

Feminism & Food

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Abstract

Cooking shows have been used to help inform audiences about food, culture, and overall health, while simultaneously mirroring gender roles implemented in the kitchens of audiences' homes. By analyzing the way female cooking show hosts present themselves on screen, via clothing, hairstyle, and jewelry, I can ascertain how growing understandings of what women look like have been implemented in these cooking shows throughout the years. I intend to study the cooking shows of three women: Julia Child, Ina Garten, and Ree Drummond, who all started their shows from different educational positions. Each were wives, but with varying degrees of education and understanding of family. Focusing on vernacular used to convey who received the food they have cooked or influenced their recipe can reveal their perception on a woman's role in the kitchen, either professionally or in the home. Through my examination of physical appearance and vernacular in female hosts' cooking shows, I hope to offer research that could prompt further questions for analyzing other cooking shows, such as those of males to use as a comparison.

Narrative

Introduction

Cooking shows, as a popular and informational form of media, reflect elements of gender roles. Female cooking show hosts have become pillars of homemakers and cooks in the home kitchen while male hosts are seen as chefs in their lucrative restaurants, building empires with their food and name. This disparity impacts the way audience members view female hosts compared to their male counterparts, which implements inaccurate stereotypes and assumptions about women in the culinary world. Throughout the years, female hosts' clothing, vernacular, body language, and intended audiences reveal the different ways these hosts perceive women's roles within the kitchen. These expectations align with society's evolving understandings of who belongs in the kitchen professionally and at home. A lack of research analyzing this evolution undermines the progress established by females for females, progress which alters the perceptions of where women belong in the cooking world. I intend to research how displays of feminism in cooking shows have evolved throughout the years, such as clothing and who is receiving their food. Through this research I hope to answer the question: How has feminism shifted the production of cooking shows, and therefore the perceptions of female hosts?

Background/Related Work and Motivation

In my research into the scholarship of this field, I found that originally, gendered roles within the kitchen became emphasized when restaurants became popular, sparking the differing roles and perceptions between entertaining publicly and privately. Stella Pierce's work, "Kitchen Cache: The Hidden Meaning of Gender and Cooking in Twentieth-Century American Kitchens: A Thesis," displays that at the time, society expected women to be in the kitchen, whereas a man cooking was a novelty. Eventually, men came to dominate the professional sphere, becoming

critically acclaimed chefs and restaurateurs, while women continued preparing food at home. Education barriers prevented females from entering the professional cooking world, and even if they were hired at a restaurant, their pay was lower and during times of budget-cuts or placing blame, they were always fired first (Pierce). Therefore, the societal expectation for females to cook without recognition while males cook for praise created the foundation for the entire cooking world, including television. I expect to trace similar expectations and perceptions of women throughout these cooking shows.

Research in the field of cooking shows primarily revolves around the impact it has on men. This includes analyzing how men perceive food. For example, cooking shows often advertise healthy options for women and encourage men to eat healthier choices. Emily Contois' book, *Diners, Dudes, and Diets*, explains how male celebrity chefs use their influence to help men choose healthier and seemingly "feminine" choices over fatty options. This forces male viewers to prioritize their health as these celebrity chefs help their audience members grapple with selecting life-preserving options instead of making a statement about their masculinity. However, there is a lack of information on women as entities separate from their roles as a wife and mother that acknowledges their perceptions of health through food. Such an understanding would inform the females' understanding of their relationship with food outside of their identity as the provider, as men have had the opportunity to do so outside their role as "the man of the house."

When chefs started to host their own shows, they served simply as instructors, utilizing an entire episode to teach the shows' audience members how to cook one single dish that ranged from main course to dessert. However, Kathleen Collins article, "TV Cooking Shows: The Evolution of a Genre" reveals that viewership ratings struggled because audiences were not

entertained. In order to create successful shows, networks started to find entertaining hosts. This search further impacted who would dominate the screen in people's homes and kitchens. Linda Civitello's work, "The Nineties: The Rise of the Celebrity Chef," reveals that this change influenced who the network hired as hosts, welcoming a transition from TV chefs as instructors and evolving the hosts into TV personalities. This phenomenon includes the rise of homemaker Martha Stewart and the personable Emeril Lagasse. Moreover, the time between Julia Child's *The French Chef* and Ina Garten's *Barefoot Contessa* created a different criteria for the hosts as networks tried to bridge the gap between the television screen and audience member's kitchens.

Cheri Ketchum's article, "The Essence of Cooking Shows" explains how the new style of cooking shows helped the fanbase within the medium grow, forever altering how these hosts were viewed. Increased exposure impacted the amount of people who would be influenced by these shows and thus perceiving these hosts, bringing new understandings of who others believe these women to be and how they perceive a woman's role in the kitchen. Similarly, current hosts have started to make dishes outside of what women are supposed to eat (Contois). Furthermore, as their audience members grow amongst different genders and perceptions of women's eating habits align with the changing times, the dishes prepared on these women's shows and who they are prepared for has changed throughout the years.

The way an audience perceives cooking show hosts impacts the show's ratings. Therefore, as people's ideologies and society's perceptions of others have evolved, who audience members want to watch has altered as well, instigating a change in the different types of cooking show hosts. In the past, research on cooking shows has remained restricted towards male hosts and their shows or simply the overall evolution of who has come to dominate the screen, such as the change from Instructors to Personalities (Civitello). Therefore, a lack of research performed

on strictly females and their shows throughout the years neglects how these women have been able to implement feminist ideologies and changes occurring in real time with their own media platforms. Meanwhile, as perceptions of female hosts were changing as they became personalities, the feminist movement in the 1970s started to enact a change in how they are perceived through wardrobe.

Wardrobe expresses identity and how individuals are perceived. Throughout the years, women's clothing in the workplace has changed drastically, such as transitioning from skirts to pants, heels to flats, and dresses to button downs. Marlene Komar's article, "Working Women's Wardrobe: How the 1970s Opened Feminist Fashion," analyzes the workplace dress code of females in the 1970s and feminists' attempts to alter it. In the early 1970s, a group of Boston secretaries created the group "9to5" to advocate for regular salary reviews, equal pay, and freedom in office wardrobes. Instead of dressing for the passive and submissive role women were expected to adhere to in a male-dominated workplace, feminists recognized the role fashion played in how they were viewed; furthermore, to blend in at their jobs so their work could be recognized for its content, not the gender of who wrote it, feminists encouraged wearing pants, pinstripes, and pockets. However, because it was harder to dismiss females when they were not looking as feminine, many workplaces enforced a strict dress code.

Analyzing the dress codes and change in apparel worn by female cooking show hosts in their workplace will display how these hosts present themselves through clothing. Similarly, the way a woman dresses impacts how people will treat or react to them. Scholar Jamie Lower recently conducted a study analyzing the way women are perceived through a first impression based upon what they wear. Lower discovered that a woman wearing traditionally feminine clothing, such as skirts and dresses, appears submissive but kind, but a woman wearing a pantsuit

is viewed as credible yet unfriendly. I hope to expand on this research relating to gender perception, specifically pertaining to the perceptions of female hosts by the ways they present themselves through aspects of their identity, such as wardrobe.

Method

I intend to analyze the cooking shows of Julia Child, Ina Garten, and Ree Drummond, starting from the first episode to the most recent, and track patterns of appearance styles, who their food is for, and vernacular regarding what they feel to be their role within the kitchen. Through analyzing these women as they present themselves on cable TV along with Lower's findings of how females are perceived based upon what they wear, I will understand how audiences perceive these hosts. Additionally, I can understand why female hosts wear specific items of clothing- whether it is to appear non-threatening or to assert dominance in a field otherwise dictated by their male counterparts. Similarly, analyzing the hairstyles and jewelry reveals a female's marital status, a status which can impact who they are cooking for. This also displays how they perceive themselves: mothers, homemakers, or bachelorettes.

Listening to the dialogue used by these hosts, such as who taught them how to cook, how that was perceived in their family, and how that informs their current role in the kitchen will reveal how these women perceive and perpetuate ideals about a female's role in the kitchen, and how they use their platforms to share this understanding. Furthermore, I will write a research paper relaying my findings to add to the public's understanding of how women are viewed. This paper will track the changes in this perception throughout the years to match the evolving understandings of a woman's role in cooking.

Expected Results

I expect my results to highlight popular gender roles within the kitchen. For example, female cooking show hosts often cook within their own homes while their male counterparts travel the world making and eating food. This sets an unfair standard that women are only allowed to do and be a certain thing. I anticipate such expectations also impact how female hosts are supposed to look. The clothing, hair, and overall style of female cooking show hosts has evolved throughout the years, reflecting the changing understandings of what women can and cannot look like. Creating a physical “look” can be difficult for female cooking show hosts because there are certain expectations for what they should and should not look like, which impacts audience’s perceptions of them, and thus viewer ratings. I expect the hosts' clothing to reflect the tone of their show and how they present themselves and their own roles within the kitchen.

The change from Instructors to Personalities influenced the tone of the shows and the type of women hired to host cooking shows. Julia Child’s *The French Chef* possesses an instructional tone that teaches audience members how to prepare dishes, whereas Ina Garten’s *The Barefoot Contessa* bridges the gap between the television screen and her audience members’ kitchens. I expect there to be a change in vernacular and wardrobe between these two cooking shows to display the change in the networks perceptions of what a woman should look and be like and appear to be to attract viewers.

With this information, I intend to write a research paper that analyzes the various ways female hosts present themselves through physical appearance and how their vernacular expresses their identity and role in the kitchen, such as who is receiving their food.

Conclusion

Cooking shows, an informational form of media, mirror society's gender roles. Research conducted on this medium focuses on perceptions of gender. However, these scholars mainly focus on male cooking shows and their audiences, disregarding females and the impact they have made towards incorporating evolving understandings of who belongs in the kitchen professionally and at home. This narrow research neglects to show the progression of female identity displayed in cooking shows. I intend to analyze this evolution through watching three popular cooking shows to research how these hosts' clothing and vernacular showcases this development. I expect to track the evolution of gender roles via physical appearance and behavior throughout the different years these shows aired to reveal the changing understandings of female identity in the kitchen. This research will work to further the understanding of a woman's role in the kitchen while raising questions about the direct comparisons between male cooking show hosts and how they are perceived.

Works Cited

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Pierce, Stella Jean. "Kitchen Cache: The Hidden Meaning of Gender and Cooking in

Twentieth-Century American Kitchens: A Thesis." Appalachian State University, 2010,

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Budget

Description of Expense	Cost
Compensation for 20 hours a week for one researcher for 6 weeks at a minimum wage	\$1800
Discovery + Subscription for two months at \$6.99/month	\$13.98
PBS Documentaries Subscription on Amazon for two months at \$3.99/month	\$7.98
TOTAL:	\$1,821.96

Timeline

Week 1

- I will research relevant works that discern how females are perceived based upon what they wear, allowing me to understand how audiences perceive these women.
- I will read and annotate my sources.
- I will use my annotations to create notes that will service my research.

Week 2

- I will write the section of the paper dedicated to Background Information.
- I will identify important categories of clothing that express how females are viewed.
- I will watch the first five seasons of Julia Child's *The French Chef*.
- I will take notes on her clothing, food, and dialogue.

Week 3

- I will watch the remaining five seasons of Julia Child's *The French Chef*.
- I will continue taking notes on her outfits, meals, and dialogue.

Week 4

- I will watch the first twelve seasons of Ina Garten's *The Barefoot Contessa*.
- I will take notes on her clothing, the food she cooks, and her dialogue.
- I will insert the appropriate notes into my outline.

Week 5

- I will watch the remaining thirteen seasons of Ina Garten's *The Barefoot Contessa*.
- I will continue taking notes on her wardrobe, food, and vernacular.
- I will integrate my notes into my outline.

Week 6

- I will watch the fifteen seasons of Ree Drummond's *Pioneer Woman*.
- I will take notes on her clothing, dishes, and dialogue.
- I will implement my notes into my outline.

Week 7

- I will craft an outline for my paper that will argue how the ways female cooking show hosts are perceived through their clothing and who their food is for reveals their perceptions of a woman's role in the kitchen.
- I will take my notes and start to appropriately copy them into the appropriate sections of my outline.
- Having finished my outline, I will start to write the final paper.

Week 8

- I will finish writing the paper.
- I will receive feedback from my mentor.
- I will revise and proofread the paper.
- By the end of this week, I will have a research paper that communicates our research question, background information, methods, evidence, and conclusion.