



# Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture

*Sherrie A. Inness*

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Who cooks dinner in American homes? It's no surprise that "Mom" remains the overwhelming answer. Cooking and all it entails, from grocery shopping to chopping vegetables to clearing the table, is to this day primarily a woman's responsibility. How this relationship between women and food developed through the twentieth century and why it has endured are the questions Sherrie Inness seeks to answer in *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture*.

By exploring a wide range of popular media from the first half of the twentieth century, including cookbooks, women's magazines, and advertisements, *Dinner Roles* sheds light on the network of sources that helped perpetuate the notion that cooking is women's work. Cookbooks and advertisements provided valuable information about the ideals that American society upheld. A woman who could prepare the perfect Jell-O mold, whip up a cake with her new electric mixer, and still maintain a spotless kitchen and a sunny disposition was the envy of other housewives across the nation.

Inness begins her exploration not with women but with men—those individuals often missing from the kitchen who were taught their own set of culinary values. She continues with the study of juvenile cookbooks, which provided children with their first cooking lessons. Chapters on the rise of electronic appliances, ethnic foods, and the 1950s housewife all add to our greater understanding of women's evolving roles in American culinary culture.

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