

The Sexism of Food and Our Kitchens: Foodie Underground

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1 YEAR AGO



COLUMN *If we want to talk about more cooking at home, we also have to talk about sexism.*

I have always been an advocate of cooking. If there is one thing you can do to better your diet and better your food choices, I really do believe it's opting to make your own food at home.

There's a current trend in food media that echoes this sentiment: Michael Pollan's most recent book "Cooked", food television shows devoted to quick and easy food preparation, and every single blog devoted to making your own yogurt/butter/kombucha/almond butter/kale infused anything.

Of course, that doesn't mean that the entire population is making a mad dash for the kitchen. All this talk of going back to the kitchen can be a big pressure on working families. As a friend of mine, a mother of two, put it recently, "I do my best but never feel good enough." And this is coming from a woman who knows how to cook, is devoted to shopping locally whenever possible and whose favorite cookbook is from the 1970s and all about putting more sustainable meals on the table. But the pressure is there, because the reality is that cooking and making our own food takes time.

But why is it that women feel this pressure more than men? Why is it that most food media is devoted to headlines like "10 Easy Meals For the Busy Mom" or, even worse, "Easy Outfits to Transition from the Kitchen to Hostess". No really, I have read several of those.

The answer is that the world of food is dealing with some serious issues of sexism.

In the food world, **chefs** gain celebrity status, and those chefs tend to be male. Take a look at any chef roundup recently and take note of how many **women** are mentioned. But if men reign in the flashy world of food, women reign in everything else. We are after all the ones usually putting food on the table at home. We are the ones that make sure that our families eat three times a day, every day of the week. When you cook in this way, you don't have time to make it artistry.

Recently, I came across an image of the cover of "**Quick Dinners for Women in a Hurry**," a book published in 1942. Ah, the 1940s and 1950s, when advertising was overtly sexist and the only role for a woman was in the kitchen. Yet in our modern, presumed more progressive era, have we really moved so far away from this? Sure, such a title would never fly with today's cookbook publishing houses, but the reality is that it's still mostly women that are bearing the brunt of putting food on the table everyday. And they get zero credit for it.

A New York Times article, titled "**When Their Workday Ends, More Fathers Are Heading Into the Kitchen**," took a look at exactly this question. As the New York Times reported, "Michael M. Rooke-Ley, a retired law professor in Eugene, Ore., echoed those concerns, noting that "a 1950s ethic still prevails" at times, even when both parents work. 'In these outposts of gender-based tradition,' Mr. Rooke-Ley said, 'Dad needs to get off the couch!'"

While the **number of men** in household kitchens is up – 29 percent of men spent time in the kitchen in 1965, in 2008 it was 42 percent – women still devote **double the amount of time** to food and drink preparation than their male counterparts.

I am not saying men don't cook. I am in a 50/50 relationship when it comes to making food with my partner; and he's not just putting frozen pizza in the oven. But there's no denying that this issue of sexism is deeply seated. On some level,

we still have the image of a woman in an apron and the man with a martini.

Let me put it another way: if it's still revolutionary enough for men to be cooking, so much so that it necessitates a New York Times article, you can be sure that the problem hasn't gone away. There's plenty of sexism in kitchens, and in the world of food in general.

If we are going to talk about getting more people back in the kitchen, the conversation needs to be inclusive. It shouldn't be just women feeling this pressure to buy better products and cook more meals at home. Both genders need to be empowered to take part in the everyday, boring cooking. Not just the sexier, dinner party throwing, look-at-the-12-course-meal-I-made-for-Saturday night type of cooking.