

**Food Practices under the Lenses of Gender.
The Appearance of Masculinity**

Vulca Fidolini

Université de Lorraine, France

Luisa Stagi

Genoa University, Italy

Editorial

1. Introduction¹

As protagonists of advertisements for food products, beer, interior design, kitchen utensils, detergents, but also for airlines and phone companies, Italian Tv chefs have become,

¹ The essay in its entirety is the result of the authors' shared and prolonged reflections over the years. Nonetheless, for the purpose of authorship, the drafting of the different parts of this text can be divided as follows: paragraphs. 1, 2, 3, 4 are attributed to Luisa Stagi; and paragraphs. 5, 6, 7 to Vulca Fidolini.

over the length of a decade, amongst the most sought-after and prestigious recommenders of all manner of products. And not only that. From being judges on cooking competitions, chefs have gone on to be judges on talent shows, Tv hosts, influencers, and opinion leaders. Regarded as sex symbols, they are continuously in the spotlight of the media, which celebrates them with articles and services centred on the reasons for their success. The most widespread hypothesis links their fame to the ever-ungraspable matter of charisma: someone who is commanding in the kitchen, and is capable of guiding a team through the territory of taste, transmits confidence and authority.

Among the chefs that appear on Tv, those who become celebrities tend to be men who perform an exaggerated masculinity. Anyone who has studied this phenomenon links the performance of particular models of masculinity to the need to distance themselves from a terrain considered traditionally feminine: men who go beyond the confines of the kitchen must seek to distance themselves as much as possible from the feminine models, because they run the risk of “demasculinizing” themselves; for this reason they perform almost a caricature of masculinity, situated in backdrops that are far removed from domestic settings (Ketchum 2004).

The representation of gender in kitchen broadcasts reproduces the traditional models: the woman, always anchored to the domestic sphere and to the role of care, is in fact a cook and not a chef. From these representations it clearly emerges how for the female gender cooking is both an attitude and a duty, not a profession and not even a land of enjoyment (Stagi 2016). From the moment in which the kitchen arrives in television and becomes a spectacle, the position of genders on the axis food work/food pleasure becomes accentuated (Ray 2007). If food in television is above all a manifestation of play, of pleasure and is functional to a symbolic enjoyment, perhaps only a man can become its protagonist. A man with an exaggerated virility, who moves in a competent way in a sphere considered a pillar for the feminine identity, far from demolishing heteronormative models based on the division of spheres and of domestic labour, can still support the focus on a certain symbolic order. As happens often, in fact, the gender order is “seen” only when someone “touches” it thus creating tension, and therefore putting in evidence what is taken for granted (Gherardi and Poggio 2003).

The call for submissions for this monographic issue invited different analytical perspectives on the relationship between gender and food, yet the contributions that arrived stood out for their particular attention to the relationship between masculinity and food, as if, precisely, once again, the gender order could emerge only in the questioning generated by an outlier. An opposite result, however, to that obtained from the monographic issue on gender and food of the *Genesis* (2017) magazine which, precisely in the editorial, pointed out that in the group of texts received “the relationship between masculinity and the consumption and production of food (...) is neglected and strengthened, above all with reference to contemporary times, and this is no coincidence” (Asquer and Capuzzo 2017, 11). As if the framing of the relationship between food and gender through the historical perspective, typical of the magazine, had mainly registered the focus of the gaze towards female paths of negotiation and subjectification in relation to gender norms, power, and social structures more generally. By shining the spotlight instead on the contemporary, what we see is more a focus in which the centrality of the media mainly shows the masculinization aspect of food, rather than a background still characterized by a more “traditional” relationship between food and gender.

In reality, the relationship between gender and food has become the object of reflections only in recent times – it was around the seventies that the first lines of enquiry arose, and, as we will see, it was roughly from 2000 onwards that more systematic analyses began – probably precisely because, like so many of the questions that revolve around models and the complementarity of genders, it too is part of a set of practices and attributions that are taken for granted.

The connecting thread running through the contributions in this monographic issue is the assumption that the heteronormative paradigm produces a division of labour, spaces, areas, and words that discipline both those who are within the norm and those who are outside (Borghi 2010).

The first essay by Fava and Soldi shows, through specific analytical perspectives – from the history of fashion to media analysis – how the division of family roles rests on a consolidated sex gender system, functional to its reproduction. The following three essays, on the other hand, reveal how symbolic reparation strategies can be activated in the digression, somehow referable to the concepts of *Reproductive and Resistant Agency*

(Laurendeau and Sharara 2008) and *Gender Manoeuvring* (Schippers 2002) – a type of perspective usually used to thematize female strategies acted in predominantly male arenas. These concepts, which emerged in the context of music subcultures and extreme sports, can prove useful in analysing how women who enter these worlds utilise and validate symbolic assets belonging to their own genre, to circumvent or subvert the hierarchy of that specific field, but they can also be equally valid in the opposite digression.

The strategies included under these umbrella concepts, in fact, range from avoiding situations that would be challenging for their skills, devaluing them, to the re-signification of practices and spaces, with the enhancement of particular symbolic assets. In this context, the use of the concept of gender manoeuvring appears significant, which occurs when “one or more people manipulate their gender performance or manipulate the meaning of the gender performance of others in order to establish, interrupt or change the relationship between masculinity and femininity” (Schippers 2002, xiii). According to this perspective, actions linked to “gender manoeuvres”, even when they are acted in specific situations, operate both at a symbolic level, proposing and negotiating gender hierarchies alternative to the hegemonic ones, and subsequently at the political level, making visible the borders of gender. From the moment a man enters the territory of the kitchen, he will have to make use of strategies that operate on a symbolic level to validate his assets within this field, but at the same time he will make visible the implicit gender norms he is moving away from.

Both the article by Lorenzo Domaneschi and in that of Federico Boni analyse the shift of cooking from the private to the public sphere. In the first case, it is the open space of the terraces or gardens where men make barbecues, in the second, it is the roads down which, riding powerful motorcycles, the chef-motorcyclists go in search of exotic food or street food. Similarly, in the essay by Raffaella Ferrero Camoletto and Alice Scavarda youth foodie cultures become an original space to think about the negotiations of masculinities that “lay claim to” an interest in food, between the need for justification and the desire for resignification of gender norms.

2. Cooking, from duty to desire

The naturalisation of the link between nourishment and femininity, for example, is one of the construction territories of the division between the public sphere and the private sphere. In the classic study *Feeding the family*, Marjorie De Vault (1991) starts from the assumption that food care work is central to the production of the functionalist family model. According to the author, cooking as care is a way to “do gender” in which “a woman behaves according to a recognisable femininity”. Some more recent studies (e.g. Aarseth and Olsen 2008; Bugge and Almas 2006) tend to confirm that women continue to do most of the care work and feel responsible for feeding the family, with variations that depend on national context and the type of family life project (Cairns, Johnston and Baumann 2010).

From the 2000s onwards, studies that have focused on tracing connections between food and gender have increased (Avakian and Haber 2005). One of the first and most important works that connected the history of food and nutrition to the relationship between genders was *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* by Laura Shapiro (1986). The encounter of these first reflections with the intersectional and post-colonial approaches, starting from the Nineties, produced the development of an important analytical perspective (Avakian 1997 and 1998). There would therefore be numerous post-colonial approach studies aimed at tracing the practices of female resistance to cultural assimilation in the context of nutrition (for example Counihan 1999; Kanafani-Zahar 1997).

Within the framework of the relationship between welfare and individual engagement and accountability, the principles of nutritional science are a fundamental component of the neoliberal structures and the family is seen as the privileged place for the application of nutritional science and its technologies. This is why the discourses around the correct diet use a series of devices to model families with “good” and “healthy” life practices. The subject towards which the set of devices and technologies of the self – also spread through nutritional guidelines – are often addressed, is the mother she is considered to be the family “guardian of health”, according to a division of gender roles which is no longer defined and justified according to a functionalist perspective of social hierarchies, but on

the basis of a choice narrated as desire, responsibility or competence (Beagan *et al.* 2008).

The concepts of food work and provisioning are useful to highlight even more viscous aspects of women's feeding work (Cook 2009), that is, how to value care; in some circumstances, it can result in a service for neoliberal demands and workfare (Fraser 2014; Casalini 2015). It is no coincidence that mother blaming – the blaming of mothers who are not good enough, played on the power of family care through food – finds a privileged ground in nutrition (Benasso and Stagi 2018; Maher 2010).

3. Gendered domestic spaces

One way to conceptualize the importance that food has in the family environment and to understand the emotions that accumulate around food is Mauss's concept of food as a form of gift (2002/1925). In his perspective, gift relationships are important for creating and reproducing social relationships between family members and friends. Considering the division of domestic work, food as a gift is very often prepared by a woman in the role of wife and mother: “since food is consumed – symbolically and physiologically – it is the extreme gift, which nourishes both the body and the psyche” (Lupton 1999, 82). Therefore, the idea of nourishing or being nourishment still persists today and, with its latency, affects the search for female identity coherence, considerably heightened by the individual empowerment within a neoliberal welfare state.

A significant aspect of food in the family context is the ritual dimension of being together at the table as a moment of socialization with the models, values, and norms, in which the relationships of authority within the family are played out (Barbagli 1988). Research conducted a few years ago on the sexual stereotypes present in children's books² revealed, for example, that a still recurring image in the representations of sharing the meal in the family is that of the mother serving at the table with a tureen. According to

² The research, conducted in 2004, can be accessed in the following link: http://www.comune.torino.it/quantedonne/documenti/guida_alla_decifrazione.pdf .

the interpretations of this work, the tureen would seem to represent a monstrosity, a symbol of the offer that the mother, officiating the ritual, brings to the family³. The dramaturgy of this moment is also emphasized by the mother's posture: in the depictions she is often portrayed standing in front of the table in an almost liturgical gesture of oblation. In the same research it is evident that domestic spaces are also strongly gendered: the woman always depicted in the kitchen and with an apron, the man in the living room, with glasses and newspaper: details that in the first case codify the role and environment of care, and in the second the function of mediator with the outside, with the public sphere.

A significant aspect of food in the family context is the ritual dimension of being together at the table as a moment of socialization to roles, values and norms, in which authority relationships are played within the family. Some of the main studies on media representations of the link between gender and food, for example, have often started from the kitchen as a symbolic place of gender roles divisions. The work of Cindy Dorfman (1992) – a historical excursus on bourgeois American cuisine as a feminine place – tried to analyse change in the media representation of the kitchen as a symbolic territory of emotions and intimacy. Ten years later, Sherrie Innes (2001) followed a similar path, deconstructing the discourses and representations conveyed by popular media about women who cook. According to these analyses, cookbooks, advertisements and magazine articles help reproduce the idea that cooking for the family is “naturally” rewarding for women, both emotionally and aesthetically.

Indeed, as the aforementioned monographic issue of *Genesis* (Asquer and Capuzzo 2017) has amply shown, female writing on food and cooking can also represent a possible agency space for women. A certain strand of studies dedicated to the intertwining of food and gender has given relevance to the fact that “the relationship with food (from its preparation to its consumption) can constitute an authentic voice of historical subjects who, out of necessity or by choice, express through it much of themselves and of what historians are called to document” (Ivi, 3). In particular, the essays by Raffaella Sarti and Agnese Portincasa, contained in the *Genesis* monograph, reveal how the female gender and food

³ The gesture seems even more meaningful when we consider that the tureen is now an obsolete accessory, which probably most children have never had the chance to see in real life.

preparation combination is a variable relationship that depends on the spatial, social, and temporal contexts. Especially, they describe the consolidation, also in the Mediterranean Europe, starting from the 18th century, a culinary literature signed by women and intended for a female audience, capable over time of conquering a sizeable publishing market. A kind of writing that in some cases has proved particularly significant as a form of autobiography and self-writing capable of making the dominant models apparent.

In the essay by Elena Fava and Manuela Soldi, the first in this issue, this ambivalence emerges strongly: on the one hand, in fact, the male voice stands up as a guide for the construction of a taste that is functional to the vision of the house as a symbolic place for the nuclear family as the basis of society, on the other hand the necessary use of expert female voices, although relegated to specific areas, produces the peculiarity of that expert knowledge and the progressive conquest of spaces, such as the gastronomic ones hitherto considered the prerogative of the technical and elitist language of the gourmet, usually male, white and bourgeois.

Their analysis concerns two of the most prestigious magazines of Italian design culture, *Domus* and *La Casa bella* between 1928 and 1948, in the period that saw them most engaged in a “domestic education” through “the design of the space for cooking, the setting of the table, the choice of recipes and new comforts suitable for modern family life”.

The point of view is the female subjectivity and the role assigned to women in the context of the design culture that unravels from the kitchen to the table. On the one hand there are the male voices of the directors who guide through the change – from autarchy to modernization – on the other the female voices that by birth (they mostly belong to the bourgeois class) or by acquisition (female architects and designers) gradually occupy an albeit limited area of “expert knowledge”.

Both the male and female voices move towards some openings and clear barriers to change. If the technical women make a feminine contribution to the discussion, combining the skills acquired with the knowledge of the critical issues of the daily ménage, the bourgeois ladies offer the readers opinions from the home owner, opening up to the use of the appliances, but not to abandoning the role of cook.

The underlying idea, exemplified above all by the great designer Gio Ponti, who directed *Domus* magazine for many years, is that of the need to educate taste, or to build a

desire that produces a voluntary and profound adhesion to his vision of progress and of the family. If in the context of the domestic organization and in particular of the kitchen, Ponti's attitude is one of openness towards technological innovation, the approach to traditionally defined female labour – described as “the natural labour of women”, that which “does not remove her from the house, which does not drive her far from the cradle and the hearth” and makes her “similar to the Virgin Mary” – is undoubtedly conservative.

La Casa bella shows an even more conservative position, more closed to progress and innovation, and uses female experts only when it comes to making embroidery decorations, leaving the design issues, including gastronomic articles, to men.

In this essay, therefore, the fundamental role of cultural production clearly emerges in the diffusion of a precise discourse which, starting from the shape and function of the tools, environments and fittings, has the purpose of building, reproducing and strengthening a precise sex gender system.

4. From the kitchen to the extra-domestic space: the socio-material dimension of culinary practices

In the 1975 performance *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, Martha Rosler plays the role of a housewife who parodies Julia Child's cooking broadcasts of the 1960s. A static camera is focused on her, while she stands, wearing an apron, in a kitchen represented by a refrigerator, table and stove, naming and using a series of utensils placed on the counter in front of her, with gestures that deviate from normal uses. Through the sound of ladles that rotate in empty pots, the closures of a nutcracker or a rolling pin that rotates in the air, the woman and her tools transgress the system of meanings of everyday cooking. In the alphabet of kitchen utensils – she assigns a letter from A to Z to each one – as Rosler herself says, “when the woman speaks, she names her own oppression”.



Fig. 1. “I was concerned with something like the notion of ‘language speaking the subject’, and with the transformation of the woman herself into a sign in a system of signs that represent a system of food production, a system of harnessed subjectivity”⁴

Similarly, Lorenzo Domaneschi’s essay begins with the semiotics of kitchen utensils: if the rolling pin is female, the grill is male. The assumption of his work is that when we talk about the kitchen – and the related practices that take shape within this social space – one cannot keep under control its specific material dimension.

As shown effectively also in the article by Elena Fava and Manuela Soldi, the architectural organization of the “kitchen place”, as well as the design of the utensils that are included in this room of the house, represent fundamental tools for the production and reproduction of asymmetries in gender relations, at the basis of the idea of family itself.

The intent of Domaneschi’s positioning, namely to study gender through the practices that produce it, is to be able to analytically separate the definition of culinary practices

⁴ <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/88937>.

from that of domestic practices, since they call into question different environments and objects. In this perspective – whose two starting points are gender as a social practice and the power relationships that structure asymmetries within these same practices – accountability becomes a central tool. It is in this way that the author uses the various gender scripts and *habitus* that come into play in particular culinary practices, with the aim of questioning the separation between activities dedicated to foodplay and activities dedicated to foodwork.

It was above all the works around foodie culture, a subculture that is built around taste⁵, which brought out some interesting analytical perspectives on the relationship between gender and food according to the duty / pleasure axis. If it is true that on the one hand foodie culture is in contrast with some traits of the dominant models of masculinity and femininity, it is equally true that the profound incorporation of these models can easily transcend the boundaries of a subculture.

The research by Cairns, Johnston and Baumann (2010), for example, starts from the assumption that gender influences and is influenced by foodie discourses according to three directions: pleasure, the work / care axis, and the knowledge / skills axis. The results show that for each of these perspectives, gender moves on a reproduction / resistance binary.

There are also conflicting messages in television discourse around food: if on the one hand they can contribute to blurring the boundaries of gender territories, on the other they reinforce traditional roles and expectations (Adema 2000). The authors who analysed the division of gender roles in kitchen broadcasts (Ketchum 2004; Ray 2007; Corcoran 2008) identified similar classifications to position the culinary scenarios in which men and women move. In the first place the nourishment/pleasure axis (food work/food leisure): women who cook on Tv usually stage a femininity linked to the role of care, for men instead the preparation of food is linked to pleasure or a special occasion. The type of language and the tone of voice used reinforces these confinements: in the feminine the calm tone and the frequent reference to family members, while a high and decisive tone

⁵ For foodies, and foodie culture enthusiasts, the food style is an important part of the representation of their own identity; aware of the ethical questions that surround food, the new foodies have food experts and celebrity chefs as role models and icons, following them especially on cooking shows and food blogs.

and the use of colourful expressions, exclamations and metaphors, which refer to pleasure and to enjoyment, are typically male (Ketchum 2004). The settings themselves reflect this difference: sets that reproduce the domestic environment for the female kitchen, and for the male, sparkling studios with the presence of an audience, which the conductors-chefs often wink at (Corcoran 2008).

This dichotomy is further expressed in the private / public axis: if the women who cook are always anchored in the reproduction of a home-maker dimension, men often cross it, to set off in search of exotic or horrific flavours, to find and challenge those on the road who cook ancient popular dishes or to compete in endurance competitions in the quantity of food swallowed. The declination of the public / private axis is also found in the type of occasion or reason for cooking: men can cook for pleasure, because it is a party or in any case a special occasion, or if it is a duty, when it is a job with a high profile and recognition (Corcoran 2008).

In the perspective of the staging of masculinity, the representation of the man who cooks at the grill appears particularly interesting, indeed, as Lorenzo Domaneschi points out, even more the man and his Bbq: if the meat and the fire (naturally built) are elements that, one could say almost ancestrally, are part of the repertoires of masculinity, the barbecue is a practice that is placed in times and spaces outside the home. It is a leisure kitchen, built outside the home (obviously outdoors), through the competent use of specific technology. In our imagination, often built on American films and Tv series, the barbecue is a practice usually carried out by men on every occasion of festivity. Furthermore, this specific cooking practice is characterized by a set of skills, meanings, and material elements, starting naturally with the foods selected for that particular cooking, but above all by the specific skills required for its use.

A 2019 commercial⁶ for a well-known brand of razor blades and beard products showed a rundown of typical scenes of virility staging, to reveal what toxic masculinity is. In one of the most evocative, a row of men with arms folded in front of a barbecue, while watching the fight between some children, obsessively repeat *Boys will be boys*.

⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=UYaY2Kb_PKI&feature=emb_logo.



Fig. 2. From *The best men can be*: <https://gillette.com/en-us/about/the-best-men-can-be>

It is interesting that the row of men at the grill is one of the central scenes in the series of reproductions of reproductions of virility. The advertisement was built to expose toxic masculinity, according to that concept popularised in the nineties by Shepherd Bliss (1987) to show how cages of virility are built around the distancing, differentiation or debasement of all that which is feminine. The reactions to the commercial were strong and immediate: several men's associations decided to boycott the brand, stating that it was yet another attack on a masculinity already in crisis. The story of the crisis of masculinity is a device for maintaining the social order (Ciccone 2009 and 2019; Gourarier 2017), which uses recognizable repertoires moving within the change. As Mélanie Gourarier says, in order for this story to be effective, it must move within the change, bringing within it traits of continuity with traditional models: to maintain itself, the gender order must be transformed and adapted to modernity, and it is on this condition that it maintains legitimacy. The transformation of gender models is not necessarily an anomaly in the functioning of power relations, but rather, if anything, it can be functional to its reproduction (2017).

The novelty of the presence of the masculine in the territory of food and nutrition can therefore prove to be a very viscous passage because it risks dulling a more critical reading, necessary instead to trace the pitfalls of gender manoeuvres that work symbolically to reaffirm orders and gender hierarchies also in transition. However, as the essay by

Lorenzo Domaneschi shows, gender manoeuvres can also open to possible contamination: if the man who finds the pleasure of cooking can then continue to practice it also in the domestic territory, the woman who finds the barbecue can learn the playful and socializing dimension of cooking outside the kitchen. As often happens, in fact, gender manoeuvres work on a symbolic level making borders evident but also revealing their porosity.

5. Media narratives and gender power

Following Gourarier's argument, we understand that the reproduction of the gender order can use the power of the masculine domination to confirm its hierarchical structure, by shaping – in the same movement – plural forms of masculinity. Many studies (see, among others, Gough 2007; Nath 2011; Mycek 2018) have shown how food practices – by interpreting them not only as the act of eating but also as consumption styles, food preparation practices, activities of buying and choosing kitchen utensils, finding the ingredients etc. – represent today a privileged arena to build masculinity (Fidolini 2019a).

Gender and food share many common aspects. They both lend themselves to the elaboration of a similar constructivist approach which aims at denaturalizing and desessentializing concepts that, for a long time, have been interpreted only in biological terms. If the categories of woman and man are not the exclusive product of the “nature” but are socially constructed and negotiated, food practices have largely overcome – at least in the Western world – their role of activities exclusively linked to vital and physiological functions. In modern societies, nutrition has become more and more a lifestyle (Poulain 2008), shaping rites and tastes and, therefore, forms of social distinction (Bourdieu 1979).

It is so interesting to deal with the trajectories of the masculine reinterpretation of food practices as they are able to tell us a lot about the contemporary transformations of masculinity and the social inequalities which shape these transformations.

As Boni's contribution explains, the interconnection between masculinity and cooking shows is certainly a privileged field of dialogue between gender constructions and food practices. In Boni's text we also observe how such a dialogue is also a clear example of

how the expression of hegemonic masculinities through food can be considered a privilege of a few men. By saying that, we are also stressing a focal point of Connell's theorization of hegemonic masculinity models (2005). If we analyse gender identification process within cooking shows, it is possible to catch flagrantly how gender is produced through food practices and vice versa, in different ways according the social profiles of the actors which are implied in this process. Thus, Boni's reflection invites us to wonder to what extent men's entry into the kitchen is capable of rethinking gender asymmetries by questioning them. In fact, in cooking shows when chefs enter the kitchen they do that "for pleasure", without the imperative to take care of the family members: a duty that seems to remain a specific "feminine" duty. Moreover, the chef is not forced to stay in the kitchen: he can go outside, riding a motorcycle in search of new tastes around restaurants; he can wear a leather jacket and biting food on the street; we can see him exalting the fact that cooking is, for him, a passion, which can be conjugated both with family life and entrepreneurial investments. Gender hierarchy clearly shows its asymmetries. We deeply understand why, since its beginnings, feminist debate claims for the recognition of the silent and unpaid feminine work at home (Delphy 1975; Mathieu 1985).

The question is therefore legitimate: do the men in the kitchen allow us to rethink the asymmetries of domestic roles, or rather do cooking shows make these asymmetries even more silent and banal? The possible answer to this question could be drawn a disconcerting scenario. Just think about how the figure of the woman is described in food shows. As it has already pointed out (Stagi 2015), the feminine figure in such Tv shows is often depicted as the opposite prototype of the masculine chef. Moreover, when the format does not insist on her "naturalness" of housewife in the kitchen, we are in front of a career woman who, with her high heels, finds time to dedicate herself to domestic cooking as a result of her own decision: in other words, the carer role which she is playing was not assigned to her by others. Finally, when feminine professionals appear on Tv shows (thinking for example of the Michelin-starred chef Antonia Klugmann in *Masterchef Italia*), attention is first focused on the role of "a woman among men". Then, the storytelling often underlines the austere and rigorous traits of an iron sergeant who, just like her masculine colleagues, imposes her style through the *mise-en-scène* of the authority and its severity.

It is precisely by describing the man in the kitchen that Boni's contribution also leads us to think about all the stereotypes which characterise the women presence in Tv shows. At the same time, Boni's text sheds a new light on masculine gender performances. Dealing with the theme of the chef-celebrity, which is the protagonist of the "motorcycle gastronomy", an easy reader of the stove, we observe how much more agile and obvious is the exit of the chef from the kitchen, his willing to colonize the outdoor and the public spaces. It is precisely outside the kitchen that the chef seems to legitimize himself: therefore, through his ability to be free from the domestic spaces (Bourdieu 2000). Finally, the masculine chef is a social actor with a privileged social profile, who makes of his mobility an extension of his dominant masculinity: a metrosexual – as Boni says – interested by the care of his aesthetic appearance and his body. The motorcycle and the motorcycle rhetoric are used as a gender technology which allow the chef to abandon the domestic sphere while ensuring that his masculinity, devoted to cooking and food, does not appear weakened, but rather reinvigorated in its hegemonic position within gender relations.

6. Hybridized masculinities and new virilities

Performing supposed "feminine" behaviours in order to confirm and renew hegemonic ideals of masculinity represents a common path of gender hybridization dynamics (Demetriou 2001). The contribution of Ferrero Camoletto and Scavarda focuses on this issue.

As research on masculine eating habits have highlighted (see Mycek 2018; Fidolini 2019b), when men move away from food consumptions which are considered (by themselves or by their interlocutors) as "typically masculine" (for example when they adopt vegetarian or vegan regimes), men may try to find other social spheres where justifying their "good masculinity" (e.g. in homosocial spaces, at work, within couple relationships). In other words, they try to confirm elsewhere their masculinity: by emphasizing their virility, their irrepressible heterosexuality, their competitive attitude at work, their dominant role in gender relations.

The studies we mentioned above also highlights that gender identification through food practices and choices do not necessarily follow binary pathways that lead to the

embodiment of “more masculine” profiles – which are linked, for example, to “aggressive” styles of consumption, or the preference for red meat (Adams 1990) – or “more feminine” profiles – linked, for example, to the consumption of light products, white meat or vegetarian food (Sobal 2005). The boundaries between gendered food habits do not seem so clear. We can observe this porosity by analysing the construction of a healthy body through food, which is one of the most interesting fields where gender and food may dialogue (Fidolini 2019b). The combination of healthy dietary styles with attention to self-monitoring (Lupton 2016) and to the optimization of one’s physical and mental health (Dalgalarrondo and Fournier 2019) can lead to the renegotiation of a hegemonic masculinity model such as the one described by Courtenay (2000) who makes of its unregulated and unhealthy life habits a prerogative to strengthen its virility. The surveillance of the health through food can participate in the production of new hegemonic masculine profiles, which use self-care strategies as a mean to create new canons of masculinity (Fidolini 2019b). Men can express their virility by dominating and domesticating their own body, pushing further its physical and moral limits (for example, think of the recent success of fasting training programs among men – Dalgalarrondo and Fournier 2019). That said, it is clear that social backgrounds play once again a primary role in these processes. The above-mentioned studies (see Fidolini 2019b) also show that the willing of using food (or avoiding food within the context of a wider self-care strategy) as a tool to affirm a renewed control over the self is particularly popular among people coming from privileged socio-professional and cultural categories.

This ability that eating styles have to participate in doing and undoing gender in multiple forms is at the heart of Ferrero Camoletto and Scavarda’s article. The authors analyse how young men represent, live and tell their eating practices, shading light on new forms of virility. In the rhetoric of the interviewees, the processes of hybridization of the hegemonic masculinities are multiple. In the stories of the Italian young men which are analysed in the article, we observe the use of irony or the exaltation of healthy food as rhetorical methods to renounce Nutella without “losing face”. We pass through the battle between attraction towards junk food or a burger as supreme representations of “masculine food”, and the repulsion for the eating styles that these same foods denote as well as the risks they can represent for one’s health. We finally come to the reinterpretation of

the meanings conferred to food preparation, in order to highlight how cooking remains a fleeting task for men (a pleasure rather than a necessity) freed from a daily “feminine” routine. Through this journey, the authors succeed in showing how the construction of masculinity is characterised by its unstable balance, which repeatedly is in front of the risk of its failure. Ferrero Camoletto and Scavarda thus capture one of the deepest meanings of Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) lesson: in the obsession of not correctly embodying its traits lies the whole stake of the mechanism of construction of hegemonic masculinity, as well as its persuasive and seductive power.

7. The new horizons we expect to explore

The contributions of this special issue invite us to think about the possible new fields of research that food and gender may invest in the next years, both in Italian and international sociologies.

The texts which are here collected show contradictory dynamics: we both observe transformations of gender models and food practices and incessant returns to traditional patterns of understanding food and the relationship between masculinity and femininity. In this conflicting dynamic we would like to focus attention on a particular issue: what about fathers’ condition? In many studies we discuss throughout this introduction parenting is a core issue, and the attention is often focused on the figure of the mother. Indeed, within dominant social representations, women are easily referred to the tasks of care, and the figure of the mother is linked to the role of the guardian of good parenting practices. The preparation of meals is considered a core task in playing the role of mother. Studies have already show how mothers adhere to the dominant norms which discipline a supposed “good parenting” practice through food, but also how mothers often try to negotiate these norms – not without difficulties and hesitations as studies on mother blaming explain (Benasso and Stagi 2018). Mothers often look for autonomous margins of choice, questioning norms and expert knowledge, for example by reinterpreting medical instructions or dominant educational models in the light of their own ethical and/or ideological food choices (Adamiec *et al.* 2019). But what about fathers? What position do they take in this dialectic?

On this issue, Northern European countries have traced and are still tracing the path towards new research perspectives. Especially in the Scandinavian countries – among the first to carry out research on gender and food –, in socio-political contexts which are historically sensitive to the promotion of gender equality, studies have started to explore new relationships between men and cooking activities. Nordic social sciences have been interested not only in deconstructing the dominant representations according to which cooking is a “feminine task”, and which is just a *loisir* for men. They also have highlighted how the growing masculine interest for the kitchen tasks is increasingly interpreted in these countries as a domestic and ordinary duty for men, becoming parallel and complementary to the activities of the woman (wives, mothers, partners...). Obviously, research carried out on this issue (see, among others, Klasson and Ulver 2015; Neuman et al. 2017; Szabo and Koch 2017) explain how this movement towards equality is differently invested by men in these same countries, according to class, cultural and professional backgrounds. But this does not prevent us from starting to observe how fathers reinterpret the kitchen, the preparation of meals, the choice of products and recipes, and how through these activities they reinvent their parental role. Think, for example, of the pioneering work of Aarseth and Olsen (2008) who first described fathers trying to build their own space of intimacy with their children through food preparation when mothers are away from home for business. A new model of masculinity is revealed: the caring one (Elliott 2016), where men show qualities of care, interdependence, family relational attitude.

Obviously, we cannot imagine that a few small drops can change the sense of the current, especially in a sea – like that of gender asymmetries – which is so wide. It would be naive to believe that the cases described by Nordic studies can be applied and can play the same revolutionary role in different societies with diverse social, historical and political backgrounds. After all, it is precisely the pioneering studies we mentioned above that are the first to warn us about the fact that, often, the role of fathers in the kitchen still remains linked to the image of the “unusual” and the “extra-ordinary”. But it is worth, in our opinion, to exploit the potential of these studies and their strength, following and enriching their discussion on how fathers and their masculinities can lead to a negotiation

of the domestic gender models, or if they are just crystallizing differences between men and women at home, by reproducing – differently – old stereotypes.

References

- Aarseth, H. and Olsen, B. (2008), Food and masculinity in dualcareer couples, in *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 17, n. 4, pp. 277-287.
- Adamiec, C., Fidolini, V. and Wolff, V. (2019), Penser les dissidences et les conflictualités “par et dans” l’alimentation, in *Revue des Sciences Sociales*, vol. 61, pp. 6-13.
- Adema, P. (2000), Vicarious consumption: Food, television and the ambiguity of modernity, in *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures*, vol. 23, n. 3, pp. 113-124.
- Adams, C.J. (1990), *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, New York, Continuum.
- Asquer, E. and Capuzzo, P. (2017), Genere e cibo. Pratiche quotidiane e scrittura delle donne, in *Genesis*, vol. 16, n. 1, pp. 1-12.
- Avakian, A.V. and Haber, B. (2005), “Feminist Food Studies: A Brief History”, in Avakian, A.V. and Haber, B. (eds. by), *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Foodstudies. Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*, Amherst & Boston, University of Massachusetts Press, pp. 1-28.
- Avakian, A.V. (1997 and 1998), *Through the Kitchen Window: Women Writers Explore the Intimate Meanings of Food and Cooking*, Boston, Beacon.
- Barbagli, M. (1988), *Sotto lo stesso tetto*, Bologna, il Mulino.
- Beagan, B. et al. (2008), It’s just easier for me to do it’: Rationalizing the family division of foodwork, in *Sociology*, vol. 42, n. 4, pp. 653-671.
- Benasso, S. and Stagi, L. (2018), *Ma una madre lo sa? La responsabilità della corretta alimentazione nella società neoliberale*, Genova, Gup.
- Bliss, S. (1987), Revisioning Masculinity: A Report on the Growing Men’s Movement, in *Context: A Quarterly of Humane Sustainable Culture*, Spring, 21.
- Borghi, R. (2010), “Generi urbani: la città eteronormata”, in Barbieri, P. (ed.), *È successo qualcosa alla città. Manuale di antropologia urbana*, Rome, Donzelli, pp. 187-191.

- Bourdieu, P. (2000), *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique. Précédé de Trois études d'ethnologie kabyle*, Paris, Seuil.
- Bourdieu, P. (1979), *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*, Paris, Minuit.
- Bugge, A.B. and Almas, R. (2006), Domestic dinner: Representations and practices of a proper meal among young suburban mothers, in *Journal of Consumer Culture*, n. 6, pp. 203-228.
- Cairns, K., Johnston, J. and Baumann, S. (2010), Caring About Food: Doing Gender in the Foodie Kitchen, in *Gender & Society*, vol. 24, n. 5, pp. 591-615.
- Casalini, B. (2015), Neoliberalismo e femminismi, in *Jura Gentium*, vol. 12, n. 1, pp. 31-65.
- Ciccione, S. (2019), *Maschi in crisi? Oltre la frustrazione e il rancore*, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier.
- Ciccione, S. (2009), *Essere maschi. Tra potere e libertà*, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier.
- Connell, R. (2005), *Masculinities*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Connell, R. and Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005), Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept, in *Gender & Society*, vol. 19, n. 6, pp. 829-859.
- Corcoran, A. (2008), Taking a Big Bite out of the Food Network. The Importance of Masculinity in Food Programming - <http://www.american.edu/cas/american-studies/food-media-culture/upload/2008-Corcoran-Taking-a-Big-Bite.pdf>.
- Cook, D.T. (2009), Semantic provisioning of children's food: Commerce, care and maternal practice, in *Childhood*, vol. 16, n. 3, pp. 317-334.
- Counihan, C. (1999), *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power*, New York, Routledge.
- Courtenay, W.H. (2000), Constructions of masculinity and their influence on men's well-being. A theory of gender and health, in *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 50, n. 10, pp. 385-401.
- Dalgalarrodo, S. and Fournier, T. (2019), Introduction. Les morales de l'optimisation ou les routes du soi, in *Ethnologie française*, vol. 176, n. 4, pp. 639-651.
- De Vault, M. (1991), *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring Work*. University of Chicago, Chicago Press.

- Delphy, C. (1975), La fonction de consommation et la famille, in *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, vol. 58, pp. 23-41.
- Demetriou, D.Z. (2001), Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique, in *Theory and Society*, vol. 30, n. 3, pp. 337-361.
- Dorfman, C. (1992), The Garden of Eating: The Carnal Kitchen in Contemporary American Culture, in *Feminist Issues*, Spring, pp. 21-38.
- Elliott, K. (2016), Caring Masculinities: Theorizing an Emerging Concept, in *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 19, n. 3, pp. 240-259.
- Fidolini, V. (2019a), *Fai l'uomo! Come l'eterosessualità produce le maschilità*, Milano, Meltemi.
- Fidolini, V. (2019b), Sorvegliare la salute? Uomini e costruzioni di genere attraverso le pratiche alimentari, in *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, vol. LX, n. 2, pp. 229-330.
- Fraser, N. (2014), *Fortune del femminismo. Dal capitalismo regolato dallo Stato alla crisi neoliberista*, Verona, ombre corte.
- Gherardi, S. e Poggio, B. (2003), *Donne per fortuna, uomini per destino. Il lavoro raccontato da lui e da lei*, Milano, Etas.
- Gough, B. (2007), Real Men Don't Diet: an Analysis of Contemporary Newspaper Representations of Men, Food and Health, in *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 64, n. 2, pp. 326-337.
- Gourarier, M. (2017), *Alpha mâle. Séduire les femmes pour s'apprécier entre hommes*, Paris, Seuil.
- Kanafani-Zahar, A. (1997), Whoever Eats You Is No Longer Hungry, Whoever Sees You Becomes Humble': Bread and Identity in Lebanon, in *Food and Foodways*, vol. 7, n. 1, pp. 45-71.
- Ketchum, C. (2005), The Essence of Cooking Shows: How the Food Network Constructs Consumer Fantasies, in *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 29, n. 3, pp. 217-234.
- Ketchum, C. (2004), *Gender, Charisma and the Food Network* - http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p113145_index.html.
- Klasson, M. and Ulver, S. (2015), Masculinising domesticity: An investigation of men's domestic foodwork, in *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol. 31, n. 15-16, pp. 1652-1675.

- Innes, S.A. (2001), *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture*, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press.
- Laurendeau, J. and Sharara, N. (2008), Women Could be Every Bit as Good as Guys: Reproductive and Resistant Agency in Two ‘Action’ Sports, in *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, vol. 32, n. 1, pp. 24-47.
- Lupton, L. (2016), *The Quantified Self: A Sociology of Self-Tracking*, Cambridge, Polity.
- Lupton, D. (1999), *L’anima nel piatto*, Bologna, il Mulino.
- Maher, J., Fraser, S.M. and Wright, J. (2010), Framing the mother: Childhood obesity, maternal responsibility and care, in *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 19, n. 3, pp. 233-247.
- Mathieu, N.C. (1985), *L’arraisonnement des femmes. Essais en anthropologie des sexes*, Paris, Ehes.
- Mauss, M. (2002), *Saggio sul dono. Forma e motivo dello scambio nelle società arcaiche*, Turin, Einaudi, (original ed. 1925).
- Mycek, M.K. (2018), Meatless Meals and Masculinity: How Veg* Men Explain Their Plant-Based Diets, in *Food and Foodways*, vol. 26, n. 3, pp. 223-245.
- Nath, J. (2011), Gendered fare? A qualitative investigation of alternative food and masculinities, in *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 43, n. 3, pp. 261-278.
- Neuman, N., Gottzén, L. and Fjellström, C. (2017), Narratives of progress: Cooking and gender equality among Swedish men, in *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 26, n. 2, pp. 151-163.
- Poulain, J.-P. (2008), *Alimentazione, cultura e società*, Bologna, il Mulino.
- Ray, K. (2007), Domesticating Cuisine: Food and Aesthetics on American Television. *Gastronomica*, in *The Journal of Food and Culture*, vol. 7, n. 1, pp. 50-63.
- Schippers, M. (2002), *Rockin’ Out of the Box: Gender Maneuvering in Alternative Hard Rock*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press.
- Sobal, J. (2005), Men, Meat, and Marriage: Models of Masculinity, in *Food and Foodways*, vol. 13, n. 1-2, pp. 134-158.
- Stagi, L. (2016), *Food Porn. L’ossessione per il cibo in TV e nei social media*, Milano, Egea.

Stagi, L. (2015), Mise en scène du genre dans les émissions culinaires italiennes, in *Journal des anthropologues*, vol. 140, n. 14, pp. 73-92.

Szabo, M. and Koch, S.L. (eds. by) (2017), *Food, Masculinities and Home: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, New York, Bloomsbury.