Bon Appétit: From Webpage to Video
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Abstract

Throughout the past few months in quarantine, many people, including myself, have found comfort in cooking. One of the places I go to most for recipes has been Bon Appétit. Bon Appétit is a very popular food magazine, that has branched out into the YouTube video world, featuring many of their chefs making popular dishes from their site. Recently however, one of their chefs, Sohla El-Waylly, came forward on Instagram calling out the company for mistreating their staff members of color by paying them less than their white colleagues, and putting them in videos just to show diversity while not paying them for their time on screen at all. The goal of this project at first was to get some insights into what kinds of recipes were most popular on the Bon Appétit website and YouTube channel, but due to the recent controversies surrounding the company, I also wanted to take a look into the diverse backgrounds of the chefs featured in those top recipes.

Introduction

Ever since launching their YouTube channel in 2009, Bon Appétit has become a popular place for people to learn new trendy recipes as well as watch professional chefs challenge themselves in the kitchen. Whether it be recreating a dish blindfolded, or taking their own spin on classic childhood treats, the chefs at Bon Appétit have proven themselves to be not only very experienced in their fields, but very entertaining as well. There are only a select few that appear on camera, however, and they are responsible for not only creating original content but showcasing various dishes that have been published on their website in the past. Some of these chefs have become so popular that they have their own merchandise with Bon Appétit, and some have even gone on various talk shows. Throughout the years, however, people have pointed out the lack of diversity amongst those who are the most popular. It has recently come to light that that apparent lack of diversity goes much deeper than we can see.

On June 8, 2020, Bon Appétit chef Sohla El-Waylly posted an Instagram story calling out the editor in chief of the magazine for doing brownface for a Halloween costume, and also talked about the discrepancies in salary between her and her white counterparts [1]. This has caused many people of color who have worked with the company to come forward and share their negative experiences as well. The basis for this project was to originally observe the most popular recipes on their website and YouTube channel (who is developing them, who is in the videos, what are readers making the most, etc.). Due to everything that has come to light in the past weeks, it also seems necessary to acknowledge and account for the inequity, and find out how this might affect Bon Appétit's list of most popular dishes.

Database Design

My database consists of four tables. The webpage table represents one of the top 67 recipes on Bon Appétit's website. The table has a page ID which is the primary key, as well as columns for the title, the date the recipe was published to the site, the number of ingredients, a chef ID that is a foreign key to the chef table that represents the chef who developed the recipe, and a type ID which represents the type of recipe it is (breakfast, entrée, snack, etc.). The video table represents the 24 of the original 67 recipes that were eventually made into a video on Bon Appétit's YouTube channel. The table has a video ID which is the primary key, as well a title column, video upload date, page ID that is a foreign key to a recipe in the webpage table, and a host ID that is a foreign key to the chef table (the chef in the video is not always the same chef who originally made the recipe). The chef table represents the 20 chefs who have made at least one recipe in the top 67 recipes. This table has a chef ID primary key, a chef name column, and a column that says whether they are a person of color or not. The type table represents the 6 different types of recipes that make up the 67. This table has a type ID as a primary key, and a type name.
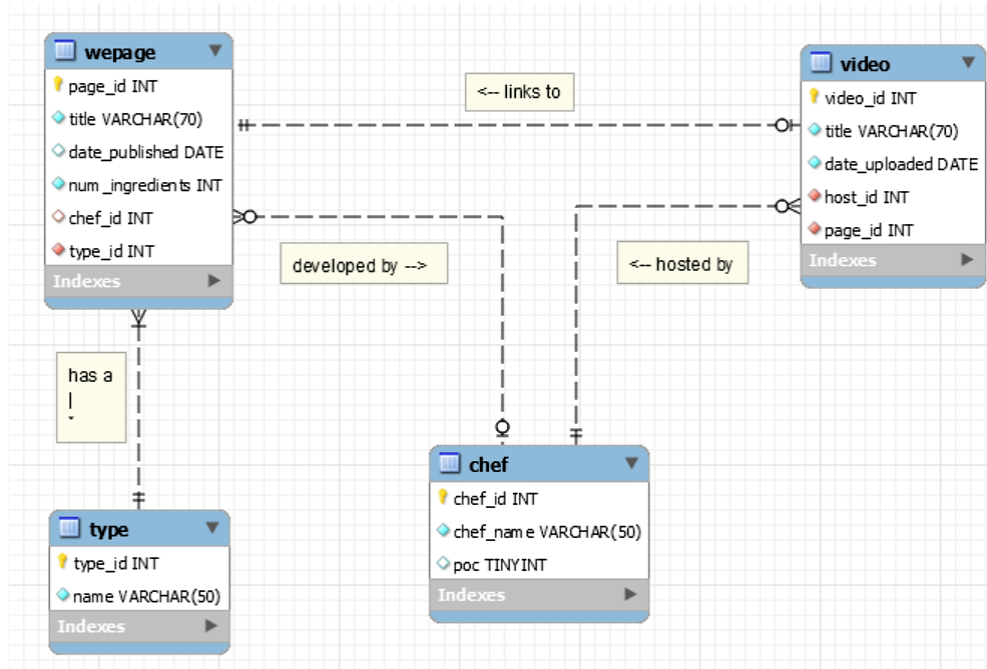

Data Sources and Methods

To acquire some the top recipes from Bon Appétit's website, I found a page on their site that had links to their top 67 recipes as chosen by their readers in 2019 [2]. I then went through each of the 67 recipes to get the data necessary for each column in the webpage table. If a recipe has a video, the video will be available to watch at the bottom of the webpage and will lead you to their YouTube channel to get the details on the video title, host, and upload date [3]. The recipes on the website only have a month and year (to represent which magazine issue they were featured in), so for all the dates in the webpage column, I put the day they were published as the first of that month. Each recipe lists the chef who developed it and has their name as a hyperlink

to get more information on them which I then used to fill the chef table. Each recipe also has a little abstract at the beginning that I read through to understand what type of recipe this would be filed under for the type table.

User Cases

- What is the average ingredient count for each type of recipe?

```
select type_name, round(sum(num_ingredients) / count(title), 2) as 'avg_recipe_count'
from webpage join type using (type_id)
group by type_name;
```


Average Number of Ingredients by Recipe Type
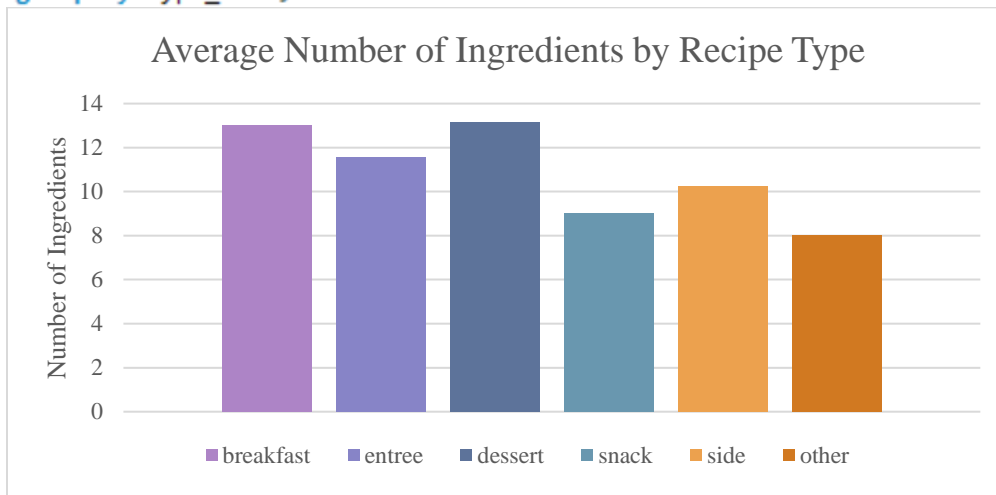
- How many days are there between a recipe being published on the website and the video being published for each recipe?

```
select datediff(v.date_published, w.date_published) as 'days_between_developed_and_video'
from webpage w join video v on (webpage_id = recipe_id)
where webpage_id = recipe_id;
```


Days Between Webpage Upload and Video Upload
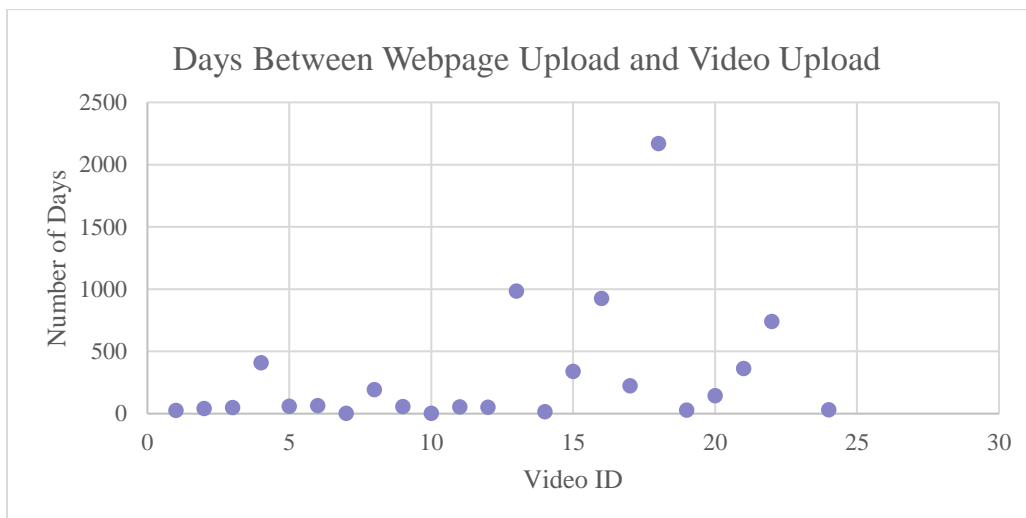
- What percent of video hosts developed the recipe made in the video?

```
select concat(round((select count(distinct host_id)
from chef c join webpage w using (chef_id)
join video v on (chef_id = host_id)
where w.chef_id = v.host_id) / count(video_id) * 100, 2), '%') as 'pct_chef_developed'
from video;
```

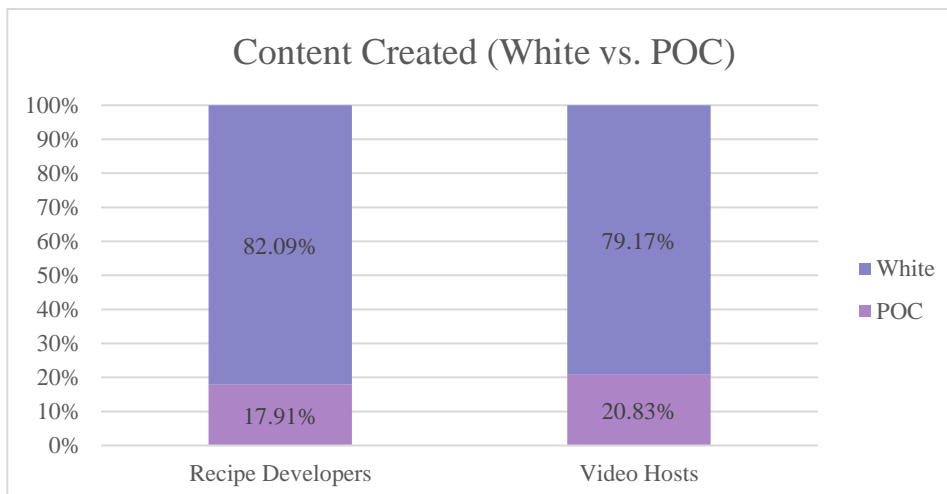| pct_chef_developed |
|---|
| ▶ 33.33% |

- What percent of recipes developed by POC in the top 67 were made into videos?

```
select concat(round(count(v.title) / (select count(*)
        from webpage w join chef c using (chef_id)
        where c.poc = true) * 100, 2), '%') as 'pct_poc_developed_recipes'
from video v join chef c on (host_id = chef_id)
where c.poc = true;
```

pct_poc_developed_recipes
▶ 41.67%

- What percent of the top recipes were developed by POC? How many of the videos were hosted by POC?

```
select concat(round(count(w.title) / (select count(*) from webpage) * 100, 2), '%') as 'pct_made_by_poc'
from webpage w join chef c using (chef_id)
where c.poc = true
union
select concat(round(count(v.title) / (select count(*) from video) * 100, 2), '%')
from video v join chef c on (host_id = chef_id)
where c.poc = true;
```

Content Created (White vs. POC)

Recipe Developers: White 82.09%, POC 17.91%
Video Hosts: White 79.17%, POC 20.83%

Conclusions

Overall, there are a lot of interesting insights that can be made from this database. Some can be used to better optimize what kinds of recipes the magazine puts out, possibly trying to limit the ingredient counts to make them seem more doable for readers. Looking at times between a recipe being published and a video of the recipe being uploaded can be useful when getting other analytics involved like the number of clicks to that webpage before a video was put out, and after. One could also ask questions based off the data. For example, why aren't more of the original recipe developers featured in the videos where their recipe is being made? Is there any benefit to waiting longer to put out a video for the recipe (i.e. is second wave of visitors to the page after an upload?)? Of course, we would need other data that is not available to the public to fully answer some of these questions.

There is also some data here to back up El-Waylly's claims. While there appears to be an extreme lack of POC both in videos and recipe developing, there seems to be a high percentage of videos featuring a host of color with a recipe made by a POC. This could support her claim that Bon Appétit tries to put POC in front of the camera to push diversity while there's not many POC actually developing recipes behind the scenes. A limitation of this database, however, is the lack of data. Adding more recipes, videos, and chefs to this database would make it more accurate to base conclusions from. Also adding some genuine statistical analyses of the results to see if any of them are statistically significant would help legitimize this project and maybe help encourage real change behind the scenes at Bon Appétit.

References

1. A. Konstantinides, "Bon Appétit's Sohla El-Waylly said she told Adam Rapoport to resign as editor in chief during an all-staff Zoom meeting after his brownface photo resurfaced," *Insider*, 17-Jun-2020. [Online]. Available: https://www.insider.com/bon-appetit-star-told-editor-to-resign-over-photo-2020-6. [Accessed: 19-Jun-2020].
2. T. B. A. Staff, "Our Readers' 'Keepers': The 67 Recipes They Keep Coming Back To," *Bon Appétit*, 23-Dec-2019. [Online]. Available: https://www.bonappetit.com/gallery/ba-readers-keepers-favorite-recipes. [Accessed: 18-Jun-2020].
3. "Bon Appetit." *YouTube*, 29-Apr-2008, https://youtube.com/user/BonAppetitDotCom.