The ‘reality’ of the Australian ‘Junior Masterchef’ television series

for preadolescents and their parents

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This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Psychology (Honours), Murdoch University, 2012
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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Rachel Goodchild
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Abstract

The increase in reality-styled programs on television and in their appeal to young viewers has not been matched by research on what motivates children to watch such programs and if there are any flow-on effects in the home for the children and their families. Current research is limited to mainly North American and European populations of adolescents and adults which reduces the application of findings to Australian children. The present mixed-methods study surveyed Australian pre-adolescent children’s (N= 38) engagement and motivation to watch the Australian series of ‘Junior Masterchef’ and if their involvement with the program was associated with cooking, food and family connectedness. Additionally, parents (N=39) of the children were surveyed to ascertain their awareness of the series, together with their perceptions of children cooking in the home and family connectedness. The children’s (N=16) and parents (N=9) experiences were further explored through focus group interviews using Thematic Analysis. Overall, three factors motivated children to watch the program: education, excitement/entertainment value and vicarious participation. Involvement with the program was not associated with cooking in the home, food engagement or family connectedness. Despite this, family connectedness was highly valued by the children. The benefit of the program for parents was increased ‘family time’ which was an important factor for their experiences of family connectedness. Parents reported their children’s interest in cooking increased when viewing ‘Junior Masterchef’, however, cleaning up and time restrictions were considerations that limited opportunities for children to actively participate.