

KITCHEN CACHE: THE HIDDEN MEANING OF GENDER AND  
COOKING IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN KITCHENS

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By  
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# KITCHEN CACHE: THE HIDDEN MEANING OF GENDER AND COOKING IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN KITCHENS

(December 2010)

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For many centuries, women have been the designated cooks of domestic America. Their legacy has been to provide nutrition and nurturing to families, a role that made them the creators and sustainers of the American diet. But as the restaurant industry became a large force in the twentieth-century economy, the task of cooking was usurped by men in the public sphere. Socio-cultural and legal forces discouraged women from entering into a field that was traditionally familiar to them, while men were granted professional training and entrepreneurial freedom to take advantage of an expanding market. This resulted in male-dominated professional restaurant kitchens in America during the twentieth-century, while women remained the primary cooks in the home.

Scholarship on gender studies, social history, and food history form the foundation of this study, from which were drawn overarching themes concerning the nature of gender relations, the economics of the time period, and the place of food in human history. Other, more specific, scholastic research revealed the intimate connections between gender and food, as well as gender division of labor in cooking, both inside and outside the home. Census data was used to determine gendered work patterns and the development of the restaurant industry, while interviews with professional chefs provide a more in-depth and personal look at the world of cooking, and the ways in which social norms manifest themselves in both domestic and professional kitchens.

The investigation revealed that the gender behaviors that were cemented during the Victorian era carried over well into the twentieth-century, establishing ideal patterns of behavior, as well as food tastes and preferences for men and women. While women entered the workforce in record numbers, only men were provided technical training in the culinary field, and men who cooked were continuously reassured of their masculinity through media and prescriptive literature. Whether professional cook or not, men endeavored to disassociate themselves from the cooking performed by women, and gender-food associations helped pigeonhole women in the culinary field to less prominent positions. Professional kitchens became increasingly masculinized, and women struggled to adapt.

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## Chapter One

### Fire and Meat: Introduction and Historiography

The historical relationship between women and cooking is a subject that has received little attention in scholarship until recent years. Prior to the 1970s when women's history, social history, and labor history became respectable burgeoning fields of study, women's work both inside and outside the home was often viewed as inconsequential to historical inquiry.<sup>1</sup> The evolution of the connection between gender expectations and the preparation of food for consumption is complex but very socially indicative. There is a growing library of materials that investigate the relationship between gender, food, and labor in the United States and elsewhere, materials that examine the socially created boundaries placed on women and their isolation from public life to the private realm. The discourse created by historians of food and gender reveals the historically pervasive notion that men and women have "natural" roles to fulfill in a well-ordered society, and that a woman's proper "sphere" is in the home, and most especially the kitchen.<sup>2</sup> Domestic behavior throughout much of American history, however, indicated that a real man did not belong over the stove.

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<sup>1</sup> Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 15-27. Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), xi-22. See works listed here for more information on the origins of women's history.

<sup>2</sup> Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 75, no. 1 (Jun., 1988): 9-39. During the 1980s debates began concerning the use of the terms "women's sphere" and "women's culture," especially among feminist historians. The former was believed to rhetorically depict a suppressive reality and the later a

During the spring of 2005, when I had only the inklings of a question in mind for a thesis topic, I was approached by a professor whose name will not be mentioned. While waiting in the hallway to meet with the Graduate Advisor this professor stopped to chat and inquired about my thesis topic. I told the professor that I was interested in discovering how restaurant kitchens came to be so clearly dominated by men and masculine patterns of behavior while women have historically been the preparers of food in the home, a standard that has only been somewhat challenged in recent years. In a flippant manner this professor insisted that the reason men are so likely to take control of cooking is simple--the undeniable fascination men have with all things related to meat and fire. Fire, said the professor, possesses a primal magnetism that instantly draws the attention of any nearby male. And meat is the first food that comes to mind when one thinks of cooking over an open flame. Primitive and instinctual, the professor declared, man, meat, and fire seem to gravitate toward each other.

I was at once amused, validated, and mildly disturbed. The statements were humorously typical and made me realize the importance of the topic. But elements of the professor's response required some interpretation and speculation on my part. Did this person mean to express this as a personal opinion, or was the statement intended to be a sarcastic tongue-in-cheek generalization about the hyper-masculine fixation on all things reminiscent of cave-living and primitive humanity? Was this individual intentionally trying to oversimplify my topic in order to be clever, or was this statement a thoughtless but still genuine personal conviction? I nodded in polite but dubious agreement, and walked away from the encounter with an even greater conviction that I needed to

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liberating one. For the purposes of this paper, I will use the term "sphere" most often simply because the subject focuses strongly on physical space as a marker for gender roles. For further discussion of women's "culture" versus "sphere," see work listed here.

investigate this curious dynamic between men, women, cooking, and kitchens. So the question remained in my mind: what social devices and economic influences allowed men to assume the work of cooking in the twentieth-century restaurant industry even though women had retained that position in the home for many centuries? What forces existed to drive men to take up pots and pans and face potential stigma for doing the same kind of work as their wives and mothers? The male relationship to food and cooking, as well as the seemingly intimate connection between women and cooking, had to be redefined in order for the task to become sufficiently masculine and therefore a socially sanctioned male activity.

In the early twentieth-century, cooking was a task that most Americans had only seen done by women. Restaurants, particularly fine dining establishments, were unknown to the majority of the population; therefore male cooks and chefs were too. In order for cooking to be considered suitable for a man, a transformation had to occur. In the public eye, men were transformed into chefs while they cooked hot dogs on the outdoor grill. Professional kitchens took on many of the characteristics associated with an all-male environment, such as that of sea-going vessels with all the fitting stereotypes of debauchery and baseness. Because of the long time connection between women and cooking, the public role of men in the kitchen became sufficiently distanced from the imagery of “mama’s in the kitchen.” Within certain physical and social boundaries, cooking slowly became masculinized, allowing men to consider it a suitable professional occupation.

Of course, male chefs were not new to the twentieth-century or to America. The most well known European ‘chefs’ were usually men, but again it was women who were

most often cooks in the home and often times for the aristocracy as well. What made the United States unique in its gendered kitchen spaces is that 1) the restaurant industry boomed at a time when women entered the workforce in historic numbers, making available both a vast number of new jobs and a knowledgeable workforce, 2) pretentious French cuisine and food-ways wavered in popularity amongst the majority of Americans, and at times was viewed with disdain, so following their lead was undesirable for most, and 3) America did not have the same heritage of professionalized cooks and court cuisine that existed in Europe. Thus the United States was uniquely situated to develop a new segment of the hospitality industry that might have put women in control of production. Efforts were made, and in some ways, these efforts succeeded. Women currently dominate the restaurant industry as a whole, but like other industries, occupy a very small number of the most powerful, highest paying positions, and are conspicuously absent from middle and upscale dining kitchens.

Gender-food associations are deeply engrained in American culture. Cooking tasks as well as food preferences have been gendered throughout American history, but became especially potent during the nineteenth-century with the indoctrination of the “cult of true womanhood.”<sup>3</sup> The defining characteristics of a true woman carried with them an arrangement of behavior, taste, and preference; women were delicate and should therefore prefer delicate foods. Victorian masculinity was equally stringent when it came to social and behavioral expectations, but men enjoyed greater ease in establishing their enjoyments if for no other reason than law did not prohibit them from doing so. Although

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, part 1 (Summer 1966): 151-174.



the lines of engenderment continually shifted during the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, they have not disappeared or even faded much.

One aspect of gender and food studies that has been glazed over (no pun intended) in most scholarship is the nominal presence of women in the culinary profession despite their heritage as domestic cooks. Management, organization, cleanliness, knowledge of tools, and chemistry, in addition to skill and (hopefully) a degree of talent were all elements that applied to both the professional and non-professional kitchen. Although there were many overlapping skills needed to effectively operate either a home or restaurant kitchen, the division of labor based on gender remained largely inflexible. While women were responsible for cooking at home, the vast majority of paid professional chefs in the United States were--and still are--men. The academic focus on gender and cooking in the twentieth-century has revealed socially constructed values and expectations based on assumptions about men, women, and their supposed “natural” roles. Women, regardless of marital status and motherhood, were expected to have an innate knowledge of food and familiarity with the kitchen. Cooking was not only what they were trained to do, it was what they were born to do. Yet, somehow, regardless of this “natural” inclination, the proliferation of restaurants in the United States beginning in the 1920s was not an invitation for women to be paid for the same work they had performed in the home for generations.

The socially constructed spheres for women and men in the twentieth-century proved to be flexible enough to adapt to a rapidly changing world but firm enough to maintain gender divisions in the labor market, though not always in predictable ways. The vast urbanization of the post-World War I years and the resulting expansion of the

working class created a tremendous demand for establishments that could provide meals to a population on the go. Between the years 1907 -1916 an average of 690 new eating places opened nationwide annually. Between 1920 -1929 those numbers jumped to 3,640 per year and in the early 1930s 9,694 eating establishments were opened annually.<sup>4</sup> Even though women formed an unprecedented percentage of this new working populace, they were less likely to occupy positions as cooks in the expanding restaurant business.<sup>5</sup> The restaurant boom was not exactly the knock of opportunity for women to utilize the skills they had acquired at home in a professional setting. As in many other professions, women were discouraged from taking jobs that would supposedly be better performed, better paid, and better suited for a male breadwinner.

But why, as women were entering the work force in record numbers, did they participate less frequently than men in an occupation so familiar to them? A number of possible explanations arise to confront this issue. One suggests that women intentionally avoided cooking as a profession as a means to escape the tasks of home, a very reasonable argument considering that even women participating in gainful employment were generally expected to 'keep house' in addition to working for a wage. Such a concept does not, however, address the fact that women throughout the twentieth-century--and up to the present day--have primarily been those employed as housekeepers, maids, laundresses, and food industry workers (but infrequently as upscale cooks and chefs). Another possible explanation for women's absence from the restaurant kitchen is the lack of managerial restraints placed on cooks and chefs. Those in control of cooking and plating food in a restaurant, as in a home kitchen, enjoy a certain degree of autonomy

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census of Business, *Retail Trade: 1939, Stores and Sales by Kinds of Business, by Types of Operation* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1943). 173. [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

<sup>5</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 217-249.

because the food service process begins with and flows from the cook. Servers cannot serve and consumers cannot consume if the cook does not cook. The element of control and power present in restaurant kitchens may have enticed men to not only join the profession but to discourage female entrance into the field.

Other reasons exist for the male-dominated professional kitchens of the twentieth-century, such as the educational barriers placed on women entering the culinary field, protective legislation that limited hours and occupations available to women, and the persistence of patriarchal sexism that made mixing the gender makeup of any profession complicated at best.<sup>6</sup> Women were also frequently the first to be fired in many industries, and universally received lower wages for their work.

Simply put, the aim of this paper is to examine how gender decided the task of cooking both inside and outside the home in twentieth-century America, and to discover what social and economic forces manipulated gender differences to result in a disparity in the gender make-up of professional cooking. Considering women's heritage of cooking, it was certainly not a result of any lack of skill or ability. The ways in which social formulations influenced the development and culture of the restaurant industry in the United States will also be scrutinized. Drawing from a variety of primary sources, such as cookbooks, prescriptive literature and magazines, census data, and personal interviews, the following chapters crack open the hidden history and meaning of American food-

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<sup>6</sup> Ann Cooper, "A Woman's Place is in the Kitchen:" *The Evolution of Women Chefs* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1998), 20-21. See this work for information on educational barriers in the culinary field. Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 180-214. See this work for information on protective legislation. Claudia Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 63. See this work for information on patriarchal sexism and lower wages for women.

ways and gendered work. Scholarship on the subject will inform much of the analysis found here, but gaps in said scholarship will also be delineated.

Such questions for the most part remain unexamined by social historians, and there is no clear reason why this important topic has remained in the scholastic closet. In fact, the difference in the social significance placed on female domestic cooking versus male professional cooking has been noted by several historians, but never thoroughly investigated. In “Campbell’s Soup and the Long Shelf Life of Traditional Gender Roles,” Katherine Parkin discusses the company’s use of male chefs as authorities in domestic cooking. Women were urged to purchase Campbell’s Soup to serve “‘the genius and art of the world’s most famous chefs!’ Women, however, never appeared as chefs, even though the ads dictated that women should be solely responsible for cooking.”<sup>7</sup> Parkin clearly recognizes the disparity in social recognition given to male chefs and female domestic cooks, but goes no further in scrutinizing that gap. Sherrie Inness also discovers that popular literature “assumed that men, not women, would be the great chefs. In the first half of the twentieth-century, cookbooks and cooking articles frequently emphasized that women lacked the special knack of male cooks, and men were always better cooks than women.”<sup>8</sup> Inness’s work on gender and food is generally thorough, but her focus remains on cooking performed within the domestic sphere.

Each chapter of this study addresses components of the larger question, with the aim of constructing a cumulative argument that delineates the disparate social

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<sup>7</sup> Katherine Parkin, “Campbell’s Soup and the Long Shelf Life of Traditional Gender Roles,” in *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture*, ed. Sherrie Inness (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 61.

<sup>8</sup> Sherrie Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 31.

expectations and limitations for women and men in relation to the labor of cooking. The remainder of chapter one outlines the gender and food history scholarship used to form the scaffolding for this study. Chapter two focuses on the nature of domestic cooking and the ways in which gender roles, gendered food preferences, and an American food-love ethic molded cooking patterns in the home. Chapter three then focuses on the public realm of gender divisions in labor, cooking, and restaurant development. Topics include women's legacy as food production managers, protective legislation and women in the labor market, and the growth of the restaurant industry, followed by the perspective of professional cooks and chefs of Watauga and Avery counties, in the High Country of North Carolina.

Although investigating gender in a historical context almost invariably reveals the subjugation of women by patriarchal authority, the diminished status of women is not entirely the focus here. Clearly, the subject raises many issues concerning barriers against females, but the nature of cooking places the cook in a position to gain respect, so it would be false to assume that domesticated women experienced none of that. My intention is to underscore the historical difference of men and women in the kitchen using scholarship and documentary evidence to accomplish two things. First, this approach exposes the changes in the social and economic environment that enabled men to become prominent figures in American cooking, a world dominated by women for centuries. Secondly, it supports the notion that many assumptions about gendered food patterns and barriers against women in the culinary profession persisted throughout the twentieth-century and still exist in the twenty-first.

## Historiography

Several theoretical fields of historical research examine the topic of gender in twentieth-century kitchens. Although at various times other fields might be used for analysis, those that create the scaffolding for this work are labor history, food history, and gender studies. Labor history has been useful for uncovering such problems in the United States as the devaluation of women's work and occupational segregation, difficulties that define the economic aspect of this investigation.

Investigating food history provided a unique and very useful outlook on the cultural meaning behind food and its consumption, as well as the power relations that derive from the control of food. Women's historic position in the domestic kitchen could be interpreted as a seat of power and thus a tool to shape their own--and others--lives. Professional chefs are generally well respected for their talent and certainly have some control over a patron's experience. It is the division of labor in food production in American society that reflects our cultural norms, and suggests importance of some groups over others.

Gender studies compose the foundation on which this investigation stands- the background for a multi-layered canvas. Studying the social constructions of feminine and masculine behavior and expectations during the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries is essential to understanding the ways these patterns manifest themselves in daily life, such as providing food for the table--whether at home or as a career. Historical theories of

gender, labor, and food are present throughout this text, and therefore require further description.

No doubt, most Americans would recognize the fact that the home kitchen is a woman's territory, and would also confess that most restaurant kitchens tend to be male dominated. The lack of much direct analysis of this phenomenon for the 1900s proved both a blessing and a curse. The subject is relatively uncharted which makes it an exciting topic, but it may have remained unexplored because finding sources, especially information on division of labor in restaurants that existed in the early twentieth-century, proved very difficult. The following comprises a summation of the various fields of history and theory employed during research and cites specific works that were particularly useful.

The economics of labor, specifically women's labor, is an essential part of understanding the social interpretations of gender discourse. In her interdisciplinary work *Understanding the Gender Gap*, Claudia Goldin explores the complex and often paradoxical history of American women in the workforce. Utilizing recent historical scholarship as well as in-depth economic research, Goldin uncovers an intriguing possibility concerning occupational segregation, wage discrimination, marriage bars, and the reasons why achieving gender equality in the marketplace is an ongoing process. The author integrates historical and sociological theory into her analysis of the gender gap, pointing to the sad fact that social norms seldom keep pace with the changing economic and political environment, thus maintaining a degree of socially sanctioned sex segregation in the labor market.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap*, 199.

Goldin focuses largely on the female labor force between 1890 and the end of World War II. She examines cohorts of women of different marital status, levels of education, nativity, and ethnic backgrounds. The author finds disparate results for the various groups, but some uniformity does emerge. For example, many would expect the economic progress of the early twentieth-century to act as an equalizer in the labor pool, narrowing the gap in earnings and occupational segregation according to sex. Yet Goldin reveals that the development of machinery, the availability of education, and the greater reliance on mental rather than physical power did not correct the unequal ratio of female to male earnings, and that segregation of work according to sex declined very little over the century, all the way up to 1980. In fact, the most drastic narrowing of the wage gap occurred almost simultaneously with the mechanical Industrial Revolution in the early nineteenth-century, when women's wages went from .288 cents for every man's dollar to .50 cents per dollar.<sup>10</sup>

Needless to say, for the purposes of this work, such evidence did not bode well for women entering into any profession during the twentieth-century, including the culinary arts. From Goldin's work we can gather that those women who did enter into food preparation in the early years of the restaurant boom were certainly being paid less than men, and probably at a lower station or, even more likely, in a less profitable, lower-end restaurant business.

The later chapters of Goldin's work are dedicated more to the state and federal regulatory actions concerning women in the work force, and the various results that came from government legislation. Interestingly, as protective legislation became a focus of state interaction with working women, it in some ways helped to maintain division of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 63.



labor based on sex. According to Goldin, “differential treatment of women. . .was one of the many pillars of social and familial stability and was viewed less as discrimination than as paternalism.”<sup>11</sup> A woman’s various roles as mother, wife, and caretaker were considered essential to the preservation of a moral society, and thus her labor outside the home was best kept to a minimum.

Another useful work concerning labor history is Ava Baron’s essay “Gender and Labor History: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future.”<sup>12</sup> Baron uncovers the progress of American labor history through the twentieth-century and delineates its various forms according to the population studied and the categories, such as class, gender, and race, used to study them. Because she focuses mostly on the social aspects of gender and labor, Baron’s work acts as a balance to the economic inquiry provided by Goldin. The author reveals the simultaneous evolution of social labor history--one that focuses on the life and culture of workers, not just unions and employers--and women’s history in the 1970s, as well as their mutually reinforcing growth. Baron also recognizes the theoretical difficulties in creating a unified labor history that incorporates the experiences of men and women, blacks and whites, men and boys, all as workers but without neglecting their divergent and unique experiences. Because labor history has traditionally focused largely on unionism, its leaders, movements, and strikes, the often non-unionized activism that women and blacks participated in frequently has been overlooked. According to Baron, “union participation and femininity have been defined

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>12</sup> Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

as antithetical,” so common conceptions do not include women as active participants in unionization, although this is untrue.<sup>13</sup>

Another issue arises from the association of labor with wages. Labor, in the American consciousness, has usually been synonymous with wage work, thus eliminating unpaid domestic labor--generally performed by women--almost entirely from labor analysis. Can unpaid domestic work be a part of labor history, or does it require a separate field of historical research? Can the tenets of labor study, which utilize the concepts of “consent” to oppression, patriarchal capitalism, economic and market forces, not be used to understand the economic and social unit of the home and family?

Additionally, Baron points to the gendered nature of skilled versus unskilled labor in the market. Within the historical study of labor, those tasks learned and executed within the domestic sphere such as sewing, canning, cooking, and home management are often defined as unskilled, regardless of the degree of learning and informal education it took to become proficient at them. When women carried these abilities over into the workplace (textile workers, restaurant workers) such labor was rarely rewarded with promotions or wage increase. Skills taught in the home possessed an assumed simplicity and were not worthy of recognition as an official form of education. Unlike the skill acquired during an apprenticeship, proficiency in home management was not highly regarded. Only those who actually performed the work understood the high degree of time management, attention to detail, and skill required to complete the multiplicity of tasks involved in home care.

For purposes of studying gender in twentieth-century kitchens labor will be dissected in order to understand its reinforcement of capitalism in terms of money and/or

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 8.

professionalism, as well as the spaces in which these systems operate. In other words, the common perception in the twentieth-century was such that when an activity was performed at home--most especially by a woman--the task was menial or unskilled and therefore less valuable in a capitalist society. But if a person--most especially a man--performed the same or similar task in a paid professional setting it was seen as skilled, or at least requiring some kind of training. Consider the topic at hand: cooking in a restaurant kitchen. The truth is that it absolutely does require training and preferably talent as well, but what is not as frequently believed is that equivalent acquisition of skill is required to efficiently cook for a family and run a household. Domestic labor, although at times daunting in its endlessness and challenging to even the most energetic individual, has been downplayed as amateurish throughout the twentieth-century and earlier, whether paid or unpaid.

Although laws and social construction favored men in pre-capitalist societies, barter and trade were blind to gender and market productivity could be achieved by either sex. Within the framework of the pre-capitalist working class, trades such as ale-brewing, farming, baking, cheese-making, and preserving to name a few could have provided modest, if supplementary, income for able-bodied women. Judith Bennett's study of ale-brewsters in England during the Middle Ages reveals that brewing and selling ale was a trade occupied almost solely by women, and usually on a small scale. As technology developed, brewing became more complex and more profitable. Instead of ale, beer became the more marketable product. It had a longer shelf life and therefore could be transported and sold over long distances. The industry was formalized, and by 1600

women were muscled out of the business and beer brewing became a male-dominated trade.<sup>14</sup>

Absent the increase of constraints on women's work created by capitalism, a hard working woman could be just as productive as a hard working man. The very nature of capitalism, an economic system that for centuries has favored white men and flaunted the social inferiority of anyone else, made women a less valuable commodity because their work was priced at a fraction of a man's, if it held monetary value at all. The Marxist interpretation of gender in history has greatly helped to shed light on the relationship between gender and economic modes of production. In the words of women's historian Linda K. Kerber,

The great power of the Marxist interpretation was that it not only described a separation of spheres, but also offered an explanation of the way in which that separation served the interests of the dominant classes. Separate spheres were due neither to cultural accident nor to biological determinism. They were social constructions, camouflaging social and economic service, a service whose benefits were unequally shared.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, gendered labor being bound by physical space assisted in maintaining the economic status quo, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries and the *post-Industrial Revolution West*. For the purposes of this work, labor will be considered any form of work, inside or outside the home, regardless of payment, that requires physical or mental exertion.

Food studies proved to be another genre of historical inquiry necessary for understanding gender and kitchen culture in the twentieth-century. In *Tasting Food*,

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<sup>14</sup>Judith Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>15</sup>Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 9-39.

*Tasting Freedom*, Sidney Mintz provides an outstanding exploration of food theory and a meaningful investigation of an activity many take for granted.<sup>16</sup> Mintz's work delves into the complicated issue of the social meaning placed on food, consumption and power. He brings to light the complexities of investing food, a vital substance so common and necessary as to appear unremarkable to many people, with the most weighted of social meanings. The appearance of eating disorders, diets, the taboos placed on food, and its capacity to cause extreme pleasure or extreme pain all indicate that food is more than a requisite substance for survival. Taking into account the history of imperialism and conquest, the growth of world-wide food trade, and the increase in food consumed "on the go," the author investigates a topic as present in the daily lives of every human being as to seem beyond need of investigation. According to the author,

the foods eaten have histories associated with the past of those who eat them; the techniques employed to find, process, prepare, serve, and consume the food are all culturally variable, with histories of their own. Nor is the food ever simply eaten; its consumption is always conditioned by meaning.<sup>17</sup>

From this perspective we can see how a certain degree of power and respect could be attained through cooking, though as the primary domestic cooks, the praise afforded women in this role has varied greatly throughout history. In twentieth-century America this ladder of power was used by men--and, more recently, by women as well--in the culinary arts to gain prestige and profit while simultaneously heightening the wondrousness of creating truly outstanding dishes. Although Mintz does not directly address food and power from this angle, his views on the socially conditioned meaning of

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<sup>16</sup>Sidney Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

food encompasses many noteworthy points concerning the development of restaurants and the male-dominated kitchen.

In *A History of Cooks and Cooking*, Michael Symons takes a more direct stance on the role of women as cooks in history. Symons investigates historical literature to uncover the unglamorous past of women in the kitchen, saying that “cooks have always been in the background--both ever present and unnoticed. Their contributions have seemed too common, pervasive, trivial, unproblematic. Cooks generally have been women, and their achievements overlooked as inglorious and private.”<sup>18</sup> Symons correctly points out that most cooks, historically, have been women, but his examination of ancient Greek plays and literature reveals that the most lauded cooks of the age were male. He notes that “while the household’s women and slaves labored over the everyday barley-cake, male professionals dealt with special occasions revolving around meat.”<sup>19</sup> The precise degree to which women were granted praise as cooks certainly varies through time and place, as later chapters will show with the rise of domesticity in America. But the correlation that Symons notes between women’s routine domestic cooking and men’s special occasion cooking in ancient Greece is remarkably reminiscent of twentieth-century patterns in American gendered cooking. Such a persistent division of assigned cooking tasks accentuates continuity over time. Despite thousands of years and an ocean between them, ancient Greece and modern America exhibit similar gendered cooking behavior, underscoring the persistence of social forces in Western culture.

While Symons’s work aims to correct women’s forgotten status in food history, Mintz concludes that, at least among Americans, the recognition of food’s importance is

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Symons, *A History of Cooks and Cooking* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), x.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 299.

personal and familial. Many southerners are acutely aware, especially at large family gatherings, of the importance of food and meals as a kind of social glue. Food holds together and anchors families in a socio-cultural state of gastronomic contentedness, regardless of personal differences. Mere thankfulness for the bounty is never adequate; the blessing must also extend to the hands that prepared the food. Historians of food delve into such extended meaning behind what we eat and the social patterns that accompany cooking, food, and its consumption.

The foundation of a work such as this necessarily rests on new methods of historical investigation that were roused by the voices of feminists, socialists, and other marginalized groups in history. This new outfit that history wears makes it much more colorful and eclectic, while at the same time more discursive and elusive. By highlighting groups long overshadowed by the prominent white man on the horizon, gender studies in history have redefined and rewritten history itself.

In *Gender and the Politics of History*, Joan Wallach Scott found an opportune moment to introduce gender theory to history, a pair that in the past were usually found scrapping in the schoolyard.<sup>20</sup> Scott discovered, however, that in order to appropriately understand the legacy of discrimination historically faced not only by women, but by all non-members of the dominant race and class, all historical categories and definitions had to be subjected to criticism. In the same way, prior knowledge about what was historically significant had to be placed under the microscope when women began to be written into history. For the same reasons that historical knowledge had bestowed scholastic worth upon certain kinds of people, events, and topics, the categories of identity used in history had an air of unshakable objectivity that made them seem beyond

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<sup>20</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

need of investigation. But by integrating theory into history, Scott put the field itself on the chopping block, exposing those processes that create meaning, manipulate power, and determine significance within the field.<sup>21</sup> In her own words, “history is as much the object of analytic attention as it is a method of analysis.”<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps even more significant for the purposes of this work is Scott’s application of the theory of “deconstruction” (conceptualized by Jacques Derrida) to binary oppositions, especially man-woman and the characteristics meant to accompany each category. There is an assumed simplicity and equilibrium to such dualities, an assumption that gender theory aims to eradicate. Believing that man-woman, nature-culture, or any other oppositional pair remains in balance allows them to go unquestioned and thus maintain the status quo. But Scott believes that “fixed oppositions...derive their meaning from internally established contrast rather than from some inherent or pure antithesis.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, opposing terms create their own definitions in the face of their opposite, and the meaning that arises from the pair is more discursive than either one singly considered. It is not all black-and-white anymore. Theoretical works such as Scott’s have forced the discipline of history to dwell in, explore, and appreciate the in-between.

Focusing on a subject such as gender and cooking relies on scholastic flexibility and the exploration of unquestioned notions. In relation to the task of cooking, traditional gender definitions and the roles that accompany them certainly should have been reconsidered with male entrance into the field, but because the topic lies outside the accepted canon of historical study, the matter has mostly gone uninvestigated. The

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<sup>21</sup> The concepts that Scott draws from in this work can be attributed largely to French post-structuralists such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. For further explanation of the ways Scott uses the theories proposed by Foucault and Derrida, see the introduction to *Gender and the Politics of History*.

<sup>22</sup> Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 7.



expected order of women cooking and men consuming was turned on its head as the professional culinary arts became male-dominated, yet the change seemed to go largely unnoticed, as though men were destined to assume the role. In order for society to accept men as cooks, the work needed to be tied to the traits of masculinity, perhaps explaining why restaurant kitchens are known for being excessively masculinized environs. The issues of men and women's work, private versus public spheres, and the nature-culture dichotomy are all involved in the study of food and cooking, but require examination to expose the incompleteness of the oppositional explanations.

## **Chapter Two**

### **At Home with Food: Gendered Food Culture and Cooking at Home**

For many Americans, the comforts of home hold little relevance without the cooking that accompanies it. Food provides requisite nutrition, but the emotional impact of being fed goes far beyond that. Home cooking has the power to soothe, comfort, and make a person feel protected. Our own identities are tied into the foods we eat, as they reflect our culture, our choices, and the way we wish to be viewed by others. Food helps to define who we are. It is not, nor has it ever been, socially incidental.

The attributes of gender in twentieth-century America carried with them assumed preferences and practices related to food and cooking. Social roles and expectations differed for women and men; therefore their relationship to food and cooking differed as well. Believed to be innately domestic creatures, women were the ambassadors of home cooking and the social wealth that stemmed from it. Yet American men during the twentieth-century developed their own unique place in the world of home cooking, one that was both special and infrequent. Thus it is necessary to investigate the socially created roles for men and women in twentieth-century America and how these different roles manifested themselves in relation to food and cooking in the home. To begin, though, a look at how cooking started is in order.

## Pre-Cooking: Food in Early History

Although much of the evidence gathered by anthropologists, archeologists, and historians concerning cooking in pre-historic times can only provide a rough image of existence prior to 10,000 B.C.E., certain theories have been well-accepted in the academic community. According to historian Reay Tannahill, hunting-gathering-fishing communities dominated the landscape throughout pre-history, and animal protein was an absolute necessity to human survival.<sup>24</sup> Regionalism often dictated that certain peoples were dependent on certain animals, and might have followed migration patterns in order to hunt almost year-round. Tannahill claims that “only the most active and wide-awake members of the community made successful hunters” and that generally “no more than ten males would be equipped for the task.”<sup>25</sup> Although the author does not delve too far into the dynamics of male versus female hunters, she does confess that “there seems no reason why the younger women should not have had a part to play, in communal hunts at least.”<sup>26</sup> That statement aside, the author assumes that hunting was a task reserved for strong, sharp, and youthful men, and the hunt could keep the males away from the remaining community for days at a time. Spatially speaking, this belief indicates that the pattern of men seeking occupation away from the home base could theoretically have origins in pre-history.

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<sup>24</sup> ReayTannahill, *Food in History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1973).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 19.

Likewise, Tannahill claims that during the Paleolithic era “women and girls set out on their own special food-gathering tasks, looking for edible roots, greenstuffs, nuts and berries, and any small fauna which might present themselves.”<sup>27</sup> Most historians and anthropologists agree that our female ancestors generally remained closer to home base for child-rearing purposes, lactation and menstruation. So out of necessity women traversed expanses of land on a daily basis in search of food in the same way hunters did, though perhaps not as far. Most likely neither men nor women in early human history perceived their work as being either binding nor liberating; it simply *was*, and it is ever important for the historian to avoid ascribing moral or ethical beliefs to peoples of the past. Presentism aside, the proximity of women to the central dwelling space makes them likely candidates for being the earliest agriculturalists. In fact, “it seems clear that woman’s appointed task of gathering seeds, vegetables, and fruits had taught her that some plants could be persuaded to grow where she wanted them instead of simply materializing at apparently random locales.”<sup>28</sup> At any rate, the work performed by men and women of the pre-historic community was apparently distinct enough for Tannahill to generalize that “by about 10,000 B.C. [E.], in both the Near East and southeast Asia, man knew a great deal about animals, woman about plants.”<sup>29</sup>

The trend persisted through thousands of years of human history, and as historian Michael Symons observes, “in societies of modern hunter-gatherers, women contribute the majority of gathered foods; such foods are mainly plant products... the men usually contribute the hunted foodstuffs: mammals, fish and birds.”<sup>30</sup> A clear division of labor

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>30</sup> Symons, *A History of Cooks and Cooking*, 216.

exists in this model in which “typically, the women and men roam in separate groups and eventually bring the main haul back to home base,” behavioral patterns that mimic early human food-ways.<sup>31</sup> The fact that the gender groups reconvene for food sharing is a noteworthy precursor to social behavior surrounding cooking, and if we can presume that women were more often near the homestead than men, then it stands to reason that women were likely the earliest cooks.

The development of cooking is yet another segment of human history largely open to conjecture. Like many developments during the early years of humanity, cooking was probably first discovered by happenstance, and continually evolved at a very slow pace by trial and error. According to Tannahill, roasting was probably the first method used, and “may have been discovered when someone accidentally dropped a cut of meat in the fire and was unable to retrieve it until the flames died down.”<sup>32</sup> From that point pit cooking arose, a kind of steaming process, and with pottery came boiling. Strangely, the author does little to delineate who did most of the cooking and how it came to be that way, assuming from very early in the text that women were cooks. She even goes so far as to refer to women in this era as “prehistoric housewives,” as if female domestication (and, of course, some form of marriage) pre-dated civilization itself, and has been a consistent feature throughout human existence, regardless of time and place.<sup>33</sup> Misrepresentations aside, written history confirms that women very often were responsible for cooking, brewing ale and beer, preserving meat, and gathering foodstuffs in most early civilizations, a pattern that continued during much of human history.

Presuming that women were the keepers of home and hearth, garden and table, women in

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 216.

<sup>32</sup> Tannahill, *Food in History*, 26.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 24.

essence were also the socializers and civilizers of humanity. In the words of Michael Symons, “cooks are not mere victims of social forces, but intimately involved in creating them.”<sup>34</sup> Women have inherited a legacy of culinary experience, if not expertise, regardless of whatever cultural limitations arose to fashion boundaries on their work.

Much of Western style cuisine originated in ancient Rome, the source of the first known cookbook, *De Re Coquinaria* (Cooking Matters).<sup>35</sup> Dating from the first-century C.E., its author is thought to be a man named Apicius, the root of the word “epicure.” Romans certainly recognized the social meaning behind food, cooking, and consumption, being known for extravagant banquets that flagrantly conveyed their class, wealth, and power. It also seems clear that gender division existed in cooking practices, as men, often religious figures, were responsible for the slaughter and cooking of sacrificial animals.<sup>36</sup> Even in these ancient civilizations, the socially constructed gender roles are evident (and arguably even more so). Roman society viewed women primarily as workers, uninvolved in the larger and loftier affairs of the state and of religious ceremonies, despite the female presence in the religious lore itself. Women’s contributions as household cooks were overlooked even as the food itself was glorified.

By the Middle Ages in Europe, the diversity of cuisine that had existed during the Roman Empire had diminished. The majority of the population subsisted on what they could grow and catch themselves, the result of disrupted trade routes and lack of imports.<sup>37</sup> Generally, all household members (excluding members the nobility) contributed to the acquisition and production of edible goods. Still, gendered work

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<sup>34</sup> Symons, *A History of Cooks and Cooking*, 103.

<sup>35</sup> Linda Civitello, *Cuisine and Culture: A History of Food and People* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), 25-34.

<sup>36</sup> Symons, *A History of Cooks and Cooking*, 299.

<sup>37</sup> Tannahill, *Food in History*, 155-170.

patterns existed, as is evident in the ale and beer trade. For centuries, the ale-brewing business in England was dominated by women, but by the end of the Middle Ages, beer production had been taken over by men.<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, there exists no consistency in the manifestation of gender roles, because those roles are determined by society. Groups create their own definitions of gender, as well as the idea of gender itself, therefore no uniform or innate patterns of behavior can emerge through history. Yet reviewing the relationship between gender and food in past cultures helps to pinpoint the uniqueness of American food-ways, while revealing new reasons for continuous investigation of gendered cooking.

**“They Conform to the Ruling Taste of the Age in Cookery,**

**Dress, Language, Manners, &c:”<sup>39</sup>**

**Gender in the New World**

With the discovery of the New World, food and cooking changed considerably and irreversibly. Trade both directions helped correct the dietary deficiencies of people in many regions, and cooking slowly became more diversified. European settlers in North

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<sup>38</sup> Bennett, *A History of Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England*, 6-21.

<sup>39</sup> Amelia Simmons, *American Cookery* (Green Farms, Connecticut: The Silverleaf Press, 1796), 2.

America carried with them their culture and customs, but adapted them to the challenges of life in the New World.<sup>40</sup>

Historians have uncovered the multiplicity of tasks that might have been performed by women in the New World without necessarily stretching the limits of their role. In *Good Wives*, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich uncovered the variety of roles that women played in colonial New England, including deputy husband, a position that made her both the decision-maker in business and commerce as well as the more traditional home-maker.<sup>41</sup> Ulrich points to the many variations in women's roles and the numerous ways they influenced their men and the larger community while remaining within the perimeters of expected behavior and feminine propriety. The southern colonies, however, possessed a very different social and class structure, one derived largely from indentured servitude, slave labor, and a highly unbalanced sex ratio rather than the family-centered townships of the North. In *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, Kathleen Brown discovered that women who occupied the social class of good wives were very often found working alongside their husbands, but may have also been responsible for maintaining the home.<sup>42</sup>

The social expectations placed on men and women surely varied from region to region, but scholars have reached a consensus concerning gender roles in American history: the changing economic environment of the nineteenth-century helped to cement separate spheres and create gender ideals that had been more elastic in previous centuries.

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<sup>40</sup> Tannahill, *Food in History*, 199-233. Civitello, *Cuisine and Culture*, 111-136. See works listed here for more information on food trade between the Old and New Worlds and changing diets.

<sup>41</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).



Seminal works such as Barbara Welter's "The Cult of True Womanhood" broke ground for new thought on the characteristics of the "lady" in nineteenth-century America.<sup>43</sup> Piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity were the ideal traits of Welter's "true woman," all elements that remained unthreatening to patriarchal rule largely because none required leaving the house.<sup>44</sup> The "true woman" Welter describes is certainly a middle-class ideal, attainable only by the married woman whose husband's income permitted her to remain a home-maker. Both men and women were expected to fulfill certain roles, and as the Industrial Revolution took more men away from localized farm work or craftsmanship for factory labor and the marketplace, the physical differentiation of space became even more distinct.

During this era the difference between a *role* and a *job* became clearly visible. Both demanded labor, whether physical or mental, but according to nineteenth- (and twentieth-) century conceptions, a woman's role in the home included preparing food and cooking for her family, among many other designated tasks. A man, and if conforming to the ideals of Victorian America, *only* a man, was paid for a job performed within a designated number of hours in a specified public setting. Such a job fulfilled his role as the provider, whereas the woman of the house was expected to pleasantly remain there. If necessity or desire led women to find gainful employment outside the home, it did not eradicate or diminish the requirements of her domestic duties. Preparing sustenance for

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<sup>43</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, part 1 (Summer 1966): 151-174.

<sup>44</sup> The spatial limitations at work are clearly delineated, and although Welter offers no analysis of the interplay of class and race among the defining elements of womanhood, later scholars such as Joan W. Scott, Gerda Lerner, and Linda Kerber offered more thorough interpretations of this phenomenon.

the family was invariably a task assigned to women, and their role was carried out in the private sphere, whether they had a job outside the home or not.

Gender roles can be understood as ideology as well as work. Women especially were bound to an ideal that prescribed not only the kinds of work they were to perform, and the space in which they performed it, but more importantly the temperament, personal aesthetic and physical manner with which such activities were undertaken. As the Victorian age heralded a more fixed dichotomy of ideal masculinity and femininity, prescriptive literature kept pace by perpetuating ideal gender roles. In addition to those qualities identified by Barbara Welter--piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity--there were endless adjectives used to describe what women should be like: beautiful, delicate, graceful, sacrificing, selfless, warm, virtuous, caring, weak, and soft, to name a few. Women were expected to be mindful of these characteristics, and maintain such standards while boiling, stewing, peeling, curing, canning, and cooking for their families. The sheer volume of normative journals, pamphlets, and books for women that appear during the nineteenth-century clearly indicated the growing anxiety to define and cement women's place, and it must be said that there was no comparable mass of literature to delineate and validate the male role, perhaps because men were not so restricted in the public realm. Many of these works were written and published by men, betraying a desire on the part of the patriarchy to relegate women to a position of comfortable subordination.<sup>45</sup>

Yet the advantages that women gained from this appropriately domesticated arrangement must also be considered. In "The Lady and the Mill Girl," Gerda Lerner discusses how the luxury of being a homemaker and hostess was afforded only to the

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<sup>45</sup> Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 159.

middle and upper-classes, a title that women would gladly flaunt. “It is no accident,” Lerner wrote in 1969, “that the slogan ‘a woman’s place is in the home’ took on a certain aggressiveness and shrillness precisely at the time when increasing numbers of poorer women *left* their homes to become factory workers.”<sup>46</sup> So it seems that the ideology of women’s proper role was disseminated by both men and women who benefited from the system.

Understanding that women were expected to mimic an ideal of femininity, there was an anticipated balance of masculinity. Middle-class Victorian men were also bound by certain social rules, expectations, and roles. Generally speaking, men were no freer of the social institutions that made them breadwinners than women were of those that designated them as domestics, nor were the dictates of masculinity elastic enough to condone a househusband. In *American Manhood*, E. Anthony Rotundo discusses the cultural creation of manhood and the changing meaning of masculinity and appropriate male behavior in the American past. The concept of individualism coupled with an expanding market economy allowed traits such as aggression and competition to thrive and become trademarks of manliness. These characteristics “drove the new system of individual interests, and a man defined his manhood not by his ability to moderate his passions but by his ability to channel them effectively.”<sup>47</sup> In the professional marketplace, being combative instead of agreeable, and tough as opposed to tender, was expected of men. Anything else was regarded with suspicion if not outright scorn. And because masculinity and femininity were defined in terms of the other, all habits,

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 9-39.

<sup>47</sup> E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformation in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 3.

predilections, and presuppositions attached to women were necessarily unacceptable for men. Granted, legal institutions clearly favored male privilege, but socially constructed ideals were no less forgiving of deficiencies in masculinity than in their feminine counterpart.

**“Tiny Pink Food:”<sup>48</sup>**

### **The Social Creation of Divergent Tastes and Tasks**

The nineteenth-century solidification of gender differences extended not only to the work and demeanor of the sexes, but also helped to define tastes and preferences among men and women that would become especially distinct in the early part of the twentieth-century. In line with women’s delicate “nature,” women were meant to have a distinct fondness for light, fluffy, creamy, soft, small, pretty substances. Men, on the other hand, were not sufficiently manly if they lacked a predilection for hearty meats, potatoes, and stick-to-the-ribs kinds of food.

Perhaps most important in noting this phenomenon is recognizing how little it has changed. Ostensibly, especially with regard to the media, food preferences for American men and women have hardly changed since the Victorian era. One example comes charging to mind. If for no other reason than pure amusement, a Burger King

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in e-mail: from Sheila Phipps to Stella Pierce, Wed, Nov 18, 2009.

commercial, first aired in the spring of 2006, deserves credit in this analysis.<sup>49</sup> The opening scene features a thirty-something man in an upscale restaurant, one that specializes in what appears to be small portions of sushi or some kind of health food. He rises to exit, declaring “I’m way too hungry to settle for chick food,” and is joined by other men on the street, singing in unison, “I’ll admit it, I’ve been fed quiche.” With just these first seconds of the advertisement, the company depicts men and women as innately different, with divergent tastes, and diminishes the value of the portrayed female preference.

As the ad continues, the male gathering swells to include every possible gender stereotype. One man breaks a cement block with his fist; another heaves forward pulling a dump truck behind him, which is attached by massive chains strapped across his torso. This hungry man is being lured forward by a big tasty Texas Whopper on the face of a shovel being held by a busty blonde in a bathing suit. Finally, there is a collective effort to throw a minivan over the side of a bridge, signifying the cultural male desire to reject all that is domestic and womanly. The commercial concludes with a triumphant male salute in unison, saying “I’m starved, I’m incorrigible, I AM MAN!” Even the capitalized letters are shown as such on the parade banners. These assumptions about gendered food inclinations are relics of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries. When put to further scrutiny, they can be linked to the mechanisms that enabled men to dominate restaurant cooking in the twentieth-century.

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<sup>49</sup> “I am Man,” *Burger King*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGLHlvb8skQ> As of November, 2010, the advertisement does not appear in the list of Burger King commercials on the official Burger King website. The video can be found on youtube, the site provided here. For an interesting feminist critique of the commercial, see the blog “Creative Destruction,” May 15, 2006. <http://creativestruction.wordpress.com/2006/05/15/i-am-man-burger-king-commercial/>

As a form of prescriptive literature, but also as one of the primary means of communicating local or family culinary history, early twentieth-century cookbooks are fundamental to the process of deconstructing gender relations in the kitchen. Second only to the recurring theme of women as the household cooks, the disparate food preferences of the sexes is conceptually imbedded in the cooking literature of this time, whether directly stated or inferred.

Cookbooks for home-makers often have planned menus for specific events, such as afternoon tea or bridge lunches. The meals at gatherings of only women reflect the image and etiquette that they were supposed to emulate--daintiness, delicacy, attractiveness, and femininity. Freda De Knight's precise menu for a bridge luncheon calls for "4 asparagus spears" on a plate lined with endive, "tiny parsley biscuits," chopped celery stuffed inside "a small tomato," and to complete the barely-existent meal, "lime and cherry sherbet with pink tea cookies."<sup>50</sup> The emphasis is clearly on the social act and the meaning behind the food, rather than the miniscule but colorful food itself. In *Good Cooking*, Marjorie Heseltine suggested in 1936 that the hostess serve watercress sandwiches, guava jelly sandwiches, date meringues, and candied grapefruit peel to a small gathering, but at a larger function provide almond and cucumber sandwiches, cream cheese and ginger sandwiches, "tiny" baking powder biscuits, mint Turkish paste, and tea cakes, in addition to the requisite beverages.<sup>51</sup> Occasions like these put femininity on parade, and middle-class leisure entertaining on the main float.

Smothered between weightless meringue and sugary-sweet pink cookies was the commonly held belief that women's palate was restricted by their fancy for fluff, never

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<sup>50</sup> Freda De Knight, *A Date with a Dish: A Cook Book of American Negro Recipes* (New York: Hermitage Press Inc., 1948), 405.

<sup>51</sup> Marjorie Heseltine and Ula M. Dow, *Good Cooking* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936), 56.

mind the daily duty to create palatable and well-rounded meals for the household. Because ideal feminine foods were often insubstantial and frivolous, men aimed to distance themselves from the delicacy foods and gravitated towards large meals of meat, stews, breads, and potatoes. Meat is somewhat of a masculine icon in the twentieth-century popular imagination, as it evokes the existence of the primeval hunter from which most Western men are far removed. The consumption of meat, especially red meat because of its expense, is also culturally linked to power and strength.<sup>52</sup> For more than a century, media, popular literature, cookbooks and socialization have emphasized the innate differences in men and women based on their perceived gastronomical tastes and tendencies, conceding superiority to one over the other.

*The Life Picture Cook Book* presents this attitude to the reader: “Whenever the menu calls for a delicate dish or a fancy pie, most men are more than happy to let their wives take care of the cooking. When it is a matter of steak, the tolerant attitude is replaced by an unassailable belief in masculine know-how. Steak is a man’s job.”<sup>53</sup> *A Date with a Dish* echoes this tendency by stating, “If there is anything men dislike, it’s dainty sandwiches and fussy menus at a man’s party,” and suggests serving hamburgers, onions and peppers, corn on the cob, and beer.<sup>54</sup> Another menu, titled “Buffet for Men,” requires roast beef, veal loaf, liverwurst, and a “large platter of cheese,” along with a “large bowl of mixed salad greens,” “a large plate of pound cake, plenty of hot coffee, and beer.”<sup>55</sup> Size, strength, and power are present in this author’s rhetoric of masculine meals. In a later segment, the author refers to roast beef as “the King of Roasts,” saying

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<sup>52</sup> Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 26-28. Symons, *A History of Cooks and Cooking*, 323-351. See works listed here for further discussion of the relationship between meat and power.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 37.

<sup>54</sup> De Knight, *A Date with a Dish*, 401.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 401.

“here he is in all his glory.”<sup>56</sup> If meat has assumed a historically prized condition in American culture--which it certainly has, even if nothing more than cost is considered--then it clearly has a gender as well.

In *Come and Get It!*, author George Martin focuses solely on outdoor cooking. The longest chapter in this work is devoted to (drum roll, please) meat. Red meat, pork, and game (a.k.a. Hunters’ Specials) have their own section. The importance of meat in this work is anything but subdued. The author believes that “you can burn your baked potatoes, over boil the coffee...but if you offer meat of disappointing quality” the episode will not be easily forgotten.<sup>57</sup> Yet if the griller’s attempt is a success even the most ignorant and inept cook can be elevated to the status of “a first class chef.”<sup>58</sup> Not only is meat the most important part of the meal, but the preparer--presumably male--can be suddenly transformed into a culinary master, having never before been introduced to an indoor stove.

Commodities such as foodstuffs and meat certainly exist within a hierarchy, and the association of meat with men is neither incidental nor accidental. The cultural connection between masculinity and meat simultaneously elevates the status of both subjects *and* grants men priority over an almost essential ingredient in the culinary arts, as the opposing connection between women and lighter foods divorces them from the valuable understanding of meat’s qualities. The man-meat kinship created a scenario in which, if a man chose to cook meat, he would be innately better at it than a woman. The supposed feminine preference for sweet treats and light delights made women less able to

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 406.

<sup>57</sup> George W. Martin, *Come and Get It!: The Compleat Outdoor Chef* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1942), 32.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 32.



grasp the fine qualities of prized meat and consequently shared none of the connections with its power and strength.<sup>59</sup>

Interestingly, the socially constructed relationship of men to meat came at a time when most American men were very far removed (perhaps farther than ever before) from the need to actually acquire meat for survival. The twentieth-century brought about a vast new urban and suburban landscape, one shielded from the dangers of life that were a guarantee to those who were dependant on the land for sustenance. The flood of popular literature and cookbooks that appeared in the early-twentieth-century assuring men of their connection to fire, meat, and the primal strength of primitive humanity betrayed a desperate need to reconnect to the last vestiges of “true” masculinity.

The status of meat and the association of certain foods with men and with women also carried over into the professional world of cooking. Head chefs, who have historically been mostly male, are typically responsible for cutting and portioning large slabs of raw meat. Pastry chefs, those responsible for making breads and especially desserts, are the one category of trained cook in which women have existed in large numbers, exposing the cultural association of women with sweets.

In many ways, meat was elevated to an iconic position in food culture during the twentieth-century. But meat does not stand alone in formulating the masculine side of domestic culinary work in twentieth-century America. The physical environment that accompanies the cooking and consuming of meat, such as the great outdoors, plays a tremendous role in cementing gender roles in the popular imagination. Food historian Harvey Levenstein points to the beef industry as at least partially responsible for the

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<sup>59</sup>Fine, *Kitchens*, 93-95. Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 26-29. See works listed here for more information on the status of meat for professional and domestic male cooks.

outdoor barbeque craze of the mid-twentieth-century and adds that “the success of the campaign was reflected in everything from a surge in lawn furniture sales to a booming market for hotdogs.”<sup>60</sup> A great number of the cookbooks written for (and usually by) men during this period focused almost exclusively on cooking outside. The 1942 publication of *Come and Get It!* was intended for just this purpose. The author argued that cooking and other leisure activities like “hunting, fishing, and camping” had always been for him “an enjoyable hobby.”<sup>61</sup> Clearly, feeding himself or his family was not integrated into his everyday routine, and the rarity of the event made it more special. Although the author claimed that his outdoor cookbook “is intended as much for the ladies as it is for the masculine wielders of the skillet,” he conceded that “the feminine touch may not be too apparent,” and rightly so. Of the eighteen illustrations in this book depicting people preparing, cooking, or serving food in the outdoors, females appear in only three, all of which feature her caring for or serving children.

Many other cookbooks and magazine articles from this era persuaded men to cook out of doors, out of the kitchen, away from the female world. Famous American chef James Beard believed that “primarily, outdoor cooking is a man’s work and man-sized menus and portions should be the rule,” while an article in *Esquire’s Handbook for Hosts* remarks that “a log cabin or open grill is the logical place” to cook game, “and a man’s the proper cook.”<sup>62</sup> In *From Hardtack to Homefries*, food historian Barbara Haber examined the early issues of *Gourmet* magazine and cookbooks of the early twentieth-century to discover the conventions and expectations conveyed in these culinary works.

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<sup>60</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 132.

<sup>61</sup> Martin, *Come and Get It*, vii.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Parkin, *Dinner Roles*, 27-28.

She concluded that *Gourmet*, one of the earliest American periodicals that highlighted European cuisine and fare for upscale chefs and restaurateurs, was “never intended for a female audience...the illustrations of boars’ heads, shotguns, and fishing rods make it clear to me now that the magazine was geared for a readership of men who fancied themselves intrepid sportsmen.”<sup>63</sup> Additionally, the male interest in food and cookery was validated as long as men were able to separate themselves from women, both spatially and aesthetically. Haber contends that long-time editor of *Gourmet*, Frederic Birmingham, “sets himself apart from women by trying to show that men are more imaginative and take more risks in the kitchen... while women are uninspired and predictable” and “he too latches onto outdoor cooking as an inveterately male prerogative.”<sup>64</sup>

Food writer Sherrie Inness deconstructs the relationship between men and cooking and analyzes the ways that the “male cooking mystique” contributes to assumptions about gender and domestic work.<sup>65</sup> One of the rules that apply to this relationship states in part that “if men desire to learn how to cook they will inevitably be better cooks than any woman can be.”<sup>66</sup> Inness substantiates this statement with a quote from a 1961 article in *Field and Stream* in which author Ted Trueblood proclaims that women are incapable of cooking what he calls “man dishes,” as they are “too cautious by nature to treat them as they must be treated if they are to be superb rather than merely edible.”<sup>67</sup> Such works validated men in their cooking interests by supporting a notion that

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<sup>63</sup> Barbara Haber, *From Hardtack to Homefries: An Uncommon History of American Cooks and Meals* (New York: The Free Press, 2002),211.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 213.

<sup>65</sup> Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

women do not get it right anyway, and the world of good food has been betrayed by male absence.

The attire of the outdoor male cook was also meant to convey a sense of grand stature and masculinity, as men were “encouraged to wear large aprons with macho slogans. . .and wield oversized utensils, which were clearly inappropriate for the kitchen.”<sup>68</sup> According to chef Anne Cooper, author of “*A Woman’s Place is in the Kitchen*,” the male interest in cooking was precipitated by the organized modern army in which certain soldiers were chosen to cook for the entire division.<sup>69</sup> Masculine outerwear enabled men to feel comfortable in the role of cook, assuring all observers that he had no intention of assuming the role assigned to his wife, mother, and daughter. Even an advertisement for Hefty Scrap Bags in 1974 showed a man scraping food into a plastic-lined container, depicted him wearing a chef’s hat the breadth of his shoulders and almost the girth of his entire chest.<sup>70</sup> By dressing the man in a chef’s uniform, the ad aimed to clarify that this man certainly was more like a culinary expert than the women in his life who actually cooked, although housewives were very rarely shown wearing chef’s attire.

Uniform aside, the soldier-warrior mythology is especially important for understanding how men were able to assume particular cooking tasks that seemed inherently masculine, as if they had been solely responsible for any cooking out-of-doors and over an open flame since the dawn of time. The connection between food, weaponry, and war is apparent in every historical setting, and is still visible in the modern American kitchen. The weapons--knives and other utensils--complete this image, as the public is

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<sup>68</sup> Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 132.

<sup>69</sup> Ann Cooper, “*A Woman’s Place is in the Kitchen*.” *The Evolution of Women Chefs* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1998), 26.

<sup>70</sup> Advertisement for Hefty Scrap Bags, *Ladies Home Journal*, (June, 1974): 118.

transported to an age of raw, unyielding, primal strength, a precarious existence dependent upon the fearlessness of the male warrior-hunter. As a weapon, the experienced and confident wielder of a knife demands respect from observers and opponents. As a tool for cooking, the dynamic would change very little. Although much historical investigation has substantiated the belief that men were the hunters, women were still more likely to cook, indoors and outdoors, than men.

The twentieth-century version of this vision still guarantees that behind the scenes of the bold yard figure sporting a phallic chef's hat and meat poker there was almost assuredly a female in the kitchen doing much of the less dramatic work: marinating, chopping, cutting and slicing, preparing the non-meat side items for the meal, making sure that her family actually got fed. In the 1936 cookbook *Good Cooking* explicitly intended for the housewife, there is a small segment entitled "When Men Serve Themselves," making suggestions for home-makers to "plan and prepare refreshments which can be served in their absence."<sup>71</sup> In a 1956 article in *Parents' Magazine*, one housewife believed that her husband's duty to provide for his family meant that when he "becomes an outdoor chef I do whatever advance preparation is required."<sup>72</sup> The American interest in outdoor grilling may have seemed to many a blessing for the woman tired of the daily chore of cooking, but very often they still remained responsible for much of the work.

Even more importantly, the drastic differences created for the worlds of cooking out and cooking in helped to further cement gendered work and the social expectations of men's and women's relationship to food. By cooking in the yard, men were that much

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<sup>71</sup> Heseltine and Dow, *Good Cooking*, 528.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 28.

further away from the taint of kitchen femininity. By highlighting meat as the central feature of the meal they were distanced from the delicate foods associated with women, and by utilizing large tools associated with weaponry, their virility was heightened.

This space differential, indoor versus outdoor cooking, may seem insignificant, but nothing could be further from the truth. As the twentieth-century designated all outdoor cooking as a socially sanctioned male activity, it furthered gender inequality and labor division in several significant ways.

First, male cooking diminished what power women possessed over the vital task of cooking by depicting it as easy, even for an inexperienced man, which also meant that female griping about having to cook was really just symptomatic of weakness or laziness. Second, because the man of the house cooked infrequently, the event was special and was therefore invested with greater familial and social meaning, worthy of commendation and celebration. Investing male cooking rituals with greater social significance may date back to the Greeks (or further), in which sacrifices were performed by high ranking religious figures. Third, almost invariably, red meat was--and still is--the central ingredient in American outdoor cooking. Meat was imbued with masculine qualities that women could not comprehend, and their incapacities with meat designated them as less qualified in this culinary arena. Fourth, grilling out also put the man of the house in the public eye, in the world, that much closer to the civic duties associated with masculinity, that much further from any dependence on women or relation to femininity inside the home. And finally, that public display of the master cook, dressed to mimic the professional chef, cemented the notion that cooking anywhere outside the domestic kitchen was a male privilege.

Each of these points helps explain the social mechanisms used to validate professional male cooking in the United States. It is no coincidence that mid and up-scale dining in America flourished at the same moment in history that cookbooks and periodicals sought out ways to convince their male readers that cooking did not threaten their masculinity. The designated domestic cooks--women--were never encouraged to wear apparel that resembled professional chefs' attire, but despite novice rank, men were persuaded of their likeness to culinary experts. American men found solace in the fact that the restaurant industry was gaining respect in the business community and that cooking was no longer strictly associated with women.

Explaining why men are more commonly found in restaurant kitchens in the United States depends on economic and social factors that made the profession worthy of a man's time and energy. The background for this lies in recognizing that working with food is a task that was socially formulated to be acceptable for women (and women only) in the home, but socially significant enough for talented men to stretch the boundaries of traditional masculinity, and try their hand at cooking.

It is now fairly accepted that both men and women are capable of cooking, either professionally or in the home, and that any assumptions about "natural" gender roles and tendencies are social constructions created to make men and women more comfortable in a rapidly changing world. But the fact that women during the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries were expected to remain in the home and cook for the household clearly did not result in her performing the same occupation in the public sphere.

**“It’s Part of the Oldest Tradition in the World:”<sup>73</sup>**

### **Finding Meaning in Food and Cooking**

The food we eat is perpetually conditioned by meaning and mirrors our lifestyle, status, and culture. It is not just that we all must eat in order to survive that makes food important; it also cements personal and civic relations, molds identity, and defines individuals and groups according to a common heritage. Gathering around food has historically reinforced the bonds of family and community through sharing rituals, and those rituals offer entree to outsiders as a means of experiencing local and familial character. Regional food experiences bring an understanding of the unfamiliar to a new participant, and re-inform cultural veterans of the comforts of tradition, familiarity, and home. This is true of food experiences in general, but is especially accurate when sharing home-cooked food and family recipes that expose regional culture as well as personal culinary flair. Even the most limited of travelers can attest to the fact that while traveling, enjoying local cuisine, especially family oriented home-cooked meals, is one of the most effective ways to absorb the culture. And for the seasoned and weary traveler, the elements that resemble home are those familiar foods that provide comfort and cultural adhesion. Domestic cooks have often been the beacon that provides for the maintenance of tradition and home comforts, not to mention the source of actual recipes that have supplied cooks with the opportunity to be a part of cultural and regional heritage.

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<sup>73</sup> Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18, 2006.



Cross-culturally and throughout history, the roles associated with food preparation, division, and distribution have defined the society in which they take place, and those roles are generally differentiated according to gender. For example, women of nomadic tribes in Australia collected edibles for themselves and their immediate families, but male hunters were subject to the complexities of rituals and hierarchical obligations and thus had very little say in the way their kill was divided amongst the larger social group.<sup>74</sup> In Western culture, the carving of meat was a task for centuries designated to the (male) head of the household, but gradually became symbolic of a housewife's culinary aptitude as well, though the activity is still often thought of as being a man's job.<sup>75</sup> Although specific food-related duties have been designated as male tasks, the use of domestic kitchen space and the task of cooking have been female-dominated for most of American history, and therefore the social constructions of culture, family, and tradition can largely be attributed to their culinary efforts. Clearly, gendered food tasks are not unique to nineteenth and twentieth-century America. But the ways in which middle-class roles were defined and in which they specified attitude, preference, and work according to sex does bespeak a certain tense desire to socially constrain the population. Middle-class men and women both acted to protect their roles and the power, prestige, and security that came with them.

The multitude of economic and social changes that took place in nineteenth-century America helped to fortify middle-class gender roles thus distinguishing tasks, spaces, and even foods as either male or female. In fulfilling her domestic duties, a woman was believed to act as a social stabilizer and her cooking represented the ultimate

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<sup>74</sup> Symons, *A History of Cooks and Cooking*, 142.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

expression of love for her family. Further along, we will see the manner in which the popular view of women and their domestic duties played out in the public sphere through law, employment and education patterns, and how that affected women's entrance into the culinary field.

**“When Did We Begin to Sacrifice the Nurturing?:”<sup>76</sup>**  
**Cookbooks and Morality through Domestic Cooking**

Perhaps one of the greatest and most telling sources for understanding the relationship between gender and food is cooking literature. In researching the dynamics of women, men, and professional versus domestic cooking, scholastic analysis of gender roles in cooking literature has proven invaluable. The accessibility of nineteenth and twentieth-century cookbooks and normative literature make such materials a perfect source for the analysis of this subject. Cookbooks are so much more than collections of recipes. They act as transmitters of culture, teachers of lessons, outlets for familial frustrations, and guides for generations of mostly female cooks in the American home. As modern technology and processed food changed the way Americans lived and ate, cookbooks provided an amalgamation of traditional recipes and newly developed time-saving techniques for home kitchens.

The food and cookbook industry made use of the increasingly diverse female experience. During the early twentieth-century, many cookbooks recognized the

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<sup>76</sup> Patty Strickland, head chef of Linville Ridge Country Club, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 12, 2006.

difficulty many women faced in potentially balancing motherhood, careers, house care, and social life, but the very nature of the topic meant they shied away from challenging the notion that women were the domestic cooks--or, at the very least, oversaw the use of food and kitchen space if she had hired assistance. In one mid-century cookbook, the authors noted that young women regularly “undertake the work in combination with a full-time job outside the home. . . little wonder that they are irritated by their lack of skill in tasks which they have seen done well by someone none too generously endowed with brains.”<sup>77</sup> If a woman was in fact an employed wage-earner, she was nonetheless expected to fulfill the myriad tasks appropriate to her gender, tasks that even female writers occasionally belittled as mindless.<sup>78</sup>

Part of American food culture in the twentieth-century was the assumption that women are innately nurturing caregivers, thus their role as domestic cook was patched in to the natural order of life. In other words, the overpowering female desire to attend to the needs of those around her made cooking simply a manifestation of her primal instinct. Food writer Katherine Parkin states that the culture of this new age in America “bound women, food, and love together,” and that “cooking for their families was an activity emblematic of women’s love.”<sup>79</sup> Cookbooks regularly touted this female-food-love ethic, as indicated in *A Date with a Dish*, in which African-American author Freda De

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<sup>77</sup> Heseltine and Dow, *Good Cooking*, xii.

<sup>78</sup> Although the authors do not explicitly state this, it could be speculated that the previous quote is a remark on the cooking abilities of servants or women of a lower class, those seen by the educated middle class of the early twentieth-century as being “none too well endowed with brains.” In reading numerous cookbooks and domestic manuals of the early 1900s, it seems that the spreading middle class meant that many women married into a lifestyle to which they were not accustomed, coming from wealth that shielded them from the necessity of learning to cook. The 1949 publication of *The Successful Hostess* discusses this socio-economic change that indicated that “servants may be of a passing race,” and therefore offered suggestion for the hostess with and without hired help. See Elizabeth Stuart Hedgecock, *The Successful Hostess* (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Co., 1949), 4.

<sup>79</sup> Parkin, “Campbell’s Soup and the Long Shelf Life of Traditional Gender Roles,” 52.

Knight states that “simplicity, order and a sunny approach” make home cooked meals enjoyable, because

this type of meal adds a special something to your family happiness, and is a pertinent factor in the training of your children. The home influence forms an everlasting imprint on their minds. Pleasant, jolly meals mean that the family feels free, and will most certainly be proud to bring company home to dinner because “Mother is so regular.”<sup>80</sup>

The responsibility to make the home comfortable and meals savory rested on the shoulders of women, and providing these elements in the home demonstrated a woman’s propensity for love and the cultivation of civility. A woman was expected to fulfill all the duties that accompanied her role, and do so with the mild and selfless temperament that accompanied her nature.

In Dorothy Malone’s cookbook from 1946 *How Mama Could Cook!*, the author begins each chapter as a narrative of her mother’s inspired cooking and the many social uses she had for food. With a flair for dramatic storytelling, Malone recounts her mother’s ability to save the day with her spectacular culinary talents, stating that she “felt that any problem could be solved with food.”<sup>81</sup> In one chapter entitled “Mama Entertains the Teachers,” the author tells of how her mother was able to save her son from severe disciplinary action in school by feeding the teachers cake and tea. Such stories depict women of this era as intimately united with the food they prepared.

Housewives were encouraged to create nutritious and palatable meals for everyone in the family, and by doing so solidified the foundation upon which an ordered society rested. Women’s domestic cooking in mid twentieth-century America not only represented an essential element of the growing middle-class conservative consciousness

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<sup>80</sup> De Knight, *A Date with a Dish*, 6.

<sup>81</sup> Dorothy Malone, *How Mama Could Cook!* (New York: A.A. Wyn, Inc., 1946), 23.

by placing her in the home as family care-taker, but it also established her civic duty to create like-minded citizens of her family. This ideal was reaffirmed in cookbooks--some could be easily classified as domestic manuals--dating back to the mid-nineteenth-century. One example is the ever popular *Virginia Housewife*, in which author Mary Randolph stated that “the prosperity and happiness of a family depend greatly on the order and regularity established in it.”<sup>82</sup> She furthers her argument by saying that “the sons bred into such a family will be moral men, of steady habits; and the daughters, if the mother shall have performed the duties of a parent in the superintendence of their education... will be a treasure to her husband.”<sup>83</sup> Orderliness in home management and palatable healthfulness in food were necessary ingredients in the mixing bowl of domestic life.

This same sentiment was echoed by Marion Harland in *Common Sense in the Household*, as she spoke directly to her housewife reader,

I speak not now of the labors of the culinary department alone; but, without naming the other duties which you and only you can perform, I do insist that upon method, skill, economy in the kitchen, depends so much of the well-being of the rest of the household, that it may safely be styled the root- the foundation of housewifery.<sup>84</sup>

Clearly, a woman’s talents and commitment to maintaining the home affected her family and thus reverberated throughout the community, making her domestic duties the epicenter of social stability. This idea offered more than one function for the internal society of the home. It simultaneously provided a miniature patriarchal structure within

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<sup>82</sup> Mary Randolph, *The Virginia Housewife: or, Methodical Cook* (Baltimore, MD: Plaskitt, & Cugle, 1828),xii.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, xii.

<sup>84</sup> Marion Harland, *Common Sense in the Household: A Manual of Practical Housewifery* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1871), 15.

the home that was reflective of the ideally ordered society *and* suggested that women uphold that ideal, thus diminishing the value of other, non-domestic responsibilities.

Since food is an essential element for life, and also exhibits the artistic style, social status, familial continuity, and cultural definitions of the cook and the consumer, cooking and eating are indelibly imbued with meaning. In American culture, special significance has historically been granted to the home cook as a transmitter of social bonding and a maintainer of familial unity. Because women's performance in the domestic kitchen was inextricably linked to the social formulation of cultural harmony, her commitment to household responsibilities was jealously guarded by the patriarchal conventions of the time. A woman's love of her family would not be nearly as genuine if she cooked for strangers in a restaurant kitchen, so her culinary efforts would be wasted in the public sphere. Being removed from her personally cultivated domain in the kitchen also removed the sentiment attached to the work a woman performed there, and diminished the value of her food in emotionally nourishing her family. Societal balance depended on a woman's ability to uphold the tenets of middle-class idealism, of which the food provided by a nurturing wife/mother was a vital part.

Domestic cooking was the Eucharist of women's work; the act of cooking and the familial consumption of food were transformed into emotional feeding time--the sustenance of love for the soul. If a woman were to employ her talents outside of the domestic sphere, however, the social view would be altered considerably. Outside of the home, the food prepared by a wife or mother would have become simply a product of the market, a commodity bought and sold like shoe laces or nose trimmers or vacuum

cleaners. A middle-class woman participating in the culinary craft in exchange for money would have been heartlessly wasted on the masses.

**“She Couldn’t Think of It on Her Own.”<sup>85</sup>**

### **Professionalism Infiltrates the Home Kitchen**

The early to mid-twentieth-century saw a great array of changes occur in the way Americans produced and consumed food. Restaurants became an increasingly popular venue not only for eating, but for exhibiting social behavior and spending leisure time. Americans of all classes began eating outside of the home more often, thus somewhat diminishing the prominent role of women cooking in the home. Although many Americans, especially those in rural and hinterland areas, did not have access to such establishments, women of this era were often grateful for the opportunity to pass the responsibilities of cooking and cleaning on to a professional staff. The restaurant industry quickly grabbed hold of an easy marketing tactic, by encouraging husbands to take her out “at least once a week with the family.”<sup>86</sup> But the surge in dining out did very little to assuage the domestic duties of women who were still assigned the task of preparing meals in the household.

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<sup>85</sup> Jack Pepper, owner of Peppers Restaurant, Boone, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 15, 2006.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Andrew Hurley, “From Hash House to Family Restaurant: The Transformation of the Diner and Post-World War II Consumer Culture,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 83, no. 4 (Mar., 1997): 1282-1308. <http://www.jstor.org/>.

Cookbooks and magazines can also reveal the gendered nature of professional cooking, and the divergent meaning of food preparation according to space and location. As the restaurant industry proliferated in the United States and the world of paid cooks became increasingly respectable, women, it seems, were meant to take cues from male chefs, the new ultimate authority in the kitchen. Katherine Parkin's analysis of the gender roles portrayed in Campbell's Soup advertisements from the early twentieth-century mentions one ad that depicts a French chef as the creator of the soup. It suggested that women would benefit from the expertise of this chef and should purchase the product with the greatest of haste. It goes without saying that the chef was a man. According to Parkin, "women never appeared as chefs, even though the ads dictated that women should be solely responsible for cooking."<sup>87</sup> Within these works there are also messages that emphasize the separateness of cooking in the home from professional cooking.

Women's prescriptive literature furthered the divide between professional and domestic cooking by suggesting that women in the home needed the assistance of male chefs. *Ladies Home Journal* regularly featured kudos to successful and admirable chefs across the nation with a "Chef of the Month" segment. Each month of 1974 featured a different chef providing useful culinary tips to its readers; even in a magazine directed at women, only one of the chefs was female.<sup>88</sup> An article in May of 1974 concedes that "being a professional chef" has "paradoxically (we think) been considered a male province," but the other monthly features did little to dissuade women from dependence on male authority in cooking, nor did *LHJ* challenge the socially sanctioned female role

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<sup>87</sup> Parkin, "Campbell's Soup and the Long Shelf Life of Traditional Gender Roles," 61.

<sup>88</sup> "Chef of the Month," *Ladies Home Journal*, May 1974, 57. 1974 was the earliest year for *LHJ* available at my disposal. Although it is quite possible, even likely, that the same or similar articles appeared in earlier years, none appeared during 1975 or later years.



of domestic cooking in general.<sup>89</sup> Second perhaps only to fashion and beauty tips, food and cooking was the most pervasive theme in the periodicals surveyed, featuring an average of fifty recipes in any given issue. In an effort to consolidate information, each issue of *LHJ* provided a recipe index, a small segment that names every concoction presented in said issue and the page number where it could be found.<sup>90</sup> Although these issues from the 1970s and 1980s do commonly address the problems women face in balancing work and home life, *Ladies Home Journal* basically perpetuated the convention that the American household was (and should be) fed by women.

Clearly, there was a social function behind the female domestic cooking ethic, one that was meant to perpetuate American values and retain conservative habits. The male cooking mystique was designed to elevate the standing of any male cook to the level of professional, easing the tension of potentially being associated with the work of women and the amateur status attached to it. The division of labor in the marketplace that created barriers for women in the culinary world also shows the innumerable ways they contributed to the development of the restaurant industry and American cuisine.

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<sup>89</sup> "Chef of the Month," *Ladies Home Journal*, 57.

<sup>90</sup> This average comes from a sample taken from late 1974, early 1975 issues of *LHJ*. The smallest recipe index featured 28 recipes (March), the largest 68 (November). The months with the highest number were predictably November and December. I also browsed through later issues and found similar numbers of recipes in the index, but did not make copies, so those findings did not enter the average.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Cooking In Public: Gendered Work, Restaurants, And the View of Professional Chefs**

Early American domestic women were the harbingers of an American cuisine. Most inhabitants of the colonies were of modest means and therefore produced food and goods at home, creating patterns of native food-ways and designing the culinary future. Largely responsible for food and cooking in the home, women's work as culinary exemplars carried on for generations. The women of infant America were responsible for the economies of home production and trade, making them both producer and manager, roles that carried on well into the early 1900s in areas like Appalachia.

Gender divisions were pervasive in many areas of twentieth-century American life. It was commonly believed that women were ideally suited to life in the home and were often discouraged from entrance into the workforce, especially if the occupation was believed to be more appropriate for a man. Women and children were often funneled into domestic service and textiles, occupations traditionally familiar to them. By the mid-twentieth-century, the emergence of pink-collar jobs--largely office and secretarial work--put women in the workforce in greater numbers than ever before. The marketplace adjusted to adapt to the needs of working women.

At the same time, eating establishments were growing in number to accommodate an ever-expanding market. While some restaurants aimed specifically to capture the

comforting atmosphere of mother's home cooking, it was men who received technical training and came to dominate middle and upscale cooking and dining. Educational barriers, protective legislation, and dismissive hiring practices all shaped the gendered working world, and restaurant cooking was no exception. Exceptional it was, however, that men chose to work in a field traditionally practiced by women. Cooking, an occupation largely associated with women, became the domain of men in the public sphere.

Certain locales were more conducive to the prosperity of upscale dining than others, and the High Country of North Carolina was one of them. The prominent tourism industry in the region spurred growth in fine dining restaurants, and with it came an influx of professional chefs and cooks to fill the occupational need. The current chefs' perspective on gender division and cooking is both unique and illustrative, being both witness to domestic cooking and participant in the professional side of it. They can provide a purposeful look at the philosophical and emotional nature behind food and cooking, as well as the gender divisions and limitations that exist in the profession. Finally, modern chefs provide an inside look at the culture of the restaurant kitchen and its masculine nature.

**“This Being an Original Work in this Country:”<sup>91</sup>**

**A Short History of Early Culinary America**

Not unlike much of the rest of the world during the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, and unadorned by modern standards, food and cooking for most people living in colonial America was perfunctory. Meals were often repetitive, though special occasions and holidays proffered greater variety and extravagance. In *Good Wives*, author Laurel Thatcher Ulrich transports the reader to colonial New England where the fundamentals of food, cooking and survival can be appreciated. Beatrice Plummer’s household inventory included bacon, salt pork, cheese, and butter, as well as grains, peas, and beans and, by the author’s confession, “small quantities of pickles, preserves, or dried herbs might have escaped notice” but generally, this family “had the basic components of the yeoman diet described in English agricultural literature of the seventeenth century.”<sup>92</sup>

In addition to living and kitchen space, a typical homestead would have had a cellar for storage, a dairy house for making butter and cheese, a barn and barnyard for housing animals, feed and tools, and various other spaces for washing, curing, slaughtering, crafting, and storing. Ulrich portrays Beatrice Plummer as possessing talent and proficiency in all of the areas of a successful colonial housewife, from fire-tending and bread-baking to slaughtering and beer-brewing. Nearly all of the spaces, activities,

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<sup>91</sup> Amelia Simmons, *American Cookery* (Green Farms, Connecticut: The Silverleaf Press, 1796), 2.

<sup>92</sup> Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 19.

and implements of the home in this age were directly or indirectly related to the production and preparation of food, making the home the center of culinary life for most of the population. Most historians agree that during this pre-industrial age, economic production was centered mostly in the home, and much of that production was done by women. Household essentials like soap, clothing, spun wool, and candles were often produced on premises rather than purchased or bartered. Animals were raised for meat and milk, fruits and vegetables were grown and preserved in-home, cheese and butter was hand crafted. Those less likely to produce these goods at home often resided in towns and cities, but since the urban population in pre-revolutionary America was rather small, this manner of traditional self-sufficiency was typical for many.<sup>93</sup>

Even among the small privileged population that relied on a team of servants and cooks for meals and household maintenance, the mistress of the house still managed its daily activities, as the staff orchestrated and carried out the multiplicity of tasks to keep a household and its guests comfortably fed. The comparatively miniscule elite class that existed in pre-revolutionary America meant that evolving culinary practices were less likely to emanate from high society and more prone to reflect the techniques of industrious homemakers.

The esteem that Americans possessed for the righteousness of the common man may have been a decisive factor in the formulation of a uniquely American cuisine, which began during the era of revolution. Initially, most colonial food-ways were an extension of British and, in some instances, French culinary traditions. Yet, as relations

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<sup>93</sup> “By 1770 the combined population of Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston was only about 60,000, less than three percent of the 1.5 million inhabitants in Anglo-America.” Emma Lapsansky, *Encyclopedia of American History: Colonization and Settlement, 1608 to 1760, Vol. II*, eds. Billy G. Smith and Gary B. Nash (New York: Facts-on-File Inc., 2003), 62.

with the mother country became increasingly strained and taxes on foodstuffs led to boycotts, the overall desire for independence spawned new practices in food preparation. America was able to distinguish itself from the Old World food-ways by embracing native ingredients and new cooking methods, practices that proved more practical and eventually more “American” than European styles. Originally published in 1796, the famed *American Cookery* has been called the “first American cookbook” because it utilized ingredients like beans, peas, and watermelon, and also has precise recipes for dishes like “a Nice Indian Pudding” made with corn meal (a.k.a. Indian meal), a truly New World staple.<sup>94</sup> Author Amelia Simmons included in her second edition recipes for Independence Cake and Federal Pan Cake, clear indications not only of the political climate of the time but also that cooks were embroiled in the social duty to emulate patriotism through food and nourishment.

In some more sparsely populated regions, this brand of self-reliance and independence persisted well into the twentieth-century. In a landscape that made large-scale farming very difficult, mountain families usually survived by its members participating in both wage labor and domestic labor. In Mary Anglin's study of Appalachian women, *Women, Power, and Dissent in the Hills of Carolina*, one resident of the North Carolina Mountains recalled how common it was for people to provide for their families with what was available on their land. Zona Watson explained, “Most everybody used to raise and produce most of what they ate and had on their land.”<sup>95</sup> Like many rural families in America during the early twentieth-century, Zona Watson’s family supplemented their modest income from mill work by utilizing the traditional farming

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<sup>94</sup> Simmons, *American Cookery*, xiv.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Mary K. Anglin *Women, Power, and Dissent in the Hills of Carolina* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2002), 88.

and gardening practices that had been passed down for generations. According to the author, “Zona always made a big garden, with...a host of vegetables that she canned for the winter. She would be outside tending her garden whenever weather permitted” and “in so doing continued the tradition of her mother.”<sup>96</sup>

Also common during these times was the selling and trading of goods produced in-home, a task usually taken on by the women of the household. Zona Watson recalled that her mother “had milk, butter, and patches of raspberries and she...walked to Monroe, to sell them [there]. All the time, back in the years when she went to the fair in Sadieville, she tried to sell everything, to have everything to take.”<sup>97</sup> Clearly, even the domestic duties taken on by these women extended far outside the home. Women of Appalachia were by no means solely responsible for tending the crops and livestock on a homestead, but were, more frequently than men, called upon to convert the materials of a working household into products for sale or consumption. Such activities gave mountain women a strong understanding not only of producing food and goods and managing the people who assisted with labor, but of commerce, trade, and local economies on which their livelihood depended. In essence, successfully running a household, regardless of size and wealth, was not unlike managing a business, having to take into consideration the many facets of expense, production, labor, and market economics.

In the historical cookbook *Food and Recipes of the Smokies*, author Rose Houk concludes that cooking in Appalachia during the early twentieth-century consisted of skills “a youngster learned through the tutoring of Granny or Mama, who passed along the wisdom of how to pluck a chicken, chop sauerkraut, sulphur apples, and bake a

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 82.

perfect biscuit.”<sup>98</sup> The book is comprised of recipes contributed by mountain women who often cooked for ten or twenty people using wood burning stoves and open flames. Such practices are echoed in the testimony of Zona Watson, a native to the Appalachian Mountains, who carried on her mother’s tradition of cooking a large Sunday dinner for extended family and friends. She explained, “I always tried to fix... a good Sunday dinner for them, if they didn’t have anything but potatoes and beans the rest of the week.”<sup>99</sup> Canning, curing, drying, slaughtering, gathering and boiling were tasks that kept women and sometimes men occupied all day. The quest to keep the family fed was an endless endeavor.<sup>100</sup>

### **“Food was Coming to a Higher Level:”<sup>101</sup>**

#### **Restaurant Development in America**

The history of culinary traditions and restaurants in America moves rather fluidly with other social and economic changes in the nineteenth and twentieth- centuries. The earliest well-known fine dining establishments were located in large metropolitan areas such as New York and Boston, restaurants like Delmonico’s and Locke-Ober, respectively. Such places were few in number, being some of the first independent dining

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<sup>98</sup> Rose Houk, *Food and Recipes of the Smokies* (Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association, 1996),10.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Anglin, *Women, Power, and Dissent in the Hills of Carolina*, 88.

<sup>100</sup> Kaye Carver Collins, Lacy Hunter, and Foxfire Students, eds., *Foxfire Eleven* (Anchor Books: New York, 1999). George P. Reynolds and His Students, eds., *Foxfire Ten* (Anchor Books: New York, 1993). See works listed here for more information on Appalachian culture, food-ways, and history.

<sup>101</sup> Jeff Causy, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 7, 2006.



places in nineteenth-century America. Most were attached to or housed within hotels so that patrons did not have to wander into the city to find food.

Even in the earliest years of growth in the restaurant-hospitality industry, work and occupation was commonly divided by sex. According to the 1910 census, just over 45% of “waiters” were female, but only 17% of “restaurant, café, and lunch-room keepers” were women, making restaurant management/ownership a predominately masculine trade.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, the “hotel keepers and managers” segment was another male-dominated profession, with 78% of positions occupied by men, while the lower ranking division of “boarding and lodging house keepers,” many of whom rented out space in their own homes for modest rewards, were 86% female. Occupational segregation in the food and hospitality industry dates back to its origins in the early twentieth-century, and the positions that touted greater prestige--and more money-- were usually held by men.

It was not just laborers in the infant restaurant industry that were separated by gender. Generally speaking, the comparatively small number of restaurants and taverns in business before the turn of the century were considered men’s domain, physical spaces outside the home where working men--according to class--could get a meal, consume libations, smoke and socialize. Certain locations permitted an escorted female to dine, but they were often segregated from the larger seating and lounging areas filled with robust political conversation and other public elements thought inappropriate for women.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Department of Commerce, *Reports of the Bureau of the Census: Population 10 Years of Age and Upward Engaged in Gainful Occupations, Census Year 1910, by Sex and Specified Occupations*, <http://www.census.gov>

<sup>103</sup> Richard Pillsbury, *No Foreign Food* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1998), 171-172. Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 185. See these works for further discussion of the limitations of restaurants in the early twentieth-century.

Single females found to be frequenting such establishments were generally assumed to be prostitutes, a reality that kept women in the profession well employed, and women not in the profession from wanting to be mistaken for their sexual counterparts. Not until the years between WWI and WWII, when women began entering the workforce in increasing numbers, did eating establishments begin to attract female customers as independent patrons.

The event that brought about the greatest change in the food and style of American restaurants during the twentieth-century was, at least according to journalist Julian Street of *The Saturday Evening Post*, Prohibition.<sup>104</sup> Although he concedes in this article from 1931 that the majority of Americans trace their heritage to the British Isles, French cooking created an imprint on American cookery, especially for those familiar with “the art of noble dining.”<sup>105</sup> “For the cooking of certain French dishes,” he says, “which are standard throughout the entire world, wines and liquors are essential, and the same is true of certain American dishes,” all of which could not be properly prepared absent the spirits.<sup>106</sup> Those French chefs who had been employed in America packed up and boarded ships toward home in herds, and those who remained in the United States were forced to adapt to changing American tastes. Perhaps most importantly though, profits from alcohol sales were--and still are--the backbone of fine dining financial returns. Bartenders and saloon keepers, both overwhelmingly male occupations according to the 1910 census of gainful occupations, lost out tremendously.<sup>107</sup> It was not until the

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<sup>104</sup> Julian Street. “What’s the Matter with Food?” *The Saturday Evening Post* (1931): 10.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>107</sup> Department of Commerce, *Reports of the Bureau of the Census: Population 10 Years of Age and Upward Engaged in Gainful Occupations, Census Year 1910, By Sex and Specified Occupations* <http://www.census.gov> Exact figures from the 1910 census conclude that 250 out of 101,234 bartenders in the U.S. were female, and that 1,491 out of 68, 215 saloon keepers were female.

end of Prohibition that American culinary art began to come into its own, when classically trained chefs were able to expand on the new concepts surrounding American cuisine and experiment with the elegance of fine cooking methods.

Especially in the large cities where upscale dining traditionally held sway, the remarkable increase in office and service jobs created a market for fast and inexpensive food, and many of the newly independent and employed were women. According to food historian Harvey Levenstein in *Revolution at the Table*, while Prohibition “helped destroy the higher echelon of the restaurant industry, it also helped spur a tremendous expansion in the levels below, particularly among those catering to the middle and lower-middle classes of both sexes.”<sup>108</sup> With the introduction of the diner, soda fountain, and luncheonette, Americans of all classes, races, and sexes could partake in meals outside of the home, prepared and served by people much like them. Middle-class women, now afforded an alternative to cooking and cleaning for themselves or for a family, and finally able to socialize un-chaperoned without stigma, became the target clientele of mid-scale dining establishments.<sup>109</sup>

Howard Johnson, who pioneered the franchised roadside restaurant chain, also hired only women to serve in his restaurants, successfully convincing customers that the food and the establishments were uniformly clean, comfortable, and conservative, in the “home-style” American sense.<sup>110</sup> Male waiters--and pretentious male chefs--reeked of the stuffy, aristocratic, French sensibility in restaurants, elements that became undesirable if not detestable to the average American, especially during the Depression. Marked by the

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<sup>108</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 185.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-52. See this work for more information on Howard Johnson, the history of restaurant food in America, and the feminization of restaurants.

desire for American “comfort food”--servings of a meat-potato-and vegetable that millions in the 1930s were lacking--the decorum and personality of successful restaurants of the Depression made many feel cradled in maternal care. Americans understood that the essence of home was a mother’s touch, and so consumers sought the softness and simplicity of home in family restaurants. It was in these restaurants that the connection between female nurturing and feeding time became most apparent in the public restaurant scene. Reflecting the desire for “simplicity, order, and a sunny approach” in the home, the developing American obsession with food cleanliness made gleaming utensils and chrome countertops essential to diners.<sup>111</sup> This paved the way for standardization and chain restaurants, meanwhile firmly cementing what would become known as all-American food. Rich sauces, one of the trademarks of French *haute cuisine*, were believed by many Americans to be used to “mask inferior ingredients.” Thus simplicity in food became the hallmark of the mid-twentieth-century American diet.<sup>112</sup>

By the 1920s, cooking schools had already begun to take shape and outline the future of gender division in professional kitchens. Some of these cooking schools in the United States were not what we would recognize as any training ground for the restaurant chef; they were institutions created for--and run by--female domestics interested in gaining a thorough knowledge of cooking and housewifery. These students faced a future as successful middle-class housewives or trained domestic cooks in the home of an employer. Other schools, such as Le Cordon Bleu (1869) and Boston Cooking School (1884), were the precursors to modern culinary institutions, and were not intended to

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<sup>111</sup> De Knight, *A Date with a Dish*, 6.

<sup>112</sup> Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 46.

train young women for cooking in restaurants.<sup>113</sup> The student body was all male. Already the line had been clearly drawn; women were channeled into domestic cooking, whether or not they earned a wage.

Ironically, the most well-known culinary school in the country today was founded by two women--Frances Roth and Katherine Angell--whose sex would have prevented them from being enrolled in their own school until 24 years after they established it. The New Haven Restaurant Institute--renamed the Culinary Institute of America in 1951--opened its doors in 1946 to returning soldiers looking for an education in professional cookery, and remained an all-male domain until 1970 when the first female was admitted on a full-time basis.<sup>114</sup> Although formal legislation did not completely prevent women from cooking in professional kitchens, women were even less likely to gain respect and authority in the restaurant kitchen because technical training was prohibitive. Professionalism in restaurant cooking was a male prerogative, in both formal education and occupational reality, making a woman's entrance into the field that much more difficult.

Food historian Michael Symons notes the gender difference between the "high culture" of culinary artistry and the "low culture" of domestic cooking.<sup>115</sup> He concludes that "high culture (usually male) claims importance, greatness, transcendence, originality. It disguises its material dependence and disowns its humble beginnings," explaining why throughout history it is "traditionally the women who do the cooking and men the

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<sup>113</sup> Cooper, "A Woman's Place is in the Kitchen," 20-21.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 20-21. "Our History," *Culinary Institute of America*, <http://www.ciachef.edu/> See these items for more information on early cooking schools, the CIA, and student enrollment.

<sup>115</sup> Symons, *A History of Cooks and Cooking*, 26.

talking.”<sup>116</sup> Masculine high culture infected and inflated food and cooking to a point socially unreachable for women, simply because they performed the routine, redundant, prosaic cycle of cooking every day, out of necessity. In a sense, Symons’s statement reaches to the very core of this study, grappling with the confinement of women to social anonymity and economic inferiority. Expected to carry out all of the daily drudgery of cooking and cleaning, women were excluded from “high culture” cooking and the refinements of fine foods outside the home.

Once the restaurant industry had shown promise as a profitable and respectable business, as it did starting in the 1920s, the act of cooking was split by professionalism. The more specialized and up-scale a restaurant and its cuisine were, the less likely a woman would be found in the kitchen. Conversely, the less skill needed in a culinary profession, such as cafeteria and fast food workers, the more common women were. The division of high versus low culinary culture not only built a wall between domestic and professional cooking, but also created barriers within the culinary field.

### **“I Really had to Fight and Claw:”<sup>117</sup>**

#### **Gendered Work and Protective Legislation**

The protective legislation that took form during the late nineteenth-century aimed to limit the hours and occupations that women in the workforce could engage in based

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>117</sup> Patty Strickland, head chef of Linville Ridge Country Club. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 12, 2006.

largely on the popularly held belief in female frailty and delicate sensibility.<sup>118</sup>

Beginning in the 1870s, there was a proliferation of activism that demanded government issued controls on the work hours and types of labor that were appropriate for women and children. In the years leading up to protective legislation, *no* workers had been successful at attaining legal protection from dangerous working conditions, low pay and long hours. Like the majority of the paid workforce, most female workers of this age were proponents of laws that promised a limitation on working hours. Legislators, activists, and workers alike endorsed the notion that women were responsible for national health as wives and mothers, care-givers and nurturers, moral pillars and social compasses before they were responsible as wage workers and paid laborers. As a result, particular kinds of work and even entire industries that might have been dismissive of women workers before were made legally inaccessible in the hope of preserving their nurturing capabilities, thus ensuring moral stability in society.

Some state laws were merely a concession to the temperament of the time and did little to assuage the burdens of long hours for female workers. A limit of an eleven hour work day, six days a week in North Carolina, for example, was hardly a relief from long hours.<sup>119</sup> Massachusetts, however, passed a law in 1867--later amended in 1902—that became the model for other state’s legislation.<sup>120</sup> It clearly designates women as a separate class of worker from men, and aligns female workers with workers under the age of eighteen in legal terms. It states that:

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<sup>118</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 180-214.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 188.

<sup>120</sup> Library of Congress, *American Memory: American Women’s History*, <http://memory.loc.gov/> The revised laws of the commonwealth of Massachusetts, Vol. 1, chap. 106. (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., State Printers, 1902), 919-921, section 24.

No child under the age of eighteen years of age and no woman shall be employed in laboring in a manufacturing or mechanical establishment more than ten hours in any one day...unless a different apportionment of the hours of labor is made for the sole purpose of making a shorter day's work for one day of the week; and in no case shall the hours of labor exceed fifty-eight in a week.<sup>121</sup>

Although protection from overworking hardly seems effective with a paltry limit of fifty-eight hours a week, the surge of legislation cast the die in favor of special treatment of working women. Other laws, such as one passed in California in 1881, denied women the right to work in establishments that sold alcoholic beverages. This law was swiftly repealed by the California Supreme Court, but it created a precedent in the United States for law to intervene in the hospitality industry in order to protect women's innocence.<sup>122</sup>

But even if public sentiment brought about laws to protect female workers, their presence in textile and other industries was prevalent enough to warrant the creation of unions and educational instruction specifically for women as early as 1915. Often orchestrated by union leaders, summer school classes were offered to women workers not only to teach them basic academics but also to inform them of their civil liberties as laborers. Labor unions recognized in women the potential for greater membership and activism, and female laborers responded with zeal.<sup>123</sup> Women in North Carolina's textile industry were some of the more fervent female strikers in the South during the 1920s and 1930s, influential enough to inspire similar activism in other areas of the South.

According to Alice Kessler-Harris in *Out to Work*, the 1929 strikes that took place in the Henderson, North Carolina mills "demonstrated once again women's capacity to organize

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 185.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 247.



and sustain struggle; for it was women who bore the brunt of picketing and of family survival.”<sup>124</sup>

Yet at times labor unions were no less sexist and patriarchal than the companies they battled with on behalf of workers. Even with some union representation, female workers in Appalachia and elsewhere faced an uphill battle against lower pay, downsizing, and occupational ceilings that halted mobility and established women’s inferior status.

Consistent throughout the nation was the call for women to contribute to the work force during the war years. Newspapers routinely requested “girls,” sometimes “women” for office work, domestic service, mill work, and jobs “where every hour that you work is an hour that helps with the war.”<sup>125</sup> World War II did much to unite women across the country and bring them into the working world for a good cause, but with the return of soldiers came a re-emergence of American traditionalism, the ideal of domesticated women and working men. Rosie the Riveter was only meant to be so until her husband returned, when duty would call her back to her home. The end of the war by no means put an end to women in the workforce, but it did underscore the practice of utilizing women’s skills to satisfy the needs of the patriarchy, encouraging their various roles through media. Many women dutifully resumed a domestic existence, making room in the workplace for returning soldiers.

The difficulties early-twentieth-century women faced in the working world were no less daunting than deconstructing those walls that surrounded them in the domestic sphere. Truthfully, acknowledging power inequities in the home may have been much

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 247.

<sup>125</sup> Wanted Ads, *Watauga Democrat*, March 16, 1944.

more challenging than facing those in the professional world, if for no other reason than that women as a group were only just beginning to be full time wage workers, but they had been employed domestically--in their own and/or other homes--for literally hundreds of years. Perhaps gender roles seemed more natural within the home and possibly more flexible as well. Yet without question, working women were far from passive and proved to be genuinely committed to resisting treatment they knew was unjust, even if the dominant paradigm was more immovable than they might have imagined.

**“Go Twenty Miles in Any Direction  
and You’d Find a Whole Different World:”<sup>126</sup>**

**Tourism in Appalachia and the Development of Fine Dining**

Although upscale dining was not pervasive in the High Country until the second half of the twentieth-century, there were numerous smaller operations earlier in the century that helped establish eating out as an option for local residents. Government census data and local news sources shed light on patterns of economic development. Relative to the state of North Carolina, Avery and Watauga counties were slow to develop the restaurant industry, but not exceptionally so. In 1940, 1.1% of the population of the state in the labor force was employed at eating and drinking places, whereas .8% of

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<sup>126</sup> Mark Rosse, owner/chef of Louisiana Purchase, Banner Elk, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 19, 2006.

Watauga County worked for the industry, and only .5% of Avery County.<sup>127</sup> Many of these establishments were small diners, drug stores and cafés that provided fast, inexpensive meals to locals. Advertisements in the local newspapers indicated there was need of workers for such places. The Princess Café of North Wilkesboro wanted “two cooks and two girl workers” in 1944, and other eating establishments advertised their business in the *Watauga Democrat*, such as the Boone Trail Café in Hickory, N.C. and the Daniel Boone Hotel in Knoxville, Tennessee.<sup>128</sup>

The more upscale segment of the hospitality and restaurant industry of Appalachia came with burgeoning tourism, enabled in large part by the increase in automobile traffic. Simply put, the automobile allowed families of the Eastern United States to travel independently, farther and more comfortably than ever before. Americans who partook of this newest form of familial quality time were mostly middle-class, almost exclusively white, and generally had some discretionary income.<sup>129</sup> The High Country of North Carolina, along with much of Appalachia, was a popular destination for weekenders and tourists due to its exquisite scenery and the sense of nostalgia for the old days it created for visitors.

Even though the enthusiasm exhibited by tourists was anything but blasé, their reception amongst locals was mixed at best. Mountain folk have historically had a distinctly isolationist paradigm and often resented the intrusion of outsiders, not to mention the real impacts to the environment resulting from overuse. The construction of roads, bridges, and parkways, and the designation of thousands of acres of land as state

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<sup>127</sup> Department of Commerce, *Reports of the Bureau of the Census: Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Characteristics of Persons in the Labor Force 14 Years and Over*, <http://www.census.gov>

<sup>128</sup> *Watauga Democrat*, April 6, 1944.

<sup>129</sup> Timothy Silver, *Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 177.

and national parks meant that the abundance of natural resources upon which Appalachian natives depended was drastically reduced.<sup>130</sup> Development led to increased taxes and cost of living, sometimes pricing out natives who were forced to confront the possibility of losing “local control over a community’s resources and future.”<sup>131</sup> Those who visited the largely rural region were by and large a more urban, if not outright cosmopolitan bunch, who, like all tourists, only had a faint grasp of the lifestyle and socio-cultural dynamics of the local populace. The hospitality and entertainment industry that emerged in the mountains of North Carolina reflected and perpetuated these misconceptions, as restaurants and inns were constructed in non-native architectural styles, and local Cherokee dressed in the elaborate war attire of the Plains Indians to satisfy the fantasy of the urban imagination. “The result,” according to Appalachian historian John Alexander Williams, “was a quaintly flattering view of ‘pioneer life’ and its hardships.”<sup>132</sup>

Despite the misgivings that local Appalachians had concerning the new look of the region, many welcomed the economic stimulation that came with tourism. An area of the nation known as much for poverty in the early-twentieth-century as for scenic majesty, the people of the North Carolina mountains took advantage of the expendable income of visitors. Stores and shops sold local wares to enchanted tourists. Inns and restaurants were built with seasonal patrons in mind, often offering a degree of elegance and refinement generally reserved for city dwellers. The Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina, for example, famously attracted notable writers and artists such as F.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 177-212. See work listed here for more information on the environmental effects of tourism in North Carolina.

<sup>131</sup> John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 391.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 299.

Scott Fitzgerald and George Gershwin during its heyday in the nineteen twenties and thirties, not to mention visits from nearly all of the presidents of the twentieth-century.<sup>133</sup> Likewise, the Carson House (now the Inn on Church Street) of Hendersonville, North Carolina opened its doors to the tourist boom in 1921, as did many other establishments in the town.<sup>134</sup> Despite the Depression, by the middle of the century tourism was a dominating, multibillion-dollar force amongst the industries of North Carolina.<sup>135</sup>

As more people were drawn to the area for longer stretches of time--ultimately creating a huge population of summer homers, retirees, and neo-natives--the landscape of many Appalachian towns was permanently altered. There existed a divide in the experience of permanent residents of Appalachia and those who were transient. Businesses existed to sustain the native population, but others were clearly not meant to encourage the patronage of local customers even though locals comprised most of the workforce. Many establishments were geared largely toward satisfying the needs of an impermanent population, and the upscale dining segment fits into that category.

Fine dining entered into the High Country through tourism and, like other luxury services, would not have thrived without it. The tourism industry of the region continued to prosper throughout the twentieth-century, and continues to do well in the twenty-first. In 2002, the combined accommodation and foodservice sales for Avery and Watauga counties exceeded \$128 million, over 11% of the state's total sales for the year in that industry segment.<sup>136</sup> There were seventy-eight full-service restaurants in Watauga County

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<sup>133</sup>“History,” *The Grove Park Inn Resort and Spa*, [www.grovesparkinn.com/Leisure/TheResort/History/](http://www.grovesparkinn.com/Leisure/TheResort/History/)

<sup>134</sup>“History,” *The Inn on Church Street*, <http://www.innonchurch.com/>

<sup>135</sup>Silver, *Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains*, 212.

<sup>136</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *State and County QuickFacts*, Watauga and Avery Counties, North Carolina (Washington D.C., GPO, 2002). [www.quickfacts.census.gov](http://www.quickfacts.census.gov).

alone in 2006, and those establishments employed over seventeen hundred residents.<sup>137</sup>

The restaurant business of the region today is a powerful presence in the local economy and helps to define the local culture.

The following segment uses first person accounts from individuals well versed in the world of professional upscale cooking, i.e. chefs of the High Country. The accounts convey the diverse yet surprisingly universal experiences of the chefs' domestic upbringing with food, and reveal how undeniably strong the social connection between gender and food really is. The interviewees hail from all over the country, testifying to the vigor of the fine dining industry in the High Country.

### **The Chefs Perspective:**

Professional cooks are difficult to pigeonhole. The restaurant industry in general is notorious for attracting a population of workers that do not fit neatly into the average workday lifestyle and schedule. It includes students, night-owls, and transients, as well as those who need a paycheck but are working toward a different goal. But the chefs interviewed for this work were selected based on a few criteria, so they do share some commonalities. First, they are individuals who were making a life-long career of their work cooking in the restaurant industry. They provide the perspectives of individuals who are serious about food and cooking. Professionally committed cooks seemed more likely to have thought deeply about the ways such elements have shaped their lives.

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<sup>137</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Selected Statistics from the 2007 Economic Census* (Washington D.C., GPO, 2007). [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov).

Secondly, these professional cooks worked in restaurants that were not chains or franchises. Chain restaurants are more uniform in function and form, creating a rigid and perhaps narrower view of cooking. Furthermore, cooks there might feel more concern over portraying the establishment and its management in a flattering light than providing an honest answer. All of the subjects were working at restaurants in Avery or Watauga counties at the time of the interviews.

The questions were devised to reveal several elements, the first simply being a timeline of the cook's life and what factors led to the choices each made to make cooking a career. In order to reveal the gendered nature of cooking in the family, some questions focused on food labor patterns in the home, such as "who did most of the cooking during your childhood?" and "what kinds of dishes were common?" Finally, there were questions designed to elicit a professional cook's perspective on the gender disparity in restaurant kitchens, and any and all thoughts as to why the disparity exists. In some cases, the answers were almost unanimous. In others, each answer was unique. Some surprising but perhaps typical stories and patterns may shed light on the curious dynamic between men and women in the kitchen. Clearly, these nine interviews are not enough to make a conclusive statement regarding gender and cooking, but they do support the arguments already presented herein.

With predictable regularity, the interview subjects generally pointed to their mothers as the primary cooks during their childhood years. Wendy Gordon's parents were the only exception. Gordon noted an "interesting role reversal" in her family because her father "had some health problems" so he was the primary cook in the

house.<sup>138</sup> Although several of the chefs alluded to a collective cooking effort in their childhood kitchen, it was mostly a collection of women--mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and sometimes children--doing the majority of the work. Chef Jeff Causy of The Best Cellar at Linville stated that in his youth “my mom had it in her mind that I was going to know how to cook... she was very adamant about me being able to take care of myself.”<sup>139</sup> Thus a parental desire to instill a high degree of self-sufficiency led to his youthful culinary education. “When she was cooking dinner,” Causy said, “she would always have me help out.”<sup>140</sup> As a result, Causy “paid attention in the kitchen, learned the basics,” and by the time he was in college, he “was always the one who ended up cooking dinner.”<sup>141</sup> Chef Patty Strickland of Linville Ridge Country Club cites simple necessity as the reason for her youthful introduction to cooking. Her father died when she was only eleven and she and her mother both started working. Both cooked for the younger children of the family. Strickland’s introduction to the kitchen was based in practicality, because her mother “would come home and cook and I would watch her, to learn and help out, and I would just throw stuff together.”<sup>142</sup> For Chef Mark Rosse of Louisiana Purchase, cooking was a fascination that came early in his life in upstate New York. He recalled gatherings with his large, multi-generational family as being “an event with thirty or forty people there, and a couple of my aunts would come in a day or two before hand and start cooking for the group, and I was the one who always liked hanging around

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<sup>138</sup> Wendy Gordon, chef at The Gamekeeper, Boone, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 21, 2006.

<sup>139</sup> Jeff Causy, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 7, 2006.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Patty Strickland, head chef of Linville Ridge Country Club, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 12, 2006.



and helping.”<sup>143</sup> Whatever the reason, there certainly existed opportunities for these chefs to get a domestic education in cooking as children, although Jeff Causy was the only male interviewed that described being encouraged to learn.

In Mark Rosse’s youth, however, gender division was unequivocally clear, and by choice he was “probably the only male in the kitchen.”<sup>144</sup> Reflecting the social conventions of the twentieth-century, these now professional cooks witnessed an essentially female dominated domestic kitchen in their youth. Even Wendy Gordon, whose father was the primary cook in her household, noted that her grandmother was the first truly inspirational cook in her life and understood that the gender division of labor in her home natal was reversed. Consistent with most Americans growing up in the twentieth-century, these chefs understood that cooking at home was typically a woman’s job and the home kitchen was women’s territory.

There certainly were noteworthy exceptions to the all-female home cooking prerogative. When initially asked “who did most of the cooking in your home as a youth,” without hesitation, eight out of nine answered “my mom.” But when asked if their fathers did any cooking at all, the light of recollection commonly moved over their faces. “Oh, yeah!” they would say, “he grilled out all the time” in the words of Jason Juall of Canyons in Blowing Rock, or “he always made Sunday morning breakfast” according to Jack Pepper of Peppers in Boone.<sup>145</sup> The “dad’s weekend breakfast ritual” recurred amongst the cooks interviewed, as did the “grill-out.”

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<sup>143</sup> Mark Rosse, chef/owner of Louisiana Purchase, Banner Elk, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 19, 2006.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18, 2006. Jack Pepper, owner of Pepper’s, Boone, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 15, 2006.

The weekend cooking rituals that men commonly participated in likely added a wholesome sense of occasion to the perpetual process of women's work in the kitchen. If dad was cooking, the family was probably in full attendance and attention. Sunday morning, perhaps before church (and adding an element of sacredness to the event), was a great time to ensure an attentive audience. As with most American families, the interview subjects depicted the paternal activity of grilling out as a hobby, something that happened on occasion. The fact that the event was made special because of its relative rarity underscores the centrality of women as the family feeders. Yet it also accentuates the sense of novelty and eventfulness associated with the man of the house doing his part to prepare meals for the family.

Out of doors, playing with fire and meat, using large knives and utensils, wearing "professional" chef's attire, American men were able to visibly distinguish themselves as cooks of the masculine kind. They prepared hearty foods, "man dishes" as Ted Trueblood of *Field and Stream* magazine called them in 1961, after surmising that "there are some things women can't cook."<sup>146</sup> This attitude manifested itself in the backyard rituals of American families, and whether they recognized it or not, the now professional cooks and chefs interviewed here were being socially educated to take a place in the fabric of domestic culinary culture.

Male dominated outdoor cooking was a staple of the twentieth-century middle-class family experience, and remains so today. The male interview subjects in particular recalled learning to grill from their fathers and grandfathers. Jason Juall described having a "strange attraction" to cooking over an open flame; as a result he "started grilling right

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<sup>146</sup> Quoted in Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 30.

away” because his father “grilled out all the time.”<sup>147</sup> Juall even recalled having “a wooden Coca Cola box that I would stand on [at the grill] and I’ve been infatuated with it ever since.”<sup>148</sup> Chef Luke Fussell attributed knowledge of grilling meat, particularly “roasting and smoking” to his step-father, who was “definitely the grill man.”<sup>149</sup> All of the interview subjects recalled that their fathers did cook in some form or another, but not in every case did they do it well, as many male-oriented cooking manuals of the twentieth-century might have us believe. Renee Bowman lovingly regaled with a story of her father on the grill:

Friday night was steak night, and he would light the grill by pouring gasoline, not lighter fluid, not kerosene, but gasoline on the charcoal, and he would stand back and throw a match, and we would have our own little Hiroshima. Then it would settle down, and when it was just at the point when the flames were barely licking it, he would put them on, and it was almost the same thing every week. He’d put the steaks on the grill and then start yelling for mom, “Doris! Doris! Bring me some water!” because he put it on too early, and he’d bring in these big, charcoal rib eye flat steaks. And no kidding, until I moved away from home, I thought that was the way people did it.<sup>150</sup>

Just as in the rest of twentieth-century American families, the degree of strictness in gendered cooking patterns varied considerably. A few interviewees noted that their fathers enjoyed cooking and did a fair amount of it. Luke Fussell recalled “both of my fathers’ [father and step-father] were big cooks,” and Jason Juall believed that his father “loved to cook as much as anybody,” but his army work kept him away for long stretches of time.<sup>151</sup> Others, Jeff Causy for example, said that the gender division of labor in his

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<sup>147</sup> Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18, 2006.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Luke Fussell, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, February 23, 2006.

<sup>150</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>151</sup> Luke Fussell, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, February 23, 2006. Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18, 2006.

house was “very demarcated” and “even to this day, if my mom is going out of town, she’ll go ahead and cook for however many nights she’s gonna be gone so he can just come home and pop it in the microwave.”<sup>152</sup> Chef Renee Bowman worried about portraying her father in a negative light, but confessed that he was “definitely the male” and despite the fact that she worked a full time job, believed that his wife “should cook, she should clean up, and he shouldn’t have to do any of that.”<sup>153</sup> One habit in particular stood out in Bowman’s mind as evidence of her father’s attitude: “He’d pick up his tea and shake it, shake the ice and that meant that he wanted more. And she’d get up and get it.”<sup>154</sup> Although the stringency employed in interpreting social norms in cooking rituals differed, the fact that there was a clear division is hard to dispute.

With a few exceptions, most chefs initially indicated that their families, or particular family members, were the first inspiring cooks in their lives. Patty Strickland first responded that a chef by whom she was trained was the most inspirational. Renee Bowman said that the industry itself, specifically her culinary school experience, was responsible for creating her interest. Although both women named their mothers as the household cooks, their feelings about it remained in the realm of the pragmatic as opposed to the artistic. The others, however, were confident about the impact that their family had on their culinary curiosity. Female elders, specifically mothers and grandmothers, were the most commonly isolated as inspirational cooks. When asked who first got her interested in cooking, Chef Wendy Gordon of the Gamekeeper in Boone

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<sup>152</sup> Jeff Causy, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 7, 2006.

<sup>153</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

answered enthusiastically, “oh, my Grandma. She kicked ass!”<sup>155</sup> Gordon was not alone in drawing culinary stimulation from her grandparents.

Chef Jeff Causy of the Best Cellar at Linville believed that “the appreciation for food probably came more from meals out at my grandparents’ house, because they were both great cooks...very southern, I gained a great appreciation from that.”<sup>156</sup> Likewise, Jason Juall of Canyons in Blowing Rock said of cooking, “my earliest experience was my parents, my grandmother...I’ve spent more time in the last five years trying to recreate my grandmothers dishes, and my moms.”<sup>157</sup> Even Renee Bowman, who hesitated to call any family member an “inspirational cook,” said “my grandmother liked to cook, and she was good at it,” while Bowman’s own mother did not share such affection for the task.<sup>158</sup> Historically speaking, it is not surprising that many of today’s chefs might have drawn just as much insight into cookery from their grandmothers as from their mothers, if not more. The changes that occurred in cooking and eating habits in the mid-twentieth-century brought greater use of canned and prepared foods, items that were rare and expensive for the previous generation. The fresh, seasonal, and local foods that are ever popular with professional cooks in the twenty-first century were simply the standard in their grandmothers’ kitchens, but were not always the most desirable for their mothers. The ability to buy canned goods was a mark of social status, and it remained a privilege of the middle and upper classes until the second half of the twentieth-century.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Wendy Gordon, chef at The Gamekeeper, Boone, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 21, 2006.

<sup>156</sup> Jeff Causy, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 7, 2006.

<sup>157</sup> Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18, 2006.

<sup>158</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>159</sup> Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 27.

Still, many of the professional cooks credit their mothers with opening their eyes to the colorful world of cooking. Jack Pepper said that his mother “was raised in the Midwest, but she has some influences from Cuba from her mother-in-law...we did a lot of different things, a very eclectic mix of food.”<sup>160</sup> Luke Fussell likewise recognized the influence that his mother, a “southern style cook,” and his step-mother, who was “a little more experimental,” had on his interest, knowledge and abilities in the kitchen.<sup>161</sup> “My first vinaigrette came from my stepmom,” he confessed.<sup>162</sup> Clearly, the understanding these chefs gained from their maternal heritage provided a solid framework for a career in cooking. But the impact that female family members had on these chefs’ desire to cook is not based solely on the tasty food they prepared, but on the sentiments attached to food and home cooking traditions.

Several of the interviewees described the world of their youth as completely saturated with the rituals of cooking. It makes sense that Wendy Gordon ended up a chef and married to a chef with whom she co-owns and operates the upscale but down home restaurant, The Gamekeeper, which specializes in organic game and local, seasonal produce. Upon reflection, she acknowledged that “it’s a little scary, and I’m sure a lot of people from the South will say this. . .it’s like my family revolves around food and eating.”<sup>163</sup> Her predilection for quality ingredients likely comes from a family tradition that meant “we all had gardens, so we had really fresh stuff. If you wanted collard greens,

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<sup>160</sup> Jack Pepper, owner of Pepper’s, Boone, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 15, 2006.

<sup>161</sup> Luke Fussell, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, February 23, 2006.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Wendy Gordon, Chef at The Gamekeeper, Boone, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 21, 2006.

you'd go out to the garden and pick them, and if you had bacon it was probably from a pig somebody raised themselves.”<sup>164</sup>

The prototypical image of a housewife slaving away to feed family members who are all otherwise occupied is not present in this scenario. Though gender division was certainly present, raising, producing and cooking food was a family affair. For Gordon, the responsibility of feeding the family was not laid in one person's lap, “it consumed every waking moment with my family.”<sup>165</sup> Similar stories come from Chef Will Burrell of Meadowbrook Inn in Blowing Rock, whose father had “a gentleman's farm of eighty acres” in South Dakota, but to feed the family he “raised three acres of garden by hand, the old way.”<sup>166</sup> Burrell took for granted the luxuries of locally raised food and meat. In his world “every day once harvest started happening our backyard was a farmers market.”<sup>167</sup> The roles for his mother and father were certainly different, but both were heavily involved in the processes of feeding the family. Despite the rarity of this type of upbringing by the 1970s, it still conformed to typical divisions of labor in the home, but certainly provided a strong foundation for understanding the fundamentals of food production and the power of cooking traditions. Jason Juall of Canyons in Blowing Rock clearly understood the irreversible impact that his upbringing had on his culinary career. A native of Fayetteville, North Carolina, he said of his family, “they helped me to realize that it (cooking) is part of the oldest tradition in the world.”<sup>168</sup> Juall seemed grateful for the privilege of his young culinary education. Like Wendy Gordon, he believed that

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Will Burrell, head chef of Meadowbrook Inn, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 20, 2006.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18, 2006.

regionalism was a large part of his experience. “I had deep southern parents and relatives,” he said, “that would spend all day cooking.”<sup>169</sup>

Most of the chefs expressed in some manner a desire to make people happy through their food, whether by introducing them to something new and wonderful, or reminding them of childhood suppers. Like many of the other professional cooks, Jason Juall sought to recreate the essence of food’s ability to comfort and nurture, to feed the soul as well as feed the body. Whether conjuring “the memory of grandma’s country style green beans” or “chang[ing] things for people in an ideological way” through the introduction of “new ingredients and maybe even the same old ingredients looked at a new way,” Juall enjoyed providing positive food experiences for others.<sup>170</sup>

Likewise, Renee Bowman’s “greatest pleasure is finding someone who appreciates food and I can give them the first taste and they honestly say ‘that’s incredible’.” In his analysis of professional kitchens and cooks, sociologist Gary Alan Fine also found that amongst many of the cooks he interviewed, “their prime satisfaction derived from pleasing customers.”<sup>171</sup> The personal sense of fulfillment for creating dishes, mastering technique, and knowing that others are both nourished and delighted as a result of one’s work is certainly a long-standing treasure of any cook’s tenure. Chef Patty Strickland of Linville Ridge recognized the gift of food as both a tonic and an artistic outlet. “I can work out a lot of things that are going on in my life,” she said, “and express it through food.”<sup>172</sup> Strickland knew that some foods have the power to “ease pain and restore good memories” and both she and the consumer are comforted because

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Fine, *Kitchens*, 43.

<sup>172</sup> Patty Strickland, head chef of Linville Ridge Country Club, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 12, 2006.



of it.<sup>173</sup> She did not take for granted the freedom she enjoyed in her career, because “as a chef you get to decide what you want to create based on what you are feeling. In that way I think of it as an art.”<sup>174</sup>

The cultural significance of food-ways is not lost on professional cooks. Their livelihood and creative canvas rests on the public’s need for food, but also on their desire for a sense of family and community, even if it is removed from the home. Renee Bowman recognized that it “is something that people crave a lot, that sense of community and to be able to sit with people and talk and share things, and food is a natural bridge for that activity.”<sup>175</sup> Although restaurants perhaps lack the personal touch of home cooked family meals, they still have the ability to bring people together around food, and according to Jason Juall, “that’s where family happens, is around the dinner table or the breakfast table.”<sup>176</sup>

Still, some interviewees were chagrined over the modern culture’s dismissal of familial nurturing through quality food at shared meals. Patty Strickland believed an overall decline in ethics has resulted in the loss of “the family values of dinner at home” as well as a “lack of pride in the work” of professional cooking.<sup>177</sup> In Strickland’s view, both a regression of family time and quality food are symptomatic of larger social problems. Chef Luke Fussell echoed this concern: “the art of home cooking is getting lost. When I was growing up, everyone in the family learned to cook. . .we ate together every night. . .and you weren’t supposed to miss meals. I think that is getting lost because

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Renee Bowman, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>176</sup> Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18, 2006.

<sup>177</sup> Patty Strickland, head chef of Linville Ridge Country Club, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 12, 2006.

it's so easy to just go out and grab something.”<sup>178</sup> Chef Will Burrell of Meadowbrook Inn also expressed frustration with over-convenienced modern culture and the resulting loss of homage to quality food: “People don't realize that the preservatives in the food that they're eating aren't preserving them.”<sup>179</sup> Renee Bowman also conveyed annoyance with “people who just want to eat. . .who go in and get something and keep moving.”<sup>180</sup> “That drives me crazy,” she said.<sup>181</sup> Interestingly, none of the chefs seemed to notice the irony in disparaging others for going out to eat. Without the desire for convenience, fewer of them would have jobs. True, most of these chefs do indeed pride themselves on providing from-scratch, high quality, fresh ingredients that are rare in chain and certainly fast-food establishments, but they still are providing a service that allows customers to *not* cook for themselves. Still, the overall sentiment relays the genuine sense of loss that they feel about the degeneration of domestic cooking.

Imbedded in the chefs' criticisms of convenience foods and fast food establishments is a desire to distance themselves from such 'easy' cooking and reiterate their status as talented producers. Sociologist Gary Alan Fine determined that “cooks dislike convenience foods, which diminish their role in the kitchen, transforming them from skilled craftsmen to manual laborers- culinary de-skilling.”<sup>182</sup> Interestingly, the intrinsic value that restaurant professionals place on their skill and desire to nurture those who consume their product aligns them with the home cook more than with the

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<sup>178</sup> Luke Fussell, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, February 23, 2006.

<sup>179</sup> Will Burrell, head chef of Meadowbrook Inn, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 20, 2006.

<sup>180</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Fine, *Kitchens*, 28.

convenience food industry cook. Although in the world of business and economics both McDonalds and The French Laundry fit into the same large category of 'restaurant,' the committed chef would be depleted of self-worth if she were grouped with a fast food fry cook. Even though professional cooks essentially usurped much of the power and admiration that was once reserved for the hard-working home cook, chefs are content to align themselves with proud domestics more so than with their own industry workers, so long as they are not heavily associated with convenience foods. During the early years of professional cooking in America, restaurant cooks desired to distance themselves from the traits of domesticity. Now, in order to maintain culinary superiority, chefs want the innate understanding of nutrition and healthfulness evoked by images of home cooking.

It speaks to the nature of the industry that eight out of nine interview subjects did not start working in restaurant kitchens with the intention of making it a career. According to the National Restaurant Association, "cook was the most common occupation during both the school year and the following summer for male students who were age 17 or age 18 at the start of the 2000-2001 school year."<sup>183</sup> Such a statement, viewed in conjunction with the interviews, reveals some interesting probabilities: young men frequently choose to cook in restaurants early in their working life, and do not see it as a long term career choice. It should also be noted that in the same study "cook" was never named as an occupation for the same age group of young women, suggesting that if women do enter the field, they do so with the disadvantage of lacking industry experience. Additionally, those who continued with that occupation likely did so despite starting with only the intention to make money. "I had no anticipation that I would be

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<sup>183</sup> National Restaurant Association, *State of the Restaurant Industry Workforce: An Overview*, [www.restaurant.org](http://www.restaurant.org)

doing it the rest of my life,” said Patty Strickland of working in restaurants, but she made it clear “I don’t have any regrets about that.”<sup>184</sup> Hers is a common story in that respect. Jason Juall said: “I spent my Pell grant on a motorcycle, so I had to start working for a living and I’ve been in the kitchen ever since.”<sup>185</sup> Juall admitted that at some point his “focus completely changed. . .but it was one of the greatest decisions of my life. . .one of the toughest, too.”<sup>186</sup> According to Luke Fussell, working in restaurants “was just a way to make money and pay for school. Then I got done with college and just kept working in restaurants. I couldn’t seem to get away from them.”<sup>187</sup> For the most part, these professionals would not have guessed it is where they would end up, but they nevertheless have very few misgivings about their path.

The variety of would-be career paths of the chefs and cooks interviewed is fairly impressive. All of the interviewees had some form of higher education, culinary school or otherwise. In addition to being a graduate of culinary school in Asheville, Renee Bowman has a Master’s degree in History and at the time of her interview was teaching at Caldwell Community College as well as cooking part time at Knights on Main in Blowing Rock. Will Burrell was a professional musician before entering the restaurant business, Patty Strickland started college as a special education major, Jack Pepper has a degree in business administration, and Jason Juall graduated from Appalachian State University with a degree in sociology. Luke Fussell studied criminal justice, and Jeff Causy attended college at Eastern Carolina University, but left in order to start culinary

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<sup>184</sup> Patty Strickland, head chef of Linville Ridge Country Club, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 12, 2006.

<sup>185</sup> Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18, 2006.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Luke Fussell, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, February 23, 2006.

school. Causy was the only subject who started working in restaurants with the intention of making a career out of it, and at the age of twenty-four was a late bloomer in terms of restaurant work.

Despite all these specialties, these individuals ultimately chose restaurant kitchens as their professional homes. So what in the minds of these seasoned career cooks makes a chef? The answer to that is not always simple, but it starts with determining what kind of chef is being defined. The easiest (but certainly unofficial) way to summarize the chef categories are cooking chefs and non-cooking chefs. A non-cooking chef is any person who carries that title but spends little or no time actually on the line, preparing and cooking food. These chefs are usually executive chefs that used to cook, but have graduated to management. Cooking chefs are those chefs who work some station for at least part a shift, and can comfortably work any station if necessary. For the most part, the interview subjects focused on describing what makes a good *cooking* chef, which most of them are.

Very often, they believed that there are several different facets, different roles even, that must be performed well by a single individual to make a successful chef. Surprisingly, no one really said outright that being a good cook was the most important feature, although their answers suggest that a certain degree of talent is essential. Jason Juall had no illusions about the difficulty of earning chef status. He said, "I'm trying to be one, being flexible, being stern, being a friend and boss. It's a million things."<sup>188</sup> Juall's attention is still on cooking, and in his mind "the title 'chef' I think of as the person in the kitchen who cooks the least, maybe that's why I've been avoiding it for so long."<sup>189</sup> But

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<sup>188</sup> Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18,2006.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

even cooking chefs recognize the balancing act that a good chef must master. Will Burrell estimated that “it’s thirty percent cooking, thirty percent psychologist, and the rest of it’s a combination of air traffic controller and. . .” He trailed off, but finished by simply saying, “It is a very intense business.”<sup>190</sup> Certainly, many of the subjects alluded to the need for a true chef to have that *je ne sais quoi*, an indefinable ability to create and understand. Mark Rosse believed that “you can be a cook, but to be a chef is something that has to be intuitive, you have to draw from somewhere inside so that it makes sense.”<sup>191</sup> Rosse acknowledged that the “passion thing. . .has been overplayed a little bit,” but confessed that he did believe passion was a necessary element in devoting one’s life to cooking in a restaurant.<sup>192</sup> Patty Strickland concurred, saying “you gotta have passion to cook, to be able to go to the fridge and look at what you’ve got, and then just see what you can do with it.”<sup>193</sup>

Devotion, if not passion, must be prominent in the behavioral characteristics of a chef. Renee Bowman believed that she was not “one of those chefs that have a passion for it like some people do, but I do enjoy it.”<sup>194</sup> Discussing the difficulties of her work, Bowman remarked on how “intense” restaurant work can be, and felt as though cooking for large numbers of people “can almost be a letdown.”<sup>195</sup> She felt it difficult at times to endure the stress and strain of cooking “any big meal by yourself or just with a couple of friends. . .and you realize how much work you put into that just for somebody to

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<sup>190</sup> Will Burrell, head chef of Meadowbrook Inn, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 20, 2006.

<sup>191</sup> Mark Rosse, owner/chef of Louisiana Purchase, Banner Elk, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 19, 2006.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Patty Strickland, head chef of Linville Ridge Country Club, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 12, 2006.

<sup>194</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

consume it for about forty-five minutes; and you worked for days.”<sup>196</sup> Bowman believes that, in this respect, cooking at home and cooking in a restaurant were very similar. Both require hours of preparation, a keen sense of timing, and a great amount of hard physical labor for a brief, though perhaps shining, moment of reward. Such a reward, though, was enough to keep chefs cooking in restaurants for many years. The immediacy of gratification and praise for producing delicious food was named by several chefs as one of the more substantial rewards of their career.

There certainly is a special kind of artistry involved in creating new and inventive dishes on a daily basis, especially without the guidance of recipes, which only one chef said was used in his restaurant. When asked if he used recipes, Will Burrell of the Meadowbrook Inn in Blowing Rock replied, “no, I teach chemistry. Good food is like good music. . . It’s very balanced. You’ve got base, mid-range, and treble. Treble is the acid, the base is the alkaline or salt.”<sup>197</sup> Most of the chefs seemed to thrive on the open-ended creativity that comes with non-conformity. Jason Juall said he did not follow recipes, but he saw them “as guidelines.”<sup>198</sup> Likewise, Wendy Gordon confessed that she commonly will “modify everything, or sometimes I will take several recipes and combine them. Sometimes it’s not good, but sometimes it’s really good.”<sup>199</sup>

Gary Alan Fine found the same to be true of the chefs he interviewed in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. Fine discovered that “although cooks have recipes, they ignore them, interpret them, and move beyond them to creative autonomy. Recipes are suggestions,

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Will Burrell, head chef of Meadowbrook Inn, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 20, 2006.

<sup>198</sup> Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18, 2006.

<sup>199</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

not orders, although many home cooks follow them.”<sup>200</sup> To many professionals, the ability to improvise is the mark of a true chef. In fact, many male geared cooking manuals of the twentieth-century suggested that women were by nature inferior cooks because they lacked the talent of improvisation. According to Jack Dempsey writing in the 1930s, “generally speaking, men are more original and individual cooks than women. They have a knack for putting unexpected upper-cuts in ordinary dishes and making them really knock-out fare.”<sup>201</sup> Jack Pepper seemed to have similar feelings, at least about the one female chef who had worked for him: “I felt like she was too rigid, she couldn’t think of it on her own. She wasn’t really creative like a person who kind of falls into it.” Although Pepper did suggest that the woman’s stiffness could be attributed to her professional training, she was also the only female head chef he had ever hired in thirty years.

The belief that home cooks depend on recipes is based on a relatively recent trend in terms of cooking traditions. In an effort to modernize and officiate the private sphere of domesticity, women urged forward the ‘home economics’ movement around the turn of the twentieth-century, which encouraged women to use exact level measurements instead of the estimations. This was meant to mold domestic work into a scientific system and bring women’s world into the industrialized world, hence the term ‘domestic sciences.’<sup>202</sup>

Numerous other attributes were named in connection with being a “true” chef and having exceptional abilities related to cooking. Renee Bowman noticed throughout her

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<sup>200</sup> Fine, *Kitchens*, 24.

<sup>201</sup> Quoted in Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 31.

<sup>202</sup> Glenna Matthews, *Just a Housewife: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 145-171. See work listed here for more information on the home economics movement and scientific principles applied in home management.



years of experience “men really like chopping skills.”<sup>203</sup> She explained that “if you chop fast and furious and it looks good they get into that, and in their mind that is a true chef.”<sup>204</sup> Possessing such weapon wielding expertise signals dexterity and confidence, attributes that are also reminiscent of warrior traditions to which many men liken themselves. Another chef remarked on how restaurant kitchens seem to operate on antiquated notions of hyper-masculinity. “It’s like the Knights of the Round Table,” said Jason Juall on the subject, believing that “the male ego and insecurities” creates a boy’s club in the kitchen.<sup>205</sup> Jeff Causy used another masculine metaphor for restaurant kitchens: team sports. Causy said that between his years playing baseball and cooking he had “missed that kind of team camaraderie, the pressure to perform. . . .Service is like a game, everybody has to work together.”<sup>206</sup> These chefs certainly recognized the associations between work in restaurant kitchens and masculine pastimes but, in describing the culture and mood of cooking on the line, their observations showed startling unity.

Each and every one of the chefs interviewed agreed on one aspect of restaurant kitchens: to use an accurate but made up word, kitchens can be “testosteroni.” Not to be confused with “the San Francisco treat,” “testosteroni” must be a snack fed to workers in restaurant kitchens nation-wide, as most people familiar with the industry know all about it. Both male and female chefs recognized the often impolite, crude nature that can accompany cooking in restaurants, even if they did not feel their own kitchens were run

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<sup>203</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18, 2006.

<sup>206</sup> Jeff Causy, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 7, 2006.

that way. According to Jeff Causy, “a lot of kitchens can be very testosterone filled, real macho” workplaces. Although he did not currently have any women working in the kitchen, he believed that he had “always gotten along with girls, almost better than guys.”<sup>207</sup> Will Burrell also believed that in all-male kitchens “there can be a little bit too much testosterone floating around,” but did not always appreciate it. Burrell touted an ethic of respect, saying “there’s just no need to disrespect others.”<sup>208</sup> Renee Bowman was thoroughly familiar with the culture of working kitchens, recognizing that “most kitchen staffs use dirty, filthy language, lots of cussing, lots of sexual innuendoes, lots of outright nastiness, flirtation, all that’s in the mix.”<sup>209</sup> Though this particular aspect of kitchen culture did not seem to bother the female chefs interviewed, they knew that if it had they would not have lasted in the years they were climbing the ladder. Several interview subjects, including all the women chefs, knew that the willingness of women to adopt certain behaviors and tolerate others is what kept them in good standing with their co-workers, and in some cases their superiors. Luke Fussell remarked that “if you are a girl in the kitchen you have to be really strong, willing to take shit and talk it back. You really have to be able to take care of yourself. You have to give it as good as you get it, and when you find somebody like that, it’s awesome.”<sup>210</sup> Patty Strickland knew all too well about having to fight for the respect of her male cohorts, and also knew instinctively how to act

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Will Burrell, head chef of Meadowbrook Inn, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 20, 2006.

<sup>209</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>210</sup> Luke Fussell, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, February 23, 2006.

in order to get it. She said “I really had to fight and claw. At Café La Ropa they really made my life hard, I went home crying.”<sup>211</sup> She continued her story, saying:

One time, I bent down to pick up a knife and a guy whipped out his thing and said “while you’re down there...” I turned around; I had a knife in my hand, and said “make my day.” And you know what? I worked with this gentleman after the training period, for thirteen years, who ended up being my best friend. It was the other guy that was working in the kitchen, Bob Valentino, it was day ten or eleven, and when he made that comment to me and I turned around with that knife, he respected me from then on. And later he apologized to me, the next day and said “well, you taught me not to fuck with you.”<sup>212</sup>

Other women approached the subject with less drama. Wendy Gordon, for example, said that she had “worked with guys who have issues with women,” but said, “luckily, I cuss like a sailor so I can totally hang.”<sup>213</sup> Likewise, Renee Bowman said she was “usually very comfortable” with the banter of working kitchens. In fact at one restaurant she was one of “a few gay women who cooked, so often times we would be the dirtier talking crew just for shock and fun.”<sup>214</sup> Evidently, embracing typically “masculine” behaviors made life for these women in restaurant kitchens more peaceable.

While the female chefs recognized that the road to their career paths were smoothed by their ability to be like “one of the boys,” several of the male chefs noted that the atmosphere of a kitchen is “a bit calmer, not so rowdy” with women cooking, in the words of Jeff Causy.<sup>215</sup> Causy described the scenario well, saying “I’ve been in some kitchens with all guys where I wouldn’t want to bring my grandmother back in the

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<sup>211</sup> Patty Strickland, head chef of Linville Ridge Country Club, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 12, 2006.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Wendy Gordon, chef at The Gamekeeper, Boone, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 21, 2006.

<sup>214</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>215</sup> Jeff Causy, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 7, 2006.

kitchen, whereas if there were a few girls in there I'd be more apt to, you know?"<sup>216</sup>

When asked if the banter and language of a kitchen can be rough, Mark Rosse's unprompted response was "more often than not, although I do try to incorporate women into the kitchen as much as I can."<sup>217</sup> For Rosse, it seemed to go without saying that having women present would dial down the coarseness. He said he made an effort "every year...to at least try to have one female in [the kitchen] because it helps to bring down that banter a little bit."<sup>218</sup> Similarly, Will Burrell said that he would "prefer that there be at least one female in the kitchen, to give balance. In a kitchen where I have over five employees at least one of them is going to be a woman. Intentionally."<sup>219</sup> Interestingly, by their own admission none of the women interviewed would properly fill the role that this token female is meant to play in the kitchen. The seasoned female chefs all learned early on that if they did not play rough, they would not fit in, while some male chefs seem to scramble to find a woman to make the play not so rough.

Luke Fussell, on the other hand, seemed less enthusiastic about the shift in atmosphere when women are present. He said, "a girl can really change the dynamic of an all-male kitchen as far as what's said and how people act, and the whole energy of the kitchen."<sup>220</sup> He continued by saying "because guys can talk like sailors and tell dirty jokes, if a girl comes in you have to feel them out for a while to see how sensitive they are to that type of talk."<sup>221</sup> Although Fussell recognized that perhaps women get a grace

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Mark Rosse, owner/chef of Louisiana Purchase, Banner Elk, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 19, 2006.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Will Burrell, head chef of Meadowbrook Inn, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 20, 2006.

<sup>220</sup> Luke Fussell, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, February 23, 2006.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

period while the crew is “feeling them out” for sensitivity, the female ability to alter “the whole energy of the kitchen” certainly places them on shaky ground. Other stories also indicated a common hesitance to accept women into working kitchens. Renee Bowman shared her knowledge of a chef in Asheville who was well known for his brutal teaching methods. She said, “If you did something that he didn’t like he’d kick you in the shins.”<sup>222</sup> Even if a female was willing to be trained in such an environment, she’d never get the opportunity because “he wouldn’t take on women interns because he said they were too emotional.”<sup>223</sup> Although most interviewees recognized that sexism exists in the restaurant industry in general and in kitchens in particular, there was a pervasive sentiment which suggested that only so much could be done; it is the nature of the beast.

The truly fascinating thing about such a sentiment is that it assumes that cooking is something men are in charge of and women wanting to enter the profession are somehow trespassing on male territory. The beast is the restaurant kitchen, its nature is hypermasculine, and if women want a voice, they must learn the language.

In fact, it may be the case that these particular women thrived in the harsh environment not because they were willing to stick it out, but because it suited them so well. Both Wendy Gordon and Patty Strickland expressed feeling a sense of family in their restaurants, and several other interview subjects also enjoyed the alternative lifestyle and personalities that restaurants house. Wendy Gordon believed it was the “fun, freakish people who always have real good stories” that makes working in restaurants so enjoyable.<sup>224</sup> The “restaurant family” she and her husband cultivated made the business

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<sup>222</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Wendy Gordon, chef at The Gamekeeper, Boone, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 21, 2006.

being a “home away from home...my kids get dropped off from the bus, they’re here every day, so it’s their home.”<sup>225</sup> Gordon managed to create another family unit, other than the one of her childhood, which revolved around food, slightly different but nevertheless a social community woven into the ongoing exchange of food and cooking culture. Patty Strickland also felt she had created a family within her restaurant, and was very satisfied with the close and co-dependent nature of her working friendships. She had different ambitions in her youth and said that, if she had not found her passion in cooking, she would have ended up “a special education major with a big house, and adopted a lot of kids, and instead of babysitting them I babysit employees.”<sup>226</sup> Strickland enjoys her free time but feels that the restaurant is “like a family. . .you know when someone is hurting and others take extra time to help out.”<sup>227</sup> The resulting bonds, coupled with a common enthusiasm for food and cooking has the potential to manifest a unique atmosphere, unlike many other workplaces.

It is precisely that type of atmosphere that makes restaurants in general, and working kitchens in particular, a haven for “all the fringes of society,” in the words of Renee Bowman.<sup>228</sup> Most cooks recognize and even embrace the less presentable side of restaurant work, because it offers a moderately respectable life despite being a highly alternative lifestyle. According to Jason Juall, restaurant kitchens are packed with “people that run on adrenaline and sweat; we’re just junkies.”<sup>229</sup> Author Gary Alan Fine analyzes the public perception of cooks, concluding that “the images of the drunken,

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Patty Strickland, head chef of Linville Ridge Country Club, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 12, 2006.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>229</sup> Jason Juall, cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, June 18, 2006.

ignorant chef and the artistic chef may be superficially contradictory, but they can coexist. Genius and deviance are, despite their distinct images, compatible.”<sup>230</sup> For those who do not properly fit in to normal society for whatever reason, cooking in restaurants offers a creative outlet, an increasingly respectable and rewarding career, and a way to exist on the fun fringes.

Many of the interview subjects pointed to the “nature” of restaurant kitchens as the reason there are fewer women. Not just the attitude, but the actual physical work and environment. When asked why there were fewer women in the cooking industry, Mark Rosse responded “I’m not saying there’s not enough in the industry, but it’s just a tough job and it still comes down to the heat.”<sup>231</sup> Evidently, Rosse believes that the few women that exist in the industry are enough, and that the proverbial heat in the kitchen literally keeps them out. Despite the fact that women are part of a long tradition of domestic cooking and for centuries had to work with open flames and hot ovens without air conditioning (not to mention wearing multiple layers of heavy fabric and possibly a corset), the perception that fire is a masculine element was instrumental in relegating many of the female professional cooks to the pantry station or the pastry counter. The cultural correlation between heat/fire and masculinity migrated into the restaurant industry from the backyard barbeque and bypassed the long tradition of women cooks.

Being the most prized element of culinary fare, the division and preparation of meat was generally reserved for the most senior cook or chef in twentieth-century restaurants, whereas lower status items, like cold foods and desserts, were prepared by pantry workers. The status of foods paralleled the status of the cooks that handled and

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<sup>230</sup> Fine, *Kitchens*, 42.

<sup>231</sup> Mark Rosse, owner/chef of Louisiana Purchase, Banner Elk, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 19, 2006.

prepared the food. In his investigation of restaurant cooks in Twin Cities, Minnesota, Gary Alan Fine found evidence of this food/cook hierarchy. In the most upscale restaurant that Fine studied, the “preparation of side dishes (e.g. vegetables) and cold dishes (e.g. salad) was the domain of the most junior, lowest-ranked cook. In contrast, cutting large slabs of raw meat was regularly done by the head chef, symbolic work, to be sure.”<sup>232</sup> Not surprisingly, a gender division of labor existed in these establishments, where “in sharp contrast to the largely male cooking staff, seven of the eight pantry workers at these two restaurants were female.”<sup>233</sup> Because meat is imbued with masculine qualities and lighter foods are seen to be feminine, restaurant kitchens have come to reflect the gendered world of food. Cold foods and sweets, those culinary items with less prestige than, say, meat and main courses, are more likely than others to be handled and prepared by women. Fine concludes that “their work was manual labor, a blue-collar, feminine occupation in contrast to more “professional” male work.”<sup>234</sup>

Mark Rosse commented directly on this phenomenon, but attributed the segregation to women’s self-imposed isolation and the inability to function well in a hot environment. He said, “I think that there are a lot more women in the *gar mange* side and the pantry side just because you can concentrate more on what you are doing and not interact as much with a bunch of people in a very hot situation.”<sup>235</sup> Jack Pepper echoed this belief, saying that his female baker can come “in early on her own, she has her quiet time... that way she can get the things done that she needs to do and get out of the way

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<sup>232</sup> Fine, *Kitchens*, 93.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, 94.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid*, 95.

<sup>235</sup> Mark Rosse, owner/chef of Louisiana Purchase, Banner Elk, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 19, 2006.



for the rest of the guys who may come in.”<sup>236</sup> Regardless of the explanation, a very noticeable division of labor is present in professional kitchens, a division that maintains the glass ceiling in the working world.

Jeff Causy also believed that it was mostly “the physical nature of it” that discouraged women from entering a profession that required “hauling fifty pound bags of flour and big boxes of bones.”<sup>237</sup> Renee Bowman admitted that there might be elements of truth to the idea that women are not attracted to kitchen work because of the highly physical demands, but concluded that “it’s just exasperating to deal with the male mentality on a regular basis.”<sup>238</sup> When Wendy Gordon heard that some chefs believed women avoid working kitchens because of the physical labor, she responded, “Oh, that’s horseshit. We just have babies, give me a break. No, it is hot over a wood fire, but we adapt. Everyone adapts.”<sup>239</sup>

Adaptation has enabled a slow but discernable growth in the fair play of restaurant kitchens, at least in the minds of a few chefs. “We’re playing well together,” said Patty Strickland of the gender relations in the kitchen.<sup>240</sup> She concluded, “We’re finally to a place where the men are starting to receive, accept, and play well. And that’s very important that the barrier has been broken.”<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Jack Pepper, owner of Pepper’s, Boone, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 15, 2006.

<sup>237</sup> Jeff Causy, chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, March 7, 2006.

<sup>238</sup> Renee Bowman, chef at Knights on Main, Blowing Rock, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, May 5, 2006.

<sup>239</sup> Wendy Gordon, chef at The Gamekeeper, Boone, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 21, 2006.

<sup>240</sup> Patty Strickland, head chef of Linville Ridge Country Club, Linville Ridge, NC. Interviewed by Stella Pierce, April 12, 2006.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

The chefs' testimonies are illustrative of the divisive nature of gendered work and appropriated cooking tasks. In the public realm, it became clear as restaurants proliferated in the United States that the business was profitable and power-laden. Men were provided the educational opportunity to learn an economically viable trade, by absorbing some of the generational secrets of female cooks. Whatever rituals and mysteries of home cooking that existed for women were no longer veiled by feminine prerogative. Male entrance into the field altered the collaborative relations of female cooks and the way society viewed the task of cooking, both inside and outside the home. Yet the male dominated cooking trade did not alleviate women's responsibilities in the domestic kitchen. Once the industry was professionalized by men, working chefs began advising twentieth-century women on cooking, thus supplanting the catalog of knowledge possessed by female family cooks.

Certain patterns of behavior betrayed an anxiety on the part of cooking men to be conspicuously masculine when performing kitchen tasks, to ensure any observer that cooking did not make him woman-like in any way. The hyper-masculinization of restaurant kitchens is a result of the same unconscious desire to alienate women by making such spaces a nearly intolerably sexist environment. Although this behavior has not been eradicated, the slowly growing number of women in the industry indicates that conditions may be improving.

The assumptions that many Americans had concerning the nature of gender differences encompassed specific ideas that led to a curious gender disparity in cooking. Gendered food preferences suggested an innate discrepancy in the consideration men and women give specific foods, enabling one gender to assume greater control over the handling and preparation of certain products. As more men became professional cooks and chefs, inexperienced male cooks were able to identify with their expert counterparts, and were simultaneously assured of their culinary ability and their masculinity. In addition, the social conviction in women's susceptibility to the dangers of the public world led to protective legislation, while technical training in professional cooking remained an all male domain, relegating women to a purely domestic sphere. Economically speaking, men saw an opportunity in the growing restaurant business and gobbled it up, leaving women to occupy the lowest paid and least respected positions in the industry. These social and economic forces at play during the twentieth-century reveal a decided effort to distinguish the divide between female cooks and male professionals, creating two culinary worlds, divided by social relevance and united by activity and meaning.

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Causy, Jeff. Chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville, North Carolina. Interviewed by Stella Pierce. March

7, 2006.

Fussell, Luke. Chef at Best Cellar at Linville, Linville, North Carolina. Interviewed by Stella Pierce. February 23, 2006.

Gordon, Wendy. Chef at The Gamekeeper, Boone, North Carolina. Interviewed by Stella Pierce. April 21, 2006.

Juall, Jason. Cook at Canyons, Blowing Rock, North Carolina. Interviewed by Stella Pierce. June 18, 2006.

Pepper, Jack. Owner of Pepper's, Boone, North Carolina. Interviewed by Stella Pierce. May 15, 2006.

Rosse, Mark. Owner/chef of Louisiana Purchase, Banner Elk, North Carolina. Interviewed by Stella Pierce. March 19, 2006.

Strickland, Patty. Head chef of Linville Ridge Country Club, Seven Devils, North Carolina. Interviewed by Stella Pierce. April 12, 2006.