that the USDA did indeed omit important cultural food items, foreground foods that connect to the most cultures while not showcasing any one culture in particular, assume that all readers eat Anglo American dishes and meals, and disrupt coherence by not addressing the contested classification of some plant foods. All the findings are significant because these rhetorical moves can alienate minority cultures in the U.S. These cultures are already frequently discriminated against in daily life and many have struggled to gain entry to our country, so the acceptance or ignorance of a governing authority is especially significant. Considering this importance, why does the USDA not make a more thorough attempts to make their website sensitive to cultural approaches to eating? One explanation stems from whiteness theory and Jessica Mudry's argument that the USDA bases its recommendations on an enumerated, scientific discourse she terms "nutritionism."

In his article "Failing to See," whiteness scholar Harlon Dalton argues that white people typically conflate the race and ethnicity of people of color. He explains, "The emergence in the 1980's of the term 'African-American' was meant to supply a label for our ethnicity that is distinct from the one used for race.

Most people, however, continue to use the term 'Black' to refer to both. 'white,' on the other hand, refers only to race" (17). Other descriptors, such as a southern or Christian describe the various cultures of white people. This means that white people acknowledge their own cultural variations but don't distinguish between the cultures of people of color. This muddling is relevant to the USDA's web pages when taken together with Mudry's argument about nutritionism.

Mudry proposed that the USDA has adopted a stance of nutritionism that rests on a bed of scientific truth. Other factors that have historically been important in food selection are not addressed because the USDA values science above these other considerations. Mudry's thesis taken together with Dalton's claims about conflating race and culture provides a possible explanation for the USDA's insensitivity to other cultural ways of eating. If the government agency, dominated by Anglo people, mistakes race for ethnicity, then they could reason that because nutritional requirements do not vary by race, then culture would be negligible as well. This perspective ignores conceptions of race as a social construct, rather than a scientific biological one, and results in excluding other cultural considerations.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Before conducting this project, I wanted to know whether or not the USDA was sensitive to other cultural ways of eating through the choosemyplate.gov website and what the implications were for minority readers. I spent a lot of time planning the method for answering this question, because I knew there was more than one way to answer it. I chose a critical discourse analysis because I ultimately wanted to study the text itself. Through this method, I found the following:

1. The USDA omits commonly eaten foods from other cultures, which excludes those minorities and adds to the layers of systemic discrimination they already face.
2. The images on the webpage foregrounded foods eaten by Asians, people of African heritage, and Latinos, only some of those cultures, or none of them. While this finding was not polarizing, the presentation of foods eaten by many cultures without any foods not regularly consumed by Anglo Americans seems that the representation was coincidental.
3. The USDA assumes what kinds of foods and dishes readers are already consuming, but the assumptions often are inappropriate for Asians, African Americans, and Latinos.

4. Coherence is potentially disrupted for readers who have alternative background knowledge about what foods count as fruit or a vegetable.

Although I am pleased with the findings from my study, I recognize that I could have made changes to my method or pursued another one to answer my research question. I believe those alternatives approaches could provide valuable information to fill in the gaps of my findings, so I explore those alternatives in this section. Finally, I conclude this section with a call to action for the USDA.

Future Research and Limitations

To continue this research based on a critical discourse analysis, I would include other pages in the analysis. The pages I selected are essential because they represent core of the website's purpose, to explain what constitutes the MyPlate and how to implement the guidelines in daily diet. However, many of the sub-pages contained little text and remained technical in nature. Other pages on the website may provide more text and room for analysis. For instance, the sections dedicated to "healthy living" tips or the pages providing meal plans may provide more text and examples to work with. Furthermore, users may frequent these pages more often if they come to the site for concrete suggestions rather than a general explanation of the principles. If that is the case, then an analysis that focuses on those pages could make a stronger argument for what users are typically experiencing.

In chapter two, I addressed the limitations I faced in depicting foods from other cultures. Future research could fill in the gaps of this research project by taking a narrower focus. Selecting only one ethnic category and exploring the

variations of eating within it more fully could confirm my findings based on more generalized information or add to what I have already found.

Additionally, another limitation of this method is that I cannot say for sure how people from these other cultures experience the site. Although I am certain that the USDA is not inclusive of other cultures on their site and that they should reconsider their approach, I do not know how people experience the site. At the conclusion of my project, I am left wondering the following:

- What are the demographics of actual users of the choosemyplate.gov website?
- Similarly, are people of minorities interested in viewing the choosemyplate.gov website?
- Do Asians, Latinos, or people from African heritage adhere to notions of eating from their home cultures and ignore conventions proposed by the USDA?
- Do users from other cultures notice the absences of their cultural foods from the lists on choosemyplate.gov?
- When users from minority cultures access the website, do they feel excluded or marginalized?
- Do they expect to see foods from their home cultures, or do they expect a guide tailored to Anglo American ways of eating?
- What reactions would people from minority cultures have to a website that did represent their approaches to food?

- How might government subsidies, a large part of our American Agriculture, influence what appears on the recommendations?

To answer some of these questions, future researchers should consider doing primary research and interviews. Interviewing Asians, people from African diaspora cultures, and Latinos about their experiences interacting with the chooseymyplate.gov website could reveal the actual repercussions of the USDA's cultural negligence. Of course, talking about cultural identity and race are sensitive topics and it may be difficult to get respondents to answer genuinely and reflect critically on their experiences. However, with a finely tuned method, interviews could yield insightful information about the actual effects of the USDA's apparent insensitivity to other cultural ways of eating.

A Call to Action: Social Justice in the United States

Despite the questions that have surfaced, I remain convinced that the USDA is perpetuating social injustice by remaining insensitive to other cultural ways of eating. Despite the challenges inherent in creating concise, educating, and visually interesting documents, the USDA should make a greater effort toward a culturally sensitive website. The scope of this project included only portion of the website so I cannot say for the sure that the rest of the website is similarly exclusive. However, because I do not imagine that a culturally appropriate website would overlook such a large and vital component of their site, I maintain that they should reevaluate the website as a whole. Considering the immense discrimination and systemic social injustices that minority cultures in the U.S. must endure, the USDA should make an example of itself by overcoming the

challenges in drafting documents to make Anglo cultural ways of eating just one of many cultural approaches to food.

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