

Reality Bites: Consuming Food Television

“Konsuming Konvergence: Kocktails with Khloe and the Contradictory Logics of Convergence and Consumption on Food Television”

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Khloé Kardashian’s *Kocktails with Khloe* premiered on FYI channel in January 2016, simultaneous with the shooting of her E! makeover show *Revenge Body* and less than two months after the release of her book *Strong Looks Better Naked*. The concomitance of these seemingly contradictory products--one a talk show with co-host chef preparing decadent cocktails and *amuse-bouches*, the other two diet- and fitness-focused vehicles--demonstrates the significance of convergence in contemporary food television. It also reveals ongoing tensions between production and consumption present in food programming as well. This response will use Kardashian’s show and related products to consider the prompt’s concerns with industry and identity issues, specifically related to convergence, consumption, and gender. Ultimately, this response argues that in revealing these complexities, *Kocktails with Khloe* unravels the conventionally functional role of most food television and its gendered logics.

Kocktails with Khloe aired four months from January to April 2016, cancelled twelve episodes into its fourteen-episode run. It was the first foray into the late-night genre for FYI, a cable channel whose programming is a hybrid of Food Network and HGTV-style DIY fare. *Kocktails with Khloe* was its own kind of hybrid, merging the late-night talk show with food television. Khloé Kardashian served as host, keeping conversation going as guests dropped in and moving the action along from the kitchen to adjoining living and dining rooms with assorted games and activities. Like other late-night shows, guests plugged recent projects, but the introductions and promotions unwound more organically within

group conversation and personal revelations. While Kardashian made conversation, Chef Sharone Hakman made custom cocktails and hors d'oeuvres throughout the hour-long episode. No preparations were shown or recipes were given during the episodes, just a banner to check the show's website for recipes.

Convergence is the first important element to consider here. Food television has always involved convergence. Whether being sponsored by food-related companies or hosted by food critics, cookbook writers, or restaurateurs, convergence has existed in food programming since its earliest appearances in American broadcasting. In *Kocktails with Khloe*, convergence is forefronted through its association with the Kardashian empire generally and Khloé's products specifically. These include not only her aforementioned book and show (still in pre-production but already highly publicized), but also her lifestyle app and social media accounts. Although few of these projects center on comestibles, food and drink are nonetheless omnipresent due to the Kardashian emphasis on "lifestyle" and its connections to the domestic and the social; the intimate encounters at the core of the Kardashians' series center on kitchens, meals, and nightlife.

Relatedly, the second element to consider is consumption. The ostensible focus in most food television is production, in making food. Even when the food may seem extraneous to everyday needs, the process depicted is still functional and the resulting consumption is comparatively brief. However, convergence always involves consumption. On *Kocktails with Khloe*, consumption is the primary focus: eating and drinking help to create the product of conversation that the audience consumes, embedded with the promotions of celebrities and their products. Even when those products seem contradictory to the primary form of consumption occurring, they coalesce through the

logic created by the person organizing it. In the case of Kardashian, *Kocktails with Khloe* fits into her brand *through* consumption. Khloé's brand has long involved her alleged unruliness, especially in terms of her larger-sized body. Having her now "tamed" body at the helm of a show focused on consumption may seem contradictory, but ultimately what she sells her lifestyle. Khloé's slimmer, more toned body may have required "workouts," but those were predicated on paying for gyms, classes, and trainers, as well as stylists to maximize her new look. She may consume food and drinks on *Kocktails with Khloe*, but on Instagram she imbibes FitTea, a tenuous balance involving the same logic.

Lastly, all of these issues must be read through gender. So much in food television depends on gender, and reality TV heightens that connection. Food television is often seen as frivolous for its associations with the feminine, the domestic, pleasure, and excess. In many ways, *Kocktails with Khloe* may seem to be an outlier to food television, a show with no cooking, mostly drinking and talking, and a host with no culinary *bona fides* whose family business involves hyperfemininity and "low-value" television. However, in pushing food television to extremes certain logics present in all food television hold. Those include concerns about convergence and consumption--including proper consumption and "invisible" effects on (female) hosts--as well as the contamination from the feminine seen to blight more "serious" cookery and food concerns. *Kocktails with Khloe* contains these contradictions--with consequent complications--but still extends the food television form through its unapologetic celebration of consumption and convergence, and the communion it creates on- and offscreen through conversation.