

Traditional Practices in Restaurants that could be Revived and Some that should not

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Abstract

Recently, there has been many journalistic articles in the media which address the issue of fraud in restaurant tables. Charges include replacing a deep-fried calamari order with a plate of pork rectum. Another difficult one to prove is that the organic salad vegetables came from non-organic sources. The motivation seems to be economic. The fraud regarding Kobe beef seems to stem from an old rule put into effect by the government of the United States of America. The traditional custom addressed in the current work is about making sounds of satisfaction as one partakes of one's meal in a restaurant or public setting. It is not an American custom, and generally, not a European custom to make sounds when consuming a sit-down meal. However, it is definitely considered a show of appreciation among the Chinese, Japanese and other Asian cultures to make a loud sound when slurping noodles, for instance. It has now been published in academic journals that sound of satisfaction helps to activate the satiety centers in the brain, resulting as an aid to the person to limit the quantity of food consumed.

Keywords: Nutrition; Restaurants; Economic gain; Fraud; Satiety; Noise

Background

The traditional practice considered here is about the noises of gratification made as a person eats a meal in a restaurant or public setting. It is neither a European nor an American custom to make audible noises when consuming a sit-down meal. It is considered impolite to open one's mouth to talk when one's mouth is occupied by food. On the other side of the world in Asia, it is often perceived as a show of appreciation among the Chinese, Japanese and other Asians to make an audible slurping sound when eating noodles, as one example. It is also interpreted as a complement to the host, when eating at a dinner function.

It has now been shown in a journal paper [1] that noises of gratification contribute to triggering the satiety control areas in one's brain. This audio effects, when practiced conscientiously often, can be used by a person to control the mass of food eaten daily [1,2].

Apparently, silence or distraction (from a television for example), aids in overconsumption of food. This is caused by the satiety centers not being activated by one's sounds of slurping, munching or other form of eating.

In recent times, there has been many discourses in the media about fraud centered on restaurants [3-6]. Mischief-making include replacing a deep-fried calamari order with a plate

of pork anus. Fraudulent acts include misrepresenting more expensive cuts of meat by lower quality ones. The investigating journalist(s) traced wrong-doers to ones in major cities like New York, Los Angeles, Miami and Boston [3].

Another bait-and-switch scheme involves salad vegetables being 'organic' and thus costing more than regular vegetables produced without following the 'organic' rules. It is of course difficult to prove wrong-doing in this particular scheme. The motivation is invariably financial. For example, the excuse made by the restaurateurs can be that the 'fish-of-the-day' has been sold out, or that the particular fish has been substituted by another by the fish supplier. The fish substituted is normally one of lower cost [3], and there is usually no offer to reduce the price of the dish.

Journalistic Articles and Literature Survey

The journalist Olmsted has unveiled and helped broadcast the fact that no one can obtain Kobe beef in the United States of America (USA) or Canada [4,6]. Reference [4] is the first of the investigative articles that help inform the public about the rule (law) that prevents Americans from buying Kobe beef, either uncooked or in restaurants.

Widespread seafood fraud was found in New York City by the researchers in reference [7] Warner and associates. Apparently,

the same kind of fraud takes place in Los Angeles (L.A.), Boston and Miami also [8-10]. Fish is a popular item to fake since most edible fish is white in color, and not very distinguishable when cooked and served without its head or tail (as done in many Asian cultures). Certainly, fish covered in batter and fried is even more difficult to identify except using laboratory methods.

Apparently, the problem in South Florida has continued since the 1980s till the present time. The upside, if any, is that the percentage of mislabeling is significantly lower than other large metropolitan areas studied like L.A. and Boston [10]. The percentage of fraud has also held steady and not risen significantly. The residents of South Florida also eat almost twice as much sea food as compared to the national average consumption of seafood [10].

Nutrition and Health Concerns

One main concern regarding fish is that the substitute fish in many cases contains a lot of mercury. This substitute fish, e.g. king mackerel in South Florida, has been identified by the government as a fish from which to be abstained by expectant mothers because of the mercury content [10]. Other concerns with respect to health are addressed well in the studies and reports done by Warner et al. [7,10].

There is a so-called urban legend [11,12] that in some restaurants in big cities like L.A. and Miami, squids are sometimes replaced by pork anus, because the squids are expensive in comparison. The substitution can be pulled off because the texture of the meat is similar to that of squid. The batter used and the frying process help to further mask any differences.

Even though investigative journalists did not find definitive proof [12] of fraud, the author happened upon the evidence through the television. It appeared on Judge Mablean's a popular court television series, at the end of July 2015, in Miami, Florida, USA [13].

In this particular case, a rich Jewish American lady sued for damages for being 'tricked' into eating a non-kosher food like pork, let alone pork anus or rectum. The restaurant owner, under oath, declared it to be true that in L.A., it is commonly done to replace calamari with imitation calamari made from pork rectum because of the high costs of squid. Judge Mablean's found for the defendant anyway, because the restaurant owner did not hide the fact, and the lady had been eating that dish of 'fried calamari' for 6 months previous without asking and/or complaining.

This is mischief at more than one level. Nutritionally speaking, squids have one of the highest Omega 3: Omega 6 ratio, which is a very good thing. On the other hand, the inverted ratio is high for pork products, rather than the ratio itself. From the position of the nutritionist, the customer has been cheated with the pork substitute. The customer ordered for something healthy, and obtained something which was not. It should be

remembered that the World Health Organization (WHO) warned about the consumption of red meat [14-18].

Religious Concerns

In the case of substituting squid or calamari by pork rectum, it offends common sensibility as well as the Jewish religion and the Muslim religion. It is not kosher to consume pork and pork products for followers of the Jewish faith. Likewise, it is not halal to eat the meat of the pig or products from the pig for believers of Islam. Not being up-front with the restaurant consumer that way, who may be of the Jewish or Islamic faith, is a misdeed. If the restaurateurs belongs to either of those religions, it would be equivalent to committing a big sin or a combination of two sins. In other words, the mischief is wrong at more than one level.

This substitution of squid by pork parts even offends the Catholics during the season of Lent each year when they have to abstain from red and white meat on Ash Wednesday and each Friday of Lent. Literally, perpetrators of this particular food substitution manage to offend the three Abraham religions. When taken together, the number of followers of these three religions make up the majority of peoples worldwide of those who follow some kind of religion.

As another example, the substitution of an identified white fish with scales (on the written menu) by catfish is against kosher rules. The catfish does not have scales and thus (by kosher rule) not kosher to consume. This rule regarding fishes is not present in the Islamic religion.

Discussion and Conclusion

To win back trust and confidence of consumers, the customers of restaurants should be better informed of the current situation, especially the frequent and repeat customers. With regards fish dishes, it should be clear that the problem is nationwide, and only some large cities were investigated. As stated in the reports from Oceana, it could occur in any city in the USA.

Through a systematic literature review, it was found that there is indeed a prevalent fraud going on in the restaurant industry regarding Kobe beef (specialty beef of Japan), seafood in general and mainly on regular fishes (rather than shellfish), as well as organic produce. It is still going on since a recent editorial [19] in South Florida addresses this issue, more than three decades after its first discovery.

This communication [19] by an experienced journalist included the city of Tampa, which is geographically not in South Florida. It pointed out that 'locally grown' produce may be grown many thousand miles away in Asia. This latest fad has at its core, an economic gain as the motivation. Locally grown produce is supposedly fresher, and better than imported produce that has to be transported from very far away. The higher prices commanded by local produce is a result of higher labor costs in the USA. This deceptive practice of substitution results in more

profit to the restaurateurs who can buy imported produce at lower prices because labor costs in many Asian countries are lower.

Complete traceability of the seafood supply chain is required to certify that only safe, legal and honestly labeled fish is sold in the USA. Traceability can also detail information about the seafood purchased, plus the date and place of capture and the method used to catch it. It should be a method that will not deplete the seafood resource in the wild.

With respect to making appreciative sounds when eating in public places like restaurants, it is suggested that this traditional Asian practice be revived and followed by Americans in the U.S.A. and Canada, for a start. After all, there is scientific proof that the noises may be employed to control one's appetite, as discussed above. Certainly, anyone with a weight problem should try it in the privacy of their own homes, to demonstrate the efficacy of this method combined with cutting food portions.

This particular traditional practice has been promoted here to put a positive spin and conclusion to an otherwise rather unpleasant topic (that is ongoing and persistent) about some commercial practices of nutrition and food consumption.

Acknowledgment

This work is dedicated to the American food consumer.

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