



The International Conference on Communication and Media 2014 (i-COME'14), 18-20 October 2014, Langkawi, MALAYSIA

Masculine Domination and Power in Indonesian TV Cook Shows

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Abstract

This article explores the ways in which gender contributes to the production of TV program well-known with the term of gendered television. It examines semiotically how the shows construct the male host to communicate with their assumed female target audiences. The analysis demonstrates how the male presenters negotiate the traditionally feminized position and the stereotypically domestic sphere to construct his masculine identity. It argues that their role as cooks does not undermine their masculine persona.

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Peer-review under responsibility of School of Multimedia Technology & Communication, Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Keywords: Politics of gender; masculinity; domination; power; cook show

1. Introduction

Cook show can be categorized as lifestyle program as it is produced to serve the obsession of the hobbyists with their special interest. Cook Show was initially dedicated to for female cooks to instruct the viewers the importance of food for everyday life from preparing, cooking and serving. The audiences learn not only the recipes but also the techniques. The process of the cooking is essential as it guides the audiences the tradition and the expertise of cooking. However, cook show also serves to satisfy the hunger metaphorically (Chao, 1998).

Every network offers its audiences a cook show program instructed either by male or female chef which is mostly broadcasted as Saturday entertainment. Cook show programs broadcasted on Food Channels are predominantly instructed by male chef, such as Emeril Lagasse, Jamie Oliver, Martin Yan, Emanuel Strooban etc. The word chef in France is synonymous with professional restaurateur. It could be assumed that instructor of cook show, the male chef

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is considered as a profession. Thus, cooking has two dimensions. Traditionally cooking belongs to women's sphere as the task of cooking passes from wife to servant. However, the male hired chef does not cook in domestic household. Historically, the middle class hired the male cook to show that they were higher in status. The politics of gender tends to support the power structure rather than reflecting everyday reality of who does the cooking. The idea of cookbook and cook show are to respond women's need to maintain cooking tradition although it is now only for leisure time (Chao, 1998).

Gula-gula and *Foody with Rudy* were Indonesian TV Cook Shows broadcasted every Saturday Morning. These programs can be categorized as programs targeted for female viewers as these programs were broadcasted on block hours of programs for women. *Gula-gula* broadcasted in TransTV is instructed by Bara Pattiradjawane, an Indonesian by birth who spent 25 years living in Bangkok and Germany to learn cooking. Meanwhile, *Foody with Rudy* aired in ANTV is presented by Rudy Choirudin, the pioneer of male cook show presenter in Indonesia. Both programs offered to audiences a cooking education from how to choose good ingredients, introducing varieties of imported and local ingredients and how to serve this food ala chef. They sent a wonderful message to the audiences that cooking is easy.

The study presented in this paper focuses on textual analysis of the two cook shows, *Gula-gula* and *Foody with Rudy*. Applying semiotic analysis, it deals with the interwoven issues of gender in the cook show. "People used to think cooking was a sissified thing", however the majority of professional chef or celebrity chefs who lead the show are male. Most of the presenters are not sissy. They are masculine and some of them are macho. (Norris, 2003) Meanwhile, it is assumed that the target audiences are women. The question arising is how the masculinity is constructed for female viewers and how they maintain their domination and power in communicating with targeted female viewers. Before examining this show, it is influential to look at closely at the gendered television.

Watching TV is gendered activity. Women and men have been conditioned to have different viewing habits. Men and women watch television at different times and they watch different programs. Men and women have different expectation when they watch TV programs. Thus, TV programs are carefully constructed to respond the expectation of the sex of the viewers. (Craig, 1993, p. 3)

John Fizke in his book *Television Culture* discusses the design and the construction of television shows to respond women and men's appeal. The sex of the targeted viewers may affect the construction of plot, characterization, costuming, staging and lighting decisions. Fizke explains that the concept of masculinity and femininity is represented differently for male and female audiences. Women's view on masculinity is different from men's expectation. Thus, programs targeted to women's viewers construct masculinity as the good male in women imagination. The good male as constructed in soap opera, for example, is characterized by caring, nurturing and verbal. Relationship is much more important rather than material wealth and professional success. He is verbal on his feeling and rarely shows his masculinity in direct action. He is still expected to be decisive as it is his masculine power but the power is expressed in a feminine inflection. Meanwhile, the masculine characteristics of goal centeredness, assertiveness and the morality of the strongest are not expected to identify in the hero. The macho men, although they are desirable hunks are more associated with villainy: "they are loved and hated, admired and despised" (Fizke, 1987, p. 186)

Meanwhile, masculinity constructed for predominantly targeted male audiences is characterized by physically aggressive male who is mostly presented on athletes. The symbolic sign of sport and athletes is the male chauvinism of male power and superiority, which is separated from the feminization of society. Sport shows as targeted on male viewers portray "the polarities of traditional male power, strength and violence and the contemporary fear of social feminization". The men were represented "away from home, having fun, and not infrequently in some sort of fantasized escapist adventure". However, there is softer male character, who is thin, weak, and clumsy as the archetypical nerd. The softer male is often contrasted to the masculine man. Thus, it reinforces the hegemonic masculinity (Craig, 1993, p. 13-14). In relation to cook show which is seemingly targeted to female viewers, the paper describes how the male celebrity chefs construct their masculine persona, whether they maintain their masculine identity or refashion their conception of masculinity to better communicate with female audiences.

2. Masculine domination and power

Gula-gula is 30-minute cook show in which in every episode of this series, Bara offers the audiences 3 food recipes with desert as the last recipe. The range of food varies to appeal of lifestyle preferences. The ingredients could mostly be bought only on big supermarket. Yet somehow, ingredients such as sour cream, coriander leaves, kiwi, are not easy to get in regular grocery stores. Quite similar, *Foody with Rudy* is also 30-minute program presenting 5 recipes with most of the ingredients are from the sponsors of the program, such as instant pudding, cake mix, cooking spices, etc. In this program, Rudy shows how to make a delicious food with instant cake mix, for example, added with some garnishes as ornament. This show delivers a message that cooking is easy and it only needs some creativity to produce tempting food. These shows are not only focused on food preparation and process, but they also offer travel experience, which is then used as the setting of the kitchen. Somehow, the kitchen is predominantly set up stylishly outdoor with beautiful scenery as the backstage. The cookware is the latest and the utensils are luxurious. Thus, these shows teach the audiences to be better and cultivate more refined tastes than what they have.

Traditionally kitchen is female space. However, in the cook shows, the outdoor kitchen is the working space for the male chefs. “In patriarchal capitalism masculinity is a problem structured around notions of power and service, freedom and discipline, individuation and dependency”. This problem is continually actuated in the work place. Work place is structured between power and discipline, freedom and restraint as well as authority exerted and submitted to. (Fizke, 1998, p. 208). The outdoor kitchen with modern and luxurious kitchen utensils and gadget represent the male world of happiness and comfort, exclusivity and uniqueness. The outdoor kitchen symbolizes a kitchen without boundaries which is free from conventional thought and restrictions.

The initial sense of masculinity of these shows is captured through the combination between cooking and travelling. The fantasy of the audiences is not only on the food but also on the travel destination. The travel, which initiates the show, looks adventurous. They visit some tourist sites and show to the audiences the beauty of the sites. The travel which starts the program signifies the masculine aspect of this show because travel gives the images of away from home and having fun. However, the food they cooks is not inspired from their travel adventure. The combination between cook and travel is significant in building the sense of masculinity. The image brought about is the combination between work and fun. Yet somehow, work is very important to construct masculinity. Work is men’s power and it positions men as the breadwinner of the family. Meanwhile, travel can be interpreted as freedom from the discipline and the restraint of working. The combination between work and travel signifies how men enjoy working and do not consider as pressure although the family relies on his power. It also solves the problem of tension between power and discipline and freedom and restraint,

Along with the set design, the audiences are spoiled with the exciting transformation of raw ingredients into a meal. In the shows, Bara and Rudy demonstrate the process of preparing and cooking the food. The camera is focused on their skills on steaming, boiling, and frying. Various medium close-up shots of the actions are taken to show Bara’s and Rudy’s skills on preparing and processing the food. Close-up shots are taken to shoot the supple movement of Rudy’s hand on playing with the kitchen utensils and produce an image of very skillful chef.

Masculinity is performance. Masculinity is characterized by “prioritizing the concepts and abilities”, “physical and mechanical power”, “social constraint and responsibility”, “freedom, individualism, leadership, and power in the service of the weak” (Fizke, 1998, p. 213-14). These characteristics are constructed in the persona of both Bara and Rudy. His communication with his audiences embodies the power relation between Bara as the host of the show and the viewers. The power differential is important to continue the ideology of patriarchal capitalism. As we know that in our society, power is distributed along axes of gender and class. Media often work in contradictory position between maintaining and minimizing the power differential. Cook show is the example of the contradictory position of media in maintaining and minimizing the power relation between the male hosts and the female viewers. The camera angle view, the language expression, the body language and the setting of the show act to maintain the power differences.

Language expression can also be used to build the intimate relations between the host and the viewers. Research shows that women tends to be warmer and communal than men (Carli, 2001, p. 733). Ways of talking between men and women are also different. The interactional style of women tends to be facilitative to include tag questions and pragmatic particles which encourage others to participate in the conversation. Indirect strategies are also mostly employed by women such as the usage of interrogative rather than imperative to soften the request and statements. (Holmes, 2006, p. 7) In communicating to targeted female viewers, Rudy chooses to behave warmly and friendly. In

the beginning of the show, Rudy always open with warm and friendly tone with smiling facial expression, a feminine interactional style which Rudy adopts to create intimate relationships with his audiences. This style of communication can be considered as Rudy's strategy to speak to seemingly targeted female viewers. Rudy uses the words "kita" (we) in giving the cooking instruction. With the choice of word "kita", Rudy wants to involve his viewers to his program. Rudy also employs interrogative expression such as producing the expression "cantik kan?" (beautiful, is it?) and it softens his domination over the audiences.



Fig. 1. (a) and (b) Foody with Rudy

Unlike Rudy, Bara employs authoritative, powerful and assertive talk. His voice tone expression is commanding and all are articulated clearly. He explains the utensils that he uses and shows how to use it in dominant voice tone. He demonstrates his mastery over the cookware with masculine body language. His shoulders are relaxed and back. His standing position is straight and relax. He produces strong and secure eye contact to his audiences as if that the audiences are in front of him. His hand moves comfortably and slowly demonstrating the process of cooking. Bara uses the word "pemirsa" (viewers), a formal word to address to the audiences. He does not produce any expression, which can create an intimacy with his viewers; rather he focuses on explaining the ingredients and the process with formal word choices. There is no expression, which shows his feeling toward certain food. He maintains his neutrality on varieties of food he cooks to create the image of his professionalism. He also employs consistent tone to create a sense of formality. To create the image of his formality and his expertise, he does follow careful rules for cooking. Although he looks never measuring ingredients, he explains the amount of the ingredients needed. It produces the impression of his expertise. He always takes spoon to taste his food. He uses cookware to process the food.



Fig.2. (a) and (b) Gula-gula

The impression of masculinity on *Gula-gula* is strong; however, the targeted audiences are female. To communicate with the female viewers, the show should employ some strategies to cope with categorization of its viewers, in this show it is female viewers. Women want to challenge the status quo for it maintains the power relation, which puts women in the position as subordinate. Masculinity should be disrupted. It should be affirmed but at the same time, it is being questioned. The disruption of masculinity is significant to create pleasure for its viewers. It also gives grant to the female viewers the sense of power in patriarchal society.

Women prefer process rather than product. Women enjoy watching the process as through the narrative of process women derives the pleasure of seeing how the process of cooking occurs rather than the food itself. It opposes to the masculine pleasure, which tends to appreciate product and final success. That is why cook show is targeted on women because the spectacle of this show is on the process of how the ingredients transform into delicious product. Cook show is produced not to invite the audiences to taste it but to make the audiences think that it is easy process and you can do it. Through lingering the process of cooking, women enjoy the step by step of the process. The various shots between medium close-up and close-up to the process creates the disruption of the masculinity as expected by the female viewers.

During the cooking process, the camera's angle view is mostly at chest level. Medium shots, which intercut with close-up of the food, are used to create intimacy. Sometimes close-up shots to Bara's and Rudy's face are employed to create the fantasy of closeness and the viewers' sense of connection to the host. The shooting technique is typical of feminine text shot with the slow camera movement (see Luke, 1996). Yet somehow, this technique is used as the targeted audiences of the show are women. Close-ups are "an important mode of representations in feminine culture". It serves as training in "the feminine skills of reading the people and the means of exercising the feminine ability to understand the gap between what it is meant and what it is said" (Fizke, 1998, p. 182) Although, *Gula-gula* applies the same technique of the feminine text, making close-ups on his head which is up and never looks down and his strong and secure eye contact, the effect of the close-ups is Bara's self-confidence on the knowledge and the mastery technique of the food process. Meanwhile, the similar technique applied to Rudy produces different impact, soft masculinity, because of the different ways of interaction between Bara and Rudy.

As a host of these shows, both Rudy and Bara present themselves as a teacher who leads and directs. All activities on the show flow through the commanding style of Bara and Rudy to the audiences, although Rudy sometimes employs some feminine interactional styles. From food preparation, culinary direction and advice, both cooks show their domination, control and expertise to the cookware, the ingredients, and the processes. They explain the peculiarities and secrets of each ingredient and where to get it. They also describe the tricks in preparing the food and the tips to serve it. They look relaxed, laid back and confident in cutting, boiling, frying and serving. While doing with the process of cooking, they still look at the camera as gestures to address his viewers. They construct their persona so that the audiences' response will be only: "Oh, I see or it's incredible". Yet somehow, Bara keeps his formality to direct the audiences' focus on his demonstration. There are no flamboyant gestures or flirtatious eye contact with the camera that are sometimes employed by male cooks to seduce their audiences. Bara is always formal. Instead, he moves vigorously to show his energetic action. This way is employed as female viewing habits, as identified by Fizke, which tend to watch while doing something else (Fizke, 1998, p. 196). Meanwhile, Rudy establishes a communication with audiences by negotiating his masculine persona, employing feminine interactional style to create warm relationship with his audiences. Rudy constructs his identity to meet the female viewers' expectation. Thus, he reduces the pace between the host and the audiences and creates a sense of commonality which is important in building relationship between Rudy as the sender and the audiences as the receiver. It can be said that in *Gula-gula* the position of female viewers is subordinate to the host of the show. The power relation between the host and the viewers is imbalance to create a respect from the viewers to the host to maintain the hegemonic masculinity. Someway, it shows how the construction of *Gula-gula* differs significantly from *Foody with Rudy* in responding to the female viewers. As explained by Fizke, women's expectation on the show is the equal relation between male and female and the position as a social subject (see Fizke, 1998, p. 193), in the show, Rudy responds the female expectations more than Bara. Yet somehow, Rudy treats his audiences as a social subject, which means that he treats equally his female viewer position. He creates friendly social space for them. However, culturally the dominant position of the host of *Gula-gula* is still acceptable as he positions himself as instructor of the cooking demonstration.

Food preparation, although it is not every day meal, can be opened socially. Kitchen is the cook's professional area. Rudy and Bara construct kitchen differently and produce the different image of kitchen. Through his soft masculine persona, Rudy maintains kitchen as the female space. Modern kitchen utensils produce an image of high

class kitchen. The usage of instant materials served beautifully in luxurious serving dish invites his audiences, the busy female professionals to go to the kitchen and to use her creativity to serve easy and delicious food for the family as her leisure weekend activity. Rudy produces an image of kitchen as friendly social space. Meanwhile, Bara maintains the tradition of male cooking as profession. (Ketchum, 2005, p. 225) The space for cooking, which is effectively set up, strengthens his image as respectable chef but at same time it is very individualized. Contrasted to friendly social space of Rudy's kitchen, the kitchen in *Gula-gula* combined with the formal expression of its host still maintains the tradition of male kitchen as a male public space. Bara does not reverse the tradition that chef is a profession.

3. Conclusion

The cook shows hosted by male chef contribute the politics of gender maintaining the power structure between male and female, especially in the kitchen as the male work place. Both *Foody with Rudy* and *Gula-gula* still applies the traditional instructive cook show. These shows are mainly about teaching how to cook although the image of cooking changes from main into leisure activity. Bara and Rudy as the host of the show demonstrates the process of cooking and speaks to the camera. Through the way Bara and Rudy engage with the audiences, they still treats their viewers as target of his show. Bara positions himself as the instructor who has the skills and the knowledge of food production and command his audiences the process of cooking. Although, Rudy does not speak in commanding style, the dominant camera focus on his staple hand movement in playing with the modern kitchen utensils produces an image of very skillful chef that creates a respect from his audiences. As the host of this show is male while the assumed target audiences are female, *Gula-gula* constructs the masculinity of the host in response to the Indonesian female viewers' imagination. The masculinity of *Gula-gula* is derived from Bara's persona. Bara maintains his domination and power through his language and body expression, which defer a respect. He still maintains the tradition that cooking in public space is profession thus; he engages with the audiences in formal way and keeps the pace between host and audiences. Meanwhile, Rudy negotiates his masculine identity to create the image of kitchen as opened social space. He offers intimate relationship with his audiences and consider them as his friend. Someway, through his soft masculine persona, Rudy treats his assumed female audiences equally and as social subjects that is expected by women.

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