

Food and Femininity. By Kate Cairns and Josée Johnston. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, 240 pp., \$24.99 (paper).

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Food and Femininity is an interesting and well-reasoned examination of the compound intricacies of responsibility, joy, burden, shared skills, and cultural norms and biases that shape foodwork as a longtime aspect of feminine identity. Kate Cairns and Josée Johnston carefully untangle parts of the age-old conflation of women and domestic food labor. Using data from a series of in-depth interviews and focus groups involving both women and men, the authors employ participants' remarks and experiences to explore the habits, attitudes, feelings, triumphs, and guilt associated with food work in families. Threaded through respondents' perspectives is commentary that provides a conscientious consideration of multiple inequalities, including class, race, income levels, culture, and other demographic and personal characteristics. Further, Cairns and Johnson attempt to build a "feminist politics of foodwork" through analyses of contemporary feeding and eating practices that spotlight "healthy eating," public discourse around food choices in blogs and popular magazines, and an exploration of the pleasures of eating and cooking. Confronted head-on is the dilemma faced by many women: while foodwork is an often-onerous service performed for others, it can also be experienced as a way to express creativity, love, and sheer *joie de vivre*. Does one perspective outweigh the other? The complex issues involved are given a satisfyingly nuanced assessment.

The feminist-inspired idea that the personal is political lies at the heart of this work. In fact, the authors argue that contemporary foodwork may be *too* personal, because of the neoliberal decentralization that rests responsibility for food choices and, therefore, health choices and outcomes directly on the individual (read: woman) rather than holding the food environment (regulatory provisions and processes of food production, distribution, and marketing) to account for its role.

While written thoughtfully, this is a slim volume that cannot cover the full range of topics in this rich subject. For instance, while the largely

female responsibility for promoting child well-being through healthy eating is explored quite thoroughly, there is little consideration of how femininity and the embedded praxes of foodwork are transmitted intergenerationally. Women learn to be female, and, as girls, we are taught what to do and what *not* to do by our mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and other female role models and instructors. Foodways and food practices, particularly, are handed down through experiences and training in personal, gender, and cultural expectations; techniques; resources; feast and holiday traditions; and other norms in which women and women's work are central.

In addition, the authors examine the notably gendered landscape of domestic foodwork almost exclusively through an emphasis on shopping, food choice, and eating, which is understandable given the study's original configuration as an exploration of how people "negotiate food decisions" (p. 14). Other aspects of domestic foodwork, such as culture-specific cooking, post-meal cleanup, maintenance, garbage, and recycling, are unexplored, although they are common elements that often involve some interestingly gendered norms.

Men's relationship to foodwork is also a topic of interest. As may be expected, male participants were rarer than female ones in Cairns and Johnston's investigations. While some men reported doing the everyday cooking for their families, most male foodwork was "associated with leisure and the preparation of special meals" (p. 151). In other words, foodwork largely remains divided along gender lines: men can choose whether or not to participate and earn major points (or salaries) for doing so, while the continued conflation of femininity and foodwork naturalizes and sustains women's efforts in the kitchen.

With their call for the development of feminist food studies and feminist food politics, Cairns and Johnston contribute to an important perspective in the multivocal dialectic on gender and food.

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