

### **The Social Pyramid of Food: Dietary Guidelines=Gender Guidelines?**

Most of us are familiar with the FDA's food pyramid, as it was often drilled into our heads by pediatricians and school nurses when we were still young enough to think that Trix yogurt and Dunkaroos were reasonable staples of a daily diet. A less obvious "food" pyramid, and an undoubtedly more interesting one, is what could be referred to as a sort of "social food pyramid" particularly relevant to the Ancient Greek world. Rather than fats, oils, and sweets residing at the top, this pyramid's tip was occupied by those who might have had greater access to such delicacies, or in the ancient world, men, specifically men of high social class. Women thus inhabited the bottom of this pyramid, possessing roles in society, particularly in relation to all things edible, that confined them to the home and removed them from the public eye. Somewhat ironically, it does not seem that men wanted to keep their own world separate because women were somehow *incapable*. Rather, women might have actually been *too* capable and therefore threatening to the patriarchal order if allowed to venture beyond kitchen walls. Viewing gender hierarchies as inextricably connected to dietary customs does not only prove relevant to the Ancient Greek era, but also to later time periods, such as the medieval years, and to some extent, today's modern world. The common thread running through all three generations is spun by how food and its associated practices were a source of influence for men. Literature across the years shows how male control of culinary practices correlates to male control of the female figure.

### **An Important Disclaimer When Analyzing the Role of Women**

Before further discussing the trends over time regarding treatment of women and their relationship to food, I would first like to acknowledge that my analysis might be somewhat biased as it is founded in, well, somewhat biased literature. Many of the sources available, particularly those from the ancient Greek and medieval eras, were written by men alone and thus provide only one viewpoint- that of men. What might women during this time have thought of their lives? Is it possible they would not have viewed their existence in as dismally degrading a way as the literature makes it seem? Yes, it certainly is possible. Could the separation between “men’s spaces” and “women’s spaces” have been less sharp than portrayed by these male authors? Yes, it could. Without access to the female perspective as literature from the past was dominated by men, it is difficult to say just what the woman would have made of her own situation. With that in mind, the following arguments regarding her role in the domestic sphere and her segregation from the public world must be viewed as just one respective set of many possible conclusions. The suggestions made in this paper are rather cut and dry, following a more structural approach than other analyses might in dissecting primary evidence. Yet, they nevertheless provide incredibly useful insight into how the women’s role has changed over time.

### **Lack of Recognition for the Woman’s Work in Ancient Greece**

Even though the role women played in food preparation in Ancient Greece was crucial to the functioning of the patriarchal society, it often went completely unrecognized. Men may have

labored in the fields, but women worked just as hard toiling away in the home to turn the secondary products into meals for symposiums, banquets, and other dietary extravaganzas.<sup>1</sup> Despite their essential function in facilitating these dining practices, women may have been bound to their own quarters, at least when other male guests were present in the house, physically segregated from the public world of food.<sup>2</sup> In some particularly elitist households, women might not have even been endowed the responsibility, or rather, the “freedom” to cook. In fact, slaves were often sent out to serve in order to keep a woman from having any reason to present herself at gatherings like the symposium.<sup>3</sup> However, most other women were allowed to work “behind the scenes” of public dining events, albeit still never permitted to partake in such gatherings. As John Wilkins suggests, “in the case of food preparation, work in the kitchen was generally beneath consideration.”<sup>4</sup> He further emphasizes the belittling of female capability by pointing out that, “in many texts, the consumption of food was of great social importance, but the food appears as if by magic; the people preparing that food are not mentioned.”<sup>5</sup> Ostensibly then, food preparation was “beneath consideration” because women and slaves were the ones preparing the food, and women and slaves were “beneath consideration” as members of society. To praise a woman for her contributions to the man’s world of food could presumably threaten his prominence in the conventionally patriarchal public sphere. Furthermore, the only women permitted to venture into the andron during a symposium or other event when male guests might be in attendance, were the hetairai, the Ancient Greek equivalent of prostitutes (perhaps deemed less degenerate than those of our time though) who provided various forms of entertainment and companionship.<sup>6</sup> Essentially then, women living during this time either retained respect only to suffer sequestration or ventured into the public dining domain only to be regarded as lusty

harlots.<sup>7</sup> The female role was barely recognized, or at least recognized as anything worth public praise or admiration.

### **Representations of Women in Ancient Greek Mythology**

To some extent, lack of recognition for the woman's contributions to society may have its roots in mythology. In Ancient Greek literature, the large majority of women with power portrayed in any sort of positive light are divinities. Mortal women were rarely shown to retain any form of authority, or at least any form of reputable authority. Demeter, for example, was recognized as the Goddess of grain, associated with the beginnings of life.<sup>8</sup> Demeter essentially created agriculture, as she introduced the seed and the plow to Triptolemus who taught the art of farming to the rest of the Greek World.<sup>9</sup> Without Demeter, men would not be able to enjoy foods like wheat, olive oil, and wine as part of their daily diets, let alone survive without such staples. Demeter is in essence then, responsible for the man's existence, which makes his ignorance of mortal women seem all the more puzzling and perhaps even somewhat paradoxical. Athena, like Demeter, was also perceived for her vital function in providing men with the food they needed to enjoy life.<sup>10</sup> Athena was known for many reputable deeds, but one particularly important accomplishment was her contribution to the Mediterranean triad, since she gifted Athens with the olive tree.<sup>11</sup> Unlike mortal women who prepared food in private areas of the house, Athena was publicly recognized for this culinary donation to the man's world as evidenced by the representation of her battle with Poseidon on the west pediment of the

Parthenon.<sup>12</sup> Thus, like Demeter, Athena was regarded as essential to male subsistence on earth, whereas human women were more likely to be deemed merely complementary.

Even in mythology though, female characters are not always portrayed positively. Women with power are often depicted as incapable of properly exercising authority. The story of Pandora's box may best illustrate this point. Pandora's box, which in some versions isn't a sealed box, but rather a pithos, as might be used to store grain, supposedly contained all evil in the world and was therefore never to be unlocked.<sup>13</sup> The all too curious Pandora, the first human woman to exist, could not quell her curiosity though, and opened the vessel, much to humanity's despair. Pandora arguably then set the stage for the widely accepted view that mortal women were inept at retaining responsibility or exercising self-control. The story of Persephone's rape by Hades, also suggests that women were incompetent in effectively wielding autonomy. Like Pandora, Persephone's lack of self-control leads her to consume the forbidden pomegranate seeds of the underworld.<sup>14</sup> Because anyone who eats the food of the underworld must remain there, she becomes bound to Hades due to her own inability to resist temptation. Persephone's self imposed imprisonment provokes her mother, Demeter, who is deeply distressed upon her daughter's kidnapping, to refuse to bring harvest to the earth until Persephone is returned.<sup>15</sup> Thus, while mythology may exhibit goddesses as figures to be publicly revered, it simultaneously shows women with freewill and autonomy as problematic for the rest of humanity. As these stories were well known and divinities played a major role in social practices in the ancient Greek world, the viewpoints they reiterate concerning the woman as a less capable member of society were likely to have been widely accepted by men.

### **Representations of Women in Ancient Greek Medical Texts**

Not only is female inferiority illustrated by mythology but also by medical literature. Peter Garnsey explains the contradictory, often unsanctioned nature of such representations of women. For example, he discusses how women were, “judged to need less food than men but their needs are defined by men and largely by the interests of men and of the male-dominated society as a whole.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, women were ostensibly given less merely because of sexist beliefs as opposed to medically legitimate rationale, or at least what we would consider legitimate today. As physicians writing during this time were raised in this culturally misogynistic environment, it is entirely possible that they considered such arguments to be anatomically sound. In addition to denial of food, prohibition of wine was also mandated for women due to their supposed “weakness of their nature.”<sup>17</sup> Again, Garnsey implies that rather than backing such claims with what we would now see as valid biological evidence, the restrictions of wine drinking for women were a result of the way men in that society viewed them, as too weak to handle its effects.<sup>18</sup> Thus, regardless of how we might perceive their scientific accuracy today, medical writings from this time most certainly emphasize that women were somehow naturally lesser.

### **Representation of Women in Ancient Greek Theatre**

Theatrical scripts in Ancient Greece also communicate negative ideas about the woman’s relationship with food. Comedies often portrayed female eating practices as uncouth and overly

aggressive. In one such play, Antiphanes' protagonist in "The Man Who Captures Runaways" consumes meat "like women do, he wolfed it down fully and fattily."<sup>19</sup> Just as medical texts might have validated alienation of the female figure from the rest of the patriarchal world, so too then might have theatrical performances. While this excerpt of Antiphanes' script is from a comedy, its subject material in regards to women is no laughing matter. Theatre was a significant part of the culture in the Ancient Greek world, particularly for men, the ones most likely to attend the shows. In turn, the messages these plays conveyed to the audience were likely to have proliferated throughout the patriarchal public sphere and thus be taken fairly seriously. In turn, perhaps these seemingly benign farces, like mythological writings or medical texts, actually helped solidify the subordinate status of women.

### **Anxiety Surrounding Female Sexuality in Relation to Literary Representations**

The establishment of women as pointedly inferior, at least as exemplified in various forms of literature in the ancient Greek world, seems to directly relate to a very prevalent sense of anxiety surrounding female sexuality. Rufus, a physician living during this time, proposed that a woman's sex drive could be suppressed if her appetite was suppressed. He cautioned that, "the quicker she puts on weight, the quicker she becomes nubile, and the quicker her desire to have sexual relations"<sup>20</sup> Rufus did not link male eroticism to consumption of food in the same way though. His statements about women appear to have been less sanctioned by what we might see as modern medical theory and more grounded in what we might perceive as chauvinism, in accordance with Peter Garnsey's views. However, as a physician, and therefore a figure of authority, men living during this time period might have referenced Rufus' writing as a way of

affirming their belief that women should be kept away from public dining events when male guests were present. Room functions may have been more flexible and women may have been able to move around the house more when male visitors were not there. However, during symposiums or other similar dining events, women were likely to have been expected to stay in closed off rooms. To offer an “edible” analogy, the hiding of the women in their own quarters, at least when male guests were present, can be compared to the shoving of moldy bread to the back of a refrigerator. Rather than rid his world of women completely and annihilate all concern, by forcing her out of his dining sphere, a man could prevent his wife from somehow tarnishing his reputation by frolicking with other men. Likewise, tucking moldy bread under not yet expired food might not quell all anxiety surrounding its unappetizing components but will indeed prevent it from sickening the stomach.

### **Objectification of Women in Ancient Greece**

While isolating women may have served as one solution to obliterating anxiety, men in the Ancient World could also objectify women to better calm their fears. Interestingly “food and sex were intimately linked in traditional agrarian societies,” such as those in the ancient Greek world. Even Athenaeus’ writings include descriptions of breads shaped like sexual organs.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly then, according to authors like Hesiod and Soranus, women were often characterized as, “ the field to be ploughed and sown, the cultivated furrow or the oven in which the fruit of the man/earth is transformed into a finished product to be nurtured or consumed.”<sup>22</sup> Rather than see women as equal human counterparts, men during this time period, or at least those men who sided with the viewpoints of Hesiod and Soranus, viewed women as necessary



solely for purposes of reproduction. By this logic, women *needed* men to be contributing members of society. For women to be of any “use”, they had to allow men to “plough” them, and place the bread to be cooked into their “ovens.” Essentially then, the ancient Greek woman was an empty vessel. As “empty vessels” would not pose much of a sexual threat, men were probably more than content to commit their minds to such a metaphor. This outlook on women as reproductive mechanisms, cornered them into quite problematic, inflexible positions. Virginitly and chastity, while less anxiety provoking than outright promiscuous behavior, still challenged the social order.<sup>23</sup> However, women who were too sexual were also reprimanded and condemned. Ostensibly then, the only acceptable role left for women to fulfill was that of inanimate receptacles only recognized for their ability to procreate.

### **The Medieval Woman’s Role in the Public Sphere (or Lack Thereof)**

Citizen women in the medieval world arguably had more autonomy than women in the ancient Greek world and could at least venture outside their own quarters. European society in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries was not characterized by, “space that absolutely excluded either sex” apart from religious places like monasteries.<sup>24</sup> However, medieval women were for the most part, still bound to the house, expected to engage in domestic duties without acquiring much appreciation in turn. Slaves and women of lower class may have worked outside the home a fair bit, but for most other women, the public sphere was still generally run by male figures of authority and, “strong custom dictated how women would move within the spaces men

dominated.”<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, medieval women really only had two options in life. They could either marry and assume the occupation of a housewife, or enter the religious realm and possibly exercise some public influence as nuns.<sup>26</sup> Even then though, the religious order still restricted the woman’s capacity to “function in the public sphere and maintain control over [her] life,” with its many rules for everything from female sexuality to female diet.<sup>27</sup> Women were also barred from positions of higher power in government, from attending universities, from engaging in legal practice, and from having any sort of medical authority beyond serving as midwives.<sup>28</sup> Due to these, “power manipulations over women’s access to economic, political, and intellectual spheres...women had virtually no access to the public arena in medieval times,” and , “ all women lived under patriarchy.”<sup>29</sup> Martine Segalen delves further into this separation of the male and female space. She asserts that “there was a ‘female house’ ,” and a “male outside,” and whenever women ventured into this “outside” they “did so in the company of other women.”<sup>30</sup> Consequently, although medieval woman may have had more mobility than ancient Greek women in a physical sense, they were still very much barred from climbing up the social ladder.

### **Anxiety Surrounding Food and Female Control**

Also similar to ancient Greek women, medieval women incited a comparable sense of male anxiety regarding their relationship to food. While ancient Greek men worried that food could provoke a woman’s voracious sexual appetite, men of medieval times saw the women’s relationship with food as troubling because of the control with which it might endow her. Women could influence their social environments, more specifically, their families and religious

authorities, through deliberately refusing to eat. Fasting without a legitimate reason, religious or other, was considerably humiliating, particularly for aristocratic families.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, for women, it was a surreptitious yet highly effective way of, “manipulating, educating, or converting family members.”<sup>32</sup> Margery Kempe was one of the most famous of these women who abstained from food to gain control. A deeply religious individual, she confessed to Christ that she no longer wished to indulge in the pleasures of sex and dining. In response, he commanded that she choose one or the other. As her husband was deeply embarrassed by her fasting, Margery was able to convince him to agree to no longer having sex in exchange for her return to a normal diet.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Margery’s refusal of food allowed her to elevate her authority about her husband’s in a society which otherwise would expect her to acquiesce to his demands.

Medieval women could also use food to acquire power by purposefully botching recipes and omitting key ingredients. Dorothy of Montau, another well known religious fanatic, “forgot” to remove the scales from fish before frying them, and “accidentally” neglected to cook for her illegitimate son on a regular basis.<sup>34</sup> Of course, Dorothy did not really forget, but actually forsook her duties on purpose to discreetly revolt against male suppression of her free will. Thus, Dorothy’s resistance served the same purpose as Margery Kempe’s in allowing her to acquire power men did not want her to possess. As Caroline Walker Bynum suggests, “we must not underestimate the effectiveness of such manipulation in a world where it was extraordinarily difficult for women to avoid marriage or choose a religious vocation.”<sup>35</sup> Food was something a medieval woman could always access, as it was part of her designated daily routine in the domestic division, where she was detained for her most of her life. In stark contrast, government roles or other positions of power in the public domain were not usually something she could

acquire. Thus, the medieval woman could, and often had to, use her relationship with food as an alternative means of acquiring any sort of voice outside the home.

### **Anxiety Surrounding Lack of Control Food Might Provoke**

On the flip side, as much as food could endow women *with* control, there also existed a fairly widespread fear that food could simultaneously cause women to *lose* that control. Similar to the Ancient Greek perspective that women would be unable to suppress sexual appetites if allowed to indulge their gastronomic appetites, female dining practices in the medieval era were associated with dangerous, uninhibited bodily sensations. Interestingly, medieval women themselves were even “profoundly fearful of the sensations of their body, especially hunger and thirst.”<sup>36</sup> For example, Mary of Oignies, a member of an aristocratic family in medieval Belgium, was so overwhelmed by the feelings and thoughts food might provoke within her that she supposedly begged Christ to take away her ability to taste.<sup>37</sup> Other women like Mary also looked to a life of asceticism specifically for the purposes of suppressing such bodily needs like hunger, which made them feel vulnerable and out of control. Simply having food within reach was a threat to this sort of coveted sense of self-discipline that medieval women themselves expressed a need to preserve.

### **Women in Today’s World- Better or worse off?**

One might argue that exclusion of women from publicly recognized positions of power is

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merely a thing of the past. Numbers of women in the workforce today have skyrocketed since ancient and medieval times. Even within a more recent time span from the late 1900's to early 2000's, there has been a considerably large increase from 4% to 16% of female "breadwinners," those who support the home financially. Thus, women have undoubtedly increased their foothold in the public sphere. Even for women who do choose to stay at home, the life of a "house wife" does not appear to be nearly as restricting as it was in earlier centuries. In fact, food preparation has become an industry in and of itself and more so, a sector of the business world in which women may even have an advantage. Martha Stewart, Oprah Winfrey, and Rachel Rae serve as perfect examples of how knowledge of cooking, providing for a family, and maintaining a household in general, can be used to garner both respect and recognition, let alone quite a hefty profit, from society. However, such an optimistic outlook does not hold true in all circumstances. Both opportunities and recognition of the female role in society may not have changed as much as the Food Network or Women's Health Magazine make it seem. The role of the stay at home mother, as someone who must literally stay at home, is still a very real and staunchly enforced concept. More so, the idea of a "stay at home father" is still considered somewhat taboo. Despite the fact that we no longer drink from kylixes or wear Marie Antoinette style dresses, it is clear that viewpoints from both Ancient Greek and medieval eras concerning the role of women may not have become totally obsolete or as least as outdated as one would hope.

### **Balancing a Role in the Public Sphere with a Role at Home**

Women today must not only face the difficulty of merely entering the public precinct, but also the criticism that comes with attempting to balance domestic and professional positions. The percentage of dual-earner families in which both men and women work outside the home has increased from 34% in 1976 to 56% in 1997, implying an equivalently significant surge in the challenge of “balancing work and family responsibilities” for women.<sup>38</sup> While having access to the life outside a home might seem entirely preferable to the segregated conditions of the Ancient and Medieval worlds, such access is also arguably just as inhibiting. Kay Wahl remarks that “the woman’s place is still in the home-no matter how many other places she finds herself in the world’s eye.”<sup>39</sup> Wahl also reminds us that although “the kitchen [has] a place in these women’s lives rather than their place being in the kitchen,” the ability to enter areas outside of the kitchen might actually complicate the woman’s role in society.<sup>40</sup> The dilemma of juggling a professional career and a family role has become “each individual woman’s to solve,” in which she is the one to blame if she is somehow inadequately able to balance both.<sup>41</sup> The woman is thus inevitably and unfairly burdened with the dual task of keeping, “her home together” because society fears, “what would be the alternative if she didn’t,” and creating a life for herself beyond the pots and pans.<sup>42</sup>

Carol Counihan goes so far as to suggest that women might actually be worse off now because of this new freedom to enter the public sphere. She argues that women today “have less security in their new identities, given the persistence of the demands of their former roles and their inability to satisfy these demands because of time constraints.”<sup>43</sup> Men can venture out into the world and never spend significant time at home, yet still receive praise and recognition for

their professional accomplishments. Contrarily, women must try to accomplish the same feats of establishing “new identities” yet are unavoidably chastised for even making such attempts to move away from their “former roles”. Essentially, “women now struggle for equal power (public) with men, while losing the influence (private) through giving which they enjoyed in the past.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, it seems nearly impossible for women to be successful in roles that would endow them with this “equal public power” yet simultaneously still be viewed in a positive light as adequate homemakers.

In effect then, in this more modern, supposedly gender progressive time period, women are still somewhat forced into choosing one way of life or the other, in which the domestic occupation is the default. However, life for women who do choose to stay at home, as might seem the “right” thing to do in society’s eyes, is not completely desirable either. As the world has become more industrialized, tasks that would have required extensive labor in the past, such as heating up food or cleaning a house, can be completed more quickly. Although this newfound efficiency of work might be beneficial to women in terms of making their jobs easier, it concurrently provides even more of a reason for the housewife to procure less acclamation for her efforts. In modern times, “house work is seen as respite from work,” in which domestic chores become “invisible as work” that would merit any sort of recognition.<sup>45</sup> Thus perhaps we have not come as far as it may seem from the Ancient Greek and Medieval eras during which the woman’s contributions to the man’s world went largely unacknowledged.

## **Views of Women in the Workforce Today**

Furthermore, although women most certainly have more opportunities to enter the workforce now, their positions within the work force are not entirely accepted by men. Tom Stocky, a stay-at-home dad interviewed by ABC News believes that there are still “negative perceptions about women who decide to work full-time out of their homes, and men who decide to work full time in their home.”<sup>46</sup> Women who labor for long hours outside the home are often thought to be neglecting their “proper” duties. In turn, men who assume those household roles that women vacate are viewed as having been wrongly delegated to such work.<sup>47</sup> Statistical evidence supports this “inappropriate assignment of familial roles.” Households in which only the mother works reportedly have lower annual incomes.<sup>48</sup> At least from a strictly numerical viewpoint then, men appear to be more capable of performing *outside* of the home to bring the most money back *into* the home.

From an ideological viewpoint, too, men are depicted as unfit for the “motherly role.” David Leverenz’s studies of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century literature unveils that, “a gendered division of labor was increasingly encoded in American culture,” due to such stereotypical backlash against men taking on conventional “mother duties”.<sup>49</sup> One man cited in such literary pieces, unemployed during the Depression, remarked that, “when a man is at home all day he cannot possibly command as much respect as when he returns to the family for a few hours of concentrated conversation.”<sup>50</sup> The sorts of men who might agree with this viewpoint preferred to only “return to the family for a few hours” as to do otherwise would be thought of as somehow socially obscure.<sup>51</sup> Thus, women do not only seem to still be pigeon-holed into assuming domestic roles because of their supposed inability to earn as much. Rather, the pressure



for the woman to remain connected to the house can also be attributed to a still very much prevalent consensus that only the woman herself can most effectively complete household chores, specifically those that deal with cooking and food preparation . Or perhaps it is not even that women can most successfully handle these domiciliary duties. Maybe men just use their own “incompetence” as justification for not having to “waste” their time on such tasks.

### **How Modern Media Contributes to Domestic Confinement of Women**

Just as Ancient Greek comedies did not portray women in a particularly reverential light, modern day forms of entertainment may also contribute to the suppression of the female role outside the home. The television undoubtedly had a largely positive impact on the lives of many when it was first introduced. As it allowed for the dissemination of important news and the production of interesting programs, it is hard to imagine how the television could have been detrimental to those lucky enough to experience its advent. In light of gender roles though, the television might have been one of the prime hindrances to female success outside the domestic sphere. Popular television shows reiterated the idea that women should be contained in the home. Programs like “Leave it to Beaver” portray June Cleaver as the role model mother, highly dedicated to her family, performing all “proper” female functions such as cooking, cleaning, and tending to her mischievous child, Beaver.<sup>52</sup> Not only did television programs like “Leave it Beaver” show woman as idyllic housekeepers , but they also characterized men as the somewhat comical counterparts who ultimately failed as “domestic do-gooders.” Sitcoms from the 1950’s, such as “My Three Sons,” and “Bachelor Father”, “portrayed men raising older kids, usually for

laughs, but by the 1960s care giving ads had been replaced by fathers like Mike Brady of The Brady Bunch, a widower whose new wife Carol ran the household.”<sup>53</sup> These precursors to modern sitcoms seem to have set a precedent for women to be revered as household honchos and men to be ridiculed as potential house parents. The importance of the media in perpetuating such views becomes evident in that individuals living during the 1950’s displayed parallel perspectives to those introduced by these television series. One young man, cited in Jeremy Adam Smith’s “A Stay-at-home Dad’s History of North America,” explains how “the thought that dad would stay home was not considered. If it was, nobody told [him], and the thought never entered [his] head.”<sup>54</sup> Given this domineering presence of media alongside societal traditions, other young men, and perhaps even young women too, would have little motivation to question these gender role “norms.”

### **Women Outside the Home Still Viewed as Threatening**

Not only have gender roles remained somewhat stagnant over time in terms of viewing women as best confined to the housewife role, but also in terms of viewing women who step outside that role as somehow threatening. Studies show that women who gain a foothold for themselves in the professional world are, “likely to be perceived as aggressive,” because, “women usually don’t ask for what they deserve but when they do, they risk being branded as domineering.”<sup>55</sup> Perhaps then, today’s Mrs. CEO is not so different from the Margery Kempe of medieval times or the unruly Ancient Greek wife who mischievously vacated the women’s quarters in the oikos. Fear of female success has essentially replaced the fear of female sexuality in earlier centuries. Women with public positions of power in today’s world may not be seen as

sexually dangerous but are indeed perceived by many (but certainly not all) men as professionally, “intimidating, abnormal and unattractive.”<sup>56</sup> Unsurprisingly, “men run roughly 97% of the largest public companies, hold 84% of major board positions and control 83% of Congress.”<sup>57</sup> Such facts and figures evidence how, “truly powerful women remain a tiny minority,” because, “fear of the unknown is common.” This “unknown” is probably best construed as the idea that women could possess professional roles even moderately comparable to those of men.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps it is not then female power in and of itself that men fear, but rather a disruption to a “known” way of life, one which they dominate.

### **Food and Women Across the Years: Summary**

To summarize, it seems that there are more similarities than differences between treatment of women in the ancient Greek world, the medieval world, and the modern world. One of the most prominent parallels that exist between all three time periods is that women were by default, recognized as the members of society best suited to domestic work. Although women living in more contemporary centuries most certainly had greater opportunities for creating a life for themselves outside of the home, such freedom was countered by criticism of women who spent too much time on their professional careers. Yet another prominent feature of gender roles prevalent in all three time periods is the anxiety surrounding female power and control, particularly when women might be able to reach a societal status equivalent to that of men. The main difference between these forms of anxiety relates mainly to what it was exactly that men feared. In the ancient Greek world, sexuality as provoked by food was a major threat. In

medieval times, men expressed concern regarding the control food might give women and the control it might cause her to lose. Anxiety in the modern era relates less to how food might bring out some sort of intimidating facet of female existence, and more to how movement away from the domestic sphere poses a problem for men. Professional women who might join the ranks of men who conventionally dominate life outside the home are the prime culprits of contemporary male distress concerning the female role.

### **The Take Away from Examining Diets Across the Decades**

Putting all the pieces of the chronological puzzle together, the relationship between food and gender in Ancient Greek times, medieval years, and more contemporary periods, demonstrates how social guidelines are not as black and white as dietary guidelines. Dining practices relate more to a gender hierarchy that extends beyond women simply controlling their appetites and maintaining slim waistlines. The argument that women require less food from a biological standpoint, that women are unable to handle wine due to their physical make-up, or that women in power are somehow dangerous, arguably disguise the man's fear of her capabilities. Men cannot just keep the woman locked away in her own quarters or prevent her from a promotion spontaneously without some sort of rational reason. If he uses the domestic sphere as what calls her away from competing with him though, maintaining a social ladder in which he stands at the top becomes far more feasible. Food is thus both the man's friend and foe. While allowing him to indulge his extravagant tastes, enjoy entertainment, and delight in the company of fellow men since Ancient times, food has also exposed a less "appetizing" facet, his

stereotypical view of women. It would be unreasonable to suggest that all men across all time periods have held and do hold such misogynist views of women. However, it is not entirely unreasonable to suggest that food practices over the years provide us with ample evidence to say that from the start, the female role has most definitely been put on the “backburner.”

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 108.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 10.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 256.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 252.

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<sup>48</sup> Marshall, 10.

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<sup>55</sup> Jenna Goudreau, “Why Successful Women Terrify Us,” *ForbesWoman*, April 3, 2012  
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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.