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Maria J. Veri¹ and Rita Liberti²

Abstract

This study provides a textual analysis of the 2009/2010 Food Network series, *Tailgate Warriors* (TW). The show features teams representing National Football League (NFL) cities in competition to determine who has the best tailgate fare. TW is part of an evolution in Food Network programming from an instructional model with a largely female audience to a competition-based entertainment spectacle geared increasingly toward men. Hegemonic masculinity is reinforced across the four themes identified in our analysis of the mediated intersection of food and sport. Competitive spectacle, the preoccupation with meat, the complexity of menus and food preparation, and discourses around place identity all work to distance cookery from the femininely coded domestic space of the kitchen.

Keywords

food studies, football, masculinity

Introduction

Iron Chef battles. *Cupcake Wars*. Mission impossible dinners. *Tailgate Warriors*. Food television in the United States has changed markedly since Julia Child's instructional days on PBS in the 1960s. Unlike the era of instructional televised cookery ushered in by *The French Chef* in 1962, early 21st-century food programming is a celebrity-driven entertainment forum that increasingly relies on competition to entice viewers. Today, television has transformed interest in food into a cultural phenomenon (Collins, 2009), cooking shows proliferate (Watson & Caldwell, 2005), and entire

¹San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA, USA

²California State University, East Bay, Hayward, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Maria J. Veri, Department of Kinesiology, San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Ave., San Francisco, CA 94132, USA.

Email: mjveri@sfsu.edu

networks are devoted to food entertainment and cooking instruction—the Food Network most influential among them. The Food Network, founded in 1993 and available in almost 100 million households (Swenson, 2009), is popular with both advertisers and television viewers (Atkinson, 2011). While one can still find programs devoted to instruction and expertise in the kitchen, the entertainment model dominates major network and cable offerings. A number of scholars (Collins, 2009; Hansen, 2008; Hollows, 2003; Ketchum, 2005; Miller, 2007) have examined gender representation in food television and how mediated cooking activities both uphold and challenge the traditional masculine/feminine binary of hegemonic gender ideology (Swenson, 2009). We are interested in building on this work by considering the intersections between food, football, and masculinity in mediated tailgate culture.

In this study, we examine episodes of *Tailgate Warriors (TW)*, a 2009/2010 Food Network reality series that exemplifies the new entertainment paradigm. The series, hosted by celebrity-chef Guy Fieri, explicitly links food with football and borrows competitive narrative elements from broadcast sport. We are mainly interested in examining how *TW* reinforces and challenges traditional social constructions of gender around food preparation and consumption. In particular, the fusion of the Food Network and the National Football League provides us with a mediated context in which to examine the social construction of masculinity through food and football. As Swenson (2009) contends, the “Food Network is an important site that articulates discourses about gender and cooking” (p. 37).

Rituals, notably tailgating, are a key part of football as spectacle, and there is perhaps no more widely practiced ritual than tailgating. Long associated with American football, thousands of fans devote significant time, energy, and financial resources to tailgating. Given football’s deeply entrenched and valued cultural status, such a pervasive associated ritual as tailgating warrants our attention. Thus, *TW* is significant as it presents a mediated slice of the activity that occurs on the blacktop. The totality of the football spectacle, including its gendered dimensions, is about so much more than four quarters of play on the field; it begins hours before kick-off in the space outside the stadium.

Feminist cultural studies and food studies are the frames of reference for our examination. We are guided by the imperatives to take popular culture seriously and to read the texts and practices of everyday life as meaningful cultural signifiers. This perspective allows us to focus on how cultural practices, such as cooking and spectating, shape and challenge forms of identity like gender. In this regard, our study links two academically marginalized practices—food and sport—in its examination of the social construction of gender. We engage in textual analysis of four *TW* episodes to explore how gender is signified by the historically coded feminine cultural practice of cooking when it is performed on the football stadium pavement in the made-for-TV-entertainment space of a public sport spectacle.

Significance of Study

A considerable amount of research in the burgeoning field of food studies has focused on understanding the historical and cultural aspects of women’s experiences with

food, yet there remains a comparative dearth of research on men, masculinity, and cooking (Buerkle, 2009; Julier & Lindenfeld, 2005). How food serves as a key site for the construction of femininity is well documented; less is known, however, about what happens when men occupy the femininely coded domain of cooking in nonprofessional settings. Even less has been written about the nexus of food and gender within the culture of sport, save for a limited number of studies on sports bars and tailgating (see, e.g., Drenten, Peters, Leigh, & Hollenback, 2009; Wenner, 1998). Moreover, cooking shows have functioned as a unique social barometer of gender roles (Collins, 2009), in much the same way that dominant men's team sports reaffirm hegemonic masculinity. Through an analysis of mediated tailgate culture, we hope to bring a feminist analysis to bear upon the relationship between men and food and provide greater insight into the gendered dimensions of food practices.

Watching What We Eat

From Julia to the Food Network

According to Watson and Caldwell (2005), "food is a universal medium that illuminates a wide range of other cultural practices" (p. 1). In the United States, food media have influenced the way Americans shop for, prepare, and consume food, as well as shaped attitudes toward the meaning of food in everyday life (Ashley, Hollows, Jones, & Taylor, 2004). From the beginning, food and television have had a highly functional, symbiotic relationship in both commercial and public broadcasting (Miller, 2007). In the early days of food television, programs typically originated to complement the instructional medium of the published cookbook. The hosts of these cooking shows were established experts before their first television appearances, such as Julia Child whose groundbreaking *The French Chef* series debuted on Boston's WGBH after the publication of the classic *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (Hansen, 2008). As a cookbook author, Child was celebrated for her exhaustive scientific testing of recipes and technique, and as a television host, was able to enthusiastically impart that expertise to viewing audiences. The intent of early food television was educational, an objective Child embraced, demonstrating what Buford (2006) called a "natural pedagogical imperative." The domestic female audience was the coveted demographic for these instructional programs (Collins, 2009), a marketing strategy that was both informed by and served to reify the already established cultural association between femininity and cooking.

The Evolution of the Food Network

The instructional model for cooking shows, which consisted largely of presenting the host in a stand-and-stir format, persisted through the 1980s and even the first few years of the Food Network. Nascent Food Network programming followed the standard established by *The French Chef*, with hosts such as classically trained chefs Sarah Moulton, Emeril Lagasse, and even Child herself in reruns (Collins, 2009;

Ketchum, 2005). Early shows emphasized education over entertainment and were geared toward capturing the interests of a narrow food audience (Miller, 2007). Many of these shows featured a lone host anchored to a small area in a Spartan studio kitchen and were shot with a single, immobile camera. By the late 1990s, however, cooking programs that adhered to this format fared poorly in the ratings and were increasingly criticized as pedantic and lacking action (Collins, 2009; Miller, 2007).

The Food Network responded to this criticism by reinventing itself with higher production standards and new programming that focused on the entertainment value of watching people cook food (Rhoshalle, 2010). Instructional cooking programs were infused with live bands, studio audiences, kitchen science, and travel segments to entice viewers who were demanding more than recipe instruction (Collins, 2009). A prime example of this transformation is *Emeril Live!* Chef Emeril Lagasse was taken out of the staid studio environment and placed in front of a live audience seated on bleachers, at small tables, and for a select few, at the bar-height counter in front of him as he cooked. A New Orleans band, with occasional guest musicians, played off to the side, with the frontman periodically engaging in banter with Lagasse. The set resembled a late-night talk show more than a cooking program, but food preparation and consumption remained the central activities around which the spectacle was based. The host, according to some critics, was “not showing viewers how to cook so much as . . . leading a cooking pep-rally” (Adema, 2000, p. 116). The success of *Live!* propelled Emeril to chef stardom as the Food Network’s first celebrity (Collins, 2009; Poniewozik, 1997). Lagasse’s blue-collar masculinity appealed to both male and female viewers (Miller, 2007), allowing him to connect with men in a way that cooking show hosts of the past had not, thus expanding the Food Network audience. At one point in its run, *Live!*’s largest demographic was men over 30. Poniewozik (1997) accounts for this appeal by citing Emeril’s perceived connection to sport, claiming “Emeril was a man who could show you how to prepare a cassoulet for Superbowl Sunday and leave you with the impression that he may have actually watched a football game once.” Chao (1998) elaborates on this theme, arguing that cooking shows “belong with the category of spectator sports; they are no longer really about viewers becoming better cooks” (p. 26). These and similar innovations shifted the emphasis in Food Network programming from expert instruction to lifestyle cultivation to, finally, competition-based entertainment spectacle, leading to the celebrity-driven edutainment format of the 2000s (Collins, 2009; Miller, 2007).

The Construction of the Celebrity Chef

In the first decade of the 21st century, the Food Network shifted the emphasis of its programming to include a heavier reliance on the Hollywood concept of stardom. Instead of expert instruction as the basis for host selection and ensuing celebrity, the network used its shows to create celebrities and then market them and their related products heavily (Collins, 2009; Hansen, 2008; Miller, 2007). With less expert instruction, shows were developed to provide more entertainment spectacle, which increasingly included elements of competition. Guy Fieri is a prime example of the

construction of the celebrity chef in this paradigm. Fieri, the bleached-blond, spiky-haired, self-proclaimed “kulinary gangsta” from northern California, was first introduced to Food Network audiences as a contestant on the second season of *The Next Food Network Star* in 2006. His victory in that competition led to the creation of his first show as host, *Guy’s Big Bite*. Fieri’s “chef-rock-star-sports-fan persona” (Moskin, 2010, p. D5) quickly resonated with American viewers, especially men, whom the Food Network actively courted with its programming expansion of the 2000s (Ketchum, 2005). The set of *Big Bite* was replete with masculine signifiers, including a studio kitchen set up like a rec room with a full bar, pool table, racecar fridge, pinball machine, jam stage with drums and guitars, and giant television (Swenson, 2009). Fieri is further distinguished from other celebrity chefs by his attire—which includes bowling shirts, flip-flops, studded bracelets, and skater shorts—as well as his spiky hair, goatee, multiple tattoos, and collection of trucks and sports cars. He has served as grand marshal of a NASCAR race, is the first to put tattoo art on his own line of kitchen equipment and clothing, and has been lauded by tattoo artists as an ambassador of ink (Garson, 2009; Moskin, 2010). Susie Fogelson, Food Network head of marketing, has said of Fieri: “I haven’t seen anyone connect to this range of people since Emeril . . . He really resonates with men” (Moskin, 2010, p. D5). Buoyed by the success of his studio show, Fieri went on to host the popular *Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives* series, numerous Food Network specials, and NBC’s game show, *Minute To Win It*. In 2009, as a well-established celebrity chef, he began hosting *Tailgate Warriors*, a partnership designed to reach a wider (male) audience by capitalizing on viewers’ preoccupation with reality show competition and expanding already established Food Network alliances with U.S. professional sports leagues (Moskin, 2010; Umstead, 2001). In this sense, Fieri, like Lagasse before him, has contributed to the regendering of food television.

The Merging of Food and Football: Tailgate Warriors

The Food Network program *TW* is a mediated merging of food and football cultures, and thus a prime text for the analysis of the various ways gender is socially constructed around both signifying practices. *TW* was developed through a partnership between the network and the National Football League (NFL). Host and celebrity-chef Guy Fieri was chosen to be the face of this collaboration based on demographic research indicating a strong correlation between viewers of football and his trademark show *Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives* (Moskin, 2010). The show is billed as featuring “tailgate teams from around the country . . . dukin’ it out to see who has the most killer grub in the game” (Food Network, 2010).

Analysis

We engaged in a textual analysis of four *TW* episodes. The first episode, which pitted tailgate teams from Buffalo and Chicago against one another, originally aired in October of 2009 and was rebroadcast in the fall of 2010. The remaining three episodes,

which featured cook-offs between Green Bay/Seattle, San Francisco/Oakland, and Minnesota/New Orleans, originally aired in October and November of 2010. All four episodes were taped at preseason NFL games. We viewed each episode multiple times, and recorded and transcribed each one to facilitate a comprehensive textual analysis of the viewed, recorded, and transcribed content. Overall, our analysis included 4 hr of programming (*TW* episodes ran 1 hr a piece).

In addition, we attended the August 28, 2010, taping of the San Francisco/Oakland episode at the home field of the Oakland Raiders in Oakland, California. During this fieldwork, we observed the *TW* crew, cast, and production staff taping the program and we conducted informal interviews with Raider Nation tailgaters, *TW* spectators, and Food Network staff. The use of these ethnographic methods on the stadium blacktop where tailgating culture thrives allowed us to more broadly contextualize the mediated events under analysis.

Themes

Four main themes emerged in our analysis of the *TW* series. Each theme, we argue, contributes to a discursive construction of masculinity grounded in power and privilege. The *TW* series constructs a *competitive spectacle* in which food practices and preparation become a gendered performance as teams “battle on the blacktop” for culinary supremacy. In the second theme, *meat* is positioned as central, even essential to tailgating. Meat’s privileged space on the platter and in *TW* narratives is symbolic not only of male dominance but a particular kind of masculinity in which power and virility hold sway. *Complexity* characterizes the third theme with menu creation and food preparation presented as extraordinary, detailed, and intricate. In the process, *TW* uncouples tailgating from the simple and mundane environment of the domestic kitchen. Finally, *TW* links *food*, *football*, and *place identity* as the menu and surrounding discourses are used as signifiers of team and city identity. The result produces narrow conceptualizations of gendered and classed arrangements and hierarchies. As our analysis will show, while *TW* presents some challenges to the traditionally gendered nature of food preparation, hegemonic masculinity ultimately is reinforced in all four themes of cooking as part of the mediated tailgate experience.

Competitive Spectacle

A competitive format forms the foundation on which *TW* is constructed as a structured, timed, judged, made-for-television cook-off between two teams of four tailgaters, each representing a specific NFL team. Each team is given 1 hr to prepare two appetizers, one entrée, two side dishes, and one dessert. Dishes are judged on taste, creativity, difficulty, and presentation. The format of the show borrows heavily from the ritual, rhetoric, and standard narrative of an American football game broadcast. From the show’s lead-in to its conclusion, host Guy Fieri essentially serves as both play-by-play and color commentator, heightening suspense and tension by continually

framing the event in relation to football and competition. Before the “game on the gridiron” Fieri announces, “we’re going to have a battle on the blacktop.” The site is, according to the host, an “awesome place for a competition.” Even corn side dishes go head-to-head in *TW* as the culinary clashes in the stadium parking lot further distance cookery from its traditional attachment to the domestic, the private, the feminine (Swenson, 2009; Drenten et al., 2009; Inness, 2001).

The format of the packaged competition that is *TW* infuses cooking practice with the already established cultural milieu of masculinity and football. Fieri “calls” the cooking action on the blacktop while interviewing contestants as they prepare their menu items, and engages in side commentaries with his fellow judges while they critique the tailgate teams’ “play.” Fieri incorporates football terminology into his narration with phrases such as “each team jumps into action with a confident game plan,” “he may have to call an audible,” “New Orleans is takin’ it down to the wire,” “teams are moving fast to beat the clock,” and “it’s the last drive of what’s been an intense competition.” At one point in the Green Bay/Seattle episode, Fieri even uses a telestrator to diagram hot spots on a grill with x’s and o’s, just as a broadcaster would to highlight an offensive play. Tailgate team members join Fieri in narrative exchanges that blend cookery and football. As Green Bay team member, Andy, struggles to thicken caramel sauce, Fieri quips, “And dessert wasn’t even Andy’s assignment. I see some audibles, I see some people changing positions, I’ve got running backs catching passes.” Andy acknowledges his team’s adaptations and responds, “you’ve got to change it as it goes, let the play develop and take the open lane . . . we’re . . . switching some things up.”

The show’s competitive structure further fuels a high energy, “one huge party”-like atmosphere on the blacktop outside NFL stadiums, pushing cookery literally and figuratively into public spaces that much more removed from the domestic kitchen. In doing so, *TW* and other shows like it “place cooking firmly in the public sphere and promote a version of masculinity tied to hierarchy, success, power, speed, and stamina” (Swenson, 2009, p. 49). *TW* constructs a spectacle of masculinity, as the cooking process, including the tools and equipment utilized, becomes a conduit through which participants perform gender and bolster traditional conceptualizations of manhood (Hansen, 2008). For example, in *TW* even the task of preparing a cake is rescued from its association with femininity and womanhood. Guy Fieri announces that the Oakland Raiders tailgate team is “going to cook a cake on the grill.” We then see team member, Kirk, pull out a large, bright yellow drill (to mix the cake batter), to which he adds, “Here we go, power tools at a barbeque. Mixin’ the cake, baby, mixing the cake.” As appears to be the case with Oakland’s cake bakers, cooking utensils utilized by men can be “cartoonishly” (Miller, 2010, p. 8) different from those implements used by women so as to make as remote as possible any association between the two activities.

Beyond power tools, other pieces of equipment, particularly barbeque grills, are showcased in *TW* as markers of masculinity. The grill, and outdoor grilling more specifically, has long been thought of as explicitly masculine, and *TW* does much to build

on that association. Indeed, size does appear to matter for *TW* producers as Oakland's large, custom grill, aptly named "grill-zilla" draws Fieri's attention. However, in the Chicago/Buffalo episode grill size *and* the teams' skills at building their own custom equipment constituted "the big story." It is "part of the lore," Fieri concedes, "that you gotta build some of it, you gotta create some of it." The Chicago club's "spinning grills" (rotisseries) were Fieri and the others judges' clear favorites, as more questions were asked about the grills than of the food being prepared on them. Built by Chicago team member Bob Bromberek, aka "the maestro of motors," the grill's system of motors, chains, and sprockets "impressed" all, with Fieri concluding, "these guys are playin' serious culinary ball." It was not just the ability to cook on the grill, but the success of constructing it that created much more appeal among men (Miller, 2010; Rogers, 2008).

The *TW* teams are not the only participants trying to outdo one another with the spectacle of power tools, outlandish cooking gadgets, and gargantuan grills. In each episode, host Fieri spends time with those tailgaters in the parking lot but outside of the *TW* competition. In keeping with the *TW* teams' gendered performances on the blacktop, tailgaters enlist displays of "primitive" masculinities (Rogers, 2008) where strength and virility, for example, are reclaimed and prized. Buffalo Bills' fan and tailgater, Kenny Johnson, "stands out" above all others in tailgate circles according to Fieri, not for the presence of any sort of traditional grill, but the absence of it. Kenny, Fieri notes, "doesn't have a grill, [he] has a Pinto [car]." Fieri seems almost in disbelief at the spectacle of masculinity in caricature before him as several men cook on the hood of Kenny's "portable grill." Fieri details the scene: "I've got a guy cooking steak, with a hatchet in a hubcap." Another "dude" cooking chicken wings in "an Army helmet with a sickle." A third man is using a saw as a griddle to cook bacon with a fourth scrambling eggs with a shovel. Finally, Fieri concludes, "Pinto Kenny's" setup includes grilling chicken on top of a toolbox with screwdrivers serving as skewers. The show's preoccupation with "recognizable masculinities" removes the specter of femininity while it confirms tailgate cookery as not only a safe but also seemingly "natural" space in which men prepare and serve food (Hollows, 2003).

TW constructs a gendered spectacle in its central casting of men and masculinity, but also as it positions women and femininity as the marginalized other. With few women on the *TW* team rosters, serving as judges, or engaged by Fieri in tailgating banter, female participants are relegated to the show's sidelines. When women do enter the *TW* frame they do so in ways that play on and play up conventional conceptualizations of femininity. New Orleans' "Jambalaya Girl" (her real name is not asked/given) and her cooking team of "Yum-Yum Girls" illustrate this point. Fieri laments, "I only have the Kulinary Gangsters, she has the Yum-Yum Girls." Interestingly, the squad does not cook on the blacktop, rather they serve as tasters who give the dish "official approval" through song. In unison they sing out, "YUM YUM! Come get you some!" The camera closes in on Fieri who declares, to the delight of the Yum-Yum squad, "I'm gonna stay here for a little bit." The "girls," in doing gender, provide culinary "cover" for men as they serve as stereotypical objects of the heterosexual male gaze.

Meat

Meat has been positioned as an essential and nutritious food item in many cultures; in the United States, meat is culturally established as a necessary component of a complete meal (Adams, 1990; Heinz & Lee, 1998). Like sports, foods are also culturally typed by gender. Meat has been historically constructed as a masculine food, and meat-eating as a way of asserting one's masculinity (Adams, 1990). Alternatively, vegetables and other nonmeat foods such as yogurt, fruit, rice, pasta, milk, and chocolate are coded feminine, and thus associated with women (Adams, 1990; Adler, 1981; Block, 2005; Miller, 2010; Sobal, 2005). According to Sobal (2005), "an archetype of gendering food is the relationship between maleness and meat" (p. 137). In the mediated space of *TW*, meat features prominently in the menus created by all teams, drives the competitive narrative of the episodes, and through its primacy, relegates vegetables to the periphery of tailgate cooking.

The menus and the running commentary of *TW* provide ample evidence of the primacy of meat to the competition, and by extension, tailgate culture. Each team included meat as the centerpiece of its entrée, and in some cases, its appetizers and side dishes, too. For example, the team representing the Green Bay Packers submitted a menu "built around grilled elk, brat sliders, and chicken." When questions arise regarding the temperature of Green Bay's grill and the time the elk has to cook, Fieri declares, "And without the elk, the entry is shot." In the contest between Oakland and San Francisco, the team representing the Raiders indicates how important tri-tips are to their entry when Bob explains, "I've got three tri-tips staggered so we present the best piece of lookin' meat for these judges." In his assessment of his team's performance, Mike from San Francisco reflected, "You know, we pulled it off. We came to the competition—it's about the meat, ribs versus tri-tip, that's it." During the Minnesota/New Orleans match-up, the following exchange between Jason (New Orleans) and Fieri displays the competitors' preoccupation with pork:

Jason: Everything tastes better when it's surrounded by a little bit of pig.

Fieri: I agree with you on that.

In fact, the love of all things pork permeates the blacktop and is encapsulated nicely on camera by an anonymous tailgater during the introduction to the Green Bay/Seattle episode when he proclaims, "Nothing says love like bacon." Banter between Dr. BBQ and Fieri during the San Francisco/Oakland episode further illustrates the primacy of meat for the judges:

Dr. BBQ: Arroz con pollo—I'm always happy to see somebody sneak in an extra protein into a side dish."

Fieri: Don't threaten me with extra protein.

Dr. BBQ's appreciation of animal flesh is also on display in the Chicago/Buffalo episode as he surveys the blacktop and states his approval for the camera: "I see a lot of

meat and a lot of fire and that's a good thing. Hot pans movin' around, guys with big sharp knives. This is kind of dangerous, it's exciting. I like it." Meat dishes often function as sources of entertainment, and illustrate the association between meat and successful masculine performance (Buerkle, 2009; Heinz & Lee, 1998).

Meat's place as a symbol of hegemonic masculinity is, perhaps, nowhere more explicitly seen than in an exchange between Fieri and an Oakland Raiders' tailgater. Meat and masculinity merge on the blacktop, elevating the activity to the status of a national ritual. Fieri asserts that tailgating "isn't just a contest, this is an American tradition." With the image of an American flag flying in the background and a pig roasting on a spit in the foreground, Fieri exclaims, "Dude, that is fantastic . . . the question is, a whole hog?!" To which the Raider fan declares, "Absolutely. She's [the pig] been goin' since 8:30 last night . . . We slept in the parking lot to keep an eye on her." Male ownership and control of the public sphere is enacted in and through tailgating culture and food, where meat, in particular, forms part of the foundation on which this process occurs.

Preoccupation with meat also drives the broadcast narrative of the *TW* competitions to create a sense of drama and suspense. In the San Francisco/Oakland episode, the judges maintain a running dialogue about San Francisco contestant Mike's ribs. Dr. BBQ doubts that Mike can grill perfect ribs in such a short amount of time: "I think the ribs are going to be the real key. That's their signature entrée and one hour's just not long enough to cook ribs properly. Let's see if they can do it." Fieri is incredulous that the San Francisco team is only preparing one rack of ribs for the contest.

Fieri: You only have one rack of ribs. What if they fall on the ground?

Mike: That's a chance I have to take.

In the Green Bay/Seattle episode, Fieri's play-by-play throughout much of the competition focuses on Green Bay's elk dish and grill man. Fieri notes that, "Chef Andy is worrying that Chris the grill man is spending too much valuable time on the side dish" and that "Andy's frustrated his grill guy hasn't gotten to the meat." After Chris puts the elk on the grill, Fieri continues to construct drama around meat: "The judges and Chef Andy are also keeping a close eye on the elk tenderloin that finally hit the grill," but "the time spent on the slaw could end up killin' the main course."

In an outro to a commercial break during the Chicago/Buffalo episode, Fieri teases the viewing audience with: "Hey, stick around, because when we return Buffalo gets back on track with a chicken pork combo you've just got to see." The team from Chicago has a signature brand that they wield to mark their grilled meat, which was of concern to Maille, one of the judges: "You really have to live up to the expectations when you put your name on it." Notably, the Chicagoans do not use their brand on side dishes or nonmeat items, but reserve it for their meat entrée, indicating the special quality of meat as the centerpiece of "meal events" (Heinz & Lee, 1998). The judges emphatically reiterate how exalted meat dishes are throughout the competitions, a dramatic device illustrated nicely by Fieri's proclamation: "Perfect slaw isn't going to make up for undercooked elk."

The cultural primacy of meat also serves to marginalize vegetarian fare, and by extension, those who traditionally prepare and eat it. In the gendered construction of food, women are associated with the preparation of vegetables, whereas men are typically associated with the cooking of meat, especially outdoors, on a grill, over an open flame (Adams, 1990; Buerkle, 2009; Heinz & Lee, 1998; Sobal, 2005). Outdoor grilling is generally seen as a masculine activity, one that is reinforced in other cultural realms, such as cookbook literature (Miller, 2010; Swenson, 2009).

In the *TW* series, women account for only a handful of the 32 contestants. When we do see a female contestant, she is usually charged with the preparation of side dishes, dessert, and vegetarian fare. Vegetables are relegated to the sidelines of the menus, and even then, the judges cast doubt on those dishes and the time devoted to their preparation by the contestants. For example, in the Minnesota/New Orleans episode, Fieri chastises the Vikings' team for spending too much time on fava beans: "It's a lot of work, a lot of time, and a lot of tension for just one side dish." Fava beans do seem a poor choice for a timed cooking competition, yet one wonders if the judges would have been just as critical of a labor-intensive meat side dish. In the San Francisco/Oakland episode, Fieri's play-by-play of Oakland's baked beans dish indicates that vegetables are insufficient on their own: "Beth is slicing bacon to fortify her baked beans." In the Green Bay/Seattle episode, Dr. BBQ expresses mild approval for an appetizer he expected to be lacking: "I'm not a big vegetable eater, I'm Dr. BBQ, so I kind of liked it that they put noodles inside and enough chicken." In the same episode, he patronizingly compliments a meatless side dish, saying "And the sweet potato salad . . . I thought that was a nice little side dish." Not only is meat the featured component of meal events, but meatless dishes are often found lacking in taste and fulfillment (Heinz & Lee, 2010). Even Dr. BBQ's understanding of his moniker indicates that grilling and vegetables are mutually exclusive concepts to him—an underlying assumption of many 20th-century barbecue cookbooks (Adams, 1990). Vegetables' place on the menu is relative to women's place in a patriarchal society, and more specifically, (hetero)masculine cultural spaces such as the football stadium blacktop. In tailgate culture, it seems, "the vassal vegetable should content itself with its assigned place and not attempt to dethrone king meat" (Adams, 1990, p. 34).

Complexity

The level of culinary complexity on display in *TW* is witnessed in each team's menu creations, preparation work, and ingredient lists, as well as the equipment used on the blacktop. These efforts, embellishments, and technological innovations serve to further separate cooking from the femininely coded domestic space of the kitchen, and even distinguish tailgate cooking from backyard barbecuing. As a contestant from Green Bay tells Fieri, "We don't just do brats and burgers, we can bring it."

Both the *TW* contestants and the fans interviewed on the blacktop display pride in their culinary repertoire and skills, and in many cases, go to great lengths to elevate stereotypical tailgate fare. Fieri and the judges frequently comment on this dynamic during the competitions. Early in the Green Bay/Seattle episode, Fieri pointedly tells

the viewing audience, “It’s not all fun and games out here on the blacktop. You think these people are just making hot dogs and cheese dip?” Indeed, the tailgaters go well beyond wieners in their competitive efforts. For example, the Green Bay menu features “BBQ baked beans with a smoky paprika infused slaw . . . elk tenderloin with fresh goat cheese, Door County cherry chutney, and Wisconsin cured pancetta” followed by a dessert of “honey crisp apple fritter with a caramel candy crust and six-year cheddar chaser.” Similarly, Kirk from Oakland tells Fieri, “We didn’t want to just throw a burger on the grill, anyone can do that.” Far from a simple burger, the Oakland team presents “an abalone poke, a pickled ginger—kickin’ mango salsa—fresh wild Alaskan salmon with a fresh made Caribbean jerk sauce,” plus “Bad Girl BBQ beans . . . soy sangria marinated tri-tip, arroz con pollo, garnished with some julienne fried potatoes.” Scotty from Buffalo tells Fieri, “I’m preparing our spicy corn medley, we’ve got an onion, a red pepper, an orange pepper, one jalapeno—we may add another. Then we’re goin’ to add some sweet corn to it and we’re gonna finish it off with a little bit of tarragon.” In the masculine performance space of tailgating, herbs are not so much feminine signifiers as cool cultural currency (Hollows, 2003).

The preparation required for the contestants’ chosen menus is also indicative of complexity. In addition to his grilling duties, BBQ Bob of Oakland, for example, is “in charge of making a marinade for the salmon and it’s got 19 ingredients, seven of ‘em chopped by hand.” In the Minnesota/New Orleans episode, Fieri notes “Reggie’s still rollin’ the prep table, choppin’ never seems to end for this ambitious parking lot menu. Even the pineapple pound cake dessert needs a good deal of prep.” In some instances, the prep work for the competition started well before the cameras were rolling. The main ingredient of the abalone poke featured by the Oakland team had to be harvested from the ocean. As Fieri explains, “abalone is a gem of the sea, you can’t buy it, you have to have a buddy that goes diving for it and if you don’t treat it right it can end up tough and rubbery.” Not only is abalone hard to obtain, but it is a high-risk ingredient to cook. Moreover, its procurement is a form of hunting—another archetypal masculine signifier.

The majority of the *TW* teams have elaborate cooking set-ups and custom vehicles to transport their mobile kitchens. For example, Oakland’s team has a state-of-the-art RV decked out in silver and black Raiders’ imagery. In addition to the RV’s kitchen, the team cooks on a large outdoor grill, the aforementioned “grill-zilla,” and uses the RV to power high-end appliances such as a rice cooker and pressure cooker. The Buffalo tailgaters modified their grill specifically for the *TW* competition. Scotty explains to Fieri, “We actually took this grill and added a foot to it just for this competition because we wanted to make sure that we had enough space.” Fieri appreciates the advantage this modification provides for cooking meat, noting “with 26 square feet that flat surface is big enough for Buffalo’s giant pork tenderloin. And the box up on top works like a convection oven.” In fact, early in the Chicago/Buffalo episode, Fieri surveys the scene and declares, “It looks more like I’m at an *Iron Chef* competition. Check these out we have scales, really dynamite knives, I mean we’ve got about every kitchen utensil you can possibly ask for.” The Food Network’s *Iron Chef*, which

features teams of elite professional chefs squaring off against each other in a similar competitive sports format, has been hailed as “a quintessential spectacle of machismo” (Polan, 2001, p. 1) and by the Food Network itself as a cross between ultimate fighting and Julia Child (Gallagher, 2004). Both *Iron Chef* and *TW* support hegemonic masculinity and challenge constructions of cooking as nurturing and family-centered labor (Swenson, 2009).

With complexity bordering on professionalization, and references to hunting and the primacy of meat as further cover, *TW* competitors can focus on presentation without jeopardizing their masculine credentials. After a description of his Louisiana hot sauce reduction, Reggie tells Fieri, “I want it to be up, to plate it. I want it to be pretty.” A Buffalo tailgater is similarly preoccupied with the presentation of his seafood appetizer: “I’m working on a warm bacon vinaigrette that’s gonna go over our four straight scallops. The scallops are actually going to be plated on a little bed of baby spinach.” These examples indicate the special quality of men’s cooking that distinguishes it from the everyday domestic provenance of the kitchen (Adler, 1981; Julier & Lindenfeld, 2005; Miller, 2010). Cooking has traditionally been considered women’s work, but the grilling craze that started in the 1950s helped define men’s role in the cooking process in a manner that kept away any “taint of femininity” (Miller, 2010, p. 8). Moreover, tailgating is a prime example of how “the festal pattern of male cooking generates and maintains a celebratory attitude which shows up in the adoption of specialties, the preemption of weekend meals and guest-dinners, or greater inclinations to experiment” (Adler, 1981, p. 51). This kind of attention to detail is also a function of professional organization. Fieri, for example, is impressed with Oakland’s execution of their menu: “Over on the Raiders’ side it’s economy of motion. You can tell they’ve been cookin’ together for years. These guys are running like a well-oiled machine. I mean, communication, hittin’ the mark.” Fieri could be describing a restaurant’s kitchen staff, or a professional football team’s offensive line. While women are more frequently tasked with cooking for daily sustenance in the home, men typically cook in professional spaces or for special meals or unique social occasions.

Consumerism linked to equipment is also apparent in the theme of complexity. Food Network shows “incorporate elaborate and expensive food processing, food preparation, and food cooking technology,” all of which is on display in *TW* (Meister, 2001). Furthermore, the network markets product lines for many of its celebrity chefs and is adept at advertising these items during broadcasts of its shows. For example, during *TW* episodes, pop-up ads for Fieri’s line of knives appear numerous times. Indeed, as Adler (1981) notes, “liberated male cooks are more likely to spend substantial sums of money on fancy and special-purpose cookware” (p. 48). Marketing firms, for their part, are quick to capitalize on men’s predilection toward purchasing expensive kitchen gadgetry (Julier & Lindenfeld, 2005). Not only does grilling over hot flames validate men’s cooking as masculine, it also gives men masculine cover when shopping for cookware and other assorted kitchen accessories.

Food, Football, and Place Identity

In *TW*, the cities participating in the competition and sometimes the regions they inhabit become gendered and classed markers of distinction. Carried out by Fieri, the show's judges and tailgate team members engage in banter that sustains city/team identification. The kind of food served and the manner in which it is prepared in *TW* are the binding agents that establish and reinforce each city's collective identity with its football team, reinforcing gender and class hierarchies in the process.

In the Chicago/Buffalo episode, the respective cities' rugged, gritty, working class vibe provided the ground from which to characterize team members and their behavior, as well as the food. Chicago's team, according to Fieri, is "led by Timmy Shanley, a plumbing contractor from the south side." With respect to the Chicago tailgate squad, Shanley reminds viewers, "We don't dance, we don't sing, we're bears, we're from Chicago, down and dirty blue collar," in case anyone had other ideas about the town's ethos and the tailgate team. Shared assumptions about place identities and perceived traits of those who occupy those spaces need not be spoken as Jay "the Tailgate guy" DiEugenio (a judge) remarks, in reference to Shanley's team, "these guys roll into Buffalo with a Chicago attitude." For captain Shanley, the team's stoicism explains their attitude and success in the *TW* competition: "We're a city of broad shoulders" after all, "nothin' got inside of us." For at least one judge (Dr. BBQ) the team's success was due to its ability to blend food with constructions of place as he quips, "that thing [fennel sausage] says Chicago to me."

For others, as well, food and the process of creating it symbolized and reaffirmed an urban area's identity in the collective imaginations of those within and beyond the city. "Hey brother," Fieri inquires of John, a Buffalo team member, "that's a big bologna sandwich. Is that how you do it in Buffalo?" Unapologetically reclaiming Buffalo's status as a working class community, John says of the sandwich, "That's how we do it in Buffalo. This is gourmet." In an example from the Green Bay/Seattle match-up on the blacktop, Fieri comments on "monstro" fritters (referring to their large size) made by the Green Bay team, adding, "If you're going to do a fritter and you're from Lambeau you better roll it like this!" Throughout *TW* episodes food comes to represent the urban center's collective identity, strengthening already strong relationships between residents of a specific city, and the professional sport franchise in that location (Danielson, 1997). The Chicago, Buffalo, and Green Bay tailgate activity, including the items on the menu, blend seamlessly with constructions of working class masculinity that define the cities and the game of football more generally. In this way, *TW* illustrates that the combination of football and food is a location that informs place identification, including construction of classed and gendered identities in those locations (Bale, 2003; Ramshaw & Hinch, 2006).

For other teams, however, the associations among place identity, gender, food, and football were less secure. Most teams did not seem to have to "prove" they were tailgate worthy, with Seattle the exception to this more general rule. Tanya, a Seattle team member, remained somewhat dubious, even in victory, "I can't believe we won." She

continues, “We are so glad to bring a win home for Seattle and to prove that we are actually a tailgating town.” In the San Francisco/Oakland episode, urban identifications were used to differentiate the two teams and in doing so exposed contrasting classed and gendered conceptualizations. Fieri offers, “If you’re a San Francisco 49er you know the refined ways of life. I mean I’ve been to a bunch of 49er games [tailgating] and I’ve seen people bustin’ out sushi and chardonnay.” The distance between the two cities, far more than the span of the Bay Bridge, is confirmed later in the episode as Dr. BBQ, admiring his plate of barbeque beans, tri-tip, and potatoes explains, “This is the kind of plate of food I’d expect to get in Oakland.”

Perhaps the most interesting episode, in terms of the construction of contrasts and contradictions in the food, football, city, and masculinity formula is the Minnesota/New Orleans match-up. Moreover, in this episode of *TW* in particular, culinary creations were marked and sustained as different along gendered, as well as racial and cultural lines of distinction. From the start Minnesota’s less complicated “Heartland kind of menu” was seen as the underdog to the more complex, “whole bunch of big food, big flavors” fare expected of the New Orleans team. Even Minnesota team member, Jason, worried about his squad’s “fried and everything on a stick” offerings saying, “we tried to keep the menu ‘Minnesota’ and that’s kind of a challenge you know.” Constructed and operating as polar opposites the menus, imbued with racialized signifiers, position the bland, “white-bread” offerings of Minnesota against the spice-filled, exciting cuisine of New Orleans. Much like Whiteness, it is within the banality of Minnesota’s menu that its power rests, as the exotic New Orleans eatables are marked and cast as other. To further create contrast and distance between the two, Minnesota’s “work ethic” as “even keeled and very solid” is played against the “flare” of New Orleans, its team and food. Thus, in this scenario, hierarchical divisions are built from, and rest upon, notions of racialized masculine identity that situate Whiteness as stable and self-regulated. Whereas, New Orleans’ “flare” is far from ordered and is instead conspicuous by its tendency toward the chaotic. Although for at least one observer, New Orleans’ “flare” is precisely what distanced the city from a connection to both sport and masculinity. Writing in late 2009 as the Saints marched toward the Super Bowl, Douglas McCollam muses:

It’s an odd pairing in a way, this team and this town. Football is a brute game, strictly regimented, born on cold, northern fields and associated with big-shouldered cities like Chicago and Pittsburgh. By contrast, New Orleans is a warm and dreamy place, birthplace of jazz, lover of good food, and afternoon naps. America’s most feminine city.

In the end, despite New Orleans’ much anticipated “pigs fly po-boy” entrée (named because people said the Saints would win the Super Bowl when pigs flew), team Minnesota won the match-up. Originally seen as lackluster and monochromatic, their menu eventually won accolades from the judges for its “simplicity” as “good, solid Heartland American food.” Moreover, it seems the Minnesota team’s ability to cook

“like a Viking” (on large grills) helped push their side to victory in a competition in which place meanings, tied to notions of gender, class, and race were generated and sustained through food.

Conclusion

In this article, we examined the ways the 2009/2010 Food Network series *TW* perpetuates and, to a much lesser extent, challenges traditional social constructions of gender around food preparation and consumption. The show, which epitomizes the celebrity-driven, competition-based entertainment paradigm of 21st-century food television, also served as a prime site for investigating the cultural nexus of food and sport. Our textual analysis yielded four themes: competitive spectacle, meat, complexity, and place identity. These themes illustrate how the mediated pairing of food and football in *TW*'s action on the blacktop reinforces hegemonic masculinity as it displaces and marginalizes women and femininity. Tailgate cookery's reliance on, and perpetuation of, traditional gender constructs provides a safe space in which men can engage in culinary practices. This study builds on food studies research on the intersection of food and masculinity in signifying cultural practices. Future iterations of our work will consider how the meanings fans bring to tailgate cookery inform their relationship with football and the ways they construct identity. As sport studies scholars continue to explore the dimensions of men and masculinities in sport spaces, we need to consider the gendered performances that play out on the blacktop, beyond the stadiums and arenas.

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Author Biographies

Maria J. Veri is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Kinesiology at San Francisco State University. She holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Studies in Education from the University of Tennessee. Her research areas of interest include gender, race, and intersections between sport and food politics.

Rita Liberti is a Professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Director for the Center for Sport and Social Justice at California State University, East Bay. Her primary research area is focused on 20th century women's sport.