

# The image of kitchen in like water for chocolate

[Food & Diet](#), [Cooking](#)



## **Introduction**

Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* models the history of the De La Garza family through their relationship with the kitchen, primarily centered on Tita's place in the kitchen. While kitchen is generally associated with submissive female roles or an "idealized" woman in the patriarchal society, Esquivel uses the kitchen to highlight sex-positive ideals and Tita's violation of social norms; for example, Tita communicates her socially unacceptable desire for Pedro through cooking. Thus, we should view kitchen not as a reinforcement of the traditional roles of women but a medium of subverting the traditional beliefs about women.

## **Keeping Everything in Track**

Given the unconventional usage of the kitchen in Esquivel's novel, it's interesting to see how Gertrudis — the most untraditional female character — interacts with the kitchen. Gertrudis's most significant presence in the kitchen occurs when she must prepare the cream fritters while Tita converses with Pedro about her pregnancy. Indeed, this brief interaction with cooking reflects subversive messages and how Gertrudis would respond to social norms. The process of preparing cream fritters is mainly about strictly following a recipe and ensuring the completion of multiple cooking stages. The recipe needs eggs to be cracked in a precise manner, and most importantly it requires the boiled candy syrup to be boiled "until it bubbles up three times, slowing the boil with a little cold water, which is thrown in each time it starts to rise up" (Esquivel, 191). In a way, the preparation is all about keeping everything in track, never allowing for overboil — a

phenomenon that causes undesirable fritters. In the context of the novel, the way that fritters boil and cool resemble Mama Elena's effort to control Tita and Pedro's relationship: everytime Mama Elena is suspicious of Tita's feeling towards Pedro, she attempts to separate the two lovers and prevent their sexual relationship.

## **Response to Traditional Norms**

Another noteworthy point is the fact that Gertrudis follows the given recipe to the letter but her cooking has little success. In the same chapter that the cream fritters recipe is introduced, Tita mentions that not following recipes when cooking is a violation to "the oh-so-rigid rules her mother imposed in the kitchen ...and in life" (Esquivel, 198). The previous chapters establish that Mama Elena's rules represent passive femininity or the traditional side, so Gertrudis's response to the recipe is parallel to her response to traditional norms. According to the novel, "Gertrudis read[s] this recipe as if she were reading hieroglyphics...She was the one who was all balled up" (Esquivel, 192). Given that recipe resemble social norms, Gertrudis would still challenge the qualifiers for an 'ideal' or proper woman.

## **Reverse Gender Roles**

The fact of the matter is her unsuccessful cooking contradicts the so called natural role of women. We see that the kitchen doesn't oppress her leadership or make her submissive, rather she extends the control of men on battlefield into the feminine realms. While society's unbalanced gender dynamic gives the men more power, Gertrudis's alternative story opens up the conversation about reverse gender roles. Gertrudis orders Treviño — a

skillful and powerful soldier — to cook fritters, and he willingly submits to her. Although kitchen is the stereotypical sphere of woman, it is Treviño who determines the “ soft ball stages” for the fritters (Esquivel, 196). Through a gender reversal, Esquivel seems to address an empowering message to her intended audiences: women need not to be unconditionally bound to stereotypical female duty. Gertrudis’s relationship with the kitchen illustrates an alternative possibility for women under a patriarchal society because she maintains her agency, or dominance, in the kitchen. Esquivel conveys that the traditional feminine space is not a factor that most limits the liberation of women; instead, subversion can take place within the female sphere if a woman is willing to break what others consider as proper female behavior.