Anthony Bourdain hates cupcakes. When asked by the *Seattle Times* to comment on the cupcake craze in North America, Bourdain said, with gravity and annoyance, “Enough” (Tsong 2009). In fact, Bourdain’s dislike for cupcakes is not a surprise for those familiar with his type of performed masculinity: edgy, rough, mysterious, and characterized by “a rejection of domesticity” (Ashley et al. 2004, 165). For Bourdain, endorsing cupcakes—the quintessential symbol of domestic femininity—would act against his performed identity, which has been carefully crafted through various media, from books to reality television. Yet, despite the chef’s dissatisfaction with the frosted dessert, the cupcake remains a very powerful presence within the North American foodscape and in various Food Network kitchens.

Bourdain’s comment on cupcakes is a suitable entryway into discussions about food, representation, and identity because it highlights the fluidity with which a culinary cultural object such as the cupcake can circulate within multiple registers of meaning and inform diverse identities. If, for Bourdain, the cupcake represents a culinary joke and the sum of many things he dislikes—daintiness, domesticity, and nostalgia—for other celebrity and noncelebrity chefs who perform on television, the cupcake can be deconstructed and reassembled in order to signify a range of things—from retro domesticity to hypermasculinity. Therefore, I argue that the baking of cupcakes on food television, specifically Food Network, represents an
informal pedagogical moment in the complex and contradictory process of identity making.

Building on the cupcake’s flexible identity, this chapter suggests that the social and cultural value of food television resides in its role of informal educator on matters of performed identities, belonging, and taste. Even if a food show does not specifically instruct the viewer how to cook—which, for some scholars, is problematic because of its lack of immediate educational value—it nonetheless presents multiple entryways into informal learning about processes such as performing the self, negotiating a sense of belonging, and endorsing a specific taste culture or more. In a nutshell, food television contributes to our identities through its various messages about food and cooking. Likewise, food shows borrow from and inform everyday food-related practices, constantly reinforcing and challenging collective identities and taste communities. In my view, the cupcake is well positioned to function as an example of this exchange because it has been co-opted by a multitude of gendered identities, from the vegan pin-up girl to the overtattooed male hipster, and it has been transformed to suit these diverse and often contradictory identities.

Starting from the argument that food television acts as an informal educator in matters of identity and belonging, this chapter explores the transformation of the cupcake from an overtly feminine item associated with an idealized form of domesticity into an almost gender-neutral dessert that can be freely co-opted by men. The cupcake is a rather unexpected object for the shaping of masculinity, given the very powerful bond between cupcakes and feminine aesthetics. At the same time, the playful, spectacular, and versatile nature of the cupcake allows it to function as an empty canvas for the performance of different types of masculinity. The ingredients, decoration, and plating of the cupcake, together with the material culture surrounding both the food and the body of its maker, contribute to different registers of identity that are “taught” through food programming. In this chapter, I address how aspects of cupcake culture have permeated the kitchens of two Food Network male celebrity chefs, Chuck Hughes and Alton Brown, who are as comfortable scooping buttercream frosting onto a cupcake as they are grilling a steak. I suggest that each cupcake reflects the identity of the chef, who, at the same time, is representative of wider taste cultures. My discussion contributes to an underexplored perspective on food television—the value of cooking shows as informal education—and
highlights the cultural significance of the cupcake as a marker of identity. In addition, the chapter traces the process of the cultural co-option that transforms the cupcake from a symbol of domestic femininity to a dessert that is “safe” for men.

FOOD TELEVISION: EDUCATION, ENTERTAINMENT, OR BOTH?

Food Network, the first television channel in North America dedicated entirely to food and cooking, had its debut in 1993 and, as Cheri Ketchum points out, “followed early conventions for television cooking shows,” such as “a single cook providing instruction,” before it became the complex lifestyle network known today (2005, 219). In 2000, Food Network Canada was launched after the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (crtc) approved the licence for a Canadian version of the popular network, ensuring Canadians access to food shows, celebrity chefs, and lifestyle lessons. However, the wheels of food television were set in motion much earlier, in the late 1940s, when James Beard and Dionne Lucas pioneered the cooking show on American television. James Beard, “the dean of American cookery,” merged instruction and fun as the host of television’s first cooking show, Elsie Presents James Beard in “I Love to Eat”—Elsie being the Borden Dairy Company’s cartoon cow (Collins 2009, 27). The show ran for only one year, from 1946 to 1947. A year later, Dionne Lucas took up the baton with To the Queen’s Taste, which was renamed The Dionne Lucas Cooking Show in 1949. Lucas’s show had a more didactic take on cooking and focused on developing proper culinary skills in the kitchen. Despite the popularity of both Beard and Lucas, it took one “French Chef” (Julia Child) and one “Galloping Gourmet” (Graham Kerr) for audiences all across the United States and Canada to believe in the value of watching people cook. Julia Child “was one of the first to present a purely food-centered cooking show as opposed to a homemaking show, and, at the same time, as if by accident, a host-centered show” (73). What Julia Child added to domestic cookery was professional ethos, entertainment (often unintended), and a genuine enthusiasm for the pleasure of cooking. Graham Kerr’s television show has been viewed as the first “to aggressively capitalize on the entertainment potential of the medium . . . the show opened with the snappily-dressed, British dandy of a ball of energy leaping over a tall kitchen chair while holding a full glass of
wine” (106). The standards for cooking shows in North America were set by these two chefs (Adema 2000, 114), who also, through their cooking and performing styles, dictated the mandate of cooking shows: education and entertainment.

Julia Child’s cooking philosophy, informed by her desire to educate the American public on how to become better cooks, is often placed in contradiction with the entertaining scope of Food Network. Food Network’s true identity was crafted in the United States under the leadership of Erica Gruen, who became CEO in June 1996 and began shifting the network’s emphasis “‘from people who like to cook to people who love to eat’ by making shows personality driven” (Adema 2000, 114–15). Under Gruen’s tenure, the first of Food Network’s celebrity chefs, such as Emeril Lagasse and Rachel Ray, were crafted in front of live audiences, a technique that was borrowed from other entertainment-centred television genres. This transformation proved successful: in 2006, Food Network reached eighty-nine million homes across the United States. As noted by Signe Rousseau (2012, 17), it had “become the perfect platform for manufacturing celebrity chefs and for turning food into a spectator sport.” Rousseau agrees that performance is a natural part of cooking shows, since they are representations of real culinary practice. However, she adds, “it is worth remembering the difference between performance as education—arguably the original point of televised cooking—and performance as entertainment” (17). On a similar note, Pauline Adema (2000, 116) asserts that “food television is not about eating: It is about watching food and being entertained by the personality. For home viewers of . . . cooking shows, being a couch potato, a consumer of food television, becomes more pleasurable than actually cooking and eating.”

Adema (2000, 118) characterizes the viewers’ relation to food television as one of “vicarious consumption” because “we want to be entertained in the comfort of our own home, we crave a home cooked meal but don’t wait to cook it.” Because Food Network viewers engage with food visually, watching food being cooked without actually participating in that process contributes to the pseudo-culture generated by modernity more broadly (Adema 2000). Mark Meister (2001) adopts a more critical perspective on food television, arguing that Food Network promotes a discourse of the “good life” born out of modernity without educating consumers about other issues related to food, such as biological and nutritional
characteristics. Thus, “food’s sole purpose, according to TVFN [TV Food Network], is to satisfy the excessive and sophisticated tastes of the human palate. To discuss food in any other way would contradict TVFN’s good life vision” (178). Signe Hansen (2008) contributes to this conversation by pointing out yet another injustice done by Food Network to society—transforming viewers into consumers. She writes, “Consumption of the consumer is played out in two ways: first, by keeping us watching, and second, through food media’s sphere of influence beyond television” (51).

While I believe these commentaries to be fair, I suggest that Food Network has not entirely dropped its educational agenda. On the contrary, I would argue that the network constantly performs unintentional pedagogical acts. Such pedagogical moments are embedded in the performed identities of the celebrity and noncelebrity chefs and in the objects—from kitchen gadgets to aprons—that define their cultural affiliations. The chefs’ tattoos, the frosting on the cupcakes, and the kitchen décor are all aspects of identity that aid the viewers in belonging to, negotiating, or challenging different identities and taste cultures. Therefore, while highly didactic shows such as Julia Child’s French Chef are no longer part of Food Network programming, viewers can still learn while being entertained. Of course, merging education and entertainment is not something new to television. However, Food Network seems to be critiqued by academics and other communities more harshly than any other television network for wanting to entertain its audiences. In the following section, I discuss the performance of masculinity on cooking shows in relation to the informal pedagogies that, I argue, are embedded in food television.

PERFORMING MASCULINITIES THROUGH FOOD: THE INFORMAL PEDAGOGIES OF COOKING SHOWS

Cooking and its representation on food television are ideal sites for exploring different instances of gender performance, because cooking practices are constantly negotiated along gendered lines. In the gendered history of cooking, the woman is traditionally confined to the private domain of the kitchen, and the man to the professional field of culinary labour. As noted by Alice Julier and Laura Lindenfeld (2005, 3), “When considering gender and food, the most obvious scenario is to analyze what gets called ‘women’s special relationship to food’—that is, an exploration of how
women are materially and ideologically engaged in food production and consumption, most often in ways that re-inscribe particular kinds of social and economic inequality.” Rebecca Swenson (2009, 37) notes, however, that “if men are doing more work in the kitchen, our cultural ideas about what is and is not strictly ‘women’s work’ might also be shifting.” This reworking of gendered relations with food and cooking often happens in the context of cooking shows, where identities of male and female chefs are crafted and performed to reflect the complexity of the cooking realities in North America. Swenson identifies Food Network, in particular, as “an important site that articulates discourses about gender and cooking, as it is one of the most widely viewed channels devoted to instructing viewers about how to buy, prepare, and consume food” (37). In addition, I believe that through informal and often unintended pedagogical moments, cooking shows offer “lessons” in identity performance and suggest the types of masculinities that can be enacted in the kitchen.

In Gender Trouble, Judith Butler writes that “performativity is not a singular act, but a representation and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization, in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” ([1990] 1999, xv). Building on Butler’s understanding of gender as performed, Hillevi Ganetz (2011, 404) adds that “rather than defining who we intrinsically are, gender is what we are doing at specific occasions.” Furthermore, the concept of “everyday” is significant to exploring the process of “doing gender,” since performing a gendered self is “embedded in everyday interactions” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 130). Cooking is one of the quintessential everyday acts that positions gender as a matter of “doing.” Just as gender is performed in everyday practices, television suggests a series of representations of these everyday realities, representations that both borrow from and recycle everyday acts of performance. Therefore, “concepts such as performance must here not be read as saying that the artists (or others involved in the TV show) are playing roles different from who they ‘really’ are, but should rather be understood in relation to the theory of performativity as a necessary aspect of all social life” (Ganetz 2011, 404). Thinking about masculinity within this framework, I view the baking of cupcakes in various Food Network kitchens as a performance of an everyday practice in which the identities of the bakers are negotiated through their bodies, the space of the kitchen, and items of material culture.
To explore notions of masculinity in the kitchen, I use the definition provided by Robert William Connell, who writes that “masculinity is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture” ([1995] 2005, 71). Because, as Connell adds, “no masculinity arises except in a system of gender relations,” the representation of cooking—a traditionally feminine practice—on television is best observed through an analysis of the borrowings and negotiations that take place in Food Network kitchens. The performative moments that define different types of televised masculinity are forged through a renegotiation of what cooking signifies, which results in the reframing of cooking as a practice safe for men. The male chefs of Food Network respond through their performance not only to other masculinities on the screen but also to the domestic and feminine history of cooking. In addition, the performance of masculinity through cooking allows viewers to reflect on their own identities—to discover, or perhaps question, the communities to which they belong—and to participate in the creation of different systems of representation.

CUPCAKES: FROM DOMESTIC FEMININITY TO . . . “BUTCH” BAKERIES

Since the mid-1990s, when cupcakes began to surge in popularity throughout North America, the little desserts have acquired many associations: domesticity, femininity, feminism, sensuality, nostalgia, memories of childhood, the colour pink, vanilla frosting, sparkles, frilly polka dot aprons, vintage cake racks, and even the roller derby culture. In the North American social imaginary, cupcakes are generally a feminine cooking affair. While contemporary cupcakes are imagined as a collage of memories of a fictional domesticity of the 1950s, they do have a place in the history of baking. But, despite its presence in American culture since the late 1700s (Smith 2012, 181), the cupcake has never been as popular and embedded with meaning as it is today. The Food Timeline website offers several recipes for cupcakes in cookbooks dating from 1796 to 1871. At that time, the name “cupcake” referenced the quantities of ingredients in the recipe—which included one cup of each ingredient—and sometimes the baking container, which was an actual cup. Only at around the turn of the century did cupcakes start to be associated with children (as favourites to be
brought to school on birthdays) and used for fundraisers (Smith 2012, 181). After World War II, the most famous cupcake was the Hostess CupCake, a mass-manufactured chocolate cake with vanilla filling sold very cheaply in most American supermarkets. Available only in one flavour, size, and decoration, the Hostess CupCake was a symbol of industrialized production of cheap foods rather than of daintiness, domesticity, or nostalgia.

The revival of the cupcake as we know it today—a symbol of nostalgia for childhood and of maternal and domestic femininity—is associated with a small bakery in New York City, Magnolia Bakery, and a very famous television show, Sex and the City. Magnolia Bakery presented a new concept to New York foodies—a bakery dedicated entirely to the small and dainty dessert. Nicola Humble explains that Magnolia Bakery inspired hundreds of other bakeries to turn their attention to cupcakes, because “the appeal of the cupcake is clear: it is small: just enough to satisfy but not too fattening. . . . It is portable, ideal for fast-paced city life. But above all it is its cuteness, its candy-colored evocation of the innocent joys of childhood” (2010, 112). Soon after the cupcake craze hit most major North American cities, from New York to Los Angeles and Vancouver, the miniature cake piqued the interest of celebrity chefs, who popularized it in cookbooks and television shows. The cupcake quickly gained a prominent place on Food Network, either as the main “protagonist” of food shows, such as Cupcake Wars, or in occasional appearances in the kitchens of celebrity chefs. Nigella Lawson’s How to Be a Domestic Goddess (2000) and Martha Stewart’s Cupcakes: 175 Inspired Ideas for Everyone’s Favorite Treat (2009) are just two of the many popular texts that advocate for the relevance of cupcakes. Such interventions from predominantly female celebrities reassured North American bakers that the little dessert was both a feminist statement and proof of postfeminist domesticity.

The troubling positioning of the cupcake in relation to feminism is linked to its rich repertoire of cultural meanings, ranging from nostalgia for a lost domesticity of the 1950s to empowerment in association with the do-it-yourself movement. In the 1980s, Martha Stewart challenged American housewives to remodel their kitchens and cooking practices according to “educated middle-class standards,” which also resulted in the creation of “a powerful nostalgia for a past of warm, cozy kitchens and the smell of grandma’s baking” (Humble 2010, 111). This fantasy reintroduced the cupcake as the perfect culinary object to bring back such feelings of nostalgia.
into the domestic kitchen. However, Stewart’s cookie-cutter traditional femininity contrasts sharply with the expressions of other female celebrity chefs, especially Nigella Lawson. Much has been said about Nigella Lawson’s culinary promiscuity with respect to her cooking style and overall relation to food. Janet Floyd (2004, 65) writes that Lawson’s television show Nigella Bites tries to “ignore the notion of the kitchen as a domestic workshop by linking it with sexual gratification.” Lawson’s performance in the kitchen and her play with food runs counter to conventional norms of kitchen behaviour. In fact, her relation to her kitchen and the food she cooks is best understood through the lens of postfeminist domesticity. “The postfeminist housewife,” writes Stéphanie Genz, “is no longer easily categorized as an emblem of female oppression but she renegotiates and resignifies her domestic/feminine position, deliberately choosing to ‘go home’” (2009, 50).

It comes as no surprise that in How to Be a Domestic Goddess, Lawson uses the cupcake in various flavours, from lavender to Coca-Cola, to suggest the playfulness of the modern woman in the kitchen. Lawson’s cookbook brought her considerable criticism from feminist writers who perceived the book as a “manifesto for Stepford Wives” (Hollows 2003, 188). The cover of the book features a single cupcake, “white icing dripping down the side, top inexpertly domed, sugar flower rakishly off-center, as vulnerable in its see-through paper case as a young girl in a nightie” (Humble 2010, 114). Throughout the book, Lawson’s cupcakes are lavish and decorated with a hint of sensuality, which contributes to Lawson’s image as a “domestic goddess” not simply a prefeminist figure of femininity, a throwback to a “real” past, but as “a point of feminine identification that responds to the contradictions of the present” (Hollows 2003, 190). At the same time, however, this cupcake-baking modern woman references the idealized mom from the 1950s and 1960s, “a fantasy constructed from the advertising images of the 1950s and ‘60s, a sepia collage of which adorns the book’s endpapers” (Humble 2010, 113).

Despite the cupcake’s associations with feminine identity and domesticity, its playfulness, versatility, and rather loose historical associations with culinary rules and hierarchies have allowed for its appropriation by a most unexpected population—men. According to David Arrick, chef and owner of Butch Bakery in New York City, the cupcake—when called “Jackhammer,” “Big Papi,” or “Tailgate”; cooked with bacon, stout, and
rum; and decorated with plaid and camouflage—is 100 percent man-approved. In his “Butch ManIFESTO,” Arrick writes, “Butch it up, Buttercup! These ain’t your grandma’s cupcakes! Our objective is simple. We’re men. Men who like cupcakes. Not the frilly-pink-frosted-sprinkles-and-unicorns kind of cupcakes. We make manly cupcakes. For manly men.” Arrick has borrowed from a visual and material culture associated with a “manly” masculinity crafted from some very stereotypical signifiers: bacon, beer, and military gear. Furthermore, he discards all that he considers to be unnecessary decorations: sprinkles, pastel frostings, or fondant flowers—stereotypes of a feminine cupcake. The result, he claims, is a cupcake for men.

Writing of the new fascination with the cupcake, Nicola Humble (2010, 114) argues that “these cakes are postmodern because they are . . . copies of an original that does not any longer exist, or perhaps never did,” going on to explain that “these miniature cakes speak of the idea of cake, of a yearning for childhood, for pastel-colored reassurance and simple pleasure, for home, for mother, for the smell of baking, for being allowed to lick the mixing bowl.” The cupcake is in fact well suited to assume this postmodern role. Within the hierarchy of desserts, it has never ranked as haute cuisine, and, in comparison to more glamorous baked treats such as the éclair or the pain au chocolat, it has largely gone unnoticed in culinary history. The very simplicity of the cupcake transforms it, however, into an almost blank canvas for new interpretations and appropriations. When recently reinvented as a nostalgic nod to the 1950s, the cupcake was co-opted by the craft and do-it-yourself culture, which is also traditionally associated with domesticity and femininity. However, the versatility and playfulness attached to the cupcake translate into multiple instances of appropriation that correspond to diverse masculinities. Such masculinities can be best observed through a close analysis of two Food Network celebrity chefs, Chuck Hughes and Alton Brown, who, like Arrick, engage in the baking of cupcakes while negotiating the practices involved in making the dessert in order to put a masculine touch on the final culinary product.

LESSONS IN MASCULINITY: TATTOOS, “GOOD EATS” AND CUPCAKES

Chuck Hughes, a Montréal-based celebrity chef and restaurateur, is best known for his cooking show, Chuck’s Day Off, and for his two trendy restaurants in Old Montréal, Garde Manger and Le Bremner. Chuck’s Day Off
is filmed on location in Hughes’s restaurant and shows the chef cooking for a variety of diners ranging from his parents to the local firefighters. On the Food Network Canada website, the show is described as follows: “Sandwiched in between the mouth-watering recipes are rock & roll reality segments that give the viewer insight behind the scenes of the city’s hottest restaurant and into the life of one of the food world’s rising stars. The end result is addictively delicious television.” Readers also learn that “Chuck loves food. So much so his favorites are tattooed on his arms: bacon, lemon meringue pie, lobster and arugula just to name a few.” And, according to Chuck Hughes, a cupcake might be the subject of his next tattoo. In an episode of his show aired in May 2013, Chuck cooks a meal for his all-female “wait staff” that concludes with a platter of red velvet cupcakes with mascarpone frosting. While prepping the cupcakes for the oven, Hughes confesses, “I love these so much, I think I’m gonna get one tattooed. But I haven’t decided where yet.” He spends very little time decorating the cupcakes and, in a rebellious gesture, scoops the mascarpone cheese on top of the cakes with a spoon, “smothering them with icing” (“The Wait Staff”). The dainty frosting, typically done with a piping bag, and the additional décor such as mini sugar flowers or sparkles are totally missing from his red velvet cupcakes. Associated with femininity, such markers of the “other” gender are avoided so as to assert that baking and decorating cupcakes can be done in a masculine yet playful way.

The playfulness and casualness of these gestures and of Hughes’s overall relation with the cupcakes are signifiers of his performance in the kitchen, which is marked by a straightforward masculinity with a touch of childlikeness, visible in his fashion style, tattoos, kitchen gadgets, restaurant décor, and language. The sum of his performative acts is translated in the way he talks about, bakes, and decorates the cupcakes. Hughes’s identity as a chef and restaurateur—but also as a representative of young, health-conscious foodie hipsters—is forged through a series of practices that identify him as being at the intersection of different cultural groups. For example, he wears the markers of his passion—foods and gadgets—on his body through a collection of tattoos. While tattooing shows his toughness, the subject matter of his body art adds an ironic twist to the overall tattoo culture. Asked in a recent interview how “a manly man” operates in the kitchen, Hughes replied that cooking like a man means “reading that recipe but making it your own” by “adding a certain spice, making it a different
way” (Brodie, n.d.). Substituting cream cheese with mascarpone in his icing and decorating the cake with a spoon are signs of difference and creativity that specifically represent masculinity, at least according to Hughes.

For Alton Brown, being unconventional is not an intentional goal of his culinary performances, despite the fact that his shows are innovative and different from anything on Food Network. Brown is best known in the culinary world for his concept show *Good Eats*, described by Cooking Channel, a spinoff of Food Network, as follows: “Pop culture, comedy, and plain good eating: Host Alton Brown explores the origins of ingredients, decodes culinary customs and presents food and equipment trends. Punctuated by unusual interludes, simple preparations and unconventional discussions, he’ll bring you food in its finest and funniest form.”

Each episode focuses on a single dish or ingredient, explaining its cultural history, the best cooking methods, the most suitable gadgets, and even its chemical composition. The show was launched in 1999, ran for thirteen seasons on Food Network, and continues to air on Cooking Channel at the time of writing. It is one of the most popular and long-lasting shows on food television. Each episode is developed as a story in which Alton Brown performs different roles, ranging from superhero to mad scientist, in order to entertain and educate. One of the *Good Eats* episodes, titled “Honey, I Shrunk the Cake” and aired in 2008, was dedicated to cupcakes.

In an attempt to take back the cupcake from the “highbrow snarf and urbanated sharps” and offer it back to ordinary Americans, Brown displays a masculinity that combines geekiness, eccentricity, a thirst for knowledge, and constant self-deprecation. At the same time, his masculinity is also recognizable and mainstream in that it encourages simplicity and lack of fuss. Therefore, while Brown does not scoop frosting onto his cupcakes with a spoon, he, like Hughes, displays a minimal concern for decorations. He explains that using a miniature spatula instead of a traditional piping bag makes the decorating process “not too fussy.” What solidifies his discourse of “not too fussy” cookery is the simplicity of the ingredients that make up the cupcake. Brown does not wish to be different through the addition of any unnecessary ingredient, so he opts for the combination of eggs, sugar, flour, baking powder, milk, oil, and vanilla, ingredients typical of most cakes. He demystifies the cupcake, making it accessible for those uninterested in the cupcake craze generated by bakeries such as Magnolia in New York City. To do so, Brown makes a series of sarcastic references
to the elements that make the cupcake a cupcake, such as the wrapper or the frosting. For example, he mentions with annoyance that “a lot of people don’t think it’s a cupcake unless they get the Christmas time effect of unwrapping the cupcake.” In his performance, Brown recycles a multitude of popular cultural types to craft a masculinity that is highly recognizable and likable.

CONCLUSION

The versatility of the cupcake and its lack of “proper” culinary history make it into a dessert that invites play. The visual potential of the cupcake, as the base for spectacular decorations, coupled with a “no rules apply” attitude in terms of ingredients and flavours, translates into multiple instances of appropriation—such as Chuck Hughes’s use of the cupcake as an outlet for manly creativity or Alton Brown’s geeky, “no frills” approach to the dessert. Audiences watching male chefs bake cupcakes on food television are thus witnessing a parade of performances of masculinity founded on the reinterpretation of a historically feminine dessert. In other words, the expressive capacity of the cupcake provides scope not only for the negotiation of masculine identity, of the tattooed man-child and the nerdy scientist, but also for the public display of that identity. I argue, then, that, quite apart from lessons in cooking, food television offers a series of informal pedagogies which bypass the question that many scholars have asked about food television, namely: does watching food television make us into better cooks?

NOTES

1 This statement is based on my own observations of the ways in which cupcakes have been represented in mainstream popular culture and co-opted by various communities, from roller derby “girls” to tattooed hipsters. More specifically, I consulted (1) multiple cookbooks dedicated entirely to cupcakes, such as Martha Stewart’s Cupcakes: 175 Inspired Ideas for Everyone’s Favorite Treat and The Cupcake Diaries: Recipes and Memories from the Sisters of Georgetown Cupcake; (2) special issues of food magazines and sections of lifestyle magazines focusing on cupcakes; (3) websites of North American cupcakeries and bakeries; and (4) all seasons of Cupcake Wars. At the moment, very little exists in the academic literature on contemporary
cupcake cultures. This chapter is part of a larger study about the cultural representations and appropriations (co-optation) of cupcakes.


6 Although the full episode (season 11, episode 17) is no longer available online, a portion of the show can be viewed at http://www.foodnetwork.com/shows/good-eats/11-series/honey-i-shrunk-the-cake.html.

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