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Crowded Kitchens: the 'democratisation' of domesticity?

Gender, Place and Culture (in press)

Angela Meah &
Peter Jackson



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Gender, power & the kitchen space

- Vast literature on 'home' and gendered subjectivities re/produced within it.
- **Kitchen** as key site in which power is deployed: routine/ritual; inscribing and reinforcing gendered roles/responsibilities; a space in which 'status is confirmed and exclusion practiced' (Floyd 2004:62).
- Design historians highlight that development of modern kitchens reinforced women's feminine subjectivity (Llewellyn 2004).
- Denigration of quotidian cooking as part of routine, taken-for-granted work of 'feeding the family' (Murcott 1983; Charles and Kerr 1988; DeVault 1991; Giard 1998).

But...

- Nuclear household no longer the norm, requiring a reconceptualisation of domestic roles (Jackson 2009).
- Time-use data re men's contribution to domestic activities: 1960s = 90 mins p/day, early 2000s = 148 mins; cooking/cleaning = 20/50mins.
- Cooking increasingly reconceptualised as a recreational, leisure activity.
- TV instrumental in invoking 'masculine domesticity' (Swenson 2009); Jamie Oliver – cooking as a 'cool', masculine lifestyle activity (Hollows 2003).
- **Has men's presence led to kitchen feeling more 'crowded' spaces for women?**

Methodology

- Multi-generational household study
 - 23 participants, aged 17-92; 7 men
 - 8 extended families, 2-4 generations
 - 17 households
- Food focussed life history interviews
- Ethnographic methods
 - Guided kitchen tours
 - Shopping go-alongs (Kusenbach 2003)
 - Videoed meal prep
 - Photography



Conflict and foodwork

Joe Green (45), twice divorced, mature student, lives with son (19) and male lodger.

“...we were sat down one day having a big argument and I said ‘You think I’m your dinner-bitch or something? That you can click your fingers and I’m going to cook you your dinner?’. Well, he’s a 19 year old man, and I may be his dad, but I’m not his fucking dinner-bitch, nor anyone else’s”.

Gender, skill and gadgets



Gender, skill and gadgets

“you can use your hands – you’ve got tools on the end of your arms! [laughs]” (Liz Elland, 37).



Choosing when to 'step up to the plate'

Jonathan Anderson (38), cohabiting with partner, son aged 3.

*"I thought I would have done more (.) I thought I was going to be more adventurous... You know the challenge of (.) cooking well because it, I suppose (..) **in the first year or two years it was such basic cooking that it almost wasn't very interesting for me**".*

Stuart Charles (42), works in IT, married to Sally (40) NHS admin, 2 children aged 7 and 5.

*"I feel it's my goal... **to make the packed lunches as healthy as they can be, and as exciting as they can be so that...I think that presentation... so that each night I sort of sit down [laughs] and sometimes it's easy and sometimes it's (not)**".*

“When it’s more his domain than your domain, you rebel”

Ted (66) and Laura Anderson (63), semi-retired, he’s the principal cook.

“...it’s his cooker really, I mean, I, I don’t find it very easy to use and I don’t really understand how it works and, all of that”.

“...it just makes me feel really good about using it ... it’s not like a toy, it’s a proper bit of kit”.



Form Vs. Function

Hannah Faulkner (35) part-time working mum of 2 children under 5, married to Ian (42), a chartered surveyor.

*“**he thought** he knew better about how to design a kitchen, so we had a bit of conflict about how to design it... it’s all about function. **I want it to look nice, but it has to work**”.*

*“Hannah drew out **her needs** and I then made the cupboards to fit the needs”.*



Conclusions

- Men are entering the kitchen largely on their own terms; but routine family feeding continues to fall to women.
- Persistence of gendered inequalities through the design of kitchen space and use/appropriation of technologies: spaces in which men's identities are inscribed.
- Persistence of gendered constructs concerning the nature of cleanliness and order = 'more work for mother?'
- Persistence of gendered constructs concerning responsibilities for family nutrition
- Domestic practices & gendered subjectivities are in a constant process of negotiation/transformation, **but** little evidence here of a significant transformation of gendered roles/relations amounting to a 'democratisation' of domesticity.