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Meal Analysis Paper (Better Title TBD)

Food means different things to everyone. For most people, meals represent fond, warm, happy memories with family and friends. However, the process of making food has changed over the years. In 2009, Michael Pollan tackled this idea in his article *Out of the Kitchen, Onto the Couch*. Pollan started off his article with an image. This image is a kitchen, covered in cobwebs, dilapidated. This is representative of how a lot of people look at cooking nowadays. Many people see cooking as “for special occasions” only. Pollan covers this by telling the story of *The French Chef* herself, Julia Child. By telling Julia’s story, it represents a shift from cooking in the kitchen with family to watching cooking shows on tv while ordering out. These days, cooking is just not what it used to be in American homes, but that does not mean that it is any less significant to people.

Pollan begins his critique by explaining how Julia Child changed his life. “My mother began cooking dishes she’d watched Julia cook on tv...” (Pollan, 2009). This was the fashion in that time. People would tune in every week to join Julia in cooking food for their families. This kind of activity is practically unheard of these days. When has anyone decided they were going to cook along with the likes of Martha Stewart and Paula Dean, at least before the days when one could pause live television to give themselves time to catch up to the flawlessly edited hosts.

Cooking was seen differently back in 1963, Julia Child's heyday. Pollan continues into the third section of his article, *To the Kitchen Stadium*, talking about how cooking shows have shifted over the years. Back in the 1960s when *The French Chef* premiered, it was focused around teaching people how to cook, easy French cuisine for American households. These days, however, the cooking shows focus more on flash and fighting. "...cooking in prime time is a form of athletic competition", Pollan writes, describing cooking shows in the modern age such as *The Next Food Network Star* and *Top Chef* (Pollan, 2009). In modern days, shows about cooking are not about teaching people, it is more about the flash and fight and flames of a commercial kitchen, making cooking as dramatic as it can be. This has created a more fantastical culture around cooking.

Back in Julia Child's day, cooking from scratch meant making everything yourself, down to the last drop of food. However, what passes for "cooking from scratch" these days would make most grandmothers, mothers and chefs roll over in their graves. Pollan writes, "Many of today's cooking programs rely unapologetically on ingredients that themselves contain lots of ingredients", referencing canned, jarred and frozen foods used for many recipes nowadays (Pollan, 2009). Sarah Smith represents this well in her favorite meal essay *Enchilota of Memories*. Smith's favorite meal is enchiladas, prepared by her father. They use the Old El Paso brand Enchilada Dinner kit. Just because they use a kit to create this meal, does not make it any less special to them. Sarah writes in her essay, "... the important part is not that the meal reached completion but rather how the meal was made and who contributed to it" (Smith, 2019). Sarah and her father may not make everything they eat from scratch, but this does not mean that the meal is not important to them. Just because something is not made fully from scratch does not make it any less special. Even the simplest of ingredients can be combined and substituted. In

Wyatt Blackstone's *Favorite Meal Essay*, he writes about the Montréal Steak Tips that his family makes. In the recipe, they season it with Montréal Steak seasoning, a combination of many different seasonings and spices to give the steak its flavoring. They might not have used all the seasonings individually, but that does not mean that it means any less to them.

Just because cooking has become easier over the years, does not mean that it has any less meaning to Americans. For his article, Pollan interviewed Harry Blazer, a food-marketing researcher, and he said, "a hundred years ago, chicken for dinner meant going out and catching, killing, plucking and gutting a chicken." (Pollan, 2009). Food, cooking and the culture around it has changed over the year, and people just do what they can to fit their meals into their busy work and school schedules. College students order more take out pizza than anyone else because it fits into their schedules. Cultural changes around things such as food are not always a bad thing.

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