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### Our Relationship Status with Food: It's Complicated

Who were the first people to ever cook food and why did we ever begin to cook food in the first place? Around 1.9 million years ago, at the turn of the late Pliocene epoch, early humans were consuming a diet that consisted of leaves and fibrous roots for breakfast, raw meat and brains from monkeys for lunch, and leaves, fruits, and grubs for dinner (Lawton 2016). Then there was fire. Warmth, illuminous, sometimes uncontrollable and dangerous. Igniting the excitement of curiosity and potential in the brain of *Homo erectus*. *What if we put our food to the flame?* Suddenly, the appetites of our early ancestors were satiated for longer. We didn't know it at the time, but cooking even the most elemental of foods—potatoes, eggs, oats, etc.—release an immense quantity of calories that were once locked into undigestible fibers that only temporarily satiated our ancestors. Once the knowledge of cooking food over flame became widespread and more foodstuffs were cooked, our ancestors had increased time to do other tasks such as rearing children at home, building larger houses, establishing trade and ideas, and creating job roles. Society was born.

Although we've come a long way from putting what we hunt and gather onto an open flame, we seem to have digressed a bit in the effort we put into cooking. Michael Pollan delves into this issue with his 2009 *The New York Times Magazine* article *Out of the Kitchen, Onto the Couch*. With the invention of the television, cooking shows started popping up. They were on par with cookbooks, with a more interactive spin to the instruction. Women could learn to cook more

elaborate meals, spending more time in preparations, cooking, and presentation for her family once dinner came around. In more recent times, women are increasingly leaving the house and deviating from traditional family roles to go to college, start a career, and make a living on their own. As this shift came to be, cooking shows became networks such as The Food Network. The audience has shifted from instructing women on how to cook certain dishes to a more family-oriented viewing of food battles, time-based competitions, and perfectly-staged homestyle “from scratch” set ups. People view cooking now as a time hassle, especially after a long day of work outside of the home. “The average American spends a mere 27 minutes a day on food preparation (another four minutes cleaning up); that’s less than half the time we spent cooking [in the 1960s]” (Pollan). We now find it less compelling to cook a meal than to just sit and watch food-related shows. There are plenty of reasons to support this shift such as the rise of feminism and woman-work force, TV audience primarily being men, the advent of restaurants, fast-food, mobile delivery applications, loss of productivity, and cost.

In the 1960s, a clumsy, eager, and unedited woman by the name of Julia Child appeared on TV with her show *The French Chef*. Her show was aimed for the audience of women at home who want to hone their skills in the kitchen and that *food isn't that difficult to make* given time, confidence, and enthusiasm. And she surely had enthusiasm. In one of her episodes, Child is seen preparing a pancake on a pan and attempting to flip it. She has uncertainty and caution in her voice. When she executes the flip, she flounders, and the pancake goes all over the stovetop. “When I flipped it, I didn’t have the courage to do it the way I should have. You can always pick it up ... The only way you learn to flip things is just to flip them!” (Pollan). This exemplification of failure was a show to women watching that making a mistake is all in the learning experience that *is* cooking. Conversely to The Food Network of today, which is littered with perfect kitchen

sets modeled after countryside ranches or Italian stucco waterfront homes and features celebrities (rarely regular people). The Food Network daytime cooking shows are simplistic, efficient, flawless, and are less inclined to teach how to cook more so to show what the perfect end-result is. This flawless nature of cooking shows today leaves viewers confused, hungry, and wanting to go out and purchase a meal that looks and tastes the way they believe it does from what they've watched. There are no apparent "teaching" lessons of which Child brought into many households' decades prior.

Works Cited (to be formatted later)

- Out of the Kitchen, Onto the Couch (NYTimes)

- <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg23230980-600-what-was-the-first-cooked-meal/>