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The Daily Update

Counihan Discusses Food Activism

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Posted on Friday, March 02, 2012

Student Contributors

The Fisher Center for the Study of Women and Men continued its year-long discussion of food, politics and gender with a Fisher Center lecture from food anthropologist Carole Counihan. As part of the Digesting Gender series, Counihan discussed food activism in Italy and the role of both men and women in this aspect of Italian food culture.



This Week in Photos

"Food - its production, its distribution and its consumption - impacts nearly every aspect of our lives," remarked Associate Professor of Dance Cadence Whittier, who currently serves as the director of the Fisher Center. "It is sensate and emotional; it speaks to our cultures, identities and beliefs."

Videos

"Gender runs throughout food activism," explained Counihan. Food activism, as Counihan studies it, is the process of advancing social and economic justice through food practices.

Inside the News

"Women prevail in food studies, their voices are very present in the study of food," said Counihan. "Women are out there doing hard work in food activism, particularly work related to women's role with food in the domestic structure. However, it seems that there is a greater presence of men in the upper levels of food activism, making the major decisions."

Social Media

In her talk, Counihan outlined the major divide that seems to exist between the private and public spheres of the food system, and how that divide seems to exist largely on gender lines. Counihan also noticed that smaller organizations tend to have a more equal representation of men and women, while it is larger corporations and more capitalist enterprises that reveal a gender imbalance.

HWS Mobile

"If we're not hearing all the voices in the food system, what potential are we missing?" asked Counihan, who has taken a feminist approach in her research, and feels that losing the voice of women is hindering food activism.

Special Events

For in particular women, said Counihan, the cooking can be the carrier of a voice and identity and because of this, it is how women often express a connection to others. In her research, Counihan has seen the powerful memories and connections that has evoked in men, women and children alike.

WEOS

"Connections to food can be a real power in strengthening the food activism movement," said Counihan. "In fact, emotional connections and networks are essential to all types of activism."

Calendar

However, there still remain the gendered connotations of domestic cooking - which still is done primarily by women in Italy - and food in the public sphere. Throughout Italy, it is more common to find a man as head chef in a restaurant than a woman. Where a chef will receive monetary compensation and public recognition for his work, a person in charge of domestic cooking will receive no such reward - which is just the beginning of problems with the gender divide in Italian food culture, leading to a culture of food activism that is flawed from the very beginning.

Publicity

"Men and women can come together around food," posited Counihan. "They can share an ideology, and food activism is a potential meeting ground to "do gender" in new ways."

Media Resources

Counihan is a visiting professor of food anthropology in the gastronomy MLA program at Boston University and a retired professor of anthropology at Millersville University in Pennsylvania. She received her BA in history from Stanford University and her Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Massachusetts. Her research focuses on food,

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gender and identity in the U.S. and Italy. Supported by a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, she authored "A Tortilla Is Like Life: Food and Culture in the San Luis Valley of Colorado."

She is also author of "Around the Tuscan Table: Food, Family and Gender in Twentieth Century Florence" and "The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power." She is co-editor of *Food in the USA: A Reader*, and editor-in-chief of the scholarly journal *Food and Foodways*. Counihan has served as a visiting professor at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy, and at the University of Cagliari in Italy.

The Fisher Center will continue its discussion on "Digesting Gender," on Wednesday, March 14 with the screening of a film made by the Fisher Center's 2011 Woodworth Fellow Lucia Berliner '12. The film will be shown at 7 p.m. in the Sanford Room.

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