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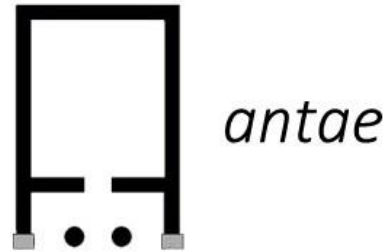
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The Culinary Coding of Gender Construction: Simplicity Rhetoric in Cookbooks from the Little Blue Book Series

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To the great and unpraised woman of the home, the builder of the race, who bridges the generations; to her who is not only the hope and foundation of the nation, but also the root of life itself, this booklet (not without error or defect; yet purposeful of enlightening the patient reader) is sincerely and hopefully dedicated.
Motto: The whole secret in cookery is practice.¹

Domestic guidance, specifically in the area of cooking, has been passed down orally for centuries and compiled into books in America as early as 1796.² Sarah Leavitt, in her history on domestic advice manuals, likens cookbook writing to a fun-house mirror which ‘distort[s] reality to show a society as some people wished it could be’.³ It is this same distortion that accounts for why cookbooks continue to be some of the most used publications in existence; cookbooks offer simple methods to achieve a desirable home life. The booklet quoted above is one of many in a popular series of small, educational volumes designed to be affordable, approachable, and convenient for all readers.⁴ The series started as *The Appeal’s Pocket Series* in 1919 and was renamed *The Little Blue Book Series* in 1923.

In the past two decades, rhetoric, feminist, and food scholars have shown a growing interest in cookbooks and how the practice of writing these works interacts with gender construction; in particular, the construction of the middle-class, white woman’s identity. One way this literature contributes to gender construction is in the continued rhetorical use of the term and concept of “simplicity” within its instruction. For example, the 1930 publication entitled *Making Men Happy with Jams and Jellies* instructs on the “simple” ways to satisfy a woman’s husband with the comforts he may remember from his own mother’s kitchen. Another work from earlier in the twentieth century, the *Majestic Range Cook Book*, purports that if one has proper organisational methods, cooking becomes a mere diversion in its simplicity.

The Little Blue Book Series focused on improving peoples’ lives with easy-to-follow directions. Their mission enabled the creation of an abundance of simplicity rhetoric to analyse and can also be set as a contrast to other cookbooks that may not have had such a directed purpose. Though the Haldeman-Julius Publishing Company printed these types of booklets for over sixty years, this

¹ Albert Hohl, *The Simplified Cook-Book: Hints on Cookery* (Little Blue Book No. 1756) (Girard: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1938), p. 3.

² Amelia Simmons’s *American Cookery*, published in 1796, is accepted by most historians as the first American cookbook.

³ Sarah Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice* (Greensboro: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 5.

⁴ This is a paraphrase of the mission statement of the *Haldeman-Julius: Pocket Series and The Little Blue Books*.

article will focus on the years of its greatest popularity, from about 1925 to 1940. The site of research is further delimited by concentrating on three Little Blue Books in particular: Gaylord Du Bois's *Simple Recipes for Home Cooking* (No. 997, 1927), Albert Hohl's *The Simplified Cook-Book: Hints on Cookery* (No. 1756, 1938), and Gloria Goddard's *The Perfect Pocket Cookbook* (No. 1360, 1929). There are almost two thousand titles in the Little Blue Book series, a number of which dealt with the topic of cooking in some way.⁵ The three covered here were chosen because of their specific uses of simple language within their cooking instruction.

It seems appropriate to begin with an explanation of the term "simple". The use of this term in cooking texts can refer to many things; however, this study investigates rhetoric emphasising the cooking process as one of little or no difficulty, as well as texts that refer to their own instruction as being easily understood or performed. "Simple" can also refer to the lack of extravagance in the dishes themselves—usually referring to meals that are more economical to prepare. The use of simplicity rhetoric in cookbooks, while remaining ever-present, has changed significantly over time and it is important to view its pattern in order to unearth specific understandings of the woman's space and position in domestic culture. While a focus on simplifying work is often trivialised, complicating the use of the language of simplicity in cooking instruction can yield a wealth of information about the authors and readers of said works.

The simplicity rhetoric used in these cookbooks contributes to the formation of woman's identity. During the era for examination, the middle-class, white woman's identity partially hinged on her ability to cook. Reinforcement of this connection through cookbooks possibly limited a woman's ability to self-identify outside of her home kitchen, and it is explicitly noted that these books are primarily intended for women. A woman's position in the home has been given many titles, including housewife, homemaker, and housekeeper; each of these labels has a history and meaning of its own. Since these histories are not a part of this project, and in an effort to avoid repeated inconsistency dealing with these terms interchangeably, the term "woman" will here be used unless directly quoting from or referring to a text where one of the specific titles above is used.

The targeted demographic of the middle-class, white woman is presented with a conflicting message by the rhetoric of simplicity. She is allowed a certain amount of simplification in her cooking duties, but must appear to expend a great deal of effort in food preparation or the meal is not considered legitimate. An additional underlying assumption and commentary in the cooking instruction is that since technology has provided the necessary support, the employment of cooking for women should have little or no hardships. And if those advancements are not enough, advice on how to further "simplify" the cooking process is perfectly within reach in a handy book. These

⁵ Other titles that dealt with cooking include: *How to Make All Kinds of Candy*, *Food and Diet in Relation to Life and Health*, *Home Vegetable Gardening*, *How to Grow Fruits for the Home Table*, *Eating for Health*, *Facts about Vitamins and Calories*, *How to be a Charming Hostess: How to Entertain Economically and Delightfully*, *How to Make Sandwiches and Lunchboxes*, *The Epicurean Doctrine of Happiness*, *Popular Chinese Cook Book*, *100 Cocktails: How to Make them and What to Eat With Them*, *Fifty Famous Sauces: How to Make them*, and *Diet Book: Eat and Get Skinny*.

factors can be read as devaluing women's work in the home by trivialising it as something requiring little exertion. For example, a frequent tactic used in the Little Blue Books cooking literature were expressions of incredulity regarding how lucky women were to have all the tools and conveniences necessary to be perfect cooks. This type of rhetoric allows very little room for the women's failure to perform the idealised cooking the books put forth and simultaneously gives all the credit to the tools and conveniences.

Indeed, there are several ways in which cooking instruction targets gender with simplicity rhetoric. In his Little Blue Book publication, Du Bois mentions male chefs, but it is the woman who is selected as needing the process of cooking to be simplified. The theme of the professionalisation of the male chef slated against the everyday, unqualified woman is not new, and nor is this the only example of gendered simplicity rhetoric in cookbooks.⁶ The question begging to be asked is of what pattern surfaces in the use of the term "simple" within cookbooks. I propose that rhetoric serves as a contributing factor to today's domestic devaluation, as well as a representation of American sensibilities regarding the sacrifice that comes with progress. Mapping a history of the rhetoric of simplicity used in American cookbooks helps to better understand the sociocultural reasons and ramifications of cookbook rhetoric on American domestic life. This study is a piece of that map.

This inquiry positions itself in the overlap between the fields of gender, food and rhetoric studies. Carole Counihan, prominent food and anthropology scholar, claims in *Food and Gender: Identity and Power* that the 'importance of [men and women's] food work reveals whether their self-concept is validating or denigrating'.⁷ The discussion surrounding individual perceptions of gender hierarchy with respect to food preparation is a multi-faceted one, encompassing historical looks into culture, class, race, economy, and food symbolism, as well as rhetorical devices. Rhetoric, being defined as the art of using language persuasively, is a perfect area to witness the interaction of these categories. This article examines use of rhetoric that emphasises simplicity with reference to home food preparation while considering different possible motivations behind this use in order to bring the movement and juxtaposition of these categories to light.

The primary sources used in this study locate it geographically in North America between 1920 and 1940. This period is an appropriate one in which to position this study because of cookbooks' rise in popularity, which emerged alongside significant role revisions for women. Encompassing the "roaring twenties", the Great Depression, and the start of World War II, this period saw domestic life for women shift significantly. Financial issues and the loss of men as a presence within home family life necessitated women addressing the shortfall to make sure that domestic tranquillity did not fall too far. A large part of keeping the peace at home was trying to make sure

⁶ See Charlotte Druckman's analysis of the male chef versus housewife phenomenon in her article: Charlotte Druckman, 'Why are There No Great Women Chefs?', *Gastronomica*, 10(1) (2010), 24-31.

⁷ Carole Counihan, *Food and Gender: Identity and Power* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Overseas Publishers Association, 1998), p. 2.

that daily rituals (a major one being the meal) did not diverge much from how they used to be when time and income were not as threatened. It is easy to see how cookbooks that dispensed with tips to do just this became in demand. This investigation into cookbook rhetoric contributes to a wealth of scholarship surrounding the history of American domestic life and women's role in sustaining it, particularly in the years between 1920 and 1940.⁸

To better found this historiographical look at simplicity rhetoric, it is necessary to mention Catharine Beecher and her work on domesticity. Beecher was a nineteenth century teacher and educational reformer, and her most famous work, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, brought the importance of women's labour to the forefront and aimed to systemise domestic duties. In her biography of Beecher, Kathryn Kish Sklar states that Catherine Beecher's 'female identity constantly intruded into her consciousness' and, as such, 'her efforts to overcome the marginal status allotted to women constituted a central theme in her career'.⁹ She chose the home and family life as the social unit from which 'to promote both cultural homogeneity and female hegemony'.¹⁰ Beecher's work and popularity placed domestic women in a position of power. Simplicity rhetoric in these cookbooks, being marketed to women, fed into this ideology with lip service while at the same time undercutting it in their different gendered instruction. If, as is argued in the following pages, the rhetoric helped to limit self-identification in women, it is easy to see why this "limitation" to the private sphere persisted. Women did not wish to break past these limitations because of how Beecher, and others, revered the domestic. Each of the Little Blue Book authors analysed here approach their audience with Beecher's principle of the naturalness and importance of women in the home.¹¹

Additional sources that provide the foundation on which to build an argument concerning simplicity rhetoric used in cookery texts include works that focus on the connection between women's writing and their rhetorical motives. Elizabeth Fleitz looks specifically at women's writing in cookbooks as a textual space for women's validation and communion with other women. Citing early cookbooks as well as the outpouring of new cooking blogs, she explains that 'the recipe—the written representation of women's domestic discourse—is a dynamic text,' and one

⁸ This literature includes notable feminist works such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, but also expands into more current and specific scholarship such as Jane Elliott's 'Stepford USA: Second-Wave Feminism, Domestic Labor, and the Representation of National Time' (*Cultural Critique*, 70 (2008), 32-62) and Tracey Deutsch's 'Memories of Mothers in the Kitchen' (*Radical History Review*, 110 (2011), 167-77). Alice Kessler-Harris's *Women Have Always Worked: A Concise History* (which belongs peripherally in this literature) was also printed a second edition at the end of 2018. Informally, there is also a large cultural commentary on the cult of domesticity as it has been formed through the social construction of gender roles.

⁹ Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (London: Yale University Press, 1973), p. xiii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Beecher's *American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Guidance; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, And Christian Homes* (New York: J.B. Ford and Co., 1869) exemplifies this principle, particularly in its inscription: 'To the women of America, in whose hands rest the real destinies of the republic, as moulded by the early training and preserved amid the mature influences of home, this volume is affectionately inscribed' (Beecher, front matter).

that ‘encourages revision’.¹² Equating cookbooks with diaries, Fleitz provides an empowered position from which to look at cooking rhetoric, since the communication *to* women is also *by* women. She asserts that the communication within these books is coded by women, and therefore granted the housewife/homemaker community power to communicate without consequences.¹³ She affirms that the ‘exclusivity’ created by women within their coded community of cookbook literate practices acted as ‘a barrier that contemporary cooking media has tried to break down’.¹⁴ Though her work deals primarily with older cookbooks, Fleitz uses Julia Child, Rachael Ray, and Paula Deen as contemporary examples of a shift in cooking instruction and its motivations. Fleitz argues that these contemporary cooking personalities on television are trying to ‘make cooking understandable for a lay audience’.¹⁵ However, her analysis seems to disregard the significant contribution throughout history of both men and women to the genre of understandable and available cooking advice, narrowing the scope of cooking to two disparate and one-dimensional groups: those of the past who wished for cooking to remain complex and exclusive, and those of the present who wish for simplicity and accessibility. Though narrow, this examination does highlight the fact that the various groups throughout time and who wrote cookbooks, and used simplicity rhetoric as a draw, would likely do so for different reasons.

As already noted, simplicity rhetoric in cooking instruction is tied up in the construction of gender. Jessamyn Neuhaus gives a very thorough and poignant look at cookery texts as important sites of historical investigation and ones that reveal the ‘discursive process of gender identity’.¹⁶ Neuhaus touches upon the need during World War II for simple, quick meals, with the understanding that ‘most Americans insisted that such changes were temporary’.¹⁷ Various national, social and cultural demands created this need for simplicity in cooking throughout history. The desire to eventually return to a state where ‘simple’ is not necessary creates a curious dilemma in the tension women have felt between their individual aspirations and any pressure toward adopting certain gender norms. Those women who had to work outside the home, for example, still felt the compulsion to perform domestic duties such as cooking. They were forced into an antagonism where they must endeavour to sustain an elaborate household, while diminishing their role as workers outside the home. Neuhaus explores a very important link in the history of American cooking that has helped to establish simplicity rhetoric in cookery literature, and perhaps confirms the widespread and recurring imbalance of the market with relation to women being the main target audience for cooking publications. If we assume the pressure to break free from simplicity in home cooking comes from a patriarchal power structure, then it must be women who continue to generate

¹² Elizabeth Fleitz, ‘Cooking Codes: Cookbook Discourses as Women’s Rhetorical Practices’, *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society* 1(1) (2010), 1-8, p. 1.

¹³ By ‘consequences’, Fleitz refers mainly to patriarchal suppression from the public sphere which relegated women to specific normative behavior that did not include free and uncensored communication between women.

¹⁴ Fleitz, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁶ Jessamyn Neuhaus, ‘The Way to a Man’s Heart: Gender Roles, Domestic Ideology, and Cookbooks in the 1950s,’ *Journal of Social History*, 32(3) (1999), 529-55, pp. 530-531.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

this 'simple' focus. If, however, we adopt a perspective like Neuhaus and do not 'limit [our] research by reiterating 'man' and 'woman' as natural givens', then we must broaden our scope of cooking literature to include men who cater just as fervently to "keeping it simple".¹⁸

Gaylord Du Bois defines a cookbook as 'a friend in need, a guide to your own observation, good judgment and memory, a hoard of valuable suggestions to aid you in time of doubt'.¹⁹ While this positive assessment coming from a man might help break down the gender discrepancy, one must consider that this writer was in no way an expert in cooking. Du Bois was a children's book and comic strip author whose only work on cooking was this one contribution to the Little Blue Book series. Perhaps then, it was his lack of expertise that gave him a more accessible style. Christine Mitchell, in her work on celebrity cookbooks, may group him with the female authors she looks at, given his instructive and inclusive nature. In her article 'The Rhetoric of Celebrity Cookbooks', an important question is raised: 'Are there differences between books written by professional chefs and those written by cooking "celebrities"?'²⁰ Though restricted to contemporary cooking personalities (focusing on Julia Child and after), Mitchell's article highlights that differences in the cooking realm are less about professional status and more about gender. She examines five cookbooks and notes that, regardless of whether the author is a trained chef or self-taught, 'those books written by the women concentrate on teaching readers about cooking as a practice that they can develop and continue. [...] In contrast, the men's cookbooks are much more about the authors themselves—their likes, dislikes, and restaurants'.²¹ Although five contemporary cookbooks are hardly representative of the entire industry, we see the repetition of an argument Charlotte Druckman voices regarding women's place in the cooking world. She sees a disparity in the subjugation of women's cooking as unexceptional and the male chef's as superior. Therefore, the very reality that a chef is a woman gives her an immediate disadvantage in the field. The cookbooks written by men that Mitchell analyses are self-promotional materials that highlight the chef's status within the cooking world and aim to advance their progression by way of exhibition. The women authors in her study are just as acclaimed, but the language of their cookbooks is toward the reader's progress rather than their own.

As mentioned, one of the biggest influences to cookbook rhetoric is undoubtedly the industrialisation of the home kitchen. Processes such as milling flour, butchering meat and canning vegetables were taken out of the home and then fed back to a consumer culture as an easier way to have what we have always had. In her book *More Work for Mother*, Ruth Cowan gives a history of housework from the perspective of a nation becoming industrialised. Cataloguing the shifts from household work under pre-industrial conditions through twentieth century technology, Cowan

¹⁸ Neuhaus, p. 530.

¹⁹ Gaylord Du Bois, *Simple Recipes for Home Cooking* (Little Blue Book no. 997) (Girard: Haldeman-Julius Company, 1927), p. 5.

²⁰ Christine Mitchell, 'The Rhetoric of Celebrity Cookbooks', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 43(3) (2010), 524-39, p. 525.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 527.

deals with what she calls the ‘industrialization of the home’.²² She states that ‘implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) we are given the impression that industrialization occurred *outside* the four walls of home’, thereby making us the ‘victims of a form of cultural obfuscation’ but goes on to assert that ‘in reality kitchens are as much a locus for industrialized work as factories and coal mines’.²³ This raises an intriguing proposal that the use of simplicity rhetoric in household cooking literature could, in being a part of this ‘cultural obfuscation’, be one more way to deny the complexity of our lives and return us to an idealized utopian home life. Cowan alludes to the Marxist debate between household and market labour which claims that housework is ‘the last surviving indicator of what the Western world was like before the market economy reared its ugly head’.²⁴ She argues that, though an isolated environment, the household is reliant upon the larger economic and social system we live in to function. Not being able to subsist on its own, the household could not then be considered a remnant of some lost world, but rather another fluctuating facet of the world we live in now. Du Bois, in fact, mentions that the rise of the industrialised home was ostensibly making it easier for women to provide quality cooking in the home with less effort than it had been previously:

As for the housewife, whether she cooks by electricity or totes her fuel from the wood-pile, she has a hundred more conveniences than her great-grandmother dreamed of, to say nothing of excellent markets where either raw materials or prepared foods may be had at very short notice. She need plan her meals only from day to day; and if some essential should be missing from the pantry, the telephone will generally bring it to her in time for dinner.²⁵

It is interesting to note, then, that the focus in his book is one of ‘simplicity’. While he maintains that ‘markets, conveniences, and books on cookery will never set a good meal on the table without the skill and devotion of a genuine cook’, he tries to assuage the reader by claiming that he can break down the arduous and complex task of being a ‘genuine cook’ into simpler terms.²⁶ Given the alteration over time of how cooking has been perceived, it is understandable that the opinion of simplicity would change as well. We can see domestic realities adapt as they are fed information in a deliberately simplified manner and this adaptation ranges from national necessity to patent nostalgia.

Gaylord Du Bois assures the reader that his book will make the cooking experience easier by simplifying the recipes he offers. At the same time, he stresses the idea that perfection is still the aim: ‘If you have practised preparing one good dish until you can go it perfectly, you have more

²² Ruth Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983), p. 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁴ Cowan, p. 5.

²⁵ Du Bois, p. 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

right to the title of cook than if you could prepare a course dinner half spoiled'.²⁷ He goes on to assert that having one good dish, properly prepared, is not enough. One must realise that variety, among other things, is a part of perfection in the home dining experience. Along with a large variety of dishes at the woman's disposal, Du Bois instructs her to make sure they are wholesome and attractive. The task of cooking seems increasingly less simple as one continues reading Du Bois's Little Blue Book, the sixty pages of which are organised into thirteen sections about how to prepare specific 'simple' dishes. To complicate his chapters even further, Du Bois gives a small history of the culinary arts beginning with the Romans and Greeks who, according to Du Bois, prided themselves on unusual and rare dishes, including 'star-fish, dogfish, hawks, porpoises, and the flesh of other strange animals regarded nowadays as inedible'.²⁸ Du Bois indicates that this contradicts the 'simple' food he is promoting. Here a distinction must be made between the association of simplicity with the term 'uncomplicated', as opposed to the term 'common.' The authors of these works tend to refer to the skills used to accomplish cooking tasks as 'common' or 'ordinary' and that their simplified language should make it available for anyone to access. However, these same terms are also applied to the food itself, which adds another layer to the process of a woman's self-identification since she not only has to focus on the process, but also on the product, the impression it gives, and how this is to reflect on her.

Another cookbook which came out at the height of the Little Blue Book phenomenon is Marian Squire's *The Stag at Ease: Being the Culinary Preferences of a Number of Distinguished Male Citizens of the World*. This work offers an interesting contrast to Du Bois's work by showing some other thickly gendered assumptions surrounding the woman and her cooking. The book makes the claim that 'the favorite dishes of many of the leading figures of American life make this book a treasure trove for the hostess who aims to please'.²⁹ The book includes recipes for dishes that certain famous men enjoyed.³⁰ Much as Mitchell's study on celebrity chefs emphasises the realm of cooking as one perceived as male-centered, Squire demonstrates how the consuming side of the equation is equally male-dominated. While perhaps quite telling about the American, middle-class, white woman's role in the 1930s, this book seems to aim for the opposite of simplicity in its instruction. Its opening appeal to the reader makes a claim against many simple cooking options utilised by other Little Blue Book authors:

Parsley as a decoration be declared incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial; that paper napkins be held as designed to defeat, impair, and impede the rights and pleasures of the masculine diner; that green glass coffee cups be declared a menace to the good humour and affability of said diner; and that such other and further relief from gustatory annoyance as

²⁷ Du Bois, p. 5.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

²⁹ Marian Squire, *The Stag at Ease: Being the Culinary Preferences of a Number of Distinguished Male Citizens of the World* (Caldwell: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1938), book jacket cover.

³⁰ This volume includes several names of prominent men at the time of publication, including Frank Delano Roosevelt and Robert Frost.

may be deemed in the jurisdiction of the Gods of Pleasant Dining be forthwith granted those on whose behalf this plea is made.³¹

Both this publication and Du Bois's *Simple Recipes* charge the woman of the home to make a meal pleasing for the man of her household, but Du Bois encourages the woman to get that approbation by simple processes that may in fact involve things Squire might term 'gustatory annoyances', rather than more difficult, complex, extravagant measures which are taken to achieve the more 'perfect' home-dining experience Squire advocates. Despite this difference, both of these books reveal some of the same gendered assumptions held by society: that cooking duties were "naturally" designed for women to perform and that women wish, above all else, to please men.

These cookbooks are not without a certain amount of reverence for women. *The Simplified Cook-Book: Hints on Cookery*, a Little Blue Book publication by Albert Hohl, starts with a dedication to 'the woman of the home'.³² In this dedication, Hohl establishes the same gendered assumption that the domestic and cooking roles in the home were women's tasks, and at the same time maintains that they are to be revered and respected as 'not only the hope and foundation of the nation, but also the root of life itself'. This mirrors Du Bois's language in the categorisation of the woman's role in *Simple Recipes*. Curiously, Hohl ends his dedication by charging this 'unpraised woman' to uncover the secret to cookery through practice. There is a contradiction in this use of terms that recurs in the simplicity rhetoric in other cookbooks of this period. There is respect for the woman in the home performing the task of cooking, such as would understandably communicate that she had some skill or knowledge above men in the cooking realm. However, his assertion that the woman is in need of practice to remedy the problem of ignorance in the kitchen seems to discredit this respect. Again, we see a similar tactic used by Du Bois in his statements about industrialisation benefiting the woman. He implies that very little effort or skill is required for these 'women's duties' now that technology is helping them, but then completes the contradiction by assuming a role of benefactor granting instruction to the women as novices, all while continually reaffirming with his rhetoric that these skills are innate or "natural" for the woman.

William Kitchiner's *The Cook's Oracle; and Housekeeper's Manual* provides us with a point of variance from Du Bois's and Hohl's Little Blue Books. The preface positions *The Cook's Oracle* as primarily for housekeepers and female cooks, and also firmly grounds himself in the simplicity rhetoric stating that:

the Editor has endeavoured to write the following receipts so plainly, that they may be as easily understood in the kitchen as he trusts they will be relished in the dining-room; and

³¹ Squire, p. 5.

³² This dedication is the quote at the beginning of this paper.

has been more ambitious to present to the Public a Work which will contribute to the daily comfort of all, than to seem elaborately scientific.³³

As with Du Bois and Hohl, Kitchiner places himself in the role of autocratic teacher to the novice woman in the home, reasoning that young women need this type of instruction more than seasoned cooking veterans. He says of the 'rudiments of cookery' that 'these little delicate distinctions constitute all the difference between a common and an elegant table', and that these 'are not trifles to the young housekeepers who must learn them either from the communication of others or blunder on till their own slowly accumulating and dear-bought experience teaches them'.³⁴ Kitchiner is not the only author to try and justify his efforts in this way; however, it is interesting to see the distinction between Kitchiner's and Hohl's approaches. Hohl indicates that women need to practice (that is, get experience cooking) in order to master the art and that his book will provide the key to starting this experience. Kitchiner, on the other hand, claims that trial and error (that is, experience cooking) is not the best way, but rather that his cookbook will solve the problem by simply giving women the answers. By speaking to his main audience (women) 'plainly', Kitchiner wishes to help them, but in so doing also makes a clear line of delineation within the home-cooking world as to what these women are allowed to pursue. Throughout the volume he consistently characterises the women's duties as 'simple,' 'easy', and 'necessitating very little effort'.³⁵

On the other hand, in the final section on carving meat, Kitchiner distinguishes the practice as 'a much more elaborate affair' and one best entrusted to a man who knew the art of carving.³⁶ While all the other cooking duties he covers in his book specifically speak to the woman of the home, carving is seen as man's work, and to be taken very seriously, explaining that:

[A] prudent carver will distribute the dainties he is serving out in equal division, and regulate his helps by the proportion his dish bears to the number it is to be divided among, and considering the quantum of appetite the several guests are presumed to possess.³⁷

Earlier in the book, Kitchiner speaks about the woman's tasks—choosing of the meat, economising of the household, maintaining the health of the family, providing a variation in the dishes, and cooking and cleaning the home—as ones that should in no way put a strain on anyone, for they are simple, common skills that anyone should be able to master quickly. But when he finally approaches the realm of a man's role, he glorifies it much more. The eminence of the carving procedure is dwelt on for several pages, including exact positioning of the man performing the duty: 'A seat should be placed for the carver sufficiently elevated to give him a command of the table, as the act of rising to perform this duty is considered ungraceful'.³⁸

³³ William Kitchiner, *The Cook's Oracle; and Housekeeper's Manual* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1830), p. vi.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

Since the heavily gendered rhetoric we have explored so far can be seen as stemming from the gender of the writers, I end with two female authors to show how the simplicity rhetoric penned by a woman functions similarly, though with slight variations. Gloria Goddard, in her Little Blue Book publication *The Perfect Pocket Cook Book*, starts almost all of her recipes with an assuring phrase to the woman of the home, revealing the simplicity rhetoric located within the instruction: ‘This is a very economical soup’; ‘Fish [...] has one great advantage for the business-girl-housewife; it can be cooked quickly’; ‘This is one of the easiest and quickest meats to prepare’; ‘Eggs [...] have the advantage of being easily prepared’; ‘The simplest salads are [...]’.³⁹ A contradiction to these assurances lies in the repeated stance of Goddard that ‘simple’ is not the ideal, a stance that aligns her very clearly with both Du Bois and Hohl. While her tone carries with it a palliative air, Goddard follows each of her assurances with a comment that reminds the woman to always aim for better.

In her section on salads, for example, she asserts that ‘Mayonnaise, Russian Dressing, [and] Tartar Sauce can all be purchased in any grocery store these days, so very few people take the trouble to make them. However, some housewives consider the home-made ones best, and they are’.⁴⁰ Though Goddard claims her focus is on making the cooking process less complicated, this type of statement seems to cancel out that intent. In her introduction, she establishes her reason for writing such a work by firmly gendering her motivations:

The favorite wail of the older generation of today is that young women have lost the womanly arts. Mothers and grandmothers sigh because their daughters and granddaughters do not take an interest in cooking. [...] On the other hand, there are many wives who work and who at the same time would gladly cook dinner in the evening, if the doing so were not such a problem.⁴¹

She explains that the modern living arrangements at the time did not lend themselves toward the elaborate cooking of “our” grandmothers. Goddard’s mission is to help women who have limited space and cooking equipment, to cook meals that are an ‘alternative [to] the delicatessen store or a restaurant’.⁴² Perhaps the biggest difference between Goddard and the other Little Blue Book authors is their audience. Both Du Bois and Hohl are speaking to middle-class, primarily white women whose kitchen is equipped with the technological advancements of the day. Goddard focuses on women of a different class; namely, those who work outside the private sphere and live in small, economical apartments with little or no kitchen. While this audience was also more diverse, it is reasonable, given the demographics and circulation of the series, that primary readership was likely still majority-white. Goddard’s focus on the need to change with the times makes this a slightly different approach than Du Bois and Hohl’s, which catered to a public that

³⁹ Gloria Goddard, *The Perfect Pocket Cook Book* (Little Blue Book No. 1360) (Girard: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1929), pp. 7, 11, 26, 34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

wished to maintain a home built from nostalgia (when women did not have the opportunity to self-identify outside the home). Two other specific differences between the cookbooks are seen in Goddard's serving specification and in her focus on '168 Unusual Dishes', the subject of one of her book sections. She states in the book's introduction that none of her recipes prepare food for more than four people, citing the reason that, having inadequate space and time to cook a larger meal, it makes no sense to give specifications for such. She also claims, differently from Du Bois, that preparation can be simplified for any recipe, even if preparing rare or unusual combinations of ingredients, as in the 168 particularly unusual recipes she includes.

Containing a fair amount of cooking instruction and recipes, Lydia Child's *The Frugal Housewife: Dedicated to those who are not ashamed of Economy*, is a domestic guide that she claims is for everyone:

The information conveyed is of a common kind; but it is such as the majority of young housekeepers do not possess, and such as they cannot obtain from cookery books. Books of this kind have usually been written for the wealthy: I have written for the poor!⁴³

This is the same sentiment that motivated Haldeman-Julius to print his five and ten cent copies of instruction books and certainly an attitude shared by Goddard, who catered to working women of limited means. A further similarity between Child and Goddard's approaches is in the focus on economy to reinforce simplicity. Child's central tenant is that 'the true economy of housekeeping is simply the art of gathering up all the fragments, so that nothing be lost'.⁴⁴ She proceeds to enumerate the many ways a household can save, reuse, cook, and economise in order to live more simply. At the same time, Child finds the need to consistently defend her argument for simplicity toward those that would find the simple steps beneath them. She charges her readers that, 'if you would avoid waste in your family, attend to the following rules, and do not despise them because they appear so unimportant: "many a little, makes a mickle"'.⁴⁵

Amid all these publications giving cooking instruction, a question arises as to why they increased in popularity toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. One volume, entitled *Housekeeping and Dinner Giving in Kansas City*, offers a reason: 'the days of trained servants seem to have passed away, and it is necessary for every housekeeper to know something more than the theory of work'.⁴⁶ There were more 'novices' to train in the art of housekeeping at the turn of the twentieth century than there were before and this could very well be one of the main reasons why the genre continued to flourish past the point when cookbooks were written for experienced people. *Housekeeping and Dinner Giving* states that all contributions had been tried and tested—therefore, simplicity equals not only "easy to do" but also "hard to fail

⁴³ Lydia Child, *The Frugal Housewife* (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1830), p. 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁶ W.S. Bird and T.F. Willis, *Housekeeping and Dinner Giving in Kansas City: A Treatise Containing practical instructions in cooking and serving dishes; in housekeeping and entertaining; also useful medical and miscellaneous recipes* (Kansas City: Press of Ramsey, Millett & Hudson, 1887), p. 7.

at”, since the recipes had been ‘proven’ to work. Bird and Willis, the authors of the book, continue their use of simplicity rhetoric, saying that ‘where we thought [the directions] were not sufficiently explicit, we have taken the liberty of altering the phraseology’, going on to say that, ‘to experienced housekeepers, the directions may seem *tediously* minute. In the majority of cook books too much is taken for-granted, and much of the very information that a *novice* most needs, is omitted’.⁴⁷

While the ‘simple’ terminology used to instruct women in the craft of cooking is represented in manuals to be used by novices, this belies the assumption that cooking in the home was a “natural” state for women. The simplicity rhetoric used in these cookbooks makes a gendered commentary about the place of home-cooking in society, as well as the woman doing the cooking. The commentary specifies that women have the innate abilities required for providing good home-cooked meals, and the strategies used to propagate this gendered association places this assumption historically as it is most likely a response to the growing number of inexperienced women entering the home-keeping domain.

Though these conclusions surrounding simplicity rhetoric are valuable, it is important to note the limited scope of this study. The Little Blue Book series, while inexpensive to purchase, still reached a predominantly urban, privileged population, as the books were not distributed as much to rural communities. The authors discussed here targeted their simplicity rhetoric to the woman who could ‘plan her meals only from day to day’.⁴⁸ Were this investigation to be more comprehensive, there would have to be an increased attention on rural domestic life as well. Interestingly, while the rhetoric used in the Little Blue Books indicates a certain amount of reverence for the woman in the home, the woman’s own perspective may not. Susan Strasser, in her history on housework entitled *Never Done*, investigates oral histories from women living in rural communities.⁴⁹ Despite the powerful position Catharine Beecher and others created for the domestic woman, the women Strasser spoke with indicated no such association between their housework (including cooking for their family) and any positive valuation. In fact, she describes the women as incredulous when told that she was writing a history on what they deemed as unimportant tasks. To extend this study on cookbook rhetoric, it would be necessary to mine for sources that these rural women may have used—including recipes and instruction handed down through generations orally.

During the period and within the population focused on in this study, the reader base for the simple cookbook was growing in tandem with the desire to continue to idealise the home-eating experience. Cooking was promoted as the foundation of a good family. Therefore, the more care a woman put into her cooking, the more she cared about their family. The reiterated notion of the “naturalness” of women assuming the home-cooking and domestic roles dictated that a woman’s very identity construction relied, to a great extent, on her cooking. The place that simplicity

⁴⁷ Bird and Willis, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Du Bois, p. 7.

⁴⁹ See Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon, 1982).

rhetoric occupies in this scenario is one of a reinforcer, strengthening the idealisation of the domestic. In the exertion of publishing these pieces, the need of the novice home-cook was given value. That value played into the same ideology that Catharine Beecher promoted for the assumption of power by women in the home. Promised this powerful position, women continued to construct their identities in the kitchen and this decision was due, at least in part, to the language used in cookbooks. Given how the domestic role is viewed today, an intriguing question that surfaces from this study is whether the simplicity rhetoric used today does the same.

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