



Look who's cooking. Investigating the relationship between watching educational and edutainment TV cooking shows, eating habits and everyday cooking practices among men and women in Belgium



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ABSTRACT

Television (TV) cooking shows have evolved from focusing on educating to focusing on entertaining, as well. At present, educational TV cooking shows focus on the transfer of cooking knowledge and skills, whereas edutainment TV cooking shows focus on entertaining their viewers. Both types of shows are ongoing success stories. However, little is known regarding the shows' links with the cooking and eating habits of their audiences. Therefore, the current study investigates the relationship between watching an educational or edutainment TV cooking show and one's cooking and eating habits. Given public health concerns regarding the decline in cooking behaviors and the simultaneous increase in caloric intake from food outside the home, this study suggests a promising intervention.

The results of a cross-sectional survey in Belgium ($n = 845$) demonstrate that the audiences of educational and edutainment TV cooking shows do not overlap. Although there is little connection between watching specific shows and eating behavior, the connection between watching shows and cooking behaviors varies across gender and age lines. Behaviors also differ depending on whether the viewer is watching an educational or edutainment cooking show. For example, men of all ages appear to cook more often if they watch an educational show. However, only older men (above 38 years) seem to cook more often if they watch an edutainment TV show. The results demonstrate that the relationship between watching TV cooking shows and cooking habits warrants further investigation.

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1. Introduction

Across the globe, the amount of time spent on cooking has dropped significantly in recent decades (Kaufman, 2010; Warde & Hetherington, 1994), including in Belgium (Daniels, Glorieux, Minnen, & van Tienoven, 2012). For instance, parents who have high-pressure jobs often rely on convenience foods and fast food (Devine, Connors, Sobal, & Bisogni, 2003; Devine et al., 2006). At the same time, however, television (TV) cooking shows are experiencing continued success (e.g., de Solier, 2005; Collins, 2009). What first seems to be a contradiction may be explained by the fact that TV cooking shows have evolved from being purely educational shows to shows that also incorporate entertainment. Accordingly, people are not merely watching cooking shows to improve their

cooking skills but to enjoy the entertaining TV show. It has been suggested (e.g., Caraher, Lang, & Dixon, 2000) that the consumption of TV cooking shows is driven by entertainment motives, rather than a desire to learn how to cook. In recent years, TV cooking shows have come to cater to these entertainment demands (Collins, 2009; Chao, 1998; de Solier, 2005; Ketchum, 2005). However, even today, educational cooking shows still exist. Although previous studies have investigated relationships between TV cooking shows in general and cooking skills, cooking practices, and eating habits (Caraher et al., 2000; Clifford, Anderson, Auld, & Champ, 2009), so far, no study has investigated the potential differences between the audiences of educational TV cooking shows and the audiences of entertainment or edutainment TV cooking shows. Therefore, the aim of this work is to investigate the relationships between TV cooking shows, eating habits, and cooking behaviors among adult men and women, making a distinction between educational and edutainment TV cooking shows. This work begins with an overview of the history of TV cooking shows and a definition of the landscape

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today, followed by a study investigating whether and how educational and entertainment TV cooking shows relate to cooking behaviors and eating habits and whether these relationships may be moderated by gender and age.

1.1. TV cooking shows: from education to edutainment

The history of cooking on TV dates back to the 1930s. Marcel Boulestin, who appeared on BBC television in 1937, was the first cook on television (Bonner, 2009). Only a decade later, America's first television cook, James Beard, appeared on screen with his 15-min segment "I Love to Eat" in a magazine program (Bonner, 2009). After World War II, television entered the households of many and became a prime source of entertainment. TV cooks became genuine stars, and they attempted to transform cooking from a household chore into a pleasurable activity (Rousseau, 2012). Cooking was no longer only about catering to the demands of spouses and children; it was primarily about enjoyment (Hollows, 2007). These themes are still reflected in modern TV cooking shows, such as Rachel Ray's programs on the Food Network in the US, Sophie's kitchen, SOS Piet, and Daily Meal, which are broadcasted on public and commercial TV channels in Belgium, most cooking shows broadcast on the BBC in the UK, and those related to the magazine BBC Good Food. These shows' core aim is to explain to laypeople how to prepare a meal from scratch.

"In the early twenty-first century, much of the Western world is in the midst of a boom in food television" (de Solier, 2005, p. 465). Several channels started to focus solely on food. Examples of these channels include America's Food Network, launched in 1993 (<http://www.foodnetwork.com>), and Britain's UK Food, launched in 2001 (<http://www.foodnetwork.co.uk>). In Belgium, the first food network would only appear when Njam TV began broadcasting food programs 24/7 in 2010 (<http://njam.tv>). Although the Food Network began with many programs focusing on food education, the format of food TV shows has gradually shifted towards entertainment, including travel shows and food competition shows (Collins, 2009; Ketchum, 2005; Nathanson, 2009). For instance, Jeroen Meus (a popular Belgian chef who became famous with his cooking show Daily Meal, in which he teaches the viewer how to prepare a savory meal in less than half an hour) hosts 'Goed Volk', a recent cooking program on the public broadcast system in Belgium that investigates the lives of people from specific communities (e.g., cowboys in Texas or sumo wrestlers in Tokyo) through their cooking habits. Although cooking and the kitchen take prominent places in this program, the core aim of the program is not to educate people about cooking.

Since the 1990s, the explosion and diversification of TV cooking shows has made it difficult to categorize these shows into genres that capture all the variations (de Solier, 2005). Analyzing TV cooking shows in Britain, for instance, Strange (1998) lists *Personality* shows, which revolve around a celebrity chef; *Tour Educative* shows, focusing on traveling; *Cookery Educative* shows that clearly demonstrate how to prepare a meal; and *Raw Educative* shows, focusing on the processing of raw ingredients into edible cooked meals. In a similar typology of American Food Network shows created almost a decade later, Ketchum (2005) makes a distinction between shows that focus on both education and information and shows that broadcast for the sake of mere entertainment. In the mere entertainment shows, such as food travel shows, few real chefs appear, competitive aspects come into play, and few cooking instructions are given. Food is a means of entertaining the audience. Jamie Oliver's *Oliver Twist*, for instance, focuses predominantly on Oliver's own sex appeal and hyperactive performances (Hollows, 2003). The educational cooking shows, in contrast, focus on instructing their audiences on how to prepare a meal, often based

on real-life time constraints (e.g., preparing a simple meal in 30 min) and/or using specific ingredients (e.g., preparing a meal with what is left in your fridge). Other educational cooking shows make gourmet, forgotten, or exotic foods more accessible to the home cook and perform their cooking either in a studio, a home kitchen, or in front of a live audience. The recipe is the main focus and thus is always available to the public, e.g., on the related Internet site, and the chefs explain to viewers how to prepare a meal by manipulating unprocessed foods.

In sum, TV cooking shows seem to have evolved from being predominantly about educating viewers to being a mix of education and entertainment. Traditional *educational TV cooking shows* continue to exist, and in addition to these shows, *entertainment TV cooking shows*, such as many modern lifestyle and reality TV shows related to food, have entered the landscape. Entertainment TV cooking shows typically emphasize elements other than cooking (Harbridge, 2013). Audiences of these shows gain pleasure from their visual appeal and the opportunity to escape into a different world (Chao, 1998). Then, again, according to de Solier (2005), entertainment TV cooking shows may best be labeled *edutainment TV cooking shows* because one can question whether entertainment TV cooking shows still contain an educational element. Therefore, the term *edutainment TV cooking shows* will be used from this point forward to refer to all TV cooking shows with a stronger emphasis on entertainment compared to education. In addition, the term *educational TV cooking shows* will be used to refer to TV cooking shows with an emphasis on education.

In Belgium, both educational and entertainment TV cooking shows dominate the current TV landscape. In the 1970s, the first TV cooking show, 'Watch and Cook', was broadcast on public television. The chef taught the audience how to prepare a delicious meal (Widart, 2005). In the 1980s, cooking TV shows began to be hosted by a chef in his/her home environment, and in the 1990s, the number of cooking shows increased significantly. TV shows were now also broadcast on commercial channels, and the shows became more entertaining. Today, TV cooking shows, both edutainment and educational shows, are very popular among the Belgian public, and these shows have an important place in the current television landscape.

1.2. Associations between the consumption of educational and edutainment TV cooking shows and cooking and eating habits

It has been suggested that across all ages, increased TV viewing results in higher intake of snacks and unhealthy foods (e.g., Blass et al., 2006; Dietz & Gortmaker, 1985; Higgs & Woodward, 2009; Rey-Lopez et al., 2011; Robinson, 1999). However, most of these studies do not focus on TV cooking shows, and only a few studies have investigated the relation between watching TV cooking shows and eating habits. In line with the predominant view that television viewing relates to less healthy food intake, Bodenlos and Wormuth (2013) have shown that more sweet snacks were consumed among individuals who watched a TV cooking show compared to those who watched the nature program. That study investigated the intake of vegetables and snacks immediately after watching a short episode of a TV cooking show versus a nature program. In another study, Clifford et al. (2009) focused on eating habits and food knowledge among students who watched several episodes of a TV cooking show. They concluded that TV cooking shows may positively influence the knowledge of their audience but do little to influence behavior. Students who watched four episodes of a TV cooking show knew significantly more about fruit and vegetable recommendations compared to a control group. However, no changes occurred in terms of self-efficacy or intake. Finally, however, Caraher et al. (2000) have shown that, although TV cooking

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