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Humor and Performing Gender on TV Cooking Shows

<https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2017-0093>

Abstract: A central aspect of humor is its social function in relating to others and in performing gender. Drawing on insights from interactional sociolinguistics and gender studies, this article explores the relationship between humor and gender in the context of one US instructional tv cooking show *The Pioneer Woman*. The gender element, while essential to performed humor, is often neglected in research on humor, language, and the media; therefore, this paper looks into how humor is signaled in the cooking show individually and jointly. Humorous joking of the female host Ree Drummond is discussed, specifically self-directed humor and teasing as expressed in personal stories and exaggeration. The ambiguity of the humorous messages reveals contradictory messages: on the one hand, self-deprecating humor reveals feelings of inadequacy for not meeting gendered status quo, and on the other hand, teasing and self-deprecation function as a persuasive strategy to promote the celebrity's cooking and brand.

Keywords: teasing, celebrity, domestic humor, self-deprecation, gender

1 Introduction

This paper explores the use of humor as a performance of gender in the media, specifically cooking shows. In spite of a recent body of literature on tv cooking shows and gender (Buscemi 2014; Hollows 2003; Swenson 2009), and on the concept of gendered performance (Chiaro and Baccolini 2014), how humor relates to female performance and female identity on cooking shows is an area to be explored. The media is influential in regulating norms and practices of discourse in society. Humor forms a crucial part of interpersonal communication and is a form of negotiation for status, power, solidarity, and distance (Norrick 1993; Schnurr and Chan 2011). Cooking shows provide a platform to explore

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humored discourse that is embedded within a historically gendered domain, the kitchen. The instructional format, one of the earliest and longest-standing genres of cooking shows (Polan 2011), stars a single chef, typically female, who cooks and teaches within a kitchen set, often her own.

This study seeks to extend the literature regarding gender and humor in tv cooking shows in a case study of one instructional cooking show (*The Pioneer Woman* on *Food Network*) hosted by a female celebrity chef (Ree Drummond). Teasing and self-deprecatory humor illuminate different aspects of gender performance on cooking shows: self-deprecating humor reinforces that women are to be perfect but also serves, along with teasing, as a type of indirect bragging that promotes the host's cooking skills and food. Further, we consider the construction of the celebrity image and suggest that the female celebrity chef shares humorous personal stories to create solidarity with her (female) viewers, supporting previous studies on gender and humor that women share funny stories to create solidarity (e.g. Hay 2000; Cortés-Conde and Boxer 2010; Coates 2014).

For example, Hay (2000) observes in a study of spontaneous humor among single-sex groups in New Zealand that women are more likely to use humor specifically to form or maintain solidarity than are men. Hay (2000) concludes that this self-disclosing humor provides a way for women to share new, personal information about themselves which builds trust. Likewise, Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006) find that women tell funny personal stories, and principally in the company of other women. In this present study, the female celebrity similarly offers stories of a personal, self-effacing nature to a largely same-sex group of at-home female viewers. Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) highlight how teasing among female friends is a type of bonding for women in resistance to wider held social norms (e.g. not knowing how to bake). Similarly, we will see from the data how the female celebrity chef's humor challenges social norms; humor's ambiguous nature allows the female host to promote herself while still acting within the American gender norms that women appear modest. Viewers are more likely to condone her over-eating and succumbing to guilty pleasures when the act is framed in humor. Also, in the celebrity's self-denigration, viewers may see a representation of their own fears and admire her way of coping with them by admitting, rather than denying, them.

Women tv chefs converge from men tv chefs; women promote their cooking from a self-deprecatory and teaching position while men are more direct and boastful about their skills (Mitchell 2010; Swenson 2009). An exemplar is Bobby Flay, long-time celebrity chef on the *Food Network*, who challenges viewers with statements like: "of course, our all-American potato salad. I know you didn't have one this good for sure. If you do, send it to me. I'll make it" (Flay 2011, Season 1, Episode 4, *Barbecue Addiction*). *Bon Appétit* magazine editor-in-chief Adam Rapoport (2014) describes Bobby: "He's direct. You might even say cocky." And

this difference between women and men celebrity chefs is not just in cooking shows; Mitchell (2010) observes in a comparative study of *Food Network* celebrity chef cookbooks that women are focused on “empowering” their readers to learn to cook while men promote themselves and have no interest in their audience, except that their fans get to know them (p. 530). Similarly, Swenson (2009) notes that *Food Network* male tv hosts construct “cooking as a way to flex professional muscles” by wearing traditional white jackets and making references to restaurant experiences and culinary training; in contrast, female hosts rarely mention cooking professionally and dress casually, often wearing aprons (p. 43).

Further, humor on men’s cooking shows arises in the very breaching of etiquette. Zajdman (1995) compares humor and etiquette, suggesting that both depend on rules: “in the case of etiquette, these rules are expected to be observed; in that of humor, to be transgressed; but in both they have to be known and accepted, in order for their observance—or non-observance—to have sense and offer pleasure” (p. 328). For instance, *Food Network* celebrity chef Guy Fieri takes “big bites” on his food travel show *Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives*.¹ Guy gives paralinguistic cues, such as leaning over, pointing to his cheesy chin, and swiping the grease with a ready supply of napkins. For comparison, Lisa Lillian’s *Hungry Girl* is about how to satisfy a big appetite without packing on pounds. Humorously titled recipes such as “Veggie So Low Mein” and “Cheeseburger Mac Attack” and kitschy kitchen décor with oversized gummy bears and ketchup bottles present eating guilt-free as fun and funny. Both verbal and nonverbal elements contextualize the preferred viewing of the eating and transgression of etiquette as humorous.

2 Literature review

2.1 Gender and humor

Early research suggested that women and men use humor differently (for overviews, see Crawford 2003; Hay 2000; Kotthoff 2006). Women do not tell jokes because joke-telling is an aggressive act (Grotjahn 1957) and should not according to social norms, because humor is an inherently powerful act (Marlowe 1989). In her controversial overview of “women’s language,” Lakoff (1975) concludes that “women can’t tell jokes—they are bound to ruin the punchline, they

¹ Guy Fieri hosts his own Food Network cooking show called *Guy’s Big Bite* with bold, imaginative flavors and generous portions. His appearance- bleached blonde hair, goatee, skateboarder shorts, and backwards sunglasses- makes a strong statement that parallels his confidence in the kitchen and position to challenge constraint.

mix up the order of things, and so on. Moreover, they don't 'get' jokes. In short, women have no sense of humor" (Lakoff 1975: 56).

Current research sees humor and gender as dynamic and situated (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992; Kotthoff 2006), suggesting that many variables influence humor, such as same-sex or mixed-sex groups, natural or mediated context, and cross-culturally (e.g. Hay 2000; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 1989; Marlowe 1989). Gender still matters, but its relevance varies from context to context (Kotthoff 2006). For example, Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (1989) found that women and men used much of the same kinds of humor, but that it was dependent on who was present. Women used self-directed humor among other women, but rarely with men; men rarely used self-directed humor among other men but made self-deprecating 'wisecracks' when with women.

Often there is ambiguity in humor with a tension between cooperation and conflict, or "bonding and biting" (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997). People joke at the expense of others (out-group) while strengthening shared values and perspectives of those present (in-group). The nature of teasing can be aggressive when considering the definition provided by Eder (1993): teasing represents "mock challenges, commands, and threats as well as imitating and exaggerating someone's behavior in a playful way" (p. 17). Verbal and nonverbal features, such as laughter, smiling, marked wording, repetition, interjections, and style shifting, what Gumperz (1982) has called "contextualization cues," are essential for interpreting humor correctly. These cues help participants identify the inferences in the humor and understand it appropriately, whether hostile and negative or playful and positive.

Laughter is a typical response to humor, so common that Norrick (1993) uses laughter as an identifier of instances of humor, claiming that joking and laughter are an "adjacency pair" (p. 23) whose collaborative activity and improvisatory nature resemble jazz music (Coates 2007; Davies 2003). But, as Hay (2001) suggests, laughter is not always the preferred response strategy and in fact, argues that laughing at self-deprecating humor in particular may often be inappropriate. As Jefferson (1984) notes, laughing at a joke teller's unfortunate situation is reserved for the teller herself. Instead, Hay (2001) suggests that offering sympathy or contradicting self-deprecating humor may be a preferred response, and identifies additional strategies for supporting humor: contributing more humor, echoing the humor, and using overlap to show involvement in the conversation.

2.2 Teasing and self-oriented humor

Teasing and self-oriented humor are relational processes that need to be interpreted within their context to be read appropriately. Teasing is humor directed at others

while self-oriented humor is humor directed at the self. According to Keltner et al. (2001), “teasing [is] an intentional provocation accompanied by playful markers that together comment on something of relevance to the target of the tease” (p. 229). Teasing has been characterized by bragging and boasting (Decapua and Boxer 1999), and wisecracking and competitive joking (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006).

Self-oriented humor may reveal personal information in the form of “humorous self-disclosures” (e.g. Cortés-Conde and Boxer 2010; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006), which may or may not be negative, or as humorous self-deprecation that introduces negative characteristics of the self. However, in both types, personal humor can be used to display common perspective and build rapport (Keltner et al. 2001). Further, self-deprecating humor comments can be made in accordance with Leech’s (1983) modesty principle: “minimize the expression of praise of self; maximize the expression of dispraise of self.” Self-disclosures in this study mean the revealing of one’s judgment about personal information in their private life, including their relationships with others and food.

Self-directed joking and playful teasing (intended positively) can be experienced as hurtful and understood as criticism, but their ambiguous nature lends to multiple functions. Schnurr and Chan (2011) identify that teasing simultaneously conveys two contradictory messages: “it may create a feeling of solidarity and a sense of belonging among interlocutors, as well as display and reinforce the speaker’s power and control” (p. 21). In the family-oriented and supportive environment of *The Pioneer Woman*, it can be assumed that the humor is well-intended and benevolent. Other cooking show genres with more hostile environments, such as competition shows (e.g. *Hell’s Kitchen*, *Cutthroat Kitchen*), are more likely to have aggressive humor and hurtful mockery.

If misread, an intended joke becomes an insult, and a self-directed poke is read as a confession. Men and women have been shown to use self-directed humor differently and in different contexts, whether in same-sex or mixed-sex interactions. Among mixed-sex groups, both men and women are less likely to direct jokes about themselves while more likely to tell humorous stories about celebrities and acquaintances not present (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 1989). In a later study, Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006) find that gender affects the types of teasing; women are more likely to tell self-deprecating personal stories within an all-female group. This suggests that the perceived level of intimacy and sympathy among the interactants affects the type of humor. In this present study, both teasing and self-disclosures are of interest here, and in the mediated television setting, the context shifts throughout the episode from the host cooking alone to interacting with family and friends.

Conversational joking is used to negotiate and construct gender identities. Cortés-Conde and Boxer (2010) examine humorous self-disclosures of two all-female

groups and argue that within this “circle of trust,” the women use humor to explore and resist socially imposed gender roles. Kotthoff (2000) similarly examines the construction of female identity in conversational joking in ironic sequences in stories, and of “new” male and female identities in mocking humor (Kotthoff 2007). Holmes (2006) also observes a subversive component to gendered humor used in the workplace, identifying a parody of the work dress by an all-women’s group as an example of female collaborative humor. This present study also examines how humor is used in the construction of gender and enactment (or resistance) of gender norms, specifically related to food, its cooking, serving, and eating.

Humor is risky for its ambiguous nature, and even more so when it is self-directed. While self-disclosures open the speaker to judgment, the listener is also in a vulnerable position. As Zajdman (1995) notes, all instances of humor are potentially face-threatening in that the humor may fail (for the speaker) or be misunderstood or not recognized (by the listener). Although responding to teasing and self-denigrating humor is challenging for listeners, Schnurr and Chan (2011) illustrate multiple ways that listeners successfully respond. For instance, listeners manage rapport by playing along, teasing back, and laughing in response to both teasing and self-deprecating humor, and specifically for self-deprecating humor, also offer sympathy, agreement, or no response (Schnurr and Chan 2011). For television, at-home viewers are not present, so the speaker must help them recognize whether the message conveyed in humor is meant to be taken seriously.

2.3 Humor, performance, and artifice

We also consider that television is a performance. Celebrity media humanizes the actors but maintains a certain part of their larger-than-life persona. Tolson (2001) considers the authenticity or “being yourself” just as false as the constructed image and part of the celebrity’s “professional ideology” (p. 445). The celebrity is constantly on performance, whether as the public persona or private persona. In this study, it is not the celebrity alone who is the author of herself; she is a character or brand marketed by Food Network. As Meyers (2009) notes in her study of authenticity and the celebrity star image, the tension between the two sides of the larger-than-life person and the “real” person, together with the tension between the impossibility and possibility of knowing the truth about her life, is what makes a celebrity, in this case Ree, so intriguing to the audience.

Humor is used in creating meaning, and on television, is part of constructed scenes that are carefully selected and edited by a television company. In a critique of Ree Drummond’s “effortless glamour,” Rousseau (2012) accepts the superficiality: “Yet television has always operated on a level of artifice.

Historically (until the advent of reality TV at least), it is a medium of performance, not disclosure” (p. 11). Performance is central to modern television cooking and the main distinction between reading a recipe and watching it being cooked on television. Part of this performance as entertainment is self-oriented humor, a recurring feature in *The Pioneer Woman*.

While there are various types of humor on the cooking show, we focus on incidents of teasing and self-oriented humor as they reveal the teller’s values and judgements (Cortés-Conde and Boxer 2010). Further, humor allows the teller to explore difficult or taboo topics (Coates 2007), such as violations of gender norms, inappropriate behavior, and excessive eating practices. Humor is marked not only by discourse; following the work of Holmes and Hay (1997) on conversational humor, we also consider contextual clues such as laughter, pre- and post-discourse, changes in pitch or rhythm, and a smiling voice. We consider humor as contributing to a wide range of social actions (Goffman 1959, 1974), joke telling (Fry 2011 [1963]) and conversational humor (Coates 2007). Humor’s duality of meaning (Mulkay 1988) and distortion of reality (McCarthy and Carter 2004) are further complicated by television’s mediated context and transposition of unreality and reality.

3 Methodology

The data of this study consists of one of the top female single-hosted cooking shows from the *Food Network*: Ree Drummond’s *The Pioneer Woman*. The series is ongoing, daytime, and among the longest running on the 24/7 food channel. The show is set in the traditional, how-to-cook format in the kitchen and at home—historically gendered domains belonging to women. In brief, we conducted a qualitative analysis and coded incidents of self-deprecatory humor. From this, we identified emergent themes relating to gender and food.

3.1 Sample

Ree Drummond is host of the cooking show *The Pioneer Woman*, which premiered in 2011. As of November 2016, 180 episodes have been produced over fifteen seasons. Writer, television personality, humorist, and blogger, Ree finds humor in the everyday experience of being a wife and mother and shares it with her readers in her blog of the same name.² Her self-deprecation and exposure of personal life to the public

² Ree’s blog, ThePioneerWoman.com, attracts more than 20 million page views per month and was named Weblog of the Year at the 2011, 2010, and 2009 Bloggie Awards. She is author of

follow the tradition of domestic humor by American women (e.g. Erma Bombeck, Shirley Jackson). Like Bombeck, the self-described “housewife-columnist” who writes “funny things that happen to [her] family” (1994: 103), and is associated with middle-class, suburban Phoenix, Arizona (Foster 2012: 38), Ree shares intimate moments to the public through her media texts (i.e., cooking show, blog, magazine, kitchen line, social media, etc.) and brings the domestic life and cattle ranch lifestyle of Oklahoma to national attention.

The Pioneer Woman show is particularly intriguing because of the juxtaposition between the traditional feminine domain (kitchen) against the backdrop of a masculine domain (cattle ranching). This contrast presents gender role exemplars where tradition is particularly respected and followed. Ree’s personal introduction in the openings of her shows acknowledges this juxtaposition of femininity within a rugged, more masculine space: “I am a writer, blogger, photographer, mother, and I’m an accidental country girl” (Drummond, *The Pioneer Woman*). The city girl with “black heels” intends to make only a quick detour in Oklahoma, but ends up staying even with its “tractor wheels,” as Ree describes in her memoir, *Black Heels to Tractor Wheels: A Love Story* (Drummond 2011). Trading her career ambitions as a journalist for a cattle rancher’s wife, Ree adheres to conventional gender roles, even while laughing at her misplacement, or “accidental” identity.

Ree has also been of interest to other gender and media studies. Ree is defined as exhibiting a “homebody persona” by Johnston et al. (2014) in their analysis of celebrity chef cookbooks in that she embodies characteristics of traditional femininity and domestic work (DeVault 1991). Practicality and necessity are the highest priority in the domestic kitchen along with time and budget constraints.

3.2 Analytic procedure

We have been watching the *Food Network* since its launch in 1997. Data collection and transcribing of *The Pioneer Woman* occurred January-April 2017 of a selection of episodes aired during 2012–2016 that were made available on *Food Network*’s website video archives (www.foodnetwork.com). *Food Network* regularly draws more than 100 million viewers per year and its website receives more than 9.9 million unique visitors monthly (www.foodnetwork.com). Given its influential and long-term media presence, *Food Network* has become a platform for manufacturing celebrity chefs and a valuable corpus for studying social and culture values especially related to food.

four #1 best-selling cookbooks, #2 NY Times Best Sellers list for nonfiction, and #1 NY Times Best Sellers for her children’s picture books. She also is a regular appearance on national talk shows including Good Morning America, TODAY, the View, and Fox & Friends.

We paid particular attention to incidents of humor as marked by smiles, laughter, and humorous content. The incidents then were categorized into different types of humor. Teasing and self-directed humor emerged from the analysis as salient speech activities. Ten shows were selected to illustrate the humor because of their diverse contexts and themes (Table 1). The data expands across the years and consists of a variety of cooking, from burgers, sweets, herbs, holidays, and 16-minute meals to ranching, entertainment, lifestyle, and more. Consistent is Ree's humor that captures the essence of family life; her jokes about family relationships and everyday aggravations make it timeless and resonating. The episodes present Ree cooking alone in the kitchen, with her family, and with the community.

Table 1: Selected corpus of the *Pioneer Woman* from *food network*.

The Pioneer Woman, food network (scripps interactive) produced by pacific and directed by olivia ball

Date aired	Episode number	Title of episode
Sep 8, 2012	Season 3, Episode 6	Girl time and burger time
Sep 15, 2012	Season 3, Episode 7	Horsing around
Oct 26, 2013	Season 6, Episode 5	Sweet deliveries
Mar 9, 2013	Season 4, Episode 9	Food and football
Sep 20, 2014	Season 8, Episode 11	One thing leads to another
Nov 1, 2014	Season 9, Episode 2	Herbalicious
Mar 28, 2015	Season 10, Episode 2	Easter weekend
May 2, 2015	Season 10, Episode 6	Friendship fiesta
Apr 16, 2016	Season 13, Episode 3	FAQ

To supplement our qualitative analysis, we versed ourselves in Ree's brand by subscribing to her blog, reading all of her cookbooks, and following her social media to add nuance to our understanding of her televised performance.

4 Analysis

4.1 Self-deprecation and personal stories

Types of humor surface in the show, namely, anecdotes about Ree's and her family's personal experiences and food tendencies. Although a television mediated performance, Ree's humor involves not only creative spontaneity, but connectedness; it invites self-disclosure and reciprocal sharing of perspectives. Humor is often

dependent on the immediate context, such as when Ree makes chocolate-dipped granola bars.

I'll throw the oats into the bowl [tipping oats from a baking sheet into a bowl, with some scattering onto the floor] and on to the floor. [laughs] Of course. Typical. But that's why brooms were invented. Right? [looks directly at camera] For people like me [laugh] (Drummond 2012c, Season 3, Episode 7).

Ree makes fun of herself, embarrassed by making a mess in the kitchen. She does not ignore the situation, but rather laughs, saying “Of course.” The media intentionally includes the embarrassing mishap that could have been edited out of the show, because this is part of the performance. The implication is that her messiness extends beyond the show's present context to being “typical.” The semantic repetition signals humor, and along with the short, similar patterns, helps to establish the rhythm of humor (Norrick 2003). The self-deprecatory joking continues with the invention of brooms “for people like [her].” Ree's comment suggests that she is like most people who too have spills and have to clean up for themselves. The continuous laughter and question, “right?” explicitly mark the self-deprecation, permitting and inviting viewers to laugh at her and with her in response.

Another display of self-deprecation is targeted at her physique. When driving to the local dry cleaners, Ree answers questions from her fans including one about her fashion: “where do you get all your tops?”

I just adore shirts, blouses, tunics. I'll take it all. I shop at discount stores, department stores, online, anywhere I can find a cute top without a waistline. I've had four children. You know how it goes. [smiles] They've got to be loose and never fitted. The more floral, fun, feminine, and colorful the better. (Drummond 2016, Season 13, Episode 3).

Ree implies that she needs flowing blouses to cover unattractive portions of her body. She shifts the potential judgment of her lacking discipline to that of being a mother (“I've had four children”). Her alignment with her female viewers (“you know how it goes”) further appeals for support and signals non-serious discourse.

Ree's humor helps create an “intimate women's circle” comparable to that of Paula Deen and her performance on *Food Network's Paula's Party*, a live cooking show:

[Deen] blends cooking demonstrations with family anecdotes, self-help mantras, humor, sexual innuendos, and advice. Deen creates the feeling of an intimate women's circle by referring to audience members as ‘us girls,’ inviting audience members to join her behind the stove and answering personal questions about her life and family. (Swenson 2009: 43).

While not hosting a live show, Ree similarly portrays herself as a likeable girlfriend through her humor and personal stories. Further, in answering her fans' questions about her clothes, she constructs herself as a fashion expert, which ironically is embedded within a critique of her body.

Self-mockery suggests the complexity of one's self-image and could be interpreted as a display of self-confidence (Kotthoff 2000). For example, Ree exposes a weakness in not being organized, which at the same time indicates an awareness of her habits and practices. When assembling a Tex-Mex Salad, she demonstrates how to compose the salad, narrating:

I've got some red grape tomatoes that I just sliced in half. You can also do a mix of yellow and red tomatoes. That's always really pretty. Then the gorgeous grilled corn.

I just want to break up the kernels. Sprinkle them all over the salad. I like sprinkling everything over the salad but you can also do neat little arrangements of the different ingredients. If you're an organized type of person, which I'm not. (Drummond 2015, Season 10, Episode 6).

By pointing out her flaws, Ree makes a conscious effort to counteract a presentation of a false persona. The spilling of rolled oats here (as well as other filmed cooking mishaps, e.g., getting a cloud of flour on her clothes when baking, Drummond 2013, Season 4: Episode 9), the admittance to wearing larger-sized clothing, and being disorganized present a normalcy that makes the celebrity more relatable to her audience's everyday experiences and concerns. Further, the self-deprecation is preemptive by calling out flaws before media critics and her social milieu do.

Ree's highlighting of her messiness is akin to the performance of Nigella Lawson, British celebrity chef of the cooking show *Nigella Bites*. Hollows (2003) observes that Nigella makes a virtue of her own laziness and incompetence that shows "both the foolproof nature and the pleasure of her cooking" (p. 182). Ree, like Nigella, portrays a carefree home cook that distances her from the efficient, proper female home economist (e.g. Martha Stewart) and from the meticulous male professional chef (e.g. Thomas Keller) (Hollows 2003). At the same time, Ree's tone is more apologetic and accommodating in comparison to Nigella who is "opinionated, forthright, funny, and has a well-honed turn of phrase" (Kimball 2016).

At the same time, humor can be seen as an inherently powerful act. In order to gain acceptance as a 'true' woman, it is unacceptable for women to display humor in public spheres, generally the domain of males. When Ree produces and presents humor, she reverses conventional social situations by putting herself, especially a flawed self, in the foreground, threatening basic gender expectations. At the same time, the spontaneous joking gives the impression of

the joke-telling occurring in a private space, the home kitchen, thus more appropriate for women, and the impression of an unmediated self.

The constructed image of Ree as a middle-class, stay-at-home mother compares to that of other female celebrity chefs, e.g. Paula Deen, Nigella Lawson, and Ina Garten, host of *Barefoot Contessa*. Ina, who has been called “America’s queen of cookbooks” and whose brand has been described: “Ina-ness is about coziness” (Sicha 2015), writes in the preface of her first cookbook, “It’s about Mom” in an explanation of Barefoot Contessa-ism (Garten 1999). And to encourage a friend who was working too hard, she writes, she invited him over for ice cream and cookies: “Isn’t that what we wanted our mothers to do?” (Garten 1999, preface). Despite never having children, Ina embodies this nurturing, maternal figure. Cooking is still a means of performing motherhood by feeding family and friends and caring for others.

4.2 Self-deprecation and exaggeration

While instructional by nature, cooking shows are also entertaining (De Solier 2005; Ketchum 2005). Storytelling is one way that cooking shows spice up the recipe telling to entertain viewers (Matwick and Matwick 2014). The kitchen and cooking scene provide a domestic setting that makes everyday talk appropriate. According to Crawford and Gressley (1991), women like to tell and hear humorous stories about mundane happenings. In *The Pioneer Woman*, Ree’s personal anecdotes detail life at the ranch, the community, family food preferences, and her personal habits. In these stories, Ree engages in self-deprecating humor to get a laugh. While the disclosed details in themselves are not important, their creation of a shared humored experience with viewers is what is important.

Self-disclosures about her food vices—loving large portions, thinking about food non-stop, using processed foods, for instance—are a frequent source of humor. In making burgers, Ree instructs that the patties be “much bigger than the bun. That’s exactly how I like it” (Drummond 2014, Season 8, Episode 11). In making bean burritos, Ree admits: “I’m always guilty of filling the tortillas too full. I’m going to try not to do that this time” (Drummond 2014, Season 8, Episode 11). In making pasta sauce, Ree says “it is so good I have [eyes rolling back] dreams about it” (Drummond 2012b, Season 3, Episode 6). In confessing her habits, Ree uses self-deprecatory humor to promote her cooking, even though to admit to her overconsumption is a violation of gender norms and daintily at that. Being funny helps mitigate possible judgment of eating too much, and thus projecting an undesirable, immoral, or gender inappropriate self.

Exaggeration adds humor and functions to mitigate face-threatening acts, such as eating in front of others., Ree's descriptions of her food as "wonderful," "amazing," "absolutely heavenly," "luscious," "divine," even "herbalicious" (Drummond 2014, Season 9, Episode 2) frequently precede and follow tastings. Being watched on television while eating amplifies the threat of potential face-threatening acts, such as grease dribbling down the chin or leafy greens stuck in the teeth. Hyperbole functions to persuade the viewer of how delicious the food is and helps interpret Ree's nonverbal expressions while eating. In the process of signaling humor, attention is drawn to the language or body. For example, some ways that Ree indicates humor include a mock-serious attitude, exaggeration, a lifted eyebrow, eye rolling, body position, and gestures, all of which signal humor and draw attention to the humor.

Cooking shows are a highly visual and multimodal text (Eriksson 2016; Matwick and Matwick 2017). Humor is also signaled through language, both verbal and nonverbal and through their combination. In a study of play in sitcoms, Kozić (2012) notes how humor is made with variations on the voice play including:

exaggerated loudness and prominence, high pitch, assuming a mock foreign accent or an exaggerated regional one, onomatopoeia and nonverbal sounds like spitting, snorting, the 'mms' of approval, blowing raspberries, shushing, caricaturing or imitating a familiar voice (e.g., of a character/celebrity), or deviant speech (stuttering, mumbling, various impediments, etc.) (p. 123).

The nonverbal sounds of gustatory pleasure are of particular significance to cooking shows in showing immediate and positive evaluation of the food. Besides expressing an embodiment of pleasure, gustatory mms are an interactional and discursive construction that contributes to the social nature of eating (Wiggins 2002). Ree's groans of pleasure are a way to express her satisfaction in the dish. Further, the explicit expression of Ree's pleasure in eating, what may seem individual and inaccessible to others, can be a way for viewers to experience "vicarious consumption" (Adema 2000) that is enhanced with visual and auditory cues.

Finally, a note about Ree's use of humor and sexual innuendos. For Ree, her groans of pleasure are not done in a sensuous manner (as compared to Nigella Lawson, cf. Chiaro 2013) but function more as a polite way to fill silence which creates awkwardness on tv shows. Further, the groans are a polite alternative to the a more offensive breach of etiquette—talking with a mouthful of food. Nonetheless, like Nigella, Ree does hint at suggestive humor with recipe titles such as "Knock You Naked Brownies" and with stories in her cookbook: "have I ever shared with you that we almost named her [Alex, the oldest daughter] Sydney as a nod to her ... um ... point of origin?" (Drummond 2012a: 217).

4.3 Teasing and indirect boasting

Teasing is layered in meaning like other types of humor, such as self-disclosures and self-deprecations, but perhaps is even ambiguous as a form of other-directed humor: teasing may be aimed at attacking a listener's face on one extreme while on the other may be intended to create a feeling of solidarity. Further, teasing may be used to display and reinforce the teaser's power and control (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Hay 1995).

Teasing also offers insight about the construction of gender and social roles in everyday life. A number of studies have found that teasing in the workplace is a valuable tool for superiors in conveying face threatening messages to subordinates (Schnurr 2009; Schnurr and Chan 2011). In cooking shows, the hierarchical relationship of the workplace could be comparable to that of the host (the superior) and guests or recipients of the food (subordinates). The host may critique recipients' food habits, such as their lack of control in eating, a face-threatening act which is heightened when teasing not only occurs in front of a group of friends or family but even more so on television.

Here, in *The Pioneer Woman*, teasing is understood as friendly because of the high familiarity of the interactants (Ree's family and friends), the informality of the setting (set in Ree's home and community), and Ree's cheerful disposition. Also, positive lexicon ("fun," "easy," "love," "all-time favorite") and terms of endearment (e.g., "my BFF Hy" for Best Friend Forever Hyacinth; "B-Man" and "Brycie" for older son Bryce; "Toddy" for younger son Todd, "Paigie" for younger daughter Paige, etc.) populate the discourse, setting a light-hearted tone. The raising of pitch or the "fronting" of vowels in the nicknames formed by adding the sound "ee" are associated with positive affect (Eckert 2010), making Ree sound appeasing and friendly. Ree also uses vowel fronting to imbue her speech with sweetness and childhood innocence when conversing with the family dog Charlie. The higher pitch, which we instinctively associate with small, thin things (Morton 1977; Ohala 1994) and use frequently with baby talk (Fernald et al. 1989), helps portray Ree as less threatening, smaller, and perhaps thinner, all desirable qualities of women. The humor deployed in the discourses about food, along with verbal cues, are also part of the construction of narrow and normative gender roles. The image of Ree represents and reproduces stereotypes about the ideal woman.

Many of the cooking show episodes share the same storyline where Ree makes food and then delivers it to extended family and friends. Ree often teases the recipients, using the same joke about not eating all of the food at once and the importance of sharing. Teasing may threaten the listener's quality face (when being teased about gluttony and greed), but in the frame of the cooking show is taken as a display of rapport and good humor. Further, Ree's teasing

makes it easier for the recipients to receive her food, offsetting feelings of indebtedness. Instead, the tease gives the recipients an opportunity to ‘give back’ to Ree by supporting the humor. Hay (2001) notes three ways that listeners can respond to teasing: “(a) provide full support, thereby endorsing the message conveyed, (b) support the humor while explicitly commenting on the message, or (c) correct or deny the message and not support the humor at all” (p. 73). Other ways to not support the humor are to keep silent or respond seriously (Lytra 2007). In the following excerpt, the recipients illustrate the first two strategies by responding positively to Ree’s jests and playfully building on.

In the episode “Sweet Deliveries,” Ree delivers desserts to “the chocolate-lovers in my life”: her father-in-law and the Kane boys, sons of her friend Hyacinth.

Papa: Hi Ree! [comes out of his house and walks towards Ree who approaches in her truck]

Ree: Hey Papa, how are you? [stops truck with the window down]

Papa: Good.

Ree: Good, I have a treat for you. [handing him a box of chocolate cupcakes]

Papa: Oh, really? [receiving the box]

Ree: These are as chocolatey as it gets [laughs]

Papa: Oh man [groaning]

Ree: I had a sneaking suspicion you would like these.

Papa: The worst chocolate I ever had was fantastic.

Ree: [laughs] well enjoy, be sure to share them!

Papa: I don’t think that’s going to happen.

Ree: Oh Papa!

Papa: Thank you Ree!

Ree: Ok, enjoy! Bye bye

[drives away and to her friend’s house; her friend and two boys are in the yard]

Ree: Philip, can I trust you with these chocolate devils? [handing him a box of chocolate cupcakes]

Philip: Yes, they’ll be safe. [0.2 sec] In my stomach! [big grin] [Group laughs- Ree, Hyacinth, Philip, and older brother]

Ree: Share with your mom!

Philip: Ok, thanks.

(Drummond 2013, Season 6, Episode 5)

Here collaborative joke telling emerges in both occasions. Ree hints at Papa’s obsession with chocolate (“I had a sneaking suspicion you would like these”) who self-discloses his indiscrimination for chocolate (“the worst chocolate I ever had was fantastic”). A similar bait-and-self-disclosure exchange happens between Ree and Philip. The shared laughter develops and maintains an intimate relationship between Ree and her in-law and her friends, a function similar to Coates’ (1996)

argument that laughter, joking, and teasing are important ways of “doing friendship.” Ree’s final teasing: “be sure to share them!” and “share with your mom!” is at once a mild reprimand of their greed but also approval of their enthusiasm for the chocolate.

In both scenes, Ree’s teasing draws out self-disclosures of the recipients whose responses reveal Western values about the giving and eating of foods. This economy of gift exchange is like a family dinner where parents are expected to feed their children and children are expected to finish their food (Aronsson and Gottzen 2011). In these incidents, Ree acts as the parent, the provider and moral guide, and Papa and Philip the children, who respond by promising their eating of the food, which is an act of gratitude.

Gender norms further come to surface in another humored exchange of food between Ree and a female friend. In contrast to the two exchanges above, the woman agrees with Ree’s tease. In the Episode “Easter,” Ree delivers hot cross buns to her friend in town.

Ree: Happy Easter! And Happy Good Friday! [women exchange hugs]

Female Friend: Well, thank you, thank you.

Ree: I brought you some hot cross buns. [handing her a basket with buns]

Female Friend: Oh, gosh, thank-you [receiving basket and smiling].

Ree: You’ll have to share with your husband and son, though.

[both laugh]

Female Friend: Well, yes, I will so I won’t eat them all. Thank you!

(Drummond 2015, Season 10, Episode 2)

The joking and shared laughter reveal norms about responsibility and control over food choices. The friend’s response suggests concern in eating too much lest she project an undesirable, immoral, or gender inappropriate self. At the same time, the friend sloughs off her anxiety about the joke’s subject matter—excessive eating—and acknowledges the social condemnation that comes from being fat. The laughing at the same joke constitutes evidence of a physical conformity and rapport function of joke-telling, resulting in collaborative speech that leads to womanly bonding (Cheshire and Trudgill 1998; Coates 1996; Cortés-Conde and Boxer 2010).

The weaving of wisecracks into ongoing conversation indicates society’s double standards: men are encouraged to have a hearty appetite whereas women are viewed negatively when admitting a lack of control in eating (Fuller et al. 2013). Following the “food rules system” produces positive results (Counihan 1992). The contagious nature of laughter eases social friction and affirms the two women’s friendship. The friend joins in the joke-telling,

indicating laughter at faults is a positive social corrective, arguably better than serious admonition.

5 Discussion

We suggest that the female celebrity chef negotiates a space between oppositions: the private and the public, the domestic and the liberated, in both the use of humor and in the cooking and eating. Ree reinforces the value of domestic tradition yet also acknowledges the pressures of “doing femininity.” As a trusted, relatable public figure and lifestyle intermediary (Lewis 2008), the female celebrity chef steps into viewers’ home through her humor in cooking shows to convey information of food and gender in an entertaining and accessible way.

The blurring of the private/public distinction or the idea of an authentic individual behind the public figure makes the celebrity magnetic. Turner (2004) suggests that celebrities’ “private lives will attract greater public interest than their professional lives” (p. 4). The behind-the-scenes life serves to create the “illusion of intimacy,” which is central to our fascination with celebrities (Schickel 1985: 4). Ree’s own laughter links viewers at home, laughing individually or in small groups, with the whole community of viewers. We suggest that this shared laughter brings the celebrity close to the audience by making her life not so far removed from the audience’s own experiences.

Further, Ree’s show, set within her own home and family “lodge” rather than a television studio, adopts a domestic ‘presentation of self,’ softening the distance between the viewer and the presenter. The domestic, private, secure scene of the kitchen serves as an extension of Ree’s personality, reinforcing her rooted, reliable presence. At the same time, the backdrop of the show is set in the wild, vast, dangerous, romantic frontier and serves also as a representation of Ree’s adventurous spirit who claims that “I’m all about breaking the rules in the kitchen” (Drummond 2012b, Season 3, Episode 6), a rhetoric similarly portrayed in her cookbooks (Matwick 2017). Food television and cooking offer safe ways to experience exotic pleasures alongside more familiar ones.

Moreover, the humorous text is rarely contained within a single cooking frame; instead, the humor is repeatedly reinforced in many ways throughout the episode and show, and with each reinforcing cue, an additional joke is precipitated. As Mulkay (1988) points out, “Although serious discourse is by no means always clear and explicit, humour differs from serious discourse in requiring at least a duality of meaning, and often a multiplicity of opposing meanings” (p. 30). The real message of playful teasing and self-oriented humor is criticism, the former aimed at another’s behavior and the latter at one’s own. The use of self-

deprecatory humor creates a doubleness in that the female host is at once talking herself “down” while talking herself “up.”

6 Conclusion

Humor provides entertainment on an instructional genre (how-to cook), making instructions easy (and pleasurable) to digest. From an interactional sociolinguistics and gender perspective, humor, especially that of self-directed negative humor and teasing, functions as a social bonding device, a social corrective, and a display of being ordinary. Drawing on a close analysis of one instructional cooking show (*The Pioneer Woman*) and one female celebrity chef (Ree Drummond), we propose that humor allows for engagement with and questioning of aspects of gender and food, specifically (over) consumption practices. We note that Ree jokes about herself and that such self-deprecation paradoxically serves a positive function in promoting her cooking and brand. As the themes and context shift, authenticity and “keepin’ it real” (Drummond 2010: 238) become increasingly important. Self-disclosures and humor are key tools for the celebrity to present herself as genuine. Further, humor on cooking shows contributes to the construction of a community of shared understanding.

So, how does this help us with the concept of humor and performance? From mediated interactional humor on the screen, how natural is the way we laugh and the way we do humor, and how much is it a part of our gendered performance? Do we interact humorously in the same way, regardless of gender and of mode of communication? Or, could it be that the use of humor simply is part of the celebrity’s brand?

We do not contend that teasing and self-oriented humor are all-inclusive nor exclusive of female celebrity chefs; however, comparing the instances of humor discussed above against the instances of gender references, it emerges that the indistinctiveness of humorous messages can be a vehicle for women to both confirm and contest status quo. In exploring the complex relationship between humor and performance, gender, it seems, flavors every bite, every punchline, and by extension, every aspect of life, on and off screen.

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