

Down with cooking stereotypes!

Stale, out-of-date ideas about the role of men and women in the kitchen still linger, says this private cook, but it's high time they were consigned to the dustbin

By KATHY SLACK



Last year, the organisers of my village's annual fete announced a newcomer in the prize roster. Among the usual rosettes for Straightest Runner Bean, Tastiest Jam and the much-coveted Best Quiche was an event titled: 'Men Only: Swiss Roll (Recipe Provided)'. A men-only cooking category? Are you *kidding* me?

So many things about this concept get my goat. First off, note that the recipe is supplied to the poor dears, just in case they can't manage to locate one and decipher it on their own... It's that old-fashioned view of men and cooking: "Silly old men. Hopeless in the kitchen. Can't even put on an apron without getting tangled up, let alone feed themselves."

To suggest that men are universally hopeless at something simply because they are men is as bad as suggesting they are good at something because they are men. A men-only cooking category is just as sexist as a men-only carpentry category. Inverse sexism is still sexism.

More insidiously sexist is the choice of recipe itself: the assumption that quiches and jams, two of the other categories, are somehow beneath men when they deign

“The idea that women are born with (and men without) the innate urge to cook is as outdated as cheese and pineapple on sticks”

to enter the kitchen. No, that's boring everyday cooking, for 'housewives'. Men get to do the sexy desserts.


The flipside of all this is an equally outdated view of women: that they, unlike cack-handed men, are natural domestic goddesses. They don't need to be given a recipe; they don't need any hand-holding. They'll produce the goods using their natural-born skills.

What utter rot. Some women are great cooks, some are lousy. Just like male cooks.

The idea that women are born with, and men without, the ability and the innate urge to cook and feed themselves and others is as outdated as cheese and pineapple on sticks (and a whole lot less palatable).

If any proof were needed, just have a look at the world of professional cooking. Hardly short of men, is it? Most commercial kitchens are chock-full of blokes who, clearly, at some point in their lives, have mastered that tricky swiss roll. In fact restaurant kitchens are almost exclusively, and annoyingly, male. Yes, there are hugely talented, creative female chefs who've broken through, but the fact that an averagely knowledgeable food lover could name most of them tells you how far we have to go.

The men-only swiss roll competition perpetuates a pair of classic gender stereotypes, one comfortably ensconced in the domestic kitchen and the other prowling the professional kitchen. At home we have the nurturing, cuddly, pinny-wearing female cook. She cooks to feed her family, to bring simple pleasure. In the restaurant there's the macho professional male chef: a grumpy knife-sharpening alpha male. He hasn't got time to be making scones! He's a creative person, a pusher-back of boundaries, a seeker of Michelin-starred glory. These outdated stereotypes are limiting and stupid and have no place in the contemporary kitchen.

So, cooks of the UK, men *and* women, emblazon your placards: Down With Cooking Stereotypes! Gender Equality in Kitchens, Domestic or Otherwise! (OK, that second one could be pithier...) And most of all, No More Men-Only Swiss Rolls! 

Do you think Kathy has a valid point, or do you take a different view? Tell us at info@deliciousmagazine.co.uk and we'll print the best replies.

