

Mastering the Meal: American Identity in the Food Network

By

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Abstract

The Food Network is one of the most successful and popular channels on cable television today. Its brand extends beyond the television screen to many different forms of media including web and print. But Americans spend less time in the kitchen than they ever have before. This disparity suggests the Food Network offers more than mere instruction to its viewers. This thesis analyzes major themes of identity found in Food Network programming including citizenship, gender and class. The framework for this discussion is established through Julie D'Acci's "Circuit of Media Study" as well as through a historical review of identity themes throughout the course of American food media. The Food Network offers many interpretations of what it means to be an American and what it means to be of a certain class within the United States. But notions of gender remain extremely traditional.

Introduction

Food is undeniably part of 21st century America's articulation of its own identity. Advertisements and news reports aside, food has become a popular topic, meriting not one cable channel but two—the Food Network and the Cooking Channel—television specials, magazines, books, and whole academic journals devoted to food and its role in the American experience. Yet despite the popularity of food as a subject matter, Americans aren't mimicking what they see on the screen—cooking shows are no longer purely instructional. In fact, Americans spend less time in the kitchen now than they ever have before, “a mere 27 minutes a day on food preparation...another four minutes cleaning up” (Pollen, 2009, online). Americans spend less time cooking than they would watching an episode of *Barefoot Contessa* on the Food Network. Yet talking about food and watching food still has extraordinary significance American popular culture.

Contemporary American culture has elevated the subject of food in the media landscape. Some media scholars are ominous about the rise of the Food Network, suggesting it “promotes the feeding of excesses in modern culture and promotes waste, indulgence, and gratification” (Meister, 2001, p. 166). But this is a narrow understanding of the discourse found in today's food programming. Furthermore, it ignores the complex way in which food is “a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior” (Barthes, 1961, p. 21). These media programs are cultural artifacts that showcase the dynamics of food preparation and consumption but which are indications of what American culture values beyond a taste or ingredient.

A lack of contextualization can jeopardize our understanding of the ways in which Americans have historically related to food. Historian Sandra Olivier (2006) gives an

example of this in an analysis of a recipe for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich from her *Fannie Farmer Cookbook*. The combination is listed casually between peanut butter “moistened with salad dressing” and peanut butter sprinkled with “crisp bacon.” She fumes:

This is but one recipe among hundreds in this classic cookbook. But please think about your last PB & J and how odd this set of instructions sounds. Then consider that the advice never even begins to hint at the importance of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in the American diet... (p. 95)

Food is often cited as a lens through which we can view a culture. Through it, “we can appreciate the universal need for nourishment that finds a myriad of diverse expressions in food’s cultural messages and uses” (Bonnekessen, 2010, p. 282). Eating habits can define “epochal social transformations in a wide range of contexts, serving as a *lens* both to characterize the past and to read the present through the past” (Holtzman, 2006, p. 371, emphasis added). Food informs our understanding of what it means to be American and thus the Food Network is a place where citizenship, class, and gender can be articulated amongst simmering pots of lobster corn chowder and freshly baked gingerbread. The study attempts to understand how this popular form of entertainment can become a lens through which the media acts out American identity. This discourse analysis is accompanied by a historical review to explain how food has come to occupy such an important role within the media.

The lens or themes that are explored here include regionalism and nationalism that together define citizenship; the politics of gender as realized through performances of domesticity; and the omnipresence of “good” and the ways in which seemingly polar ideas

of proper ingredients and consumption are fused without conflict but which can still act as stand-ins for class.

These themes were not selected at random; rather they are commonly found in the many Food Network programs already. More importantly, gender, class, and citizenship are important to contemporary Americans. These points of identification are debated, critiqued, and championed in the greater American society and media. They are linked together in sometimes surprising ways and it would be difficult to understand mechanism of one without acknowledging the others.

Historical Review

Julia Child is undeniably the most well-known television chef. In fact, “when conjuring up a historical (that is, pre-Food Network) lineup of television chefs, it is usually Julia Child’s name that first passes anyone’s lips” (Collins, 2009, p. 71). It was at her feet, some claim, that today’s Martha Stewart, Emeril Lagasse and Rachel Ray learned the essentials of television cookery. Julia Child is also credited with educating uncouth American housewives—alarmingly attached to their dried soup packets and miracle whip—to become mavens of their kitchens with the “courage of [their] convictions” (*The French Chef*, 1962). Though Julia was an important influence for television cooking and American cooks in general, her presence on screen was not unprecedented, it was the continuation of a long tradition in American media and indicative of the cultural values of 1960s America.

The first episode of *The French Chef* aired in 1962 but Child was not the first chef to be broadcasted into American homes—*The Mystery Chef* bested her by 40 years—nor was

she the first women on television to educate American housewives on cooking techniques—Dionne Lucas had a popular program in the 1950s. She wasn't the first celebrity television cook—James Beard's acclaim lingers still. Child was not the first to introduce French cuisine into American kitchens either. French cuisine has been popular in the United States since the American Revolution and was especially so after World War II when French food "was perceived to be the very essence of sophistication and worldliness in the 1950s and 60s" (Collins, 2009, p. 79). It is more accurate to say that Julia capitalized on already existing national obsessions with cooking technique programming and French cuisine. The television chefs that have followed her are no different.

This historical review is meant to both give a background of the industry and to develop the major themes that include citizenship, gender, and class. At times, it is difficult to separate one theme from the other—they are inextricably linked, flavoring one another within the discourse. A background on how these themes specifically and the American food media in general developed is necessary to a comprehensive understanding of food, culture, and media in the United States.

Nationalism: Measuring American

Food and cuisine have helped to define American identity both as a united country and through the culturally and geographically distinctive regions of which it is comprised. American cookery is a slippery concept because it must waiver between a national uniformity and a proud diversity that emphasizes difference of location and ethnic heritage. One cookbook published in 1947 arranges recipes by the state of origin, but still attempts to unify them, encapsulating that contradiction:

The grace in American cooking lies, I think, not in the concoction of the fabulous dishes in which we remember with reverence rather than affection, but in doing well by whatever grows in our back yards or is caught along our shores...

(Hibben, 1947, p. x)

In some ways, Americans have always been accustomed to cuisine that is subtly regionalized or infused with some sort of ethnicity, but which is overall compatible with their universal notion of what food is. In the 1920s, the Farm Radio Service, part of the USDA, developed Aunt Sammy's *Housekeeper's Chat* that included a regular segment called "What Shall We Have for Dinner?" Though the script remained the same for each segment, different women voiced it, depending on the region of broadcast. Each Aunt Sammy used their own accent and slang adjusted to match that of their audience (USDA, 1976).

Articles published in popular ladies magazines were among the earliest forces to standardize the American food identity, joined by regionally based amateur cooking guides. Later, mass-produced, professional cookbooks and nationally broadcasted radio and television programs standardized American tastes, ingredients, and even measuring utensils.

The magazine industry was responsible for establishing and defining one of the most quintessential American holidays, the feast of Thanksgiving. It began when Sarah Josepha Hale who "wrote a fictional story with an elaborate account of a Thanksgiving dinner very similar to the traditional Thanksgiving dinner of today" (Smith, 2009, p. 60). Though her "cooking" was fictional, her examples of what one should find on an American family's dinner table on the third Thursday of November bear striking resemblance to what

one expects to find today, including a turkey as the main course and pumpkin pie for dessert.

Hale's success is notable because of her ability to use a sort of celebrity-hood to influence American eating habits and establish the purpose of the Thanksgiving holiday through food. She became the editor for *Godey's Lady's Book* in part because of the popularity of her fictional story. She used the publication to champion her own cause, a federal declaration of Thanksgiving as a national holiday. The magazine became her mouthpiece and she actively wielded the influence her role as editor granted her. From 1846 until 1863, "she wrote regularly to members of Congress, prominent individuals, and the governors of every state and territory, requesting each to proclaim the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving" (Smith, 2009, p. 60). President Lincoln declared it a national holiday in the midst of the Civil War, allegedly after a meeting with Hale. It was the third national holiday ever declared, after Independence Day and Washington's Birthday (Smith, 2009) and it was almost wholly a celebration of food—or rather a very specific mix of foods, considered "American." Yet some differences of tradition still exist.

Cultural identification with a specific dish or cuisine can "bring together regions and nation, left and right, old and new" (Parkiston Ferguson, 2010, p. 104-105). If cultural taboos cannot be overcome, differences can become problematic. But differences are often resolved through careful fusions. Such was the case in the United States after several decades of uneasy immigration and cuisine xenophobia when in 1920s "exotic was In" (Lovegren, 1995, p. 31), albeit a more Anglicized version of the Italian, Mexican, and Chinese dishes that immigrants would actually prepare. More recently, "an increasing range of consumers [welcome] new "ethnic" cuisines, a world of tastes cultivated by

heightened processes of globalization and the diversifying cultural make-up of the population” (Johnston & Baumann, 2010, p. 12).

Research Question 1: In what ways Food Network chefs establish traditional ideas of American cooking?

Research Question 2: How are regional or ethnic foods valued in each show?

Research Question 3: What is the role of Thanksgiving in promoting sameness or accommodating difference in national, regional or ethnic cuisines?

Domesticity: Cooking Indoors or Out

For American women, cookbooks were an important resource because “a “servant shortage” in the first part of the [20th] century had drastically reduced the number of domestics in middle-class households” (Barbas, 2002, p. 44) and as a result, housewives found it necessary to learn a new art and to rethink their relationship to the kitchen. The combination of canned foods and electric appliances “heavily advertised and promoted in women’s magazines” (Barbas, 2002, p. 44) both aided housewives in solving their labor problem and claimed to give them more time for other household duties and leisure activities – keeping them outside the kitchen.

But paradoxically it converted the kitchen into a space wherein women must prove or showcase their femininity. No longer relegated to a well-trained family cook, food became a subject of grave importance. Typical housewives were expected to take an interest in the foods their families ate as meals became a symbol of family well-being. The use of appliances to prepare food became a symbol of social standing and the presence of

tomatoes versus canned tomato soup in one's pantry was linked to ideas of modernity and provincialism instead of nutrition.

Cookbooks were America's introduction to food experts. Even if their recipes weren't embraced, they did teach American women that, when in question about the preparation of food, they could and should turn to scientific methods. Fannie Farmer standardized measurements in 1896 with the publication of what is today known as *The Fannie Farmer Cookbook* and gave Americans a common language through which they could communicate food preparation directions.

In an analysis of popular media and food culture through cookbooks, Sherrie A. Inness (2001) found that "food preparation, especially in the private home, is considered feminine and inappropriate for men and boys" (p. 3). She attributes this to the division of public and private spheres wherein "women are still associated with the "unimportant" domestic sphere, including cooking, while men are associated with the "important" world of the public workplace" (p. 4), reinforced through a "vast network of popular texts, ranging from cookbooks to articles in women's magazines" (p. 10).

According to Inness, American women came to feel that nourishing their families with food was an important part of defining their womanliness, their role as wife and mother. She contends that,

Many wives and mothers—whether or not they have full-time employment outside the home—still feel that it is their responsibility to cook; this belief is hard to shake because it has been woven into the cultural fabric of American society since its earliest years. (p. 45)

Cooking was imagined as “not just hard work; it was also fun” and maybe even “a sort of magic” or at least “an expression of one’s personality” and contradictorily, “a chore that girls were expected to perform almost every day for the rest of their lives...a task that might be drudgery, not fun” (p. 45). Cookbooks reinforced this rhetoric every time American housewives sought out a recipe.

Though cooking and food preparation are gendered in American culture, cooking is not just for females. In fact, Inness points out that “superstar chefs, the majority of them male, have dominated American fine dining for well over a century” (p. 17) but the difference was that “cooking was men's work when men wanted it to be; cooking for women, however, was not optional but was something they all had to do” (p. 22).

Men could cook when they wanted to and their “masculinity was not diminished by cooking” (p. 23) but what they ate did matter. Men were very explicitly expected to enjoy meat and “hearty foods that contain alcohol” (p. 25). They were not to partake in “processed foods as “sissy” foods - marshmallow whip and maraschino [cherries]” (p. 24) which were considered more feminine.

The media played “a significant role in shaping the way American society perceives the complex relationship between women and food” (p. 10). Fictional characters like Betty Crocker, born in the 1920s, albeit as a fully formed adult American housewife and corporate mascot, told audiences “how to buy, what to buy, how to make the best with what is available” through her “enormously popular radio cooking school” (Collins, 2009, p. 16). These programs aired during daytime hours, when women were most likely to be listening. Collectively, they taught American women en masse how to perform domesticity on the kitchen stage. Television cooks continued the tradition of teaching American

housewives what and how to cook. Julia Child “performed in a kitchen and talked to the camera as a confidante. Her cooking was supposed to be replicated at home” (Ray, 2007, p. 54).

In contemporary food media, cooking remains a gendered activity. The Food Network features both male and female hosts but there remains a distinct difference between men and women and their presentation or preparation of food and cooking (Ketchum, 2004). For women, cooking is an intrinsic part of their identity but for men, it’s professionalized. Men are usually referred to as chefs but women are called cooks (Druckman, 2010). Men are also more likely to leave the kitchen and are “trusted to lead “food lovers” to passion, knowledge, expertise, and diversity of experience” as opposed to women who “are still available to be enthusiastic supporters in the kitchen” (Murray, 2010, p. 2).

Research Question 4: In what ways do hosts of the Food Network perform traditional gender roles and in what ways do they present an alternative ideology?

Bon Vivant: The Changing Meaning but Ever Present “Good”

Through the vaguest of terms, “good”, Americans became introduced to a variety of food topics – many of which politicized or classified the consumption of food. Contemporary food discourse is one laden with class distinctions, “where food’s authentic and exotic qualities appear paramount relative to formal markers of snobbery, and where the relationship to social status and distinction must be carefully analyzed to reveal its latent content” (Johnston & Baumann, 2010, p. 13). The notion of what is “good” to eat is constantly evolving and at present is in a state of evolution between elitism and populism.

The launch of *Gourmet* magazine in 1941 was not a signal that Americans were finally ready to give up canned soup for gazpacho. Subtitled “The Magazine of Good Living,” those that flipped through the pages of *Gourmet* were unlikely to have ever held a can opener. Instead, its audience was those “who’d gotten a taste for fine food and wines while traveling abroad,” who had developed a taste for “haute cuisine, fine wines, and exotic foreign travel” but who were now unable to travel the Continent due to the untimely outbreak of World War II (Smith, 2009, p. 185).

By the 1970’s, even *Ladies’ Home Journal* began to include their own guides to gourmet foods and “by the end of the decade it was running more than 450 recipes per year—many of them ethnic—more than triple the 1960 number” (Levenstein, 1993, p. 218).

In the 1980s, the definition of “gourmet” shifted. European foods had been considered the highest order of fine foods but suddenly, aficionados began to search out any unique ingredient that was not yet universally consumed. As a result, “America plunged into a new orgy of spending...on fancy, fashionable food” (Lovegren, 1995, p. 356) and became “greedy for new taste sensations, exotic new foods, expensive and high-status new ingredients” (Lovegren, 1995, p. 357). But:

like the broader American discourse surrounding wealth and inequality, the foodie discourse around wealth and class is fraught with contradictions—particularly the contradiction between an overt democratic populism that seeks solidarity with others, and a more covert but perpetual drive to achieve social distance and distinction. (Johnston & Baumann, 2010, p. 173)

Modern food enthusiasts balance between two very different class-based approaches to food. The first suggest food is a great equalizer and emphasizes the ways in which “good” food can be found in abundance for those interested in exploring culture through taste. But the second is one of privilege, the antithesis of the former. It values difficult to obtain or expensive ingredients that create barriers to universal consumption.

Research Question 5: How does the Food Network resolve these conflicting notions of “good” food?

Broadcasting the Food Empire

Early radio and television programming often featured cooking shows because were fairly simple and inexpensive to produce. And if “the objective of any broadcasting organ is to sell products for its advertisers,” then “cooking shows were a super way to market...products” (Collins 2009, p. 20). Early cooking show hosts for the radio and television, like James Beard, had a “readiness to turn...easily and frequently into a commercial spokesperson when financial reward was promised” (Polan, 2010, p. 25). Quick profit, not quality instruction was the goal.

As previously noted, Julia Child was not the first chef on television but she enjoyed a success her predecessors did not. Even today, Child is a standard for television food personalities and many current hosts cite her as their inspiration. Julia approached her television program, *The French Chef*, as a form of entertainment instead of a forum for promotion. Her French cookbook —*Mastering the Art of French Cooking*—was an enormous volume, noted for its exquisite detail and it established Child as expert in French cuisine for her American audience. Even so, when Child cooked for the camera, she was

performing. Her skill in entertaining her audience was noted by Jacques Pepin, her co-host in the latter portion of her career who said, "She made me realize that television was entertainment and that if you want to impart a message and teach people, you have to do it in a way that is light, amusing, and as much fun as possible" (Ray, 2007, p. 54). Contemporary hosts continue to imitate her demeanor.

Origins of a food channel.

The French Chef first aired on WGBH Boston, a public television station, in 1962. Thirty years later, changes in the television industry brought about the creation of the Food Network or TVFN, a transition which Collins (2009) chronicles in detail. With the rise of cable television came new opportunities for media companies to expand their operations. In 1990, the president of the Providence Journal Company instructed his employees to "seek out niche categories in the print world which weren't being addressed or weren't properly tended to by cable" (p. 159). At this time, magazines like *Bon Appetit*, *Food & Wine*, *Cooking Light*, *Eating Well*, *Cook's*, and *Gourmet* were showing healthy subscriber and circulation rates...[and] the subject of food and cooking were obvious rising stars with consumers" (p. 160). In 1993, Providence Journal Company and Pacesetter Communications announced their partnership in launching a "unique 24-hour basic-cable TV channel of cooking, nutrition, fitness, and other food-related features and news" (Quill, 1993).

Food had captured America's attention and TVFN executives were ready to profit from the low costs of producing cooking shows in comparison to other types television programming and the "enormous amount of advertising available" (Collins, 2009, p. 161).

But it wouldn't be until 1996 when Erica Gruen became the President and CEO of TVFN that the channel's potential became realized. The channel dropped the nutrition and fitness aspect of the programming and shifted the "emphasis from people who like to cook to people who love to eat" (Collins, 2009, p. 167). Gruen's new programming model reinvented the food genre on television and created the foundation for multi-media expansion that would generate further success for the channel. Shortly after, in 1997, Scripps Networks acquired a majority share of the Food Network. (Cablefax Daily, 2008)

Freed with the idea that "most television viewers do not really want to duplicate the efforts of the television chef...they want to take a very inexpensive trip" (Collins, 2009, p. 197), TVFN expanded beyond cooking into a new notion of food lifestyle. Incorporating elements of exotic travel shows, the drama of competition, and the authoritative voice of "Best Of" guides, TVFN has become a "genre-bending mix of shows...like a microcosm of the broadcasting landscape itself" (Collins, 2009, p. 194).

One of the changes Gruen advanced in new TVFN programming was the celebrity chef. Collins (2009) notes Emeril Lagasse was the first chef to get a celebrity makeover. Lagasse already had a cooking show on TVFN that had a loyal following but lacked popularity with a large audience. Gruen gave Lagasse a second show that reinvented the chef as a "cooking Jay Leno," and made *Emeril Live* and its host "the emblem for the new style of cooking show—the live audience, the in-studio band, and the high energy host who comes out to cheering crowds like a rock star" (p. 169). The show created a high-energy personality for Lagasse, one that sidestepped his qualifications as a trained chef who had studied in Europe in favor of charisma and charm.

Critics of this business model would say, “Celebrity chefs, like Hollywood stars, are overwhelmingly media creations” who “create an appetite for consumption that can never be satisfied” and that “there no longer exists a direct correlation between cooking skills and celebrity status” (Hansen, 2008, p. 49-50). But in fact, the original celebrity chefs, those that were hosts of radio shows or early television programs, were very much media creations themselves and unabashedly promoted consumer products in each episode. With only a few exceptions, such as Julia Child, media chefs are seldom teachers before media products. But consumers don’t seem to mind. In fact:

‘recognized authors and series’ account for ten of the top twenty-five general cookbooks sold at Amazon...And who are these top-selling authors? Rachael Ray, Emeril Lagasse, and Bobby Flay—all Food Network stars—all continue to top the charts...celebrities are big news in cooking and publishing. (Mitchell, 524-525, 2010)

The Food Network has a proven ability to turn its hosts into food celebrities, translating into great financial success for those individuals. One host, Giada De Laurentiis, called the relationship between Scripps and its hosts as “synergy,” noting, “Food Network’s been wonderful at acknowledging that, if I grow, they grow with me and, if they grow, I grow with them” (Becker, 2007, p. 11).

Beyond television.

Only recently has the Food Network “changed in its own mind from...television...to a brand” (Jensen, 2007, online) and they have found success in this approach. Their viewers are more likely to make purchases after watching TVFN than even the DIY network (Media

Week, 2009, S14). And the company has thrived even as others faced stagnation (Weprin, 2009, p. 4), warranting a spin-off, the Cooking Channel (Murray, 2010). They've even embarked on other media ventures, including a social media inspired food website (Telecommunications Weekly, 2009), and a magazine. In fact, *The Food Network Magazine* has increased circulation even as longstanding food magazines, such as *Gourmet*, have folded (Pardee, 2010). TVFN has also traded on their brand name to launch a line of Food Network cookware (Becker, 2007).

The Food Network has become the almost de facto leader of food and media within the United States at a time when Americans have given increasing intention to food preparation and eating (Collins, 2009). Cookbooks were the only genre of book to maintain sales after 9/11 (Ketchum 2004). Food programming can be found on cable channels like the Hallmark Channel and Bravo and the big three networks, such as Jamie Oliver's *Food Revolution* on ABC or Flay's frequent appearance on CBS's morning show. Many universities have recently developed programs in food studies – both biologically and culturally – to support this new demand (Nestle, 2010).

Research Question 6: How does this new attention to food in the media articulate cultural identity for the broader American population?

Research Question 7: In what ways are singular concepts, such as gender, enhanced through further articulation of seemingly non-related identifiers, such as class?

Methods

Circuit of Media Study

These television shows are not analyzed as absolute measures of social consciousness. Instead, they are understood in the context of their production and reception with the assumption these two are linked. Food and cooking shows on American television act as artifacts or cultural objects and are useful in identifying cultural values and social practice.

This analysis makes use of Julie D'Acci's "Circuit of Media Study" (Figure 1). According to D'Acci, (2004) "the model makes clear that cultural artifacts, reception, and socio-historical context cannot truly be conceived or understood apart from the specific conditions of television production that are operative for the specific project in question" (p. 434). Its purpose is to be "porous and analytical rather than self-contained" (p. 431).

D'Acci's model is an extension of several other models also used in media culture studies. She says:

The model I'm espousing may, of course, be traced from Stuart Hall's "encoding/decoding" (1980) to Richard Johnson's "circuit of production, circulation, and consumption of cultural products" (1986) to the Open University's "circuit of culture" (1997). (p. 425)

She acknowledges Stuart Hall's theory of encoding/decoding and its role in shaping her own work, but says "the encoding site is too homogenous and is linked too directly to a purported dominant ideology, and thus does not reveal encoding's contestatory character" (p. 426). In reality, the creation of a program is informed by exposure of producers and

hosts to programs of the past. Encoding becomes infinite because decoding is an act of creation itself.

Understanding the production values that go into the creation of each program and also its reception on a deeper level besides rating points are undeniably the two most difficult portions of D’Acci’s model to approach. But it is possible to cull some information about production from interviews of Food Network leaders and other members of this process. At the same time, D’Acci includes the reader in her model. The audience’s reception can be loosely understood through the analysis, one viewer’s understanding extrapolated to a greater viewership.

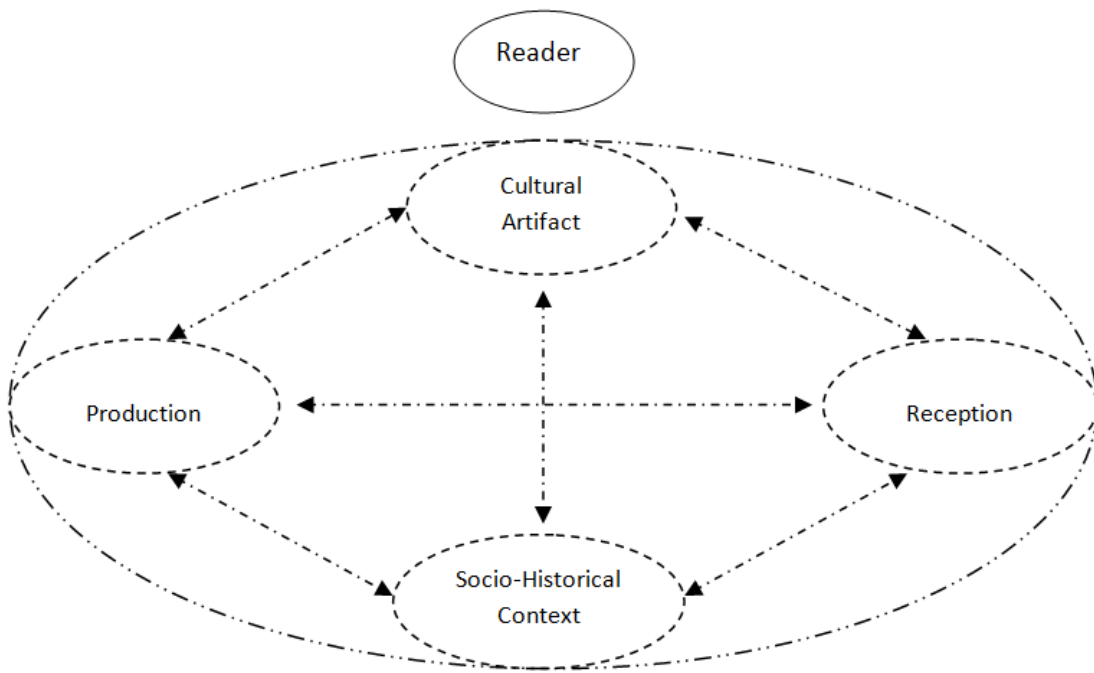


Figure 1. Julie D’Acci’s Circuit of Media Study

Adapting the Model

In this model, the programs act as the cultural artifacts and are chosen specifically for their popularity and cultural significance within the greater scope of the Food Network and the media. The television shows studied include: *Diners, Drive-ins, & Dives*, *Throwdown with Bobby Flay*, and *Barefoot Contessa*.

Diners, Drive-ins, & Dives combines travel and food preparation into a larger narrative about American difference and sameness as well as tradition and contemporary twists on old standards. Host, Guy Fieri, explores “greasy spoons” in his role as an appreciative foodie fan (as opposed to a gourmet foodie). The show takes the viewer “inside” the kitchen of American restaurants, allowing the audience to see the ways in which ideas of domesticity and gender are supported or surprisingly reversed.

Fieri is also a figure of interest as well because of his extreme popularity on and off the Food Network. His show, “Triple D” as he calls it, has a primetime network spot for new episodes and reruns air frequently—it is difficult to find a day when the show is not slotted. After winning a Food Network celebrity chef contest in 2006, Fieri has worked his way through the ranks of the Food Network chefs, hosting many shows, and was named the “face of the Network” in 2010 (Moskin, 2010) and was featured in a 2011 Super Bowl commercial. He is a professionally trained chef who was able to launch his career on cable television yet has been able to leverage that popularity into various endeavors, including becoming the new face of Ritz Crackers yet is still wildly popular with viewers – the marketing head for the Food network is quoted as having said “I haven’t seen anyone connect to this range of people since Emeril” (Moskin, 2010, online).

Another celebrity chef on TVFN is Bobby Flay. His *Throwdown with Bobby Flay* program is a half-hour long competition and travel show in which Flay challenges “the absolute masters in different kinds of cooking,” promising “an exciting, tension-filled competition”(Food Network). Differences such as experience and place of origin are exploited and eventually “resolved” through the competition. Flay’s role as a man who cooks, often against women, provides a lot of material on gender and domesticity—especially when one considers that multiple other of Flay’s Food Network programs feature exclusively the manliest cooking acts—grilling.

The episodes of *Barefoot Contessa* serve as an example of a typical ‘traditional’ cooking show. Host, Ina Garten cooks within the realm of her own kitchen in her home in the Hamptons for her devoted husband—a throwback to traditional ideas of domesticity to be sure. Yet she is also a successful businesswoman who launched a gourmet food empire and catering company after a career as a policy analyst in Washington D.C. She references her career in catering frequently during her show, seemingly drawing on it for authority in her subject.

Garten’s partnership with the Food Network is not necessarily the same as other hostesses because she operates her own website and product line instead of incorporating herself into TVFN’s brand but Garten’s books and television series have a solid audience. Her show airs during the day on the Food Network and its format minimizes the drama that one might find in prime-time shows. In fact, from the kitchen color scheme to the light jazz that plays during the show, Garten’s show minimizes the drama. Her show offers insight into gender and class as well as citizenship. Her very demeanor is incredibly matronly and she often reminds her viewers to buy “good” ingredients, but one must infer

exactly what that means by “good”. She values exotic, European—especially French—recipes and products, doing hour-long specials wherein she travels across Europe, finding French importers for the perfect water glass. Yet she’ll also leave the kitchen during one of her shows and wander the aisles of the local grocery stores, giving viewers tips on how to make supermarket finds into trendy table centerpieces.

Approaching the Analysis

This study spends most of its time on only two aspects of D'Acci's model, I turn to her own words, that "a four-site model does not mandate that each site be examined fully for each and every analysis or research question; rather, it simply illustrates the point that the operations and effects of each should be considered when designing any project, fashioning any research question, evaluating any claims, or making any conclusions" (D'Acci, 2004, p. 434). Greater importance is given to understanding the ways in which each of these aspects work together holistically to create the ever-popular Food Network.

Through this paper, I attempt to understand and explain the ways in which programming found on the Food Network express notions of American culture and identity through food and cooking, guided by themes articulated earlier in this paper.

The analysis includes six episodes from each program, including a Thanksgiving special. Because foods are undeniably a center point of holidays and festivals, it seemed important to include at least one. Thanksgiving has a unique place in the American collective consciousness and also its history is as much defined by the American food medias as programs on TVFN. It seemed the ideal holiday to tease out some assumptions about identity and celebration as expressed through food.

Analysis

Citizenship in a Sandwich

Food becomes a cuisine when “humans have the agency to transform nature via cooking, and various modes and methods of cooking are more or less semiotically associated with either culture or nature” (Schugart, 2008, p. 69). Even though it is increasingly possible to access any food, however geographically unique, from any place in the world, “more than ever food and cuisine are tied to place” (Parkhurst Ferguson, 2010, p. 105). And in fact, “more and more countries propose culinary distinction as a marker of identity” (Parkhurst Ferguson, 2010, p.105).

In the United States, this concept of culinary nationalism can be found throughout the patriotic rhetoric that emphasizes the American “melting pot.” The Food Network presents a flexible and seemingly contradictory set of notions about food as it relates to notions of American culture and citizenship. It asks the audience to imagine that there is something inherently characteristic of the United States in certain foods, something that every American would recognize as a culturally significant food. But this same channel also relies on notions of regionalism to define wholly different types of cooking that can be found in the United States. And it celebrates fusions between “traditional” American and exotic or ethnic ingredients. These flavors are at odds with one another and represent the supreme contradiction in both American cooking and American notions of citizenship—that one can be a part of the whole, but also distinct from it. By eating certain dishes, Americans can “partake each day of the national past” (Barthes, 1961, p. 24) or they can “travel” to a different culture.

At no other time are these juxtapositions more evident than during Thanksgiving on the Food Network. The hosts of *Barefoot Contessa*, *Throwdown with Bobby Flay*, and *Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives* each have different approaches for cooking this fundamentally American meal. Their Thanksgiving episodes act as "culinary consciousness raisers" that "tie food to place...whether or not we put the recipe in the oven and on the table" (Parkhurst Ferguson, 2010, p. 102). The word tradition is used constantly, suggesting that American notions of citizenship or nationality are not flexible. Yet, ethnic or regional differences in dishes or ingredients are included and in some cases, sought out to minimize "boring" American dishes.

The *Throwdown with Bobby Flay* Thanksgiving episode perhaps best represents the merging of these seemingly contradictory concepts of American citizenship and how they are reconciled and further bolstered by notions of class and gender. Flay is challenged to "a Thanksgiving like no other" by Rhee Drummond, a popular lifestyle blogger who lives on a ranch in Oklahoma. Drummond emphasizes that she is a self-taught home cook, at times teasing Flay for his culinary education and city origins. She seems very much aware that her pioneer-prairie woman rhetoric is affected—she says she met her husband when she was working in Los Angeles and formerly loved ethnic food. She says she switched to "down home cooking" because her husband didn't like to try new flavors and she had difficulty getting gourmet ingredients in isolated ranch country. She calls her approach "complimentary to country life," an emphasis on the regional differences that Oklahoman rural cooking has from other sections of the United States.

At the beginning of the competition, Flay and Drummond make a list of the traditional food items they usually prepare for Thanksgiving and which dishes they will

make for the competition. Flay says he prepares soup because it's a family favorite, and he suggests seafood—not surprising since he's from the East coast. He says repeatedly, “we need...”—indicative of Flay's assumptions about the universality of Thanksgiving dishes. In a way, he's right – certain dishes are common through these Thanksgiving episodes, including cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes and gravy, stuffing and dessert. Methods of preparation may differ, but some version of those dishes is always present. Both Flay and Drummond emphasize the importance of the turkey as the centerpiece of the meal. He says “It all starts with the Turkey.” Never is the turkey absent from this meal, though other main course dishes in *Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives* accompany it.

Fieri's contribution to the Thanksgiving season line up is a show that seems more cobbled together with remnants of past episodes than a true Thanksgiving special. Fieri's Thanksgiving is very specific to the region in which he is filming. In Maine, the turkey dinner is served after stuffed lobster. In New Jersey, a Greek family serves lamb, but gives extra attention to the turkey marinated in duck fat and served with cornbread stuffing. Finally, Fieri proclaims that “Thanksgiving is Big Time in New Orleans” where he indulges in oysters and other seafood dishes as a turkey is unceremoniously prepared in the background.

Abundance or excessive consumption is an explicit part of this traditional American meal. Fieri never stops eating throughout the course of the episode. On *Throwdown with Bobby Flay*, Drummond says she believes “Thanksgiving is about pigging out in seconds and thirds and fourths.” The sheer number of dishes prepared is astounding when one considers that Flay typically cooks one dish per episode. Garten, meanwhile, side steps this aspect of the holiday. She prepares a turkey and one side – stuffing filled mushroom caps,

then spends the remainder of the episode building tablescapes and answering basic viewer questions, such as how to make gravy.

But Garten differs in some ways from the rest of the chefs in this analysis because she is unabashedly upper middle class. From her home in the Hamptons, Garten entertains frequently and often prepares elaborate dishes. In some ways, her privilege makes Thanksgiving seem less special. Garten's world of constant company and unfettered access to any ingredient is exactly the opposite from Drummond's isolation and limited supply of non-homegrown foods. Drummond's performance further emphasizes her difference from Garten when she asks her husband to slice the turkey for her. This seems somewhat ridiculous of Drummond because she has no difficulties in wielding knives or a large bird in the rest of the episode. Garten does not seek assistance when it comes time for her to carve the turkey. These two approaches to gender and class are linked to their regional locations and supplement their own displays of citizenship through the preparation of this American feast.

One question Ina Garten answers is particularly applicable to all of the shows—how does one “spice up some traditional recipes?” Do they need to be updated, or should the audience be satisfied with the same traditional ingredient combinations? The very word “tradition” is the standard adjective in all three of these episodes, followed by a cook or chef's interjection that they have somehow changed or updated a traditional way to prepare said traditional recipe. Rhee Drummond exalts tradition and homey-ness. She is adamant that, in Oklahoma, there is one way to prepare for Thanksgiving and it unites all Oklahomans in that way. Garten acknowledges that old standards can be boring and should be changed. Her solution is to use mushrooms and Italian sausage in her stuffing.

Drummond implies a re-discovery of traditional Southern recipes, supporting the claim that “despite the recent passion for ethnic foods, nouvelle cuisine, and ever more fanciful theme restaurants, there persists within the middle-class American psyche a longing for an idealized home” (Barbas, 2002, p. 52).

But Drummond may have been unaware that her uniquely Southern cornbread stuffing was also very popular with Greek immigrants living in New Jersey that Fieri features in his episode. In general, no “twist” is very unique – there are definite trends throughout the recipes, including mushrooms and cornbread – but nothing wholly unexpected. Even Guy Fieri’s dishes are relatively tame, especially from a man who once recommended a wasabi hotdog.

It is impossible to escape notions of citizenship in Food Network programming but articulating those cultural ideologies is complicated. Hosts identify a fundamental American experience or an American taste but at the same time, they suggest the inherent uniqueness of regional flavor, suggesting that these differences cannot be overcome. Alternatively, they emphasize the value of “authentic” American experiences but will also praise international fusions – suggesting that American food improves when paired with non-American aspects. These notions are part of a layered dialogue in Food Network shows, even during Thanksgiving specials – the quintessential celebration Americanism.

Gender in the Kitchen

The format of *Barefoot Contessa* is fairly common to all Food Network cooking programs that feature a female host. Ina Garten’s kitchen and methods do not at first appear radically different from the idea of the “Happy Housewife” of the 1950s that

suggested: women should be creative in the kitchen; their kitchen should be “up-to-date” and technologically sophisticated; and they should make ample use of modern foodstuffs so as to have personal time for their own activities (Inness, 2001, p. 142-143). Garten is quick to point out that she develops all the recipes on the show, indicating her mastery and creativity. Her sleek kitchen is filled with appliances that she always uses to speed up the cooking process and her mantra is “basic” or “quick” or “simple.” Garten frequently references her husband and is constantly party planning, giving one the sense of watching a 21st century melding of Martha Stewart and Julia Child. On the surface, Garten is utterly and completely a traditional mothering domestic female.

Yet, Garten is not a “happy housewife.” She has successfully turned an interest in food into a thriving business. Technically, she is never in the domestic sphere when she’s in her kitchen because cooking is her career. At times, Ina Garten moves between her cooking space, the kitchen, and her home office. The transition, usually accompanied by a music change, attempts to bolster Garten’s kitchen space as a personal space or a non-work environment through the juxtaposition with a place where work happens. Garten frequently alludes to her experience as a caterer and her gourmet food business. In one episode, she prepares what she calls “a working lunch” and invites her employees to her home to discuss business. Garten is specifically the “boss” in this episode and she clearly displays her authority as such. Her creativity and skill overturn the idea that “gourmet specialties...were so complex [they] would (presumably) stymie a woman chef” (Inness, 2001, p. 31).

In the kitchens that Guy Fieri visits for *Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives* women are more likely to be associated with comfort food and “home cooking.” Even though these women

did most of the preparation, they were considered “cooks,” not “chefs,” as if their expertise was intuitive instead of learned. In one episode, Fieri emphasizes that the female owner and cook of a popular neighborhood diner has no formal training, but is using traditional recipes passed down to her from family. She feeds the neighborhood much like a mother or grandmother would feed her children. This kind of rhetoric is not usually found in restaurants run by men.

Instead, the men Fieri visits are more likely to be creators of concept restaurants that have some sort of surprising twist. Take, for example, Fieri’s visit to a traditional Mexican restaurant in Wisconsin. It is ambiguous whether Doug Clark, the owner, has a culinary degree but he is associated with expertise because of his yearly trips to Mexico to search out new recipes, methods, and products. In another episode, Fieri visits a “funky little joint” in California where chef, Jimmy Carter (a former Olympic swimmer for Scotland) creates innovative recipes such as apple pie with grapes. Carter’s wife assists as a waitress, serving customers as a housewife might do at home. In juxtaposition to Garten’s constant assurances that the dishes prepared in the home (presumably by a female) needn’t be “perfect,” Carter’s food is described as being “always perfectly prepared.”

Along with expertise, TVFN allow their male chefs to have a much more charismatic personality. In many shows, male chefs “are able to audaciously ‘perform’ in front of a large audience, which establishes them as having clear and explicit emotional and social ties to a visible audience – a key element of the charismatic persona” (Ketchum, 2004, 23). And while men “can appear in kitchens and maintain their ‘professional’ status”, “they can also thrive in public spaces” (Ketchum, 2004, p. 24). In Guy Fieri’s interactions with the cooks and chefs featured on his program – he often giggles, fools around, and shouts, “you’re

awesome!” to the cook. Ina Garten is much milder, speaks in an even tone and does not raise her voice. She is never angry and when pleased, she smiles slightly.

Overt charisma is the lynchpin of what makes *Throwdown with Bobby Flay* watchable. The premise of *Throwdown* is questionable at best – home cooks (women) and restaurant owners (men) are tricked into thinking they’re filming a profile for TVFN. The first half of the show features them making a signature creation for the camera, often saying with a smile a catchphrase to the camera clearly devised by the production staff. Next, they prepare their dish for an audience under some premise, at which time Flay surprises them and challenges them to a cook-off. Flay almost always loses but his friendly banter and charisma removes what should be unbearable tension and awkwardness. In one episode, Flay flatters the two female owners of a whoopee pie bakery (using a family recipe) that he wants to eat *their* frosting.

When Flay faces off against a Texan cowboy, the show becomes reminiscent of traditional ideas of cooking that suggest “a man should take charge of outdoor cooking...grilling a steak...is a man’s responsibility” (Inness, 2001, p. 19). The two men cook outdoors to make chicken fried steak– the ultimate show of masculinity. Flay’s opponent is Kent Rollins, described as “a bonafied cowboy” who cooks out of a chuck wagon for ranchers. The two share cooking space over an antique outdoor cooking stove, sweating over the flames. Even though Flay has actually hosted multiple other grilling television shows for TVFN, he does not react aggressively or seriously competitively towards his opponent. Instead, Flay performs the stereotype of a city slicker on the range. Flay may give up establishing his own masculinity in this episode, but his treatment of Rollins suggests

the cowboy, and its traditional concepts of masculinity, to be the superior to less masculine urbanity.

A study by Cairns, Johnston, and Baumann (2010) looked at the ways in which audiences use “foodie discourse” to define their personal gender identity. Their conclusion is applicable in understanding the performances of TVFN hosts:

On one hand, foodie discourse is often at odds with historically dominant ways of doing masculinity or femininity. On the other hand, the discourse is still constrained by a broader system of conventional gender relations, a system that is also conditioned by the economic and cultural implications of class positions. (p. 609)

While the Food Network does allow space for new interpretations of gender roles in their programming, females seem able to contradict traditional notions of gender through their success outside the kitchen. At the same time, male chefs are already afforded a great deal of flexibility in terms of where they can go and what they can cook and they are assumed to be experts in their fields, rather than self-taught. Overall, representations of masculinity or femininity are relatively defined in each episode depending on the host and the other cooks with whom they interact.

Democracy in the Diner

On The Food Network, “good” can mean everything and anything. The constant use of that word creates a sense of ambiguity about what exactly is “good.” This allows TVFN to promote two oppositional ideologies about how their viewers should eat or think about food. Modern food discourse is one which balances between “two central, competing

priorities: Democracy and distinction” (Baumann & Johnston, 2010, p. 204). And more confusingly, followers of both are referred to as “foodies.” Baumann and Johnston (2010) go into further analysis of this term in their book, *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*. For clarity in this analysis, I make a distinction between “foodies”—who will “try anything, eat anything or eat anywhere” (p. 55)—and “gourmands” who “cultivate dining experiences as a source of status” (p. 11). The Food Network as a brand does not articulate the difference between the two, refusing to favor one over the other. Instead, each host creates their own ideology that may even compete against the interpretation of a different program.

Ina Garten’s audience must be the “descendants of yesteryear’s gourmets” (p. 203). Garten values traditional ideas of gourmet food culture like “high-status French food” (p. 203). Her recipes often contain expensive or imported ingredients not available at typical grocery stores and she frequently hosts parties for semi-celebrity guests with lavish menus and settings. Garten does not attempt to maneuver between the Foodie and Gourmand ideologies. Though she sometimes suggests ways in which the Gourmet experience might be accessed by a non-elite audience, overall, *Barefoot Contessa* contributes to “the reproduction of social inequality because food knowledge is one way that privileged and high-status people relate to one another” (p. 205).

The setting for the show is itself a signal of Garten’s role as a member of the upper-middle-class elite. The kitchen is spacious with industrial stainless steel appliances and ample cookware – all indications of expense. It is not cluttered but decorated in soothing monochromatic tones and neatly organized. It is fairly well known that Garten cooks from her home in the Hamptons, the outside of which is shown before commercial breaks. Like

the ingredients she uses and the people for whom she cooks, the house implies the values of the show and host as being distinctly upper-middle class.

The Barefoot Contessa does not necessarily teach elite gourmards how to cook but her show certainly teaches its audience how to cook like an elite gourmand. During the episode “Cooking for a Crowd”, Garten prepares lobster corn chowder for the theatrical cast for *Young Frankenstein*. As she says “we’re entertaining the most entertaining crowd in town.” While Americans can easily access the Food Network, few would be in the position to entertain guests with such prestige. In the preparation of the lobster corn chowder, Garten avoids “a disdain for foods that were not fresh, natural, and “authentic”” (Levenstein, 1993, p. 219) as would be typical for a conventional approach to Gourmet cuisine. When adding fresh corn to her pot, she does say one could use frozen. But she urges her audience not to use “bad” wine in the recipe, though she never qualifies what makes wine “bad” or “good.” This allows her audience some flexibility cooking with *The Barefoot Contessa* recipes without forcing Garten to alienate her viewers through explicit wealth.

Garten uses simplicity, a concept which Johnston and Baumann (2010) consider an important aspect of Gourmet discourse. It is a notion highly romanticized by the belief that simple food is “authentic because of the honest and effortlessness it conveys” (p. 76). Authenticity is in opposition to the artificiality of the mass-produced. But Garten avoids the politics of the industrialized food complex and the charged debates they inspire in the public sphere by stating her preference but not giving details as to *why*. Instead, one supposes that simplicity is embraced because food produced “without commercial

motivation, and only with single minded artistic fervor” (p. 80) is in some way “better” – it is “good.”

Both gourmands and new foodies value the preparation and consumption of food, but “foodie discourse also recognizes the political dimensions of food production and consumption” (p. 129). In his show, *Diner’s, Drive-ins, and Dives*, Guy Fieri explores places that serve a “good” meal without a fussy dining experience. Even the title the show suggests an avid pursuit of unexpected dining spots that can be “discovered” by adventurous foodies. He spends most of each segment in the kitchen with the restaurant’s head cook or chef, learning about and discussing the cooking methods used by that establishment. Fieri becomes a guy who just wants to have a “good” meal – wherever that might be.

The rhetoric of foodies and that of gourmands is undeniably similar. This is obvious when Fieri weighs in on what he calls a “hot topic”—fast food or not. He says “my position is this: quality, not quantity; handmade, not over processed.” The real litmus is availability and barriers to entry.

In one episode, Fieri visits a restaurant converted from a garage that is “small but...the flavor’s big” with a menu filled with “unusual combinations.” The owner, Louis Silva, emphasizes foods that are “simple, clean, and very fresh.” He uses herbs grown behind the restaurant and makes his own ketchup and barbeque sauce. Fieri calls Silva “the real deal” and after tasting one of Silva’s burgers, says “good job” and fist pumps the chef.

Like many of the cooks and chefs that Fieri visits, Silva says he uses smell to tell when his dishes are finished cooking instead of timers and thermometers. In this world, every day practice creates a level of skill that is attainable even among non-culinary institute trained chefs. Through his attentions to the relaxed manner in which his guests

prepare meals, Fieri suggests that “good” cooking is done through attention and love of food, not expensive gadgets. Family recipes are celebrated as are farm to table policies, all of which get Fieri’s seal of approval through his profuse excitement and fist-pumps of joy. But a more nuanced understanding of *why* these policies are positive and the implications they could have on the collective American diet are absent. And since Fieri is also the face of T.G.I. Friday’s, an American chain restaurant, it is not surprising that he wouldn’t articulate specifics.

The tension between foodie “good” and gourmet “good” becomes a plot device in *Throwdown with Bobby Flay’s* *Buche de Noel* episode. Unlike most episodes where Flay surprises an unsuspecting lay-cook during their supposed “filming” of a Food Network special, Flay himself gets “punk’d” by chef Francois Payard who is “world famous for holiday yule logs.” Flay makes a maple sugar and vanilla flavored dessert, complete with candied orange peels and chocolate maple leafs dusted with powdered sugar. He tells us it’s a non-traditional flavor and decidedly American. The presentation is, however, a typical *buche de noel* – rolled pastry and frosting decorated as a piece of firewood. Payard makes a chocolate mouse and hazelnut cream creation that is supposed to be a more traditional taste. His version looks much more modern and is rectangular instead of rolled, adorned with golden balls.

Flay is technically a trained chef but in this episode, he represents the typical American cook who enjoys putting his own twist on traditional recipes. Payard is decidedly French and the *Buche de Noel* is a French dessert. But his version is extremely contemporary and is described as “flawless.” Though the judges say the competition is “close,” they ultimately choose Payard’s version as the winning *Buche de Noel*. Between

two trained chefs, the best is determined through professional qualifications. Payard is world-famous for his *Buche de Noel* so even Flay's traditional version cannot compare to the French chef's expertise. But in the greater scope of *Throwdown with Bobby Flay*, Flay often loses to home cooks who emphasize traditional methods of preparation as opposed to the unconventional, exotic preparations Flay with which attempts to compete. These two dichotomies suggest that home-cooking/foodie "good" is distinctly different than professional/gourmet "good." Because of the nature of *Throwdown*, one method has to be a winner but episodes like this *Buche de Noel* help to balance the implied values of others.

The Food Network attempts to reconcile the difference between democratic ideas of food and those of distinction by showcasing the two forms side by side, labeling each with the non-descriptive term, "good," and broadcasting hosts who are willing to be flexible in terms of their approach to what "good" means. By refusing to promote one over the other, The Food Network avoids isolating any segment of their audience. Real discussions about food issues or agricultural policies are absent, allowing the host to maintain a sense of entertainment in their programming without referencing any sobering issues like hunger or the economic plight of American farmers. Instead:

The overall gastronomic message is one of abundance and variety, discrimination and choice, and increasing awareness of different culinary codes and the aesthetic possibilities of each. (Hanke, 1989, p. 233)

Concluding Remarks

The success of the Food Network is indicative of a much wider interest that the American public has in food preparation and exploration. The rhetoric of food

programming is a part of the articulation of identity in the United States. Through the mass media, Americans are exposed to a variety of cuisines, both ethnic and regional in origin. These differences are celebrated and suggest a broadening of the American palate that transcends traditional boundaries such as national identity or class. Food based holidays like Thanksgiving are important sites for this fusion and provide a place to affirm American-ness and less universal customs. Yet the Food Network is not a space to challenge outright traditional notions of identity. Instead, they present these conflicting notions side by side without further comment beyond that of a singular host. Hosts of the Food Network seemingly conform to gender roles in a way that sequesters women in the kitchen but they allow a great deal of freedom to participate in American culture across class boundaries. Conflicting notions about what “good” or “American” food are all presented in TVFN programming. Instead of reconciling competing interpretations, hosts promote them as needed. There is a great deal of diversity when it comes to TVFN fare and it gives viewers a great deal of choice to find themselves within the programming, or to explore something different.

Perhaps most interesting is the way in which food allows a very complex investigation of identity. This paper is limited in many ways because it does not include an analysis of popular non-TVFN food programming. Nor does it examine in great detail contemporary notions of food in other forms of media. The Internet is increasingly a popular site for foodies and gourmands alike to present their own interpretation of identity through food blogs and chat boards. A future project should further articulate the development of change in food programming to better understand the future of identity

themes presented here, or to explore alternative types of identity, such as sexuality or age which were overshadowed in this study.

The programs featured in this analysis are fairly typical of the Food Network. The hosts present layered notions of citizenship, gender, and class within a framework that has been established through decades of attention by the American media. Viewers invite Guy Fieri, Bobby Flay, and Ina Garten into their homes each week even though they may not mimic the recipes they find. There is another reason why American tunes in beyond instruction—communication. When “substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification...we have communication by way of food” (Barthes, 1961, p. 22). Through food, we can hope to understand some essential components of culture.

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