SETTING THE TABLE: ETHOS-AS-RELATIONSHIP IN FOOD WRITING

by

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Abstract

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BRITA M. THIELEN

Setting the Table: Ethos-As-Relationship in Food Writing employs methods from rhetoric and technical and professional communication to argue that the rhetorical mode of *ethos* should be understood as fundamentally relational, rather than as a more discreet property of communication synonymous with the rhetor's authority or character. I argue that reconceiving ethos-as-relationship better accounts for the rhetorical strategies used by the food writers who identify as women, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and/or as part of the LGBTQ+ community whose texts I analyze, which include food memoirs, decolonial cookbooks, and food blogs. Food writing is a valuable place to examine the development of ethos because food writers are especially attuned to *hospitality*, a structural metaphor that all rhetors can use as a framework for understanding their relationship to their audience. A key focus of my analysis is the development of these food writers' textual personas, or their self-portrayal within the text. Textual personas are crucial to the development of what I call the *ethotic relationship* between writers and readers because a reader is unlikely to meet the writer in person, and an ethotic relationship can only be formed *with* another party. Ethos-as-relationship has important implications for understanding expertise and professional identity, especially for those rhetors who occupy historically-marginalized positionalities, as they must often work harder to negotiate a position of authority in relation to their audiences.

Introduction

Food is crucial to the stories we create about ourselves and our communities. Food is a quotidian topic, and how we write about food gives us insight into how we all connect to communities through our own bodies. Food writing is often both deeply personal and communal, and writers and readers of food writing texts cohere around food and food practices, even when these communities are temporary. As a result, food writing is an ideal place to examine the formation of both individual and community identity and how this identity is communicated to others.

These identity formations are critical to the development of ethos. In this dissertation, I draw on an array of theories, methodologies, and primary texts to examine how ethos develops as a relationship co-constructed by rhetors and their audiences. Walzer, Tiffany, and Gross state that Aristotle "describes *êthos* as a tripartite complex consisting of *phronêsis* (practical wisdom), *aretê* (moral virtue), and *eunoia* (good will)" (194),[1] which in textbooks and reference books often seems to be reduced to the character of the rhetor.[2] S. Michael Halloran emphasizes the performative nature of Aristotelean ethos when he writes, ". . . [the speaker] must also manifest

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[1] They continue: "Principal areas of disagreement surround not so much what *êthos* is as whether argument grounded in character, broadly conceived, was seen by Aristotle as moral or amoral. The specific areas of interest and sometimes of contention are whether Aristotle regards appeals from êthos as necessarily arising within the speech only and not as also a function of the audience's previous knowledge of the speaker's character" (Walzer, Tiffany, and Gross 194).

[2] See, for example, a reference text such as Bizzell and Herzberg's *The Rhetorical Tradition*, which describes ethos in the Aristotelian tradition as "trust in the speaker's character" (29), in the Sophisitic tradition as "people's moral sense" (22), and in the General Introduction as "authority to speak about certain kinds of knowledge" (14). Corbett and Connors' *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* takes a more nuanced approach, describing ethos as ". . . the character of the speaker, especially as that character was evinced in the speech itself. A person ingratiated himself or herself with an audience—and thereby gained their trust and admiration—if he or she managed to create the impression that he or she was a person of intelligence, benevolence, and probity" (19) but later reduces it to "the appeal of our personality or character" (32). *Classical* does, however, emphasize that it is "*the speech itself* that must create this impression [of "sound sense," "high moral character" and "benevolence" in the rhetor]" (72). In the passage by Walzer, Tiffany, and Gross quoted in the previous footnote, the authors summarize their previous description of ethos as "argument grounded in character" (194). The ethos-as-character shorthand is also present in rhetorical scholarship, such as Arabella Lyon's description of ethos in Western rhetoric as "referenc[ing] the character of the speaker" (183).

the proper character through the choices made in his speech. The speech is among other things *a dramatization of the character of the speaker*" (60; my emphasis). Whether character is understood as primarily a trait of the rhetor or performative misdirects our focus from what I argue ethos actually is: the *relationship* developed between rhetor and audience. The common modern shorthand of ethos-as-character is problematic in that it privileges individualism and a hierarchical relationship between rhetor and audience—an expression of Western hierarchies more broadly.[3] Centering the relational nature of ethos, on the other hand, destabilizes hierarchies in favor of dynamic and interactive relationships. In other words, I conceptualize ethos as something that is developed "with" audiences rather than presented "to" audiences.

In this dissertation, I investigate how ethos develops within a selection of food writing texts, a project that allows us to see how the writers of these texts use rhetorical strategies and discursive practices while negotiating generic expectations in order to form what I call an *ethotic relationship* with their[4] audience(s). One of the most critical rhetorical strategies used by the food writers I examine is *hospitality*. A rhetor or writer shows hospitality to readers by creating a textual environment that welcomes the reader to listen to the writer's argument without coercion or pressure. An effective host prepares the environment and sets the table (so to speak) in order to create a shared experience with their guests. While hospitality as a rhetorical strategy is certainly not limited to food writing genres, their conventions and subject matter mean hospitality becomes a uniquely powerful strategy available to food writers.

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[3] Another common definition of ethos is "The characteristic spirit of a culture, era, or community as manifested in its beliefs and aspirations" (*Lexico* "Ethos"). However, in this dissertation I use ethos exclusively within the realm of the rhetorical modes of persuasion.

[4] I use "they/them" as both singular and plural pronouns in this dissertation in keeping with the idea of gender as a spectrum rather than a binary.

While my examination of ethos does not take the rhetor's character or authority as its end-point, these characteristics do play a role in the construction of the ethotic relationship that ideally develops between a rhetor and their audience. Moreover, in writing for a public audience, the authors examined in this dissertation write from a position of authority and expertise, whether the purpose of their communication is to share recipes, personal or food history, or some combination thereof. The rhetorical strategies these food writers use to assert their authority and professional status often look different than Western rhetorical traditions have primed us to expect, in no small way because I have deliberately chosen to examine food writers who do not occupy the positionality of a straight, white, cisgender man.[5] In other words, my particular interest in this dissertation is how historically-marginalized rhetors within food writing genres negotiate, resist, and sometimes defy traditional conceptions of ethos, professionalism, and expertise in order to gain and sustain readership.[6]

My dissertation contributes to current scholarly conversations about ethos and identity, arguing that ethos arises through the interaction of and engagement between writer and reader, rather than, as is commonly taught, existing as a trait or performance by the rhetor. It also engages with conceptions of expertise, authority, and professionalism in both Rhetoric and Technical and Professional Communication (TPC). Because knowledge is relationally built and dialogic, scholars of rhetoric and TPC should reflect on whose texts we study and why,[7] as well as be conscious and open about our relationship to the communities we study and how we study

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[5] It is true that straight, white, cisgender *women* occupy a position of privilege within food writing genres greater than or equal to similarly-identifying men. Traditional rhetoric does, however, privilege rhetorical practices that are typically used more by men than women—one that Andrea Lunsford describes as "competitive, agonistic, and linear" ("On Reclaiming Rhetorica" 6), and women writing in these genres are still expected to rhetorically perform hegemonic femininity (a reality I explore more fully in Chapter 3).

[6] Genres play an important role in identity formation (Schryer and Spoel), and I deliberately chose to focus on several food writing genres in this dissertation to account for different genres' affordances and constraints.

[7] Walton, Moore, and Jones put this argument another way: "When we fail to ask ourselves whom we are leaving out, we continue to relegate the work of minority scholars to the margins of the field" (3).

them. From a decolonial perspective, this means taking a hard look at our methodologies

(Agboka 2014; Walton, Moore, and Jones 2019; Cox 2019), our citation and canonization

practices (Walton, Moore, and Jones 2019), and our own rhetorical practices in order to avoid

what Godwin Agboka calls "oppressive rhetoric"[8] (2021). It also means heeding Matthew Cox

and Cobos et al.'s calls for a greater integration of cultural rhetorics into scholarship in rhetoric

and composition and TPC, since, ". . . cultural rhetorics can offer insightful and relevant

approaches for interrogating how larger histories and organizational and systemic structures

impact everyday practices and the interventions imagined and employed therein" (Cobos et al.

150). I see this dissertation as heeding their call for scholarship that ". . . (re)historicizes and

(re)inscribes bodies of people and knowledges overlooked by the hegemonic rhetorical tradition .

. . work that makes apparent how cultural rhetorics is embodied and employed theoretically and

methodologically" (Cobos et al. 150).

Culture in this sense can be understood as referring to ethnic, racial, or national groups as

well as communities formed by other shared identity characteristics (such as the LGBTQ+

community), interests (such as food), or shared practices related to a particular role or job. These

latter types of cultures are consistent with Pimentel and Gutierrez's definition, where culture is ".

. . the grouping together of people based on shared traditions, beliefs, and behaviors" (88).[9]

Cultural rhetorics[10] is therefore an important theoretical orientation for this project because it

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[8] Agboka builds on the work of Paolo Freire for his definition of oppressive rhetoric as rhetoric that, ". . . oppresses, disables, colonizes, and recolonizes. Oppressive rhetoric characterizes the use of language by a group or an individual to denigrate or belittle the cultural, political, social, and philosophical experience of another group or individual" (2021, pp. 163).

[9] Pimentel and Gutierrez are distinguishing culture here from "ethnicity" ("social groups [formed] on the basis of language, religion, and nationality" [88]) and "race" ("a socially-constructed category used to assign power, privilege, worth, and such to imagined racial groups" [88-89]).

[10] The Cultural Rhetorics Consortium defines cultural rhetorics as "…the study and practice of making meaning and knowledge with the belief that all cultures are rhetorical and all rhetorics are cultural" ("Rhetorics"). While many definitions of cultural rhetorics exist—and the Consortium certainly isn't an official representative of all cultural

offers alternatives to the universalizing tendencies of Western rhetorical traditions by attending to rhetorical strategies *within* their cultural contexts. Scholars of cultural rhetorics have pointed out in a number of ways how rhetorical practices are culturally-bound rather than universal. I participate in these conversations by arguing that it is more productive for rhetoricians (and our students) to think of how ethotic relationships develop within particular communities rather than imagining only one type of relationship. If we view the ethotic relationship as operating in the same way regardless of the particular rhetors and audience's involved, we miss out on opportunities to understand its role in creating and sustaining communities.[11]

Gender, sexuality, race, class, and cultural identities are bound up and reflected in food—a dish such as salad, for instance, is often associated with femininity, whereas a food such as chitlins is often associated with African Americans, particularly those living in the American South. Writing about food will also, therefore, be infused with these associations. The rhetorical practices of food writers who occupy historically-marginalized positions in American society, then, have much to reveal about how textual identity and ethos are constructed and negotiated.[12] I bring these ideas to the ongoing conversations surrounding food and identity within the field of food rhetoric, as well as to the study of food writing as a procedural genre in TPC. The genres I have chosen—the food memoir, the cookbook, and the food blog—allow me to use different lenses to examine the continually-changing ethotic relationship between writer and reader.

I chose to make subject matter (food) rather than genre the stable variable of this dissertation for two reasons: first, because food is deeply tied to individual and community

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rhetorics scholarship—this definition informs my attention in this dissertation to how rhetoric and cultural are mutually-constituted.

[11] Though coming from a different scholarly orientation, Candace Spigelman makes a similar point in *Personally Speaking* that, ". . . viewing difference within identification as a rhetorical act on which both writers and readers depend can offer a corrective to essentialist and universalist readings" (Spigelman 52).

[12] Such as the rhetorical "agility" that Cox argues LGBTQ+ persons display in their everyday social and professional interactions (19).

identity and therefor is used symbolically as well as literally in constructing the self. As I argue throughout this dissertation, food is embodied, rhetorical, and political. The second reason is because of genre's influence on rhetors. The power of genre to shape discourse, and how identity and communities are then shaped and expressed through discourse, has received much attention in rhetorical genre studies (e.g. Carolyn Miller 1984 and 1995; Swales 1990; Coe 1995; Bawarshi 2003; Devitt 2004; Bazerman 2004; Schryer and Spoel 2005; Applegarth 2011; Spoel and Derkatch 2016). Examining different food writing genres allows me to attend to the constraints these genres impose on the writers—and how writers negotiate and sometimes resist these constraints.

Like genre, food also operates rhetorically. While food at its most basic is a substance that humans, other animals, and plants consume in order to live and grow, it also represents a range of meanings within human societies. Carlnita Greene writes, "To say that food is rhetorical means that we use food as an attempt to influence or persuade others, in countless ways . . . . Food also is a primary way that we, as individuals, employ politics within everyday life, which intersects with, informs, and comes into conflict with wider, cultural discourses and experiences" (*Gourmands and Gluttons* 4). In other words, choices of what we buy and consume signal our sense of identity and project our values—as well as clash with other social values and discourses. Our social values (e.g. buying local and organic produce because it's better for the environment) might be at odds with our abilities (e.g. being unable to afford the higher costs of organic food) and location (e.g. living in a northern climate where fresh local produce is difficult to find year-round). In addition to our personal values, we face constant pressure from others to consume in a particular way.

The textual persona crafted by the writer becomes an important concept to attend to in food writing. How writers portray themselves in their writing speaks both to how they view themselves as well as how they wish an audience to "read" them. James Baumlin and Craig Meyer provide a useful differentiation between "personhood" and "persona": "By 'character' we assume both *personhood and persona*—that is, *the self's expressive self-identity as well as its social presentation or mask*" (Baumlin and Meyer 6; my emphasis). Combining personhood and persona provides a useful way of thinking about "identity" as both individual and social. In this dissertation, I am primarily interested in the "persona" crafted by the writer within the text and refer to this construct using Bakhtin's term "textual persona," which he describes as the "image" of an author as projected through a text ("Problem" 109). I use Bakhtin's term rather than Baumlin and Meyer's in order to emphasize the construction of this persona through written and visual language.

In order to establish ethotic relationships, then, writers must first create a consistent textual persona that appeals to and allows readers to take up the narrative surrounding the persona in some way. Baumlin and Meyer argue that the primary way ethos "unfolds" in the 21st century is through stories that "are *shared by* individuals *within* culture" (15; authors' emphasis). Culture provides a framework through which stories of the self are created and a context within which they abide. As Karen Burke LeFevre[13] and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell[14] also argue, ethos is inherently social (rather than individual), as it ". . . appears in that socially created space, in the 'between,' the point of intersection between speaker or writer and listener or reader" (LeFevre

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[13] See LeFevre pp. 45-46 for more on ethos a social phenomenon. LeFevre's argument that ethos is socially-constructed is a component of her larger argument that rhetorical invention should be thought of as a social act.

[14] According to Kohrs Campbell, "Ethos does not refer to your peculiarities as an individual but to the ways in which you reflect the characteristics and qualities that are valued by your culture or group" (122; quoted in LeFevre 45).

46). In other words, the establishment of ethos requires an "other"—listeners or readers who judge whether the persona (as used by Baumlin and Meyer above) is effectively persuasive.

Lefevre and Kohrs Campbell's explanations of ethos remind rhetorical scholars that Aristotle, at least, did not view ethos as "idiosyncrasies of an individual" or "a personal or private construct such as is often meant by 'personality'; rather, ethos arises from *the relationship* between the individual and the community" (Lefevre 45; my emphasis). Despite the fact that Kohrs Campbell and Lefevre made these points in the 1980s, ethos is still often reduced to a trait or performance by the rhetor. As a result, I often use the term *ethotic relationship* within this dissertation in order to emphasize the relational core of ethos.

In order to understand how ethos develops in food writing, we must attend to how food writers "story" their personal and/or social relationship to food(s), how identity manifests in these stories through the writer's textual persona, and the end to which writers put these ethos-building stories. The construction of a consistent textual self-narrative is as much embodied as it is symbolic, which the specific site of food makes clear. The establishment of ethos between writers and readers therefore depends not only on the words on the page, but through enactment in the body by acquiring, preparing, and consuming food—steps with which all food writing is concerned. In addition to being *embodied* and *symbolic,* food is also *personal* and *social*—one ingests food individually and decides what and how to eat, but these decisions are embedded within and influenced by a larger socio-cultural context. Examining these four dimensions of food and how they are communicated in food writing through constructed self-narratives gives us insight into the formation of the ethotic relationship between writers and readers. In other words, how writers and readers link themselves to food (both literally, through consumption, and

symbolically, through language) and to each other *through* food is an ideal place to examine how rhetors construct ethotic stories of our selves.

In the next section of this introduction, I review the relevant scholarship related to cultural rhetorics, ethos, and food writing as it has been engaged by both rhetoric and TPC. Then, I provide a brief overview of each body chapter. Finally, I explain why this particular dissertation project required me to deploy different theories and methods within each body chapter—some of which are not widely used in the humanities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In keeping with what Kimberly Wieser calls cultural rhetorics' ability to "'constellate' [stories] in order to make meaning," each chapter of this dissertation functions as a self-contained analysis of a particular food writing genre; therefore, each chapter requires its own orientation, and I will include miniature literature reviews within each chapter to contextualize its focus. In this introduction, however, I provide an overview of the larger conversations within rhetoric and TPC in which this dissertation intervenes: namely, contemporary understandings of ethos in relation to identity as intersectional and multi-faceted; cultural rhetorics; food writing as it has been analyzed in both food rhetoric and TPC; and the concepts of professionalism and expertise as they have been theorized in rhetoric and TPC.

Contemporary Understandings of Ethos

Collections such as *Ethos: New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory* (1994)*, The* Ethos *of Rhetoric* (2004), and *Rethinking Ethos* (2016) interrogate the place of *ethos* in a world that no longer sees the self as static but rather under constant construction and negotiation. Kimberlé Crenshaw's groundbreaking assertion in 1989 that identity is intersectional[15] has

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[15] Intersectionality as a theory refers to the way in which different facets of an individual's identity (such as her race, gender, and/or sexuality) interact with one another. This theory is profoundly useful for examining how, for

required rhetoricians to rethink how rhetors can persuade other individuals who are not only experiencing internal flux, but whose identity characteristics might be quite different from their own. If, as many rhetoricians assert, ethos is a social construction between rhetor and audience (Baumlin xxii; Campbell et al. 251; Reynolds 327), instability within the selves of all of the people involved in a rhetorical situation would seem to make ethos difficult or impossible to achieve in its historical formulation as a discreet property of communication.

Marshall W. Alcorn, Jr. views rhetorical persuasion as less the result of a rhetor persuading an audience than a rhetor encouraging audience members to persuade themselves, since he sees the self as divided by its exposure to different (and often competing) discourses ("Self-Structure"). A particular environment must first be established in order for this self-persuasion to occur, and an important part of this environment is the genre of the rhetor's communication (Applegarth 44-45). The cookbook, food memoir, and food blog, like all genres, have typical conventions that readers expect to encounter and with which authors must therefore contend. While skilled rhetors both conform to and resist generic constraints in negotiation with their social identities and those of their invoked audiences (Applegarth), rhetors may also draw on rhetorical strategies not typically associated with their primary genre in order to make their points.

Michael J. Hyde's understanding of *ethos* as ". . . the way discourse is used to transform space and time into 'dwelling places' (*ethos*; pl. *ethea*) where people can deliberate about and 'know together' (*con-scientia*) some matter of interest" (xiii) provides a useful basis for understanding how such an environment functions. "Such dwelling places," Hyde continues, ". .

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instance, a white woman's experience in the world differs from a black woman's. Since race interacts with gender, there is not universal experience of being a woman. Similarly, the experience of a black woman differs from that of a black man's, and a heterosexual black man's experience differs from a homosexual black man's.

. define the grounds, the abodes or habitats, where a person's ethics and moral character take form and develop" (xiii). In order to create a "dwelling place" that provides an audience with the space to attend to a new idea or call to action, the rhetor must effectively *host* their potential readers, requiring attention to hospitality. Creating a hospitable environment, then, is one crucial way for a rhetor to set the scene for an ethotic relationship to develop between the rhetor and audience. But how does a rhetor host within such a dwelling place when their identity, and that of the intended audience, is multi-faceted and context-dependent? For that matter, how does a rhetor present a coherent self-structure within a text in order to welcome their audience to the table?

These questions are central to the work of this dissertation. However, in order to answer them we must recognize that, "Ethos is neither solitary nor fixed. Rather, ethos is negotiated and renegotiated, embodied and communal, co-constructed and thoroughly implicated in shifting power dynamics"[16] (Ryan, Myers, and Jones 11). While scholars such as Hyde and Ryan et al. come close to articulating a theory of ethos that is less a discreet property of communication than it is relational, they do not go far enough. Recognizing that ethos is a *relationship*, and therefore dependent on the constantly-shifting interactions between the rhetor, the audience, and the larger socio-cultural context is essential to fully account for the myriad types of ethotic relationships that are possible and the rhetorical strategies rhetors use to develop them. The socio-cultural context(s) informing any and all interactions between rhetor and audience is an important part of the puzzle, as there is no "universal" rhetorical situation. Cultural rhetorics, then, is essential to

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[16]We can understand these terms through the work of Nedra Reynolds, who argues that ethos is not formed in isolation by the individual but requires "a negotiation or mediation between the rhetor and the community" (328). Reynold's description comes close to naming ethos as a relationship.

attending to ways in which cultures shape particular rhetorical situations and the rhetorical agents operating within them.

Cultural Rhetorics

My goal in this dissertation is not so much to produce clear-cut cultural rhetorics scholarship as to embark from an understanding that rhetoric is culturally-bound and deployed differently within different communities, thus limiting—or even eliminating—universalist notions of how rhetoric functions. Cultural rhetorics is an emerging subfield of rhetoric that is in many ways still being defined. Its contemporary origins are often located in the 1990s, arising out of the "Culture Wars," with different threads and understandings of the term continuing to spiral outward.

For instance, Andrea M. Riley Mukavetz describes cultural rhetorics as an "'*orientation* to a set of constellating theoretical and methodological frameworks' . . . [that enacts] a set of respectful and responsible practices to form and sustain relationships with cultural communities and their shared beliefs and practices including texts, materials, and ideas" (109; author's emphasis). In their 2016 introduction to a special issue of *Enculturation* devoted to cultural rhetorics, on the other hand, Phil Bratta and Malea Powell claim that "cultural rhetorics is a *practice,* and more specifically an embodied practice" in which "scholars must be willing to build meaningful theoretical frames from inside the particular culture in which they are situating their work" ("Entering"; authors' emphasis). More recently, Cobos, Ríos, Sackey, Sano-Franchini, and Haas's 2018 article "Interfacing Cultural Rhetorics: A History and a Call," attempts to map some of the various arms of cultural rhetorics scholarship in part to "displace the notion that cultural rhetorics must be the exclusive realm of minoritized and racialized

subjects"[17] (Cobos et al. 141). The article includes individual segments by each author where

they outline their personal understandings of what constitutes cultural rhetorics scholarship.

Donnie Johnson Sackey, for instance, conceptualizes cultural rhetorics "as a verb or a recursive

way of inhabiting and engaging space" (Cobos et al. 147), while Angela Haas understands it as

"rhetorical work" that ". . . makes explicit the ways in which subjectivities, positionalities, and

commitments to particular knowledge systems are interrelated and situated within networks of

power and geopolitical landbases" (Cobos et al. 145). The differences outlined in this article

alone (originally articulated during a conference roundtable) are highlighted in Louise

Weatherbee Phelp's response that these different definitions and understandings show cultural

rhetorics' power as a "flexible, yet unifying symbol" (2016).

Cultural rhetorics scholarship published in the past ten years in particular has taken on a

number of topics related to many different cultural communities, including human trafficking

(Gagnon 2017), dissertation writing (Cox et al. 2021), infertility treatment access (Novotny

2021), the effects of video captioning on the deaf community (Butler 2019), environmentalism in

TPC (Enríquez-Loya and León 2020), American exceptionalism and the hunt for Osama Bin

Laden (Hasian Jr. and McFarlane 2013), the ethics of storytelling (Grijalva 2020), student-athlete

writing practices (Rifenburg 2018), and research and publication practices in Rhetoric,

Composition, and Writing Studies (Ruiz 2021). Likewise, cultural rhetorics scholarship engages

with regional cultures like Appalachia (Lindquist 2002; Hayes 2018) and LGBTQ+ communities

(Jack 2012; Morrissey 2013; Pritchard 2014; Miles 2015; Rhodes and Alexander 2015; Glasby,

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[17] In their recent Introduction to an issue of *College English*, Ellen Cushman, Damián Baca, and Romeo García
sharply criticize cultural rhetorics and characterize the term as "a catch-all signifier to ostensibly corral necessarily
othered rhetorics . . . into a collection of tokenized areas of study and classroom interventions" (7; authors'
emphasis). Their critique includes discussion of Cobos et al.'s article.

Gradin, and Ryerson 2020). There is also, of course, much cultural rhetorics scholarship that centers the rhetorical practices of particular ethnic and racial groups, such as Jewish rhetorics (Bernard-Donals and Fernheimer 2014), U.S. Indigenous rhetorics (Haas 2007; Riley Mukavetz 2014; King, Gubele, and Anderson 2015; Grant 2017; Klotz 2017; Privott 2019; Grijalva 2020), Black and African American rhetorics (Lockett 2021), AAPI and Asian American rhetorics (Hoang 2015; Sano-Franchini 2015; Harrigan 2021; Jimenez 2021), and Latinx rhetorics (Baca 2008; Meyers 2015; Enríquez-Loya and León 2017; Rivera 2020; Cortez and García 2020). This sampling of existing scholarship illustrates the variety of groups that cultural rhetorics scholars have classified as cultural communities. In this dissertation, I primarily examine cultural communities formed by shared interest in a subject (food) as well as those formed by shared identity characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity.

While cultural rhetorics is not limited to the study of racial or ethnic communities, attending to the food writing produced by these communities is vital considering they have long faced pressure in the U.S. to assimilate their diets to "American" dietary standards (i.e. those set by the white Protestant population of the Northeastern United States) as a performance of morality and citizenship (Biltekoff, Veit). Enslaved African American and Native American peoples were often forced to subsist on nutrient-poor diets by their white masters and the U.S. government (Twitty, Hoover & Mihesuah, Lindholm). Depriving these communities of nutritious food continues today in the form of food deserts; loss or modification of cultural foodways, land, and heirloom seeds; and a host of other systemic issues (Twitty, Hoover & Mihesuah, Janer, Peña et al., Valle). Forced or encouraged dietary assimilation, agricultural and distribution changes in the mid-20th century, and cultural and racial stereotypes about particular foods

resulted in the loss of pre-Columbian and African American foodways in favor of what is often called the "Standard American Diet" (SAD).

Yet there has been an equally-long resistance to such culinary assimilation by these communities (see Peña et al.; Mihesuah & Hoover; Williams-Forson; Harris 2010; Wallach; Eves 2005). This resistance is perhaps most overt in cookbooks like those written by Terry, Calvo and Esquibel, and Sherman. Their calls for a return to ancestral foodways as a form of physical and spiritual healing enact Peña et al.'s definition of a "decolonial approach to critical food studies" (xvii). These cookbooks reveal how food facilitates arguments to and about individual and community identities. Such resistance to Western culinary assimilation and assertions of racial and ethnic identity as exhibited through foodways can also be seen in food memoirs, as argued by Herrera (2010), Davis (2012), and Baena (2019). Unfortunately, there has been relatively little scholarly attention to food blogs in general within cultural rhetorics or rhetoric more broadly,[18] despite the fact that food bloggers often develop communities of dedicated readers around their work. Other fields, such as cultural studies and diaspora studies, have published a few articles examining food blogs in relation to cultural communities (McGaughey 2010; Lee et al. 2014; Hegde 2014; Gupta 2020) and gender performance (Rodney et al. 2017; Lepkowska-White and Kortright 2018; Presswood 2020), as well as communities formed around shared food-related interests, such as dietary information (Lynch 2010). Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation begin to fill the gap in the existing literature by attending to the rhetorical strategies food bloggers use to connect with readers, as well as the affordances and

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[18] An exception being Kristin Winet's 2017 article, which notes that food blogs can enact "culinary tourism," and where the writing can "stray from joyful and tantalizing and veer toward colonizing and sometimes even patriarchal" (101-102).

limitations of the digital medium on food bloggers' attempts to connect with audiences and establish themselves as a culinary authority.

Food Rhetoric and Food Writing in TPC

Food rhetoric as a sub-field of rhetoric more broadly has attended to food writing in a variety of ways, though of particular relevance to this dissertation is scholarship relating to narrative (Leonardi 1989; Bower 1997; Newlyn 2003; Floyd and Forster 2003; Tippen 2014), gender (Theophano 2002; Fleitz 2010; Salvio 2012; Goldthwaite 2017; Walden 2018), and various forms of identity (Eves 2005; Frye and Bruner 2012; Tippen 2018). Listing these concepts as separate categories is, rather misleading, as these concepts tend to be intertwined in food writing scholarship. Susan Leonardi's foundational article, for instance, is concerned with the narrative possibilities of cookbooks and recipes and argues that recipes are an embedded discourse[19] (340); furthermore, she sees this discourse as gendered and linked to the feminine (344). Leonardi's identification of recipes as an embedded discourse—one that is inextricably linked with other discourses or contained within them—paved the way for other scholars concerned with the gendered nature of the genre. One such piece is Anne Bower's article "Cooking Up Stories," which focuses on the narrative capabilities of cookbooks and their use of narrative elements, including, character, plot, and setting. Attending to cookbooks as narratives allows us to see the stories of (typically) women's lives—as either what Bower calls "communal partial autobiographies" ("Cooking" 30) or "fictions" (32)—that were granted limited voice in other, more dominant, literary genres. Bower claims that by attending to cookbooks as narratives, we can learn how the genre blends the everyday and domestic experiences of women

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[19] While Leonardi does not explicitly define her use of "embedded discourse," from the larger context I understand her to be claiming that recipes are often contained within or contextualized by other types of discourse. For instance, a recipe can be contained within a memoir or shared with a friend after telling a story about serving the prepared dish at a potluck.

with the literary (50). The impact of gender on food writing genres is taken up in this dissertation most prominently in the chapters on food memoirs and food blogs, as these genres have received less scholarly attention in this realm than the cookbook.

In attending to the way in which people's relationship to food is *storied,* or narrativized, we gain insight into food writer's rhetorical strategies. Another example of these rhetorical possibilities is the topic of Carrie Helms Tippen's 2018 monograph *Inventing Authenticity,* where she analyzes how contemporary Southern cookbook writers create narratives of authenticity for their recipes through the "origin narratives" the writer chooses to ascribe to them (12). Tippen sees cooking as a way to enact and reinforce the cultural identity of a recipe and the cultural identity of the person cooking the recipe. Tippen's insight here informs my analysis of three recent decolonial cookbooks in Chapter 2. While Tippen is concerned with how a community seeks to represent *itself* through food writing, Consuelo Carr Salas attends to how historically-marginalized communities are represented and commodified by dominant cultures ("Commodification"). Additionally, Salas more explicitly adds race to her analysis of food writing by using visual rhetoric to attend to the images of Mexican women on Mexican food products. Salas's application of visual rhetoric to the discourse of food packaging shows the necessity of analyzing not just the words on the page, but the images that accompany and inform them, a necessity that is particularly relevant to my analysis of food blogs.

This dissertation also helps remedy a dearth of technical and professional communication (TPC) scholarship that attends to food writing. Thirty years' worth of existing scholarship (Allen 1990, Durack 1997, Branch 2015, Moeller and Frost 2016, Sarat-St. Peter and St. Peter 2020) focuses almost exclusively on the cookbook as a technical genre. Casting a bit further afield, we find Tim Wharton's study of recipes as procedural discourse using pragmatics (2010). None of

this scholarship, however, has attended to decolonial cookbooks or cookbooks authored by BIPOC writers or communities, much less food blogs or food memoirs. Furthermore, as Cruz Medina argues, TPC in general still often privileges the "white, middle-class, male voice" (68). In response, this dissertation centers the work of rhetors who have historically been excluded in conversations about food writing in TPC in addition to strengthening the existing attention to food writing genres within the field.

Most relevant to this dissertation is Moeller and Frost's call for a re-situation of cookbooks within technical communication in order to critically examine the cookbook as a "physical manifestation of the intersections between representations of womanhood and technology" (1). They conclude their article by calling for feminist technical communication scholars to attend to the ways in which cookbooks contribute to "how we think of ourselves, which in turn affect how we cook and how we talk about cooking" and the ways in which gender is embedded in cooking practices (Moeller and Frost 8). The chapters on food blogs and, to a lesser extent, food memoirs, in this dissertation take up Moeller and Frost's call for TPC scholars to attend to the relationship between gender and writing about food.

Expertise and Professionalism in TPC and Rhetoric

Like ethos and rhetoric more broadly, expertise and professionalism are also culturally-bound and gendered concepts—a woman, for instance, might be penalized for asserting her professional status or expertise in the same way as a male colleague. Expertise and professionalism, then, should always be understood as operating *within* a socio-cultural context, with their expression influenced by what is expected within a particular cultural community. In this section, I provide an overview of some of the ways in which the fields of Rhetoric and TPC

currently theorize the concepts of "expertise" and "professionalism" and their accompanying

subject positions (i.e. the "expert" and the "professional").[20]

Expertise

In *The Rhetoric of Expertise*, Johanna Hartelius attends to expertise as a rhetorical

construct and argues that "being recognized as an expert generates not only status and power but

considerable influence" (1). Drawing on Aristotelean rhetoric, Hartelius argues that expertise is

enacted using both "artistic" and "inartistic" persuasive tactics. She describes "inartistic"

methods as those which precede a rhetorical situation, such as the rhetor's knowledge or training

and title. The "artistic" methods, then, are those that are "invented rhetorically" by rhetors,

necessitating that they "enact [their] position, knowledge, and experience in a public manner

while considering audience and context" (Hartelius 9-10). In other words, ". . . individuals can

only exercise expertise and enjoy expert status to the extent that they can motivate an audience to

assent" (Hartelius 9). Hartelius's position that expertise must be acknowledged by someone other

than the rhetor claiming expertise is an important point, as it illustrates the relationality of

expertise. Like ethos in my own theorization, claims to expertise are negotiated between rhetor

and audience. The relationality of expertise is important because it helps explain tensions

between different kinds of claims to expertise and conflicts that can erupt due to these tensions.

As Hartelius writes, "Being an expert means having the right to a certain chunk of human

experience. It means one's version of that experience is recognized as authentic, one's

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[20] While "expert" and "professional" have much in common, they distinguish themselves in important ways. As an example, Merriam Webster defines an *expert* as "one with the special skill or knowledge representing mastery of a particular subject," ("Expert") whereas it defines *professional* as "characterized by or conforming to the technical or ethical standards of a profession; participating for gain or livelihood in an activity or field of endeavor often engaged in by amateurs" ("Professional").

perspective is acknowledged and believed, one's voice is heard and respected . . . ." (Hartelius 15).[21]

Rhetors like many of those whose texts I analyze in this dissertation are drawing from personal experience, rather than outside credentialing, to declare themselves experts. The decision of whether or not to explicitly claim expertise (and the type of evidence provided) seems to largely depend on how the rhetor thinks their audience perceives experts (e.g. positively, with suspicion, etc). In some cases, rhetors like Ree Drummond explicitly dismiss a position of expertise in favor of a "just like you" connection to the audience. Or, in the case of Michael Twitty's food memoir, the inclusion of book jacket blurbs by Nigella Lawson, Toni Tipton-Martin, and Carla Hall, as well as by publications like *Food & Wine* and *Saveur*, and the prominent display of his receipt of the James Beard Foundation award for Writing and Book of the Year signal his expertise. Hartelius's phrase, "strategic associations of expertise" (19), is a useful term for describing these kinds of linkages. We also see such "strategic associations of expertise" in the trend I note in Chapter 1 of cookbook authors quoting or writing a forward for one another, as well as in food bloggers seeking to establish expertise by being recognized by more traditional food writers or food organizations, or by hyperlinking to other food blogs or organizations within their posts. Hartelius argues that "Strategic associations of expertise serve rhetorical purposes well beyond allowing one expert to borrow cultural capital from another. They also create a structure or chart of expertise in the public mind" (19). She continues, ". . . to construct oneself as an expert, one must demonstrate the location of one's expertise in a network" (20). Networks are inherently relational, and rhetors who situate themselves within an

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[21] Hartelius notes twice on pp. 13 that self-help gurus excel at linking their own identities to that of the communities they address, which has relevance to Chapters 1 and 3 in particular.

established network of expertise help establish or perpetuate their own expertise in the readers'

minds—as long as readers recognize these other nodes of the network as credible.

Hartelius's book provides a very useful theorization of expertise that has many

applications to the food writing texts I examine in this dissertation, and I extend its insight by

foregrounding the relational aspects of ethos. In describing ethos, Hartelius writes, "Experts

must, in other words, construct *ethos* as both an attachment to a social collective *and* a reflection

of personal identity" (Hartelius 13; my emphasis). While I agree with Hartelius that ethos

involves both social attachment and a display of the rhetor's identity, she still leans heavily on an

Aristotelean understanding of ethos. By more fully viewing ethos as a relationship that is

constructed between rhetor and audience—with the rhetor playing the role of host to the

audience—we can more fully account for the diverse rhetorical strategies that food writers use to

be perceived as experts. Additionally, Hartelius's view of ethos does not engage with

embodiment, a concept that is crucial to the ways that food writers and audiences negotiate

expertise.

T. Kenny Fountain's argument in *Rhetoric in the Flesh* for expertise as a type of "trained

vision" helps fill some of these gaps related to embodiment. He writes, ". . . expertise involves

more than learning the knowledge of a group; it involves learning to perform tasks as a member

of that group as well as gaining the social role that allows one to perform those tasks" (Fountain

5). Food writers, especially those in the genres of the cookbook, food memoir, and food blog,

must demonstrate not only their knowledge of cooking and recipe development (whether

acquired through years of home cooking or professional culinary training) but also their ability to

cook effectively. Within the genres of the cookbook and food blog, this demonstration of the

food writer's own culinary abilities often comes in the form of food photography—(often

artfully) plated finished dishes or step-by-step photos of the food writer's own execution of the recipe. Photos are less commonly used in food memoirs, with these authors instead favoring detailed written descriptions of themselves making a particular dish. Of course, there are always exceptions—Twitty's memoir includes several photos of him standing next to or actively preparing colonial African American or African-derived dishes. While one need not occupy a particular social role in order to cook, food writers must find a way to disseminate their knowledge to an audience, whether that involves finding a literary agent and publisher or starting a blog and gaining followers. In other words, if a writer wants readers, relationship-building is required.

While Fountain's site of study differs from my own, in that he examines how medical students develop trained vision through their work with cadavers in the gross anatomy lab, his attention to expertise as a result of embodied practice transfers. Specifically, his point that "a participant develops trained vision through what [he calls] the 'embodied rhetorical actions' of a domain" (Fountain 6) speaks to the importance of acquiring and demonstrating, in this case, culinary expertise through cooking itself. Eating, as well as cooking, is an embodied practice, and food writers' audiences are able to judge their expertise through consuming the dishes resulting from the writers' recipes. It is of course possible that a poorly-received dish is the result of a reader-cook's lack of culinary skills, rather than the fault of the recipe. However, the technical affordance of food blogs for readers to comment on a particular recipe or post reveal that while readers might attribute a negative recipe outcome to their own lack of skill, they also often blame the blogger or otherwise indicate a problem with the recipe. The impact of the comment section on a blogger's ability to negotiate a position of expertise in relation to readers is a taken up more fully in Chapter 4.

Taken together, then, Harterlius and Fountain's theorizations of expertise offer useful ways to examine food writers' attempts to negotiate expertise with their audiences. However, a few more models of how expertise is negotiated between rhetors and audiences that attend specifically to how expertise is utilized in marginalized communities and in online spaces is likewise necessary to the particular rhetors and genres of my analysis.

The past decade has seen a strong interest in the properties and communication of expertise within the fields of rhetoric and TPC (Mackiewicz 2010; McCann 2011; Pfister 2011; Ledbetter 2018; Bakke 2019). McCann identifies the central claim of his article as "struggles for the prerogative of expertise are necessarily also battles over identification" (259). Furthermore, he writes, "Thus, when publics debate expertise . . . at stake is nothing less than the constitution [of] a people" (250). While McCann's specific focus is the LGBTQ+ community, these points also describe what is at stake for writers who have not historically (or presently) been recognized as technical experts by fields such as TPC. Pfister's study of Wikipedia as an example of "many-to-many communication" (218)—as opposed to the more traditional "one-to-many" communication of most print books, such as cookbooks and food memoirs—reveals important distinctions between print and digital texts that I will explore more deeply in Chapters 3 and 4. More recently, Abigail Bakke's analysis of an online Parkinson's discussion forum reveals that expertise is "built socially" (158), especially in online spaces, and Mackiewicz notes the ways in which the commenting feature on many websites (such as food blogs) reveal "the ways in which credibility and credible identities are co-constructed" (406). Finally, Ledbetter's findings that storytelling techniques (289) and "circulating shared language" (292) are useful and common ways for online rhetors to construct identity and community. As Chapters 1-4 demonstrate, cookbooks, food memoirs, and food blogs blend procedural discourse with narrative, allowing rhetors to

leverage aspects of their individual life stories (and in many cases, the communities to which they belong) to establish themselves as trustworthy and credible in the eyes of their readers.

Professionalism

I now turn to a deeper interrogation of the modifier "professional" in relation to technical and professional communication. This term has been examined many times within TPC, often in relation to the field's own efforts towards professionalization (see, for example, Carliner 2012, Cleary 2012, Coppola 2011 and 2012, Faber 2002, and Malone 2011). TPC's own interest in establishing itself as a recognized profession—and therefore how it defines and measures its success—is useful in uncovering how the term "professional" is used within TPC scholarship and whose writing is thus defined as professional communication.

Faber, for instance, claims that ". . . traditional forms of professional power and authority are changing, being challenged, and even declining" (323); however, this description of professionalism (and professionals' rhetorical strategies) privileges certain types of professionals and ignores the rhetorical strategies used by individuals *striving to be treated as professionals.* Faber's description ignores the fact that the positionality of the rhetor plays a key role in being perceived as professional, as it allows rhetors the credibility and authority to communicate with the assumption that their words will be respected and well-received. Women, people of color, and/or members of the LGBTQ+ community who occupy professional positions based on their credentials have always faced additional challenges to being seen as professionals by peers and outside audiences alike.

The various rhetorical techniques the writers I examine in this dissertation use to cultivate trust in readers reveal the degree to which Faber's fears about the deterioration of "the professional class as experts" (325) relies on structural power imbalances. As long as professionalization and deprofessionalization are viewed as binaries, we risk upholding a narrow

sense of professionalization (and, therefore, professionals) that privileges straight, white, male identities—and their accompanying rhetorical strategies—as inherently more credible and professional than those of people with other identity configurations.

Saul Carliner, on the other hand, views professionalization as a spectrum and distinguishes between "formal professionalization," "quasiprofessionalization," and "contraprofessionalization." He describes formal professionalization as "rooted in a worldview that values expertise and sees the infrastructure of an occupation supporting the development of expertise and controlling access to the profession" (Carliner 49). Quasiprofessionalization, on the other hand, is "rooted in professional identity" (54), and this professional identity is "focused on a self-conception and, as a result, is more focused on the individual than the community" (55). Finally, contraprofessionalization ". . . refers to initiatives that offer or promote professional services outside of parts of or the entire infrastructure, sometimes circumventing it completely" (Carliner 49).[22] Individuals drawn to quasiprofessionalization, Carliner argues, might feel a tension between an associated professional society and their own personal view of their work (54-55)—in other words, they might not feel fully accounted for or welcome in the governing body's definition of a professional. Individuals who favor contraprofessionalization see little-to-no value in gatekeeping the role in the form of certifications and formal education, believing client satisfaction should be the only standard (Carliner 59). I argue that people with historically-marginalized identities might be more likely to pursue quasiprofessionalization or contraprofessionalization because traditional avenues were not designed with their presence in mind (and in some cases, might have been designed to keep them out). In this dissertation, I include formal professionalization, quasiprofessionalization, and contraprofessionalization under

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[22] Or, more memorably, "Contraprofessionalism figuratively gives the finger to the exclusivity of professionalism. In fact, it often resists or undermines professional efforts" (Carliner 59).

the umbrella of the terms *professional* or *professional identity*, unless otherwise specified. While distinguishing between them has its uses, I am concerned with all three channels as professional activity. Furthermore, these three types of professionalization are inherently relational and can be utilized by individuals who do not necessarily occupy the position they project.

Other common criteria for formal professionalization include compensation and institutional affiliation. Emily January Petersen (2014) and Bryan Pirolli both identify monetary compensation as a way of differentiating between professional and non-professional labor. However, the possibility of monetary compensation as a criterion for professional designation raises additional questions: how much money would a communicator need to make to be considered professional? Does it matter where this revenue comes from (e.g. from an institution, business, or client versus ad-generated)? While answering these questions is beyond the scope of this project, they are essential companions to criteria for professionalism that include the communicator being paid for their services.

Institutional ties are another common criterion for professional status, although as Petersen and Nancy Coppola argue, this criterion should be reconsidered. Petersen critiques the ways that the rhetorical study of professionalization within TPC often equates professional identity with performance within institutions, thereby excluding "extra-institutional" people from analysis in ways that disproportionally exclude women ("Redefining" 277-278). I argue in this dissertation that tying professional identity to institutions can also result in ignoring the rhetorical practices of other marginalized groups, such as people of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Like Petersen, Coppola detaches professional identity from institutions when she describes the "new professional" as ". . . an innovative, *independent* and networked problem-solver who creatively works across disciplines, time, space, and organizations to design

solutions" (2012 pp. 3; my emphasis). Coppola's definition of a professional emphasizes particular *traits* (innovation, creativity) and *positionality* (independent and networked, i.e. connected to others in the field) rather than mastery of specific skills or institutional affiliation.

Taking Fountain's description of professional identity as a form of "embodied rhetorical action" into account with Coppola's definition provides additional grounding. Fountain writes, ". . . embodied rhetorical action [explains] how objects, bodies, and discourses together generate a *professional* (in this case, medical) *subjectivity* that emerges in practice and is rooted in bodily activities" (14; my emphasis). Fountain explains that embodied rhetorical action is ". . . the connection of objects, discourses, lived bodies, and embodied practices—and object-body-environment intertwining—that develops in participants the skilled vision that makes all technical and professional knowledge possible" (Fountain 14-15). While essential to food rhetoric and communication, the body and embodiment as essential components of professionalizing interconnection are less apparent in print and digital modalities. While the body is necessary to the composition process, print and digital communication in many ways erase (or conceal) the physical body from the immediate rhetorical situation. It is therefore necessary to turn our attention more particularly to formulations of professional identity that center digital modalities.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the rise of the internet as a site of communication and knowledge-sharing has complicated historic distinctions between non-professionals[23] and professionals (Coppola 2012 pp. 3; von Platen 2016). A particularly muddy space (and one that is especially relevant to this dissertation) is created by bloggers who generate online content

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[23] I use the term *non-professional* rather than *amateur* because of *amateur*'s connotation of a lack of skill or experience. The primary texts I examine in this dissertation are not written by unskilled or inexperienced communicators but by people who might struggle to be viewed as *professional* due to their positionality or the genre in which they compose.

(Pirolli 2017). By questioning our distinctions between professional and non-professional technical writing, we might lose a certain elitism that professionals exercise in trying to delineate who is or is not part of their professional group (Cleary 2012, Petersen 2014). Petersen argues that, "Instead of calling this decline [of professional claims to knowledge] deprofessionalization, we should view it as a new avenue of professionalization that addresses the proletarian concerns many have expressed over elitism" ("Redefining" 293). She concludes that professional communicators might even benefit from studying the communicative practices of a group they consider unprofessional, as her subject, mom blogs, "present a way for professional communicators to learn ways of dealing with their own communities in more democratic ways" (293).

Finally, Prades, Farré, and Gonzalo's analysis of discourse strategies used by food risk/benefits communicators in Spain concluded that part of what makes professional food risk/benefits communicators "professionals" is the ability to shape the public conversation surrounding food, which I argue functions as the curation of technical knowledge for audiences who are not subject-matter-experts. Such a notion of professionalism loops us back to distinctions between experts and non-experts but adds a dimension of rhetorical power, by which I mean the degree of visibility and influence a particular rhetor has within and beyond their field.

Acknowledging that professionalization exists as a spectrum, not a binary, as Carliner, Pirolli, and Cleary argue we should, requires attending to food-related communication that is tied to or bears the features of formal professionalization, quasiprofessionalization, and/or contraprofessionalization (to use Carliner's terms). Furthermore, scholars interested in professionalization should be conscious of the embodied rhetorical action (Fountain) upon which these forms of professionalization are based, as well as the effects of digital modalities. Such

changes include, but are not limited to, the development of individual professional "brands" (through professional websites, social media, or LinkedIn profiles) in addition to or instead of institutional affiliation, a primarily digital "workplace" (due to remote work or self-employment), and degree of audience or influence (e.g. "followers"). Finally, professionals are compensated in some way for their labor, whether that is through a salary, ad revenue, sponsorship, "freebies," or some other form of payment. Thus we are left with a framework for defining the professional that is both inclusive and dynamic.

The next section provides a summary of each of the dissertation's four body chapters. Finally, I conclude my introduction with a note on the methods and theories deployed within the dissertation.

CHAPTER OUTLINES

In Chapter 1, I begin my analysis by revealing how food-related metaphors and metonymies merge the personal and social, as well as the embodied and the symbolic, dimensions of food. My primary texts are food memoirs, specifically, *The Cooking Gene* by Michael Twitty (2017), *Licking the Spoon* by Candace Walsh (2012), and *A Tiger in the Kitchen* by Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan (2011). I argue that metaphors and metonymies within food memoirs can function as compositional acts that allow memoirists to write their families into their own bodies and presence them through food—thus complicating the individual autonomy we typically associate with memoir authorship. In other words, these compositional acts contribute to the construction of the authors' textual personas. I also focus on metaphor's relationship to ethos, as well as the influence of family on personal identity.

Chapter 2 provides another avenue into the embodied/symbolic and personal/social dimensions of food. I bridge my focus on metaphoric and metonymic language in Chapter 1 by

analyzing how one specific metaphor—hospitality—functions in three recent decolonial cookbooks: *Afro-Vegan: Farm-Fresh African, Caribbean & Southern Flavors Remixed* by Bryant Terry (2014), *Decolonize Your Diet: Plant-Based Mexican-American Recipes for Health and Healing* by Luz Calvo and Catriona Rueda Esquibel (2015), and *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen* by Sean Sherman (2017). I examine these cookbooks in order to illustrate how an ethotic relationship can be predicated on hospitality, where a rhetor creates a welcoming textual space for readers. The cookbook authors I selected demonstrate a complex engagement with ethos and hospitality as they seek to reconstitute the cultural identity of their primary audiences both literally, through the consumption of food as an individual act rooted in the body, and symbolically, through the ways in which food connects us to others. My analysis reveals how an ethotic relationship can result in reshaping our understanding of ourselves and our communities.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on food blogs: specifically, *Budget Bytes* by Beth Moncel, *Damn Delicious* by Chungah Rhee, *The Pioneer Woman Cooks* by Ree Drummond, and *Smitten Kitchen* by Deb Perelman. Two chapters are necessary for this genre, as Ch. 3 is rooted in an analysis of the content and Ch. 4 takes us out of the texts themselves and into how the food bloggers manage their public personas and negotiate expertise and professionalism in interactions with their audiences through features such as the comment section. While food blogs share generic features with the cookbook and food memoir, the digital medium of food blogs creates different opportunities for authors to develop their textual personas that require deeper attention. Because online interactions take place over a vast network of sites and forums, scholars of digital rhetoric have theorized the concept of "networked identities" in online identity formation. I am particularly interested in how these networked identities shape ethos

development, as well as the way blogs' serial publication and bloggers' ability to interact with their readers in a digital environment impact the ethotic relationship.

In Chapter 3, I attend to how the serial nature of blogs allows food bloggers to create textual personas by *curating* their lives through various "small stories" (Cheng), which eventually accrete into a coherent self-narrative. I also argue that food blogs strongly encourage rhetors to abide by gendered discourse patterns both in the kinds of stories they share and the language they use to share them. Gender becomes a key focus of this chapter because food blogging is an overwhelmingly female genre and, as a result, is more dictated by gendered scripts than cookbooks or food memoirs. These bloggers' performances of hegemonic femininity also necessarily intersect with race, sexuality, and class—examples of which are examined in greater detail as they relate to the bloggers' attempts to establish an ethotic relationship with readers—as well as the kinds of audiences with whom they wish to connect.

Chapter 4, then, provides a more detailed examination of how food bloggers Moncel, Perelman, and Rhee manage their ethotic relationships with readers, as well as how they establish and maintain a positon of expertise and professional identity. I examine what I see as three key components to the ethotic relationships that full-time food bloggers must negotiate in order to cultivate and maintain their relationship with readers: their professional journey, the comment section, and sponsorship.[24] These three components can function as both opportunities and pitfalls for the blogger in developing an ethotic relationship with readers, and I argue that the

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[24] There is also a boundary and range between distance and familiarity (or, the professional and personal) that bloggers must navigate—how much personal disclosure is too much, or not enough, for their audience? As mentioned in Chapter 3, there will always be a segment of the food blog readership that is not interested in developing a relationship with the blogger—the "I just want the recipe, not to know you" crowd—that will be critical of nearly any level of personal disclosure on the part of the blogger. However, in this chapter I am primarily concerned with the development of the ethotic relationship and will maintain focus on the portion of the audience who does come to these blogs at least partially for the personal content.

dialogue between food bloggers and their readers in the comment sections is particularly illustrative of how ethos is relational and constantly negotiated between rhetor and audience.

A NOTE ON THEORIES AND METHODS

The interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation project requires me to draw on a range of rhetorical theories, including cultural rhetorics, rhetorics of healing, constitutive rhetoric, utopian rhetoric, and digital rhetorics. The range in the types of texts I examine, and their modalities, also requires me to employ research methods[25] beyond textual analysis. While some of these theories and methods are less familiar to traditional humanities research (i.e. qualitative data coding), they are all qualitative in nature. I used close reading textual analysis for the majority of the chapters in this dissertation, but the shift to the "born-digital"[26] (Eyman) food blog texts in the latter half of the project—especially Chapter 3—necessitated a different form of data collection. Specifically, the sheer volume of material these blogs contain (each of these blogs has hundreds, if not thousands, of individual posts) and the serial nature of their publication (meaning there is no official order in which the blogs should be read) meant that textual analysis alone was not adequate to developing an understanding of these texts. Coding allows researchers to measure patterns across large quantities of text and is especially useful for tracking the frequency with which a word, phrase, or idea appears in source texts (Blythe 222). I used grounded theory techniques to begin my analysis of the sample blog posts I selected, grounded theory being "a systematic methodological approach to qualitative inquiry that generates theory 'grounded' in the data themselves" (Saldaña 270). Because the use of qualitative data coding is not standard

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[25] By "method," I refer to the "procedures" and "techniques" I used for data collection and analysis (Blythe).
[26] i.e., texts that were originally conceived on and developed for distribution by computers or similar technology (Eyman).

practice within humanities dissertations, I have included a more detailed description of this

method within Chapter 3.

Chapter One

Developing Textual Persona: Food Metaphors in Three Intergenerational Food Memoirs

Food memoirs, like all memoirs, create narratives from the lived experiences of their authors: "We make something into an experience by ordering and arranging it as a narrative, but there is already a difference between a lived moment and our attempts to capture it in thought and words" (Spigelman 63). In other words, a memoir is no more the real, lived experience of an author than the memoir's textual persona captures the full identity of the author—both are constructions to serve a particular purpose and are therefore rhetorical. Spigelman also notes that, ". . . the stories we tell ourselves of our experiences come filtered through the collective subjectivities of our social and cultural relationships, so that *our interpretations of experience are not simply individual processes*" (63; my emphasis). Memoirs, then, become an important genre for observing the role story plays in developing an author's textual persona, how this textual persona is used to foster an ethotic relationship between authors and their readers, and the role culture plays in shaping both the author's construction of the narrative and how individual readers approach understanding it. Since, "stories are relational, historical, cultural, and embedded in the lived experiences of communities" (Galván 5), memoirs—particularly those that center the author's relationship to their culture—are important sites for cultural rhetorics to explore. Food's deep connection to culture means the food memoir in particular has much to offer cultural rhetorics scholarship.

In this chapter, I demonstrate the embodied/symbolic and personal/social dimensions of food by analyzing food metaphors and metonymies present in a selection of three recent food memoirs. The memoirs I have selected—*The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South* by Michael Twitty (2017), *Licking the Spoon: A Memoir of Food, Family and Identity* by Candace Walsh (2012), and *A Tiger in the Kitchen: A*

Memoir of Food and Family by Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan (2011)—are not meant to be representative of food memoirs as a whole. Rather, I selected them because they also function as what David Parker calls the "intergenerational auto/biography," in which the author is concerned with how they were shaped into the person they are today not just by events and experiences but by their families.[27] Rocío Davis, for example, analyzes how the intergenerational food memoir *Sweet Mandarin* by Helen Tse represents ethnic and familial identity ("Family History"). The intergenerational food memoirs I have selected more specifically contain what Parker calls "narratives of relationality" that present family in a positive light, where ". . . forebears embody specific values that have been unrecognized or misrecognized by the dominant narratives of the culture" (142).[28] The prominence these food memoirs give to their families in relation to their own identities make them particularly rich sites to examine the four dimensions of food. I am interested in these types of food memoirs because they are concerned with the authors' connections to others and reveal how the individual connects to larger communities through food. Memoir by nature is concerned with the individual; focusing this chapter on how the individual relates to their family through food and food metaphors provides a microcosm before spiraling out into broader types of cultural communities. The metaphors and metonymies they include open up questions about belonging, community, and identity that will continue to be examined throughout this dissertation.

The presence of food-related metaphors and metonymies in food memoirs, and in food writing more generally, might seem so ubiquitous as to be mundane or cliché. In my examination of these three texts alone, I located 67 instances where the authors use food as a metaphor or

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[27] Some intergenerational memoirs also function as *bildungsromans*, as Barbara Frey Waxman notes ("Food Memoirs" 364).

[28] Parker claims that part of the author's purpose in writing this type of narrative is to gain public recognition of the author's relatives and ancestors (142).

metonymy for some other object, emotion, or phenomenon. As a figure of speech, metaphor equates two seemingly disparate objects or ideas in order to express some larger point or truth. Rather than merely being a device that adds literary flourish to writing, "It is to metaphor, [Aristotle] says, that we resort when a thing can be named in no other way . . . ." (Kirby 547). Furthermore, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue, metaphor powerfully shapes our way of understanding the world by constructing our thinking about concepts (3-5). They claim that, "*The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*"[29] (Lakoff and Johnson 5; authors' emphasis).[30] Metaphorical expressions often work in concert with or alongside other kinds of related figurative expressions. Whereas metaphor involves using one conceptual domain to think and talk about something else, metonymy and synecdoche, for instance, "allow us to use one entity to *stand for* another" (Lakoff and Johnson 36; author's emphasis). Cognitive linguists working in this tradition specifically claim that, in metonymy, "we gain access to a mental entity via another mental entity" (Kövecses and Radden 39). Food metaphors, then, ask audiences to understand or experience that other "thing" in terms of food, whereas food-related metonomies use food as a stand-in for something else. If, as James Olney argues, autobiography (and memoir, as a sub-genre) both metaphorizes and composes the self (35; Spigelman 62), then metaphors and metonymies within food memoirs can function as one of these compositional acts.

If metaphor and metonymy figuratively bring one thing into relation with another, as Lakoff and Johnson assert, then they are potentially problematic in that they can collapse

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[29] Lakoff and Johnson's description of this "essence" of metaphor functions as my definition of metaphor in this paper. They also further distinguish metaphor and metonymy in the following passage: "But metonymy is not merely a referential device. It also serves the function of providing understanding" (Lakoff and Johnson 36; author's emphasis).

[30] Applying Lakoff and Johnson's theory of metaphor to life experience, James Olney claims that autobiography itself is "a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition" (Olney 35).

boundaries between two disparate things. As a result, metaphor and metonymy can cause us to forget the very real differences between the objects or ideas being compared in favor of sameness,[31] or even of seeing the limitations of a particular instance of figurative language (Lakoff and Johnson 10). However, metaphor and metonymy's potential lie in their ability to help us hold two disparate things in our minds simultaneously,[32] and the linkages created through the metaphors and metonymies construct new meaning—they can, in other words, actually be generative. The tendency of metaphors and metonymies in these memoirs to collapse the physical and temporal boundaries between food and ancestors or relatives brings these family members into the presence of the writer and reader. In other words, I argue that metaphors and metonymies within the food memoirs by Twitty, Walsh, and Tan function as compositional acts that allow the memoirists to write their families into their own bodies and make them present to themselves and readers. These compositional acts are also crucial to the construction of the authors' textual personas and reveal how food can be embodied, symbolic, social, and individual. In this chapter, I show how the construction of textual persona is aided by metaphors and metonymies—textual persona being the necessary other half of the rhetor-audience relationship. The author's textual persona is simultaneously more and less than the author themselves: in the case of these memoirs, the persona is bigger than an individual (it is family, it is history, it is

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[31] Tuck and Yang (2012) provide an important example of this danger when they argue that decolonization is too often treated as a metaphor for other anti-racist or social justice work in ways that undermine decoloniality's very essence: "When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future . . . . The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym" (3).

[32] One of Lakoff and Johnson's early examples is the metaphor "Argument is War," which asks us to hold argument and war together in our minds and to perceive argument as a combative experience with winners and losers, attacks and defenses, etc. Another metaphorical comparison, such as "Argument is Truth," would conjure up different perceptions and associations.

culture) but it is also a construction that elides the messiness and contradictions an individual contains. Audiences require a textual persona to connect with in order for hospitality to be offered and for an ethotic relationship to be cultivated (these developments are the focus of Chapter 2).

The desire of these authors to learn family recipes and ancestral cooking practices is not just about collecting recipes—it is about actually preparing and *consuming* the food that nourished the people who have gone before them as a way of bringing those family members and ancestors into the present. My use of the term *consuming* is not focused on the facet of devouring (as in, using up or destroying) so much as on embodiment, or the act of taking something into ourselves in order to make it a part of who we are. In other words, it is a generative and inventive act. Tan, for instance, learns her paternal grandmother's recipes in an effort to feed her body in a way that evokes memories of home and binds her to her family history. The recipes she wants to learn are part of her family's identity; in a sense, they are family members themselves. Similarly, while Walsh might seem to distance herself from her family more than celebrate them, she uses food metaphors that emphasize her connection to her relatives and ancestral history in a way that integrates her family into her present and future. And while Twitty cannot access most of his ancestors—since, as enslaved people, they are the ultimate example of those whose lives were lost to history because they were not valued by the dominant culture—he can cook their food and therefore evoke and "taste" their experiences.

In the pages that follow, I review the existing scholarship on food metaphors and food memoirs within Cultural Rhetorics and Composition and Rhetoric more broadly. Then, I analyze pertinent examples of metaphor and metonymy in Tan, Walsh, and Twitty's memoirs to

demonstrate how these examples of figurative language enable the authors to create a palimpsestic persona that incorporates their family histories and culture.

"Story is something all humans share"[33]**: Cultural Rhetorics, Food Memoir, and Metaphor**

Cultural rhetorics lends itself to the study of metaphor because metaphors, like narratives, are culturally constructed. According to Lakoff and Johnson, "The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture[34]" (22). They later note, however, that cultures contain values (and therefore metaphors) that might at times conflict with one another, and such conflict is resolved by "the different priorities given to these values and metaphors by the *subculture* that uses them" (23; my emphasis) or by an *individual* within that culture (24). Analyzing food metaphors within food memoirs, then, requires attention to the cultural communities to which the author belongs as well as to the ways these values and metaphors are presented within the memoir. Such attention is consistent with Haas's claim that cultural rhetorics, ". . . makes explicit the ways in which subjectivities, positionalities, and commitments to particular knowledge systems are interrelated and situated within networks of power and geopolitical landbases" (Cobos et al. 145). Passing references to metaphor are made in some cultural rhetorics scholarship (Powell et al 2014, Del Hierro et al 2016, Monberg 2016, Cox et al 2021, Galván 2021, and Jiminez 2021), but a more sustained treatment of it is needed in order to understand the many ways it can function within different cultural contexts and genres.

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[33] From the quote: "Story is something all humans share, and cultural rhetorics . . . . allows us to make stories central, to 'constellate' them in order to make meaning" (Wieser 3). Wieser also notes that "the centrality of story," "the practice of constellating stories," and "approaches to culture, such as counterstory, that challenge master narratives" are part of the methodology of cultural rhetorics (3).

[34] Lakoff and Johnson do not explicitly define "culture" in their book, though they make frequent reference to "our culture" versus "other cultures"; however, in the chapter "Metaphor and Cultural Coherence," they refer to "American subcultures" (24), leading me to believe that they use culture in a nationalistic sense at least some of the time.

"Food limns the issue of identity"[35]: Writing Studies, Food Memoir, and Metaphor

The subgenre of food memoirs combines life writing and food writing. As in a more general memoir, food memoirs focus on the life of the memoirist; however, in the food memoir life moments are thematically organized around culinary memories and experiences. Also, as in many instances of food writing, the preparation and consumption of food is often exquisitely rendered. In fact, pages of memoirs might describe a single dish (as is the case in *Tiger*). Such detail invites the reader into a rich sensory experience where they feel they could touch, smell, and taste the pineapple tarts or barbeque being prepared and consumed.

Other composition and rhetoric scholars have noted the ability of food memoirs to explore family and racial and cultural identity (Waxman 2008; Herrera 2010), and to recast a particular historical moment (Anderson 2017). This first area is of particular importance to my work in this chapter, as Herrera, for instance, argues that Denise Chávez, author of *A Taco Testimony*, "experiences eating and preparing Mexican food as a critique of racism and as a way for her to assert her *Mexicanidad*" (242). Using food to assert cultural identity is a prominent theme in both Twitty and Tan's memoirs examined in this chapter. Comparatively little attention has been paid, however, to the role of metaphor within food memoirs and "the treasury of metaphorical associations that link food with love and emotional nourishment" (Waxman 363). Rosilía Baena scrutinizes the use of metaphor in two Canadian food memoirs, applying postcolonial theory to argue that the authors she examines employ food metaphors to challenge stereotypes and render a more complex and individual identity for themselves and their cultural communities ("Gastro-Graphy"). In her analysis of Fred Wah's 1996 food memoir *Diamond Grill*, for example, Baena writes, "Culinary language enables Wah to explore his personal

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[35] From the quote: "Quite logically, in autobiographical writing, food limns the issue of identity significantly—as in 'we are what we eat'" (Baena).

identity through metaphors of additions, mixing, and cooking of elements. Wah's culinary performance duplicates his literary enactment: his final product (his text) is composed of his own version of a family past" (n.p.). While Baena focuses on Wah's construction of his family's past, my interest is in how Tan, Walsh, and Twitty seek to make their family members and ancestors present within themselves as *components of their own identities*. In other words, their use of food metaphors is an attempt to break down the temporal separation between past and present, as well as between the self and the other, the individual and the familial community.

A Tiger in the Kitchen: A Memoir of Food and Family

I begin with Tan's memoir because it highlights the personal/social dimensions of culture by centering on the smallest unit of culture—the family. Her memoir shows how family influences the construction of personal identity as Tan becomes a "Tan woman" through learning to cook her family's cherished recipes. The familial focus is made clear in the memoir's subtitle; however, Tan's memoir also describes cultural and familial disconnection.[36] Having moved to the U.S. from Singapore in college, Tan has spent over a decade routinely separated from the family and foods that she loves. Now in her 30s, she yearns for the cuisine of her home country and realizes that she does not have the culinary skills or the recipes to prepare these dishes for herself. She explains this lack of knowledge in the prologue: "As a child, I had been steadfastly determined not to pick up any womanly skills, least of all cooking. I was more intent on reading, writing, learning about the world—and plotting how I was to eventually go forth and conquer it" (Tan 4). A few pages later, Tan also explains this lack of interest in cooking as related to her

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[36] In fact, Tan's memoir illustrates one of Parker's points that narratives of relationality sometimes "assume the narrative of autonomy as [a] starting point" ("Narratives" 143); Tan's early life and emigration to the U.S. perform a desire for autonomy from her family, a degree of separation that *Tiger* reveals she later regrets.

parents', particularly her father's, tendency to treat her as more of a son than a daughter (Tan 7-8).

These passages indicate that Tan's focus on culture in *Tiger* cannot be divorced from her attempts to negotiate gender, as it is the women in her family who are the prized cooks. Tan articulates this negotiation between gender and culture at the end of the prologue, when she explains her decision to spend a year traveling to Singapore for weeks at a time for the purpose of learning to make her family's dishes: "I journeyed home to Singapore, finally ready after all these years to learn to cook, to learn about my family, to learn to be a woman—but intent on doing it on my own terms" (Tan 7). This passage relies on metonymy: to cook, in Tan's view of her home culture, stands for womanhood. This metonymy collapses the boundaries between cooking and gender to the point that Tan's gender identity becomes consumed by and embodied in her culinary skills.

While Tan's memoir occasionally notes cooking by Singaporean men, such activity is either so infrequent as to be surprising (Tan's father assisting before her big New Year's feast: "I had never seen my father cook in my life" [263]) or performed by children (205) or professional chefs. Tan knows that if she wants to learn to cook the Singaporean dishes of her family, she must turn to her aunts, mother, and grandmother; this fact is foregrounded throughout the memoir as she cooks and builds relationships with the women of her family. It should be noted, however, that some of Tan's relatives have hired cooks, meaning the women in those families do not do much actual cooking themselves as a marker of class distinction. As a result, there is seemingly a discrepancy between the *reality* of food preparation within Tan's family and the *symbolism* of food in relation to her family. This apparent discrepancy actually reveals something important, in that it is the *metonymy* that Tan creates between the women in her

family and cooking that is ultimately important in establishing her sense of identity. As Lakoff and Johnson write, "Thus, like metaphors, metonymic concepts structure . . . our thoughts attitudes, and actions" (39). Tan associates cooking with the women in her family, which then becomes the part of them that functions as the metonymic representation for womanhood in her family within the context of her memoir.

During her cooking journey, the women of Tan's family share with her many family stories of which she was previously unaware, including some that indicate that her older female relatives were not always as traditionally "feminine" as they would appear (e.g. her paternal grandmother running a gambling den out of her living room to support her family [210-211]). These stories, and the dishes the women in Tan's family teach her to cook, situate Tan as an adult woman within her extended family in a way she has not previously known and finds she has long craved. The recipes Tan learns, just like the stories she's told, are particular to her family, meaning that Tan is not just learning Singaporean cooking, she's learning the specific version of Singaporean cooking practiced by her family. Tan's family culture is thus nested within Singaporean culture more broadly. In learning to cook her family's recipes, she's becoming not just a Singaporean woman, but a Tan woman, as she states after describing how failing to trust her aunt's verbal instructions resulted in sub-par *bak-zhang*: "This 'learning to be a Tan woman' quest was starting to look a little bleak" (82). Learning to successfully cook her family's recipes symbolizes Tan's place as a woman within her family.

The above passage also reveals that Tan does not just want to learn her family's recipes. She wishes to execute them with such skill that the resulting dishes will live up to her family members' high culinary standards—especially those of her deceased Tanglin ah-ma (paternal grandmother), who created or perfected many of the family's recipes. The desire for her Tanglin

ah-ma's approval is apparent even the memoir's prologue, where Tan describes a daydream that motivates her to finally begin learning her family's recipes: "[My Tanglin ah-ma's] come to me with a piece of paper bearing her cherished recipes" (6). Later, during one of her early forays into Singaporean cooking, Tan worries about her grandmother's approval: "I had been nervous about making this dish, feeling the discerning eyes of my Tanglin ah-ma on me the whole time" (30) and, "I wondered what she would think of this effort" (30). While on one hand, these passages suggest the pressure that Tan feels to execute these recipes well, we can also see Tan's Tanglin ah-ma made present through the preparation of these dishes. It is important to note that Tan's thoughts while cooking (or planning to cook) her family's recipes are *not* memories of her paternal grandmother. In other words, this is not an example of food recalling memories of time spent making or enjoying food with a loved one in the past. Instead, these family dishes function metonymically by providing access to Tan's Tanglin ah-ma in the present.

We see the recipes themselves being metaphorized when Tan states that she needs to learn these recipes because "The women of my family had fed me well for years . . . . After all this time, it was my turn to feed them" (58). While this reference to family alludes to Tan's living relatives, it also includes her deceased Tanglin ah-ma, suggesting that by learning to cook, Tan can gastronomically satisfy both living and dead relatives. In this sense, then, "feeding" one another functions as a metaphor that collapses the boundary between life and death, allowing Tan to have a relationship with her deceased grandmother that they never had when she was alive. This idea surfaces again in Chapter 9 when Tan celebrates the "Festival of the Hungry Ghosts" with her Singaporean family, a religious observance where families prepare offerings of food for their deceased ancestors, including her Tanglin ah-ma. I do not wish to suggest that ancestor feeding rituals merely function as metaphors; however, this example functions in part as

metaphoric because of Tan's authorial decisions elsewhere in the narrative. Finally, by successfully preparing familial and cultural recipes, Tan joins a culinary tradition in her family that allows her to embody those family members in the present, especially her deceased grandmother, through consuming the resulting dishes.

Licking the Spoon: A Memoir of Food, Family and Identity

Walsh's memoir treats food even more symbolically than Tan's, and her focus is often on family as a detraction from personal identity rather than a positive, nurturing force. While Walsh touches on her ethnic and cultural heritages (Cuban, Greek, and Irish), she is less concerned with this broader form of culture than with how she is going to fashion herself into the person she wants to be, particularly in relation to her sexuality. Food helps Walsh cope with the trauma caused by her family's dysfunction, but a relationship with food that is rooted in trauma becomes yet another problem that Walsh seeks to resolve in the memoir's narrative.

Walsh's narrative is primarily organized chronologically; after a prologue that is set the first time she cooks dinner for her then-husband Will (roughly her mid-20s), we flash back to the life of her maternal great-grandmother and move forward in time from there. These early chapters establish her ancestral background, with chapter titles like "How Cuba Married Crete" as a metonymy for her Cuban grandmother and Greek grandfather. As previously mentioned, while cultural identity is a focus for Walsh, she is less concerned with her cultural background than the relationships she has with her parents and other relatives. For the most part, in fact, culture is only relevant insofar as it relates to a particular dish tied to these relatives, such as her paternal grandmother's chicken fricassee that Walsh recalls while eating the dish on a trip to Paris (92-93) or her maternal grandmother's *ropa vieja*. Walsh is only interested in exploring her

ethnic heritages insofar as they contributed to her difficult upbringing as she recreates herself into the person she wants to be.

Chapter 1 of *Licking the Spoon* opens with a statement of identity that connects Walsh to her family members and hinges on a food metaphor that collapses the boundary between herself and her ancestors. Walsh writes, "Once I decided to write about my lifelong love affair with food, I realized that I needed to talk about my *own* ingredients: my family—my grandmothers and grandfathers, my mother and father, who gave me my genes and made the meals that shaped my tastes—one way or another" (1; author's emphasis). Through the use of the "ingredients" metaphor, Walsh casts herself as a kind of dish, one that is composed of multiple components in the form of genes passed down from her ancestors. By framing herself as a dish from the outset, we can view the rest of the memoir—which traces the lives of her grandparents, parents, and eventually, Walsh herself—as a kind of recipe. In other words, what we are reading in Walsh's memoir is a symbolic process of how Walsh came to be and how she has evolved over time. Describing herself as made up of ingredients also reveals Walsh's perspective on identity. Specifically, we see her taking a constructionist approach to identity—she was not born into the world as an already-finalized version of herself but rather was molded and shaped by her environment (particularly, her family). While this approach is not necessarily surprising given the period in which the memoir was written, it does invite us to think of other types of construction, such as memoir as a type of narrative that composes the self (Olney).

However, this metaphor refers not only to genetics but also to how her "tastes" have been shaped by preceding generations through the meals they have fed her. Rather than specifying that these tastes are purely culinary, Walsh allows the term to stand on its own, inviting it to hold multiple or broader meanings. For instance, given that one of Walsh's primary journeys in this

memoir is her gradual acknowledgement and acceptance of herself as a lesbian, "tastes" can refer to sexuality and desire as easily as preferences for a certain recipe for buttercream frosting. Additionally, "taste" itself is a metaphor for selection and judgment, and this metaphoric use of taste bridges the literal and figurative through embodiment. As food enters the body through consumption, it is broken down through digestion, with useful components being absorbed by the body while others are eventually expelled. We see this selection process mirrored in Walsh's memoir as she navigates her upbringing and early adult life, trying, often through trial-and-error, to decide which experiences she will allow to enrich her life and which she will reject.

Taste functions as the dominant metaphor of Chapter 3, "Cradle of Flavor." Walsh splits this chapter into four sections and uses the flavors of bitter, sweet, sour, and salty as headers. While most of these sections talk about food in some capacity (the Sweet section describes her father's love of candy, for example), they focus primarily on familial relationships (Walsh 33-41). The section titled "Bitter" deals most obviously with intergenerational relationships and identity, and Walsh's Greek and Cuban maternal grandmother Migdalia features prominently, particularly in her tense relationship with Walsh's Irish-American father, Peter. When Migdalia visits, she and Peter fight frequently, and Migdalia takes advantage of Peter's monolingualism to ridicule him in Spanish (35). Peter, however, forbids Migdalia from teaching Walsh any Spanish, or from cooking Cuban dishes in his house, as he "didn't want [Walsh] acting or appearing to be Hispanic" (34). In addition, he tells Walsh to deny her Cuban roots, commanding, "'You're 100 percent Irish . . . If anyone asks you, you tell them that you're 100 percent Irish'" (34). Migdalia obeys Peter in not teaching Walsh Spanish, but she draws the line when it comes to food. She serves Walsh's family Spanish and Latin American dishes such as *ropa vieja* and *arroz con pollo*, while avoiding their Spanish names and presenting them in a more American style (35).

This particular act of subversion closes the section, acting as a culmination of the intergenerational and intercultural tensions Walsh experiences. Through food, Migdalia forces Peter to literally consume the culture he rejects and simultaneously "feeds" her granddaughter part of the heritage that she is being denied. "Bitter" as a flavor and header operates as a tonal metaphor that captures Walsh's emotional bitterness at being forced to deny part of her heritage to please her father. Denial of self, particularly her sexuality, is a theme that will come to dominate Walsh's memoir, and making peace with her full self is the project of healing that drives the narrative.

Finally, much of Walsh's memoir dwells on how her tumultuous childhood set her on course for a nearly equally tumultuous early-adulthood, where physical and emotional hungers abounded. Her mother's body-consciousness and her father's requirement that Walsh always clean her plate set off a cycle of bulimia that Walsh battles well into adulthood. Despite a fraught relationship with food and body, Walsh turns to cooking, especially baking cakes, to bandage her emotional wounds from failed relationships, particularly her rocky marriage to Will. Her marriage to Will is metaphorized by their overly-sweet wedding cake—Will, who initially seems charming and gentle, becomes prone to fits of rage that fracture their relationship. In many ways, Walsh's consumption of food serves as a symbol for her emotional state: she binges on junk food when she's sad or angry, cooks and bakes elaborate dishes for others to celebrate success, and rejects cooking altogether at the lowest point in her relationship with Will. Finally, her turn towards emotional healing near the end of the memoir, especially her embrace of her sexuality, is mirrored by a pursuit of physical health, including moving away from purging and temporarily switching to a juicing and raw-foods diet. The penultimate scene of the narrative finds Walsh back in the kitchen baking her own wedding cake for her marriage to Laura—a cake that has

perfectly-sweetened buttercream frosting. By reviving the frosting metaphor, Walsh collapses the boundary between two very different romantic partners and periods of her life in a way that is narratively satisfying while also making her marriage to Will present during her marriage to Laura. In order to know whether the frosting is too sweet or just right, Walsh would first need to consume it, leading to an embodiment of both relationships. In this sense, then, Walsh becomes a participant in her relationships with Will and Laura *as well as* manifesting each relationship in her physical body.

The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South

I end my analysis with Twitty's memoir because this is where we can most clearly see the embodied/symbolic and personal/social dimensions of food coming together. Twitty uses food-related metaphors and metonymies to connect to his direct lineage and larger cultural history in a way that is continued by the three decolonial cookbooks I analyze in Chapter 2, as these cookbooks seek to tie individuals more firmly to their cultural communities and push those connections into the future. *The Cooking Gene* also contains the greatest quantity and most complex use of metaphor and metonymy of the three memoirs I examine and is the clearest example of how these types of figurative language allow these food memoirists to consume and make present family members and family histories. Twitty intertwines his personal genealogical history project with a cultural genealogical exploration into the roots of Southern cooking. In other words, we follow Twitty on a hunt for ancestors lost to his family tree due to the ravages of American slavery while simultaneously embarking on a journey across the Southern United States to tease out the complex history of Southern food. His memoir is both individual and social as he grounds his personal history within the greater context of Southern agriculture and

foodways.[37] As Twitty argues, the South and its foodways cannot be divorced from the legacy of slavery; African slaves were essential to the production of crops such as rice, cotton, and corn, as well as to the culinary development of the region. More so than Tan or Walsh, Twitty seeks to situate his family history within a larger socio-cultural context—the experience of members of the African diaspora, particularly those descended from enslaved African Americans, within a country that is still dominated by the interests of white Americans. Twitty's research into his own genealogy and into the history of Southern food takes him to archives, historic sites, and restaurants across the American South and eventually to Ghana, where he learns that several of his distant ancestors originated. The memoir's subtitle, *A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South*, notably lacks the appeals to family, love, and/or identity present in the memoirs by Tan and Walsh. Yet part of what makes Twitty's memoir particularly rich is that he manages to blend the historical and cultural so seamlessly with the personal that it is difficult to imagine any of these narratives independently.

Even Twitty's title, *The Cooking Gene*, evokes a range of figurative associations. The implication of the title is that cooking is innate to the self—so much so that it can be imagined as encoded in one's genes and therefore can be passed down to other blood relatives. It also suggests that cultural cooking techniques and foodways can be embodied. These many associations make sense in terms of the way it combines the two main threads of Twitty's project in the memoir: to trace his personal genealogy alongside the genealogy of Southern and African American foodways.

However, Twitty also consciously disrupts this synecdoche in the following passage by replacing genes with the concept of "blood memory":

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[37] The term "foodways" encompasses "the eating habits and culinary practices of a people, region, or historical period" (Merriam-Webster).

I know there is no such thing as a 'racial' 'cooking gene.' Let's get that

straight. I am not one to indulge in too much biological essentialism; that

can be very, very, very tricky as a black, gay, Jewish guy. 'Don't talk

about dry bones around an old woman,' the Igbo of Nigeria say. However,

I wonder if blood memory, which I do believe in, contains some clause for

the ability not to burn water. (Twitty 14)

Here, Twitty is not limiting himself to a connection with his direct ancestors, but to the historical

African and African American communities more broadly, even as he cautions that this

connection should not be taken too literally. While it might seem strange that Twitty is replacing

one bodily metaphor with another (blood for genes), particularly when blood memory has strong

associations with Native American culture, it makes sense given Twitty's project of showing

how African, European, and Native American food traditions came together to develop the

foodways of the American South. Chadwick Allen attributes the concept of "blood memory" to

Native American novelist N. Scott Momaday in 1968 (93-94). According to Allen, blood

memory "achieves tropic power by blurring distinctions between racial identity and narrative"

(93-94) and describes Momaday's construction of the term as an "appropriation and

redeployment of the U.S. government's attempt to systematize and regulate American Indian

personal and political identities through tabulations of 'blood quantum' or 'degree of Indian

blood'" (94). African Americans, of course, have been subjected to a different kind of racial

regulation—the infamous "one-drop" rule—which is nonetheless still concerned with genealogy

through blood. While it appears that Twitty is exchanging one metaphor of the body for another,

I argue that he is really bringing them into conversation with one another. More specifically, he

uses cooking, genes, and blood memory to collapse some of the division between European,

African American, and Native American contributions to Southern foodways. None of these groups individually created Southern food; it is only through the blending of these contributions that the cuisine was generated. In effect, he unites European, African American, and Native American conceptions of the connection between the body and cultural memory with (and despite) their problematic histories and valences. And it is precisely this *embodiment* of memory and culture that I also see present in Twitty's (as well as Tan and Walsh's) views about food.

Twitty continues to build on the embodiment of memory and culture in the chapter "0.01 Percent,"[38] where he discusses genetic testing: "All I ever really wanted was a recipe of who I am and where I come from" (Twitty 120). In this statement, Twitty is directly referring to genetic testing, which helps him determine his ancestral origins (to the best of current technology's ability). This metaphor is fairly straightforward: the genes passed down from Twitty's ancestors serve as the ingredients that, when combined, have created the unique individual that Twitty is. However, Twitty's decision to use the term "recipe" here, instead of a variation like "All I ever really wanted were the *ingredients* of who I am and where I come from" (the term used by Walsh) calls up a distinctive set of associations. Recipes, after all, are not just lists of ingredients—at least not in their modern form. They are also sets of procedures, or instructions for how best to combine the individual ingredients to produce the desired dish. Following recipe instructions is a way for a cook to "compose" a dish. Twitty's choice to use "recipe" instead of "ingredients" thus suggests that he wants access to more than just the genes that produced him: he desires origins and direction, an understanding of how and why these combined genes resulted in the individual he is at this point in history. This moment indicates that Twitty wants

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[38] The chapter title refers to how genetic testing deals with the ". . . 0.01 percent difference that can be used to pick [humans] apart by ethnicity or race and biogeographical region" (Twitty 119).

concrete answers, not speculation or imaginative recreation, even as he acknowledges the limits of current genetic testing.

Similarly, a page earlier Twitty questions how one can sort out complicated ancestry through genetic testing by asking "But how do you unscramble a scrambled egg?" (Twitty 119). The use of a food metaphor here once again does important work in "understanding one thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson) and illustrates the difficulty of accessing one's past through genetics alone. In a scrambled egg, two distinct components the albumen and the yolk, are combined in such a way that attempting to tease them back into separate entities is impossible. Additionally, in the act of combining the components, something new is created—as anyone with egg-eating experience knows, consuming a scrambled egg is a different experience than consuming one that is poached or sunny-side-up. Thus, Twitty's desire to know his ancestral and genealogical past is not an effort to replace himself with previous generations (to let himself be devoured by these generations, as it were). Rather, it is an effort to understand how his individual ancestors have been "scrambled" into his body, as well as how their stories remain part of his own self-narrative. This metaphor therefore asks us to view Twitty's body as a living vessel that brings his ancestors into the present, absorbing them in a way that allows him to participate in his own lineage through food.

In addition to genetics, blood memory, and cooking techniques, Twitty also evokes the sense of taste as a way of embodying and accessing the experiences of his ancestors. In his chapter on gardening, Twitty describes how he plants varieties of produce that would have been accessible to his ancestors so that by eating foods that his enslaved ancestors would have eaten, he can get a "taste of how my ancestors survived slavery" (Twitty 268). While Twitty is of course aware of the temporal distance that prevents him from literally sharing his ancestors'

experiences, he claims a degree of knowledge due to his willingness to consume the same foods. However, food is not simply a type of lodestone that draws Twitty back into the past: by invoking the sense of taste, Twitty is actually drawing the past into his own body, bringing it into the present. These historical foods carry knowledge and memory of an experience that can be transferred to Twitty's own body, and as that food is incorporated into Twitty's body, he becomes a living container for his ancestors. Thus Twitty moves from narrating an intergenerational connection to embodying that connection, holding together the personal/social and embodied/symbolic dimensions of food.

The metaphorical and metonymic connections that Tan, Walsh, and Twitty create serve to collapse boundaries between themselves and their family members and ancestors such that readers are asked to see the memoirists' textual personas not merely as individual, but as a sort of palimpsest of their family, ancestors, and culture. The repeated insistence for readers to view food as a metaphor for identity and family likewise collapses the boundaries between food's literal and symbolic dimensions to the point where consuming particular foods equates to embodying the past. Of course, not every food metaphor in a food memoir performs this function. The food metaphors in these memoirs, however, illuminate the personal/social and embodied/symbolic dimensions of food, which are important for writers to navigate as they develop textual personas in food writing texts.

In the next chapter, I shift my attention to three recent decolonial cookbooks in order to analyze how the authors construct textual personas and use hospitality as a foundation for developing an ethotic relationship with their readers. In fact, hospitality can be understood as an organizing metaphor structuring these authors' rhetorical stances. The cookbooks I selected—

Decolonize Your Diet by Luz Calvo and Catriona Ruida Esquibel, *Afro-Vegan* by Bryant Terry, and *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen* by Sean Sherman—once again demonstrate the embodied, symbolic, social, and individual dimensions of food as they seek to reconstitute the cultural identity of their primary audiences. The authors' deployment of rhetorics of healing, constitutive rhetoric, and utopian rhetoric also reveals how an ethotic relationship can reshape audiences' understandings of themselves and their communities.

Chapter Two

Ethos, Hospitality, and the Pursuit of Rhetorical Healing: How Three Decolonial Cookbooks

Reconstitute Cultural Identity through Ancestral Foodways

Michael Twitty's first line in his preface to *The Cooking Gene* is, "The Old South is a

place where people use food to tell themselves who they are, to tell others who they are, and to

tell stories about where they've been" (xii). This passage highlights the ways in which food

mediates our understanding of ourselves and helps us communicate this understanding of

ourselves to others (i.e. the personal/social dimensions of food). I move in this chapter from

considering the ultra-personal genre of the food memoir to the more technical (though still often

quite personal) genre of the cookbook. While recipes themselves are generally viewed as a

procedural genre (Wharton), genres such as food memoirs or cookbooks serve as their "frame"

(to use Leonardi's term), and the way recipes are "embedded" within these frames varies

(Leonardi 340). Through her analysis of the changes to the introduction of the recipe for "red

devil's food cake" in various editions of *The Joy of Cooking*, Leonardi demonstrates how the

content that surrounds a cookbook's recipes contributes to the development of the author(s)'

textual persona (340-342). When recipes are stripped of their contextualizing content, Leonardi

argues, they are also stripped of this opportunity for developing a textual persona, as well as

much of their social context (342). In this chapter, I am concerned with the introductions of three

recent cookbooks written by authors from historically-marginalized communities, which serve to

contextualize the entire cookbook rather than individual recipes—the "principal frame," if you

will. Cookbook introductions, when they are included, provide their authors with their first and

most substantial opportunity for constructing their textual personas and developing an ethotic

relationship with readers.

Ryan et al.'s assertion that *ethos* is both "embodied and communal" is of particular significance to the cookbook. Generically, cookbooks persuade readers to embodied actions (e.g. chopping, pouring, and stirring) to execute the recipes they contain. The resulting dishes are consumed, with the food literally becoming part of the reader-cook's body. I have selected three recent cookbooks—*Afro-Vegan* by Bryant Terry (2014), *Decolonize Your Diet* by Luz Calvo and Catriona Rueda Esquibel (2015), and *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen* by Sean Sherman (2017)—as texts of exploration. It should be noted that cookbooks and recipes, as written genres that displace other forms of knowledge-making and dissemination (such as imitation and oral communication), can themselves be seen as tools of colonization (Linda Garcia Merchant). On this basis, the term "decolonial cookbook" might seem to be an oxymoron. However, all three of these cookbooks serve decolonial ends and shed light on why we should re-envision hospitality as a key foundation for ethos. A decolonial cookbook is recognizable to white audiences in generic form but purposefully disrupts the colonization of BIPOC foodways. By focusing on such texts, I attempt to decenter the white, primarily male, figure whose speech and text has historically formed the basis of rhetoric (Walton, Moore, and Jones 2). It is a contribution to Malea Powell's call to see that ". . . Native peoples' writings (and African American, and Chicano/Latino and Asian American, et cetera) aren't just included but are, instead, critically important" (41).

Terry, Calvo and Esquibel, and Sherman identify within their cookbooks as cultural and/or ethnic minorities in the U.S. (African American, Chicanx, and Native American [Oglala], respectively) with a declared mission of writing cookbooks that reject the Standard American Diet in favor of the indigenous foodways of their cultural groups. In this way, their cookbooks function as specifically decolonial cookbooks, a sub-genre I selected because the authors seek to

disrupt the dominant discourse around food—a disruption that is echoed in their methods used for constructing ethos. I selected these three particular cookbooks based on their popularity and prestige within the sub-genre of decolonial cookbooks.[39]

These cookbooks attempt to reform the individual and cultural identities of both readers and the authors themselves so as to transform the physical and spiritual well-being of their cultural communities. That these authors' goal is to alter the *collective* identity of their cultural groups through their interactions with food is crucial; I refer to this alteration as "reconstituting" readers' collective identities, in a modification of Maurice Charland's theorization of constitutive rhetoric. This reconstitution is part of a larger act of resistance to legacies of slavery and colonization that have marginalized the food traditions of communities of color in the U.S. and, in the process, wreaked havoc on these communities' well-being.[40] Reconstituting cultural identity through food exemplifies what Peña et al. describe as a "decolonial approach to food studies"[41] (*Mexican-Origin Foods* xvii). While an individual identity might be fragmented and ever-changing, constructing a textual persona that projects a stable identity creates the illusion of internal cohesion. The authors need to project stable-for-now identities within their cookbooks to effectively host their readers. When these authors host their readers, they welcome them to the table to heal their communities. The complexity of presenting a stable identity, as well as

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[39] As of June 2021, *Afro-Vegan* was ranked #1 on Amazon's Caribbean & West Indian Cooking & Wine and #2 in African Cooking, Food and Wine lists. It was nominated for a 2015 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work, and Terry received a James Beard Foundation 2015 Leadership Award. *Decolonize Your Diet* was ranked #6 on Amazon's Latin American Cooking, Food & Wine list and received the International Latino Book Award for Best Cookbook. *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen* was ranked #4 on Amazon's Native American Cooking, Food & Wine list and received the 2018 James Beard Award for Best American Cookbook.

[40] These cookbooks speak to multiple audiences. While white readers might take something away from these cookbooks due to the rhetorical hospitality of the authors, which provides white readers with the information and tools to learn about the cultural foodways of the respective authors and execute their recipes, in this article I am primarily interested in the effect these cookbooks might have within each writer's own cultural community.

[41] Peña et al. define a "decolonial approach to food studies" as ". . . the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge, belief, and practice as these are related to food, foodways, and cuisines and the methods they inspire in our agroecosystems" (xvii).

preparing these dinner tables, requires the authors to blend a variety of rhetorics, namely rhetorics of healing, constitutive rhetoric, and utopian rhetoric. In the pages that follow, I untangle these rhetorical strategies to reveal the complexity of these cookbooks' engagement with ethos as they seek to reconstitute the cultural identity of their primary audiences both literally, through the consumption of food as an individual act rooted in the body, and figuratively, through the ways food connects us to others. I show how attention to hospitality as a structuring metaphor and precursor for ethos challenges the common shorthand of ethos as a rhetor's inherent authority and credibility—an understanding of ethos that has historically marginalized the rhetorical practices of people of color.

While other cookbook authors must also negotiate *ethos*, the layers of complexity that exist within Terry, Calvo and Esquibel, and Sherman's cookbooks set them apart and necessitate a closer examination of their rhetorical strategies. In part, their rhetorical complexity is due to the authors' racial identities (and in the case of Calvo and Esquibel, also gender and sexual identities), which require additional negotiation with the dominant cultural discourse (i.e. that of white America) in order to be seen as credible. In their introduction to the relationship between ecological feminism and *ethos*, Ryan, Myers, and Jones contend that women, and marginalized groups more generally, struggle to establish *ethos* because an individual's credibility or character is established against and within larger a cultural milieu; therefore, to be non-white, non-male, and/or non-heterosexual in the United States is to be at a rhetorical disadvantage (6-7). The choices these cookbook authors make when deciding how to translate multi-faceted, historically-marginalized identities into a textual persona, then, demands careful analysis. The complexity of these cookbooks also stems from the fact that the authors' calls for dietary reform seek to reconstitute the cultural identity of their primary audiences both literally, through the

consumption of food as an individual act rooted in the body, and figuratively, through the ways in which food connects us to others.

The remainder of this paper situates hospitality as a foundation for ethos within contemporary reformulations of ethos in rhetorical studies and connects my argument to recent food rhetoric scholarship. I provide an overview of the cookbooks by Terry, Calvo and Esquibel, and Sherman and their relationship to Tamika Carey's rhetorics of healing. The final three sections examine how these cookbook authors use constitutive and utopian rhetorics within their introductions to reconstitute the cultural identity of their primary audiences through a complex engagement with textual persona and temporality. These cookbooks welcome their primary audiences home, so to speak, and invite them to reconsider their relationship with food. They also create space for white readers and others outside of their communities, as a gracious host might set an extra plate for an unexpected guest.

Rhetorics of Healing and Cookbook Overview

The cookbooks by Terry, Calvo and Esquibel, and Sherman call for other members of the authors' cultural groups to return to traditional foodways to restore their spiritual and physical well-being. I see this call as a variation of what Tamika Carey terms "rhetorics of healing," defined as ". . . a set of persuasive discourses and performances writers wield to convince their readers that redressing or preventing a crisis requires them to follow the steps to ideological, communicative, or behavioral transformation the writer considers essential to wellness" (*Rhetorical Healing* 5-6). While Carey is primarily concerned with how rhetorics of healing impact Black women through self-help literature, they are a useful critical lens with which to view these cookbooks. The "crisis" these cookbooks identify is the physical and spiritual

"sickness" they see present in their cultural communities, and they invite readers to undertake a

"behavioral transformation" by switching to a pre-colonized diet.[42]

Carey describes establishing "a culture of lack" as integral to rhetorics of healing, a

process by which rhetors "foster a state of injustice among readers by suggesting that the

reader's lack of success in relationships or other pursuits is because something is wrong with the

culture that guides them or the information they have and use within the world" (62). In the case

of these cookbooks, readers are told they "lack" the diet appropriate to achieving physical and

spiritual wellness. This "lack" has been produced by Anglo-American culture-at-large through

the dominance of the Standard American Diet, agricultural industrialization, and segregation

practices that result in many people of color living without access to healthy food, the knowledge

of how to use it, and adequate facilities in which to prepare it. As Carey argues, the ultimate goal

of rhetorics of healing is to persuade audiences to follow a particular set of practices defined by

the rhetor to reach a state of wellness or healing that is also defined by the rhetor. By deploying

rhetorics of healing, Terry, Calvo and Esquibel, and Sherman seek to move audiences to take

individual action towards "transformation" that will bring about a "personal and collective

victory" (Carey 62). In so doing, they strive to create a cultural community that is physically and

spiritually well and to reconstitute their community through that wellness. But for this persuasion

to be effective, these authors must first create a hospitable environment where their primary

audiences feel comfortable and welcome.

Afro-Vegan: Farm-Fresh African, Caribbean & Southern Flavors Remixed

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[42] Individual or group behavioral modification is certainly impacted by existing structural systems. In the case of dietary change, individuals and groups are limited by the accessibility of heirloom seeds, land on which to plant/forage/hunt, and other disruptions caused by the industrialization of food. I unfortunately do not have the space in this paper to attend to the disruptions discussed by Peña et al. (2017) and Mihesuah and Hoover (2019).

In the Introduction to *Afro-Vegan* (2014), Terry expresses concern that many people of African descent in the United States lack knowledge of and access to traditional African and African American foodways—a knowledge gap he himself experienced when searching the internet for "African-American beans" and receiving search results for black beans and an unrelated film (1). He hopes his cookbook will remedy this problem and "move Afro-diasporic foods from the margins closer to the center of our collective culinary consciousness" (1). In other words, through this cookbook Terry constructs an informational dwelling place to reflect one that already exists in human practice—a place that people with an interest in cuisines from Africa, the Caribbean, and the American South, can inhabit to learn ancestral foodways—information that Terry, as host, can provide. *Afro-Vegan* also provides others with the means to recreate a diet based around historic and indigenous African ingredients.

In the introduction, Terry issues a call for people of African descent to "honor, cultivate, and consume food from the African diaspora" (2). He justifies this claim through reasoning that is both spiritual and physical. He argues that African-diasporic foodways connect people of African descent to their ancestors, memories, histories, and stories, as well as contribute to physical health, since he believes the Standard American Diet is making people of African descent sick (2). In fact, Terry claims that "disconnect from our historical foods is a significant contributing force" to "chronic illnesses affecting African American communities" (2). Viewed in Carey's terms, this culinary disconnection creates a "culture of lack" within African American communities. Terry believes a two-pronged approach is needed to fix the problem: African Americans and people of African descent more broadly need to work for food justice *and* to reclaim ancestral knowledge of food and diet. His cookbook full of Afro-diasporic recipes

enables readers to do the latter, creating a set of practices readers should follow to heal their communities through ancestral foodways.

Ancestral knowledge is important to Terry because he views "Culturally appropriate food [as] an important criterion for determining what is 'healthy'" (2). Terry's concern for culture as a method of providing guidance for dietary health also suggests that a quality diet is about more than just achieving and maintaining physical health: it is about the culture with which one feels connected. Terry's emphasis on ancestral and cultural knowledge raises the question of whether he believes culture or nutrition should have greater authority over our food choices; however, Terry makes it clear that he views culture as a strong guide for not only what we eat, but how we eat. Regarding Afro-diasporic cuisine, Terry writes, "Delicious as they are, these dishes do not stand alone—they are supported by culture, tradition, and memories. In fact, even the African Heritage Diet Food Pyramid emphasizes gardening, spending time with family, and building community around the table" (4). For Terry, food is more than just nutrition: how that food is produced and procured, and the social and familial aspects of dining are also emphasized. We can therefore understand "the table" in Terry's passage as both a literal location *and* an invitation for people to come together to form a community. This culture- and community-orientation is also present in the cookbooks by Calvo and Esquibel and Sherman, and it is one of the ways these authors create hospitable environments where readers are invited to think about food and food consumption as community-based concerns in addition to individual acts.

Decolonize Your Diet: Plant-Based Mexican-American Recipes for Health and Healing

A year after *Afro-Vegan* was published, Calvo and Esquibel published *Decolonize Your Diet* (2015). This cookbook makes much of its central project clear in its title—it is a

compendium of vegetarian recipes designed to help a primary audience of US-based Latinx[43]

communities reclaim their physical and spiritual well-being by eschewing the contemporary

Standard American Diet in favor of a return to indigenous Mesoamerican foodways. They call

this project part of a larger attempt to "decolonize" modern the Latinx-identifying consciousness,

a reversing or moving beyond the violence of centuries of European colonization. Calvo and

Esquibel's project is consistent with Chicanx and Latinx rhetorics more broadly, defined by

Aydé Enríquez-Loya and Kendall Leon as "rhetoric that focuses on decolonizing, reinventing,

and remembering" (212).[44]

Calvo and Esquibel articulate the influence of food on their own physical and spiritual

well-being in the Introduction, where they describe Calvo's battle with and recovery from breast

cancer. Calvo explains how her experience with cancer left her feeling disconnected from herself

and, like many cancer patients who undergo intense treatments like chemotherapy, forced into a

new relationship with food (12). As Calvo sought to understand more about the relationship

between breast cancer and diet, she learned that historically, Mexicans experience very low rates

of cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, which she attributes to the traditional Mexican diet

centered on vegetables, wild greens, fruit, nuts, and seeds (14). This research, as well as her

personal feelings of physical and spiritual recovery as she and Esquibel shifted to a less Western

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[43] I follow Calvo and Esquibel's lead in the terminology used to describe their cookbook's primary audience. Their frequent comparison of the health of Mexican and Central American Latina/o communities with US-based Latina/o communities (e.g. pp. 14, 19, 26) suggests that they are primarily addressing Latinx people living in the US. They also differentiate themselves from "American Indian and First Nation scholars, activitsts, and chefs" (pp. 35), and in discussing their work I will maintan this distinction. I have chosen to use "Latinx" instead of the "–a/o" suffix used by Calvo and Esquibel to be more inclusive of non-binary people, while recognizing that "Latinx" as a term is also controversial. The authors use the adjective "Mesoamerican" several times to label the cuisine they draw from, as will I.

[44] There are, of course, differences among Chicanx and other Latinx rhetorics and this statement is not meant to suggest they are synonymous. For more information on these distinctions, see Lugo-Lugo.

and more traditionally Mesoamerican diet, became intertwined with the authors' political activism:

> As citizens of the US and Canada, we understand that we have a responsibility to contest the immense power of US and Canadian governments and multinational corporations, who are wreaking havoc on native communities: displacing people, polluting lands and waterways, and threatening ancestral seeds . . . . It is within these broader contexts that we issue the call to 'decolonize your diet,' with full knowledge that what we need is a dismantling of our entire food-for-profit system. (16-17)

Calvo and Esquibel view the "food-for-profit system" as an attack on indigenous knowledge and culture because, among other things, it devours diverse cultural diets and eliminates indigenous food systems through industrial agricultural practices. Food lies at the nexus of their political activism, then, because it shapes and sustains both individuals and their communities. Like Terry, they see individual dietary reform as an important step in healing the individuals within their cultural community, eventually strengthening the community as a whole. A "decolonized diet" cannot, however, stand alone—Calvo and Esquibel intend it to be part of a larger political project in which their readers should participate, which is to reform the contemporary American food system.

The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen

Like *Afro-Vegan* and *Decolonize Your Diet*, Sherman's 2017 cookbook establishes a "culture of lack" (Carey 62) in Native American communities and in response calls for the reclamation of indigenous foodways. Sherman, a successful Minneapolis-based chef, realized he lacked knowledge of his own people's culinary history. In his cookbook, he writes, ". . . I wanted

to know my own food heritage. What did my ancestors eat before the Europeans arrived on our lands?" (Sherman 3). After noting the lack of easily-accessible information about Native American foodways, Sherman decided to shift his culinary focus towards celebrating these cuisines and making such knowledge more accessible to Native (and non-Native) home cooks (4-5). Like Terry, Sherman seeks to fill a cultural knowledge gap and, through his Native American catering company, food truck, and plans for a brick-and-mortar restaurant, create a welcoming place for those who wish to connect to indigenous foodways, with a focus on health.

However, Sherman identifies another lack that he hopes his cookbook will fill: the kitchen as a place of "joy" and simplicity (6). Writing of his cookbook, Sherman states, "This book is about the joy of indigenous cooking. It reveals the delight in finding ingredients right outside our kitchen doors. In a world that has become overcomplicated and reliant on appliances, gizmos, and tricky methods, we are returning to simple preparations that enhance the bold, fresh flavors of our local foods" (6). Describing the modern kitchen as a place that lacks joy and simplicity implies that these are the signs of a healthy culinary environment—perhaps even a natural state from which we have deviated. For Sherman, recovering joy and delight in the kitchen is part of his larger project of spiritual healing. To return to this state of wellbeing requires a stripping away of the unnecessary, a return to wild and local foods that home cooks can harvest or hunt for themselves. This passage also hints at a larger theme of contamination/decontamination present in Sherman's cookbook introduction, which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

Surrounding the primary text of these cookbooks lies important paratextual material written by others: namely, a foreword, epigraph, and/or epilogue. For instance, *Afro-Vegan*

opens with a foreword by the well-known culinary historian and cookbook author Jessica B. Harris[45] and closes with an epilogue by African American and Jewish culinary historian and writer Michael W. Twitty.[46] In *Decolonize Your Diet,* the foreword is written by none other than Bryant Terry, and the introduction opens with a quote by the Native American environmental and political activist Winona LaDuke.[47] Forewords, epilogues, and epigraphs (as well as who writes them) are important for establishing authorial identity and laying the ground on which an *ethotic relationship* can develop. The paratextual materials selected to play this role are typically written by people who are part of an already-established circle of influence: one into which the primary authors of the text wish to enter into or be recognized by as a way of establishing the importance or legitimacy of their text, as well as their own expertise on the topic. While a book could certainly be published without this paratext, it helps a reader understand the intellectual company the text's authors keep. Readers who are already familiar with scholars, activists, and writers like LaDuke and Harris can infer that they are in similar company with these cookbooks—part of a community that cares about similar issues. In this way, forewords, epilogues, and epigraphs are an example of how expertise and professionalism are communally-built (something I will touch on in much more detail in Chapter 4).

Reconstituting Cultural Identity

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[45] Harris's monographs include *Iron Pots and Wooden Spoons: Africa's Gifts to New World Cooking* (1989), *The Welcome Table: African-American Heritage Cooking* (1995)*, The Africa Cookbook: Tastes of a Continent* (1998), and *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America* (2010).

[46] Twitty's 2017 memoir *The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South* won the 2018 James Beard Award for Book of the Year.

[47] While Sherman's cookbook does not have a foreword, epigraph, or epilogue, reviews from other chefs and cookbook authors appear on the back of the book. The front cover of the cookbook also bears a seal advertising that Sherman was awarded a 2019 Leadership Award from the James Beard Foundation, one of the most prestigious awards for culinary professionals in the U.S. Book blurbs and awards are also important means of establishing *ethos* because they signal approval of the author or work from the professional community of which they are a part.

The cookbooks by Calvo and Esquibel, Sherman, and Terry employ a combination of rhetorical strategies to persuade culturally-affiliated readers to enact their cultural/ethnic identities *through the food they prepare and consume*: specifically, by adopting indigenous diets. However, they are not only seeking to change individual readers' actions: their expressed goal is to alter the *collective* identity of their cultural groups through their interactions with food. I refer to this attempt at alteration as "reconstituting" their readers' collective identities.

Before we can understand how these cookbook authors reconstitute their audiences, we need to determine *whom* is being addressed. The relative brevity of Terry's introduction enables a close examination of how he addresses his audience. While much of Terry's introduction describes how this cookbook can benefit people of African descent and African Americans in particular, he directly reflects on his audience on the last page of the introduction: "To be clear, *Afro-Vegan* is for everyone. I love feeding my diverse circle of family, friends, and fans vibrant and yummy home-cooked food that reflects my values around health, sustainability, compassion, and community building" (5). As a result of these various audience invocations, I would describe the audience of *Afro-Vegan* as three-tiered: 1) African Americans 2) People of African descent more generally 3) everyone. This shift in audience is also reflected in Terry's use of pronouns throughout the chapter to refer to his audience and, at times, himself. For instance, at times Terry uses the second person pronoun ("you") to address the reader directly. However, Terry also alternates between using the first person singular ("I") to describe his actions or statements of personal belief and the first person plural ("we") and first person plural possessive ("our") to align himself with his readers.[48] The use of first person plurals "we" and "our" is especially

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[48] I include here a complete catalog of the pronouns Terry uses in reference to people or organizations, listed in the order of frequency: I (21), you (15), our (11), my (11), we (5), your (4), us (2), me (1), they (1; additional uses of this pronoun refer to non-human nouns like ingredients), their: (1; referring to "people" in general).

apparent when he discusses the health benefits of an Afro-diasporic diet on African Americans. By using inclusive pronouns at strategic moments, Terry is able to link himself with his primary audience, a move of identification that creates connection. Including himself within the population that he believes can be most helped by switching to an Afro-diasporic diet suggests that Terry is practicing what he preaches—if he is willing to bet on this diet for his own physical and spiritual health, then his audience can trust that it would be beneficial for them as well. Calvo and Esquibel's cookbook takes a very similar approach to audience—for the sake of space, I will not tease out the specifics here.

Comparatively speaking, Sherman's introduction indicates a broader primary audience than Terry's and Calvo and Esquibel's—his use of collective pronouns such as "our" and "we" are typically in reference to his team at The Sioux Chef organization. In a paragraph where he wonders why a Native American diet is not more popular in the U.S., given the current cultural obsession with unprocessed, local foods, he asserts, "[The indigenous diet] connects *us all* to nature and to each other in the most direct and profound ways" (5; my emphasis). Given the focus of the paragraph in which this statement appears, Sherman is using "us all" here to refer to Americans, not specifically (though certainly including) Native Americans.

Understanding how the authors of these cookbooks position themselves in relation to their audience contributes to our knowledge of how group affiliation works in these texts. In "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple *Québécois*," Maurice Charland theorizes how rhetoric constitutes what it means to belong to a particular group (e.g. how are Athenians made to identify as Athenians?) (Charland 134). Charland wants to embrace the "radical edge" (137) of Kenneth Burke's theory of identification,[49] which Charland believes is the way that Burke ". .

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[49] Burke's theory of identification: "*A* is not identical with his colleague *B*. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that

. moves towards collapsing the distinction between the realm of the symbolic and that of human

conceptual consciousness" (Charland 137). According to Charland, to embrace this radicalness

requires going beyond Edwin Black's work in "The Second Persona," where Black distinguishes

between a real, flesh-and-blood rhetorician or author and her persona projected through her

words and self-presentation during a speech or through a text (111). Black traces how idiomatic

speech reflects the underlying ideology of the rhetor and argues that when confronted with

discourse, particularly discourse that seeks to persuade, a subject is not only negotiating the

viewpoint being expressed but also the language in which this viewpoint is expressed. As the

subject is (perhaps) persuaded to the rhetor's position, they are also being persuaded to accept

the language—the terms, in a sense—underlying that position (Black 113).[50]

This final point—that a subject of persuasion must negotiate the language, as well as the

viewpoint, of a persuasive occasion—is worth touching on in more detail as it relates to the three

cookbooks I examine in this chapter. Building off of Black's argument, readers of these

cookbooks are not only facing a rhetorical situation in which they are being persuaded to adopt a

new kind of diet, they are also being persuaded to adopt this diet through the language of a

"culture of lack" (Carey) and physical and cultural wellness. While some readers might gravitate

towards these cookbooks because of their local focus or because a particular dish sounds

appealing, the overarching *goal* of these cookbook authors, as stated in the introductory sections,

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they are, or is persuaded to believe so . . . . In being identified with *B*, *A* is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (Burke 1019-1020).

[50] Thus, we get Black's example on school integration, where the position against integration being described by the rhetor is accompanied by an offensive referent to African Americans. The slur, according to Black, is not itself inherently concomitant with the argument being made, but their pairing suggests a particularly ideology held by the rhetor. If the reader adopts not only the rhetor's position, *but also* the slur in his/her own speech, then we can see the reader adopting or beginning to adopt a particular ideology as well that will extend beyond the debate at hand (Black 113). As Black writes of the reader, "[The discourse] will move, unless he rejects it, to structure his experience on many subjects besides school integration" (113).

is to persuade culturally-affiliated readers to adopt an indigenous *diet*—to change their pattern of consumption. For example, in his introduction to *Afro-Vegan*, Terry writes, "[Afro-diasporic foodways] also have the potential to save our lives. As Afro-diasporic people have strayed from our traditional foods and adopted a Western diet, our health has suffered" (2). He continues, "Culturally appropriate food is an important criterion for determining what is 'healthy,' and people of African descent need not look any further than our own historical foodways for better well-being" (Terry 2). The authors' focus on how the Standard American Diet harms these indigenous communities both physically and spiritually represents this "culture of lack" and uses rhetorics of healing to convince readers that an indigenous diet can restore them to an optimal state of wellness. Readers need not adopt this language themselves to prepare and consume these recipes; however, by explicitly linking diet to cultural identity and wellness, these authors suggest that not only will adopting pre-colonized diets make reader-cooks healthier in body and spirit, they will also achieve a state of well-being or wholeness within their cultural identity. To explore this claim more fully, it is necessary to turn to Charland's expansion of Black's ideas.

In Charland's view, Black doesn't go far enough in helping us understand the relationship between people and personae. According to Black, the difference between these two categories has to do with abstraction: a flesh-and-blood person is not the same as the *representation* of that person in word or image. For example, it is common for literary scholars to teach students that there is a difference between the author of a text and how they might "read" an author into being based on his or her novel (this distinction is the basis of the intentional fallacy). Charland critiques Black's theorization of personae for its failure to account for ". . . the significance of becoming one with a persona, of entering into and embodying it" (137). In other words, while

Black focuses on the creation of a persona from a person, Charland's interests lie in the occasions where a person seeks to embody a particular persona.

This critique leads Charland to Althusser's concept of "interpellation", or "the process of inscribing subjects into ideology" (Charland 138; see end note 1 of Charland for how he defines "ideology"). Charland explains, "Interpellation occurs at the very moment one enters into a rhetorical situation, that is, as soon as an individual recognizes and acknowledges being addressed. An interpellated subject participates in the discourse that addresses him (Charland 138). In the case of these cookbooks, readers who identify as members of the particular cultural community being addressed (Chicano/Latino, Native American, people of African descent) are addressed by the authors as the primary audience to which they are writing. As previously discussed, all of the authors foreground their cultural identities early in the books' introductory materials in an attempt to identify with readers through shared cultural identity. While the authors do strive for inclusivity by welcoming readers who might not belong to their cultural groups (e.g. Terry's statement that his cookbook "is for everyone" [5]), it is clear from the introductions' overarching rhetoric that the authors are seeking an audience from a similar cultural background. In this sense, then, the readers are expected to already identify with a particular cultural group—to have already been socialized and interpellated as "Chicano/a," for example. The cookbook authors, then, are not constructing a group within which readers can belong, but drawing on an existing constituted group and then extending a call-to-action. Charland refers to this type of group identity as a "collective subject," by which he means, ". . . an 'ultimate' identification permitting an overcoming or going beyond of divisive individual or class interests or concerns . . . . transcend[ing] the limitations of the individual body and will" (Charland 139). According to Charland, establishing a collective subject is "*the first ideological*

effect of constitutive rhetoric" (Charland 139; author's emphasis). We can see a call for transcendence in the cookbook authors' claims that adopting a traditional indigenous diet will bring about a change within the cultural community (collective spiritual wellness).

Additionally, the cookbook authors argue that adopting traditional foodways will help members of the cultural group fully embrace their cultural identities. Calvo and Esquibel hint at this point when they acknowledge a debt to Devon Abbott Mihesuah (Choctaw), who argues, "'One symptom of accepting colonization is adhering to the typical American Diet, even while it is killing us.' Her words summarize our entire project: we must reject colonization because this diet is literally killing us" (37). By rejecting the Standard American Diet in favor of a more pre-contact diet, Latinx individuals can reclaim their cultural identity through their physical bodies as they become, in a sense, more authentically themselves. Enacted on a large scale, adopting this pre-colonized diet not only transforms individuals; it plays a role in transforming Latinx peoples from those that are colonized into those that are, in Calvo and Esquibel's language, *decolonized*. The de- prefix as an act of undoing is therefore transformed from simply destructive to constructive. It also signals an attempt to reconstitute what it means to identify as Latinx. By offering their primary audience knowledge of their ancestral foodways as a form of "Potlatch gift"[51] (Bernice Olivas), these cookbooks authors hope their hospitality will be returned through readers acting on this knowledge and collectively healing the cultural community.

Temporality and the Utopian Impulse

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[51] According to the *Canadian Encyclopedia*: "The potlatch (from the Chinook word *Patshatl*) is a ceremony integral to the governing structure, culture and spiritual traditions of various First Nations living on the Northwest Coast . . . . Historically, the potlatch functioned to redistribute wealth in what some refer to as a gift-giving ceremony. Valuable goods . . . were accumulated by high-ranking individuals over time, sometimes years. These goods were later bestowed on invited guests as gifts by the host or even destroyed with great ceremony as a show of superior generosity, status and prestige over rivals. In addition to its economic redistributive and kinship functions, the potlatch maintained community solidarity and hierarchical relations within and between bands and nations" (Gadacz).

Charland claims that the "positing of a transhistorical subject" follows the establishment of collective identity (140). For Charland, the "peuple *Québécois*" function as a transhistorical subject by the way current group members see their group's lineage extending back into the past. By locating their cultural heritage back to the time of the original French settlers of Quebec, the "peuple *Québécois*" argue that they are not a new development, but a *people* who have long had an identity separate from Canadians as a larger population (Charland 135).[52] Furthermore, they argue that the "peuple *Québécois*" of today maintain a special connection to their ancestral past; that to be *Québécois* is a special, distinct subject position.

The construction of a transhistorical subject is certainly present in the introductions of these cookbooks, but it occurs differently from Charland's description of the *Québécois*. These cookbook authors certainly know that their cultural groups have already been established and are recognized as specific "peoples." In this case, then, it is the *return to traditional foodways*—specifically, the *preparation* and *consumption* of heritage ingredients and dishes—that creates a link *back* to those ancestors. While hosting their readers, the authors argue that to eat the food of one's ancestors is to revive and strengthen the already-existing spiritual connection with those ancestors.

We can see this connection most clearly in the following example from Calvo and Esquibel: "When we eat traditional foods, we connect to our ancestors" (17). Establishing this ancestral connection is part of the healing of the cultural group—a return to a time before conquest and slavery inflicted centuries of trauma. Since a true return to the past is of course impossible, this healing becomes future-oriented: group members can recover some semblance

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[52] Charland cites Michael McGee's work that demonstrates that a "people" is a rhetorical construct, as are the boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Charland 136).

of the past through a return to traditional foodways. We see this past-to-future move when Calvo and Esquibel write, "Cooking a pot of beans from scratch is a revolutionary act that honors both our ancestors and future generations" (17). They continue with a brief discussion of epigenetics, creating a connection to ancestors and future generations that is at once both figurative (in the sense that cooking this traditional dish provides a link to the past through re-creation) and literal (in the sense of genetic inheritance). Time is also collapsed by the role food plays in healing the community. The time-logic of these cookbooks' introductions encourages members of the cultural group to eat traditional, indigenous foods in the *present* in order to connect to the *past*, so the group and its members can have a better *future*—defined by physical and spiritual wellness. This time-logic thus performs decoloniality in the way it ". . . breaks from a totalizing [*a*] reality and [*a*] linear history and shifts to *an-other* set of geo- and body-politics of knowledge and understanding that encourages the conception of non-Eurocentered paradigms" (García and Baca 23).

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the *chronotope* is useful when discussing the way time functions in these cookbooks, particularly the present-past relationship. Bakhtin defines the *chronotope* as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" and, I contend, in other forms of writing[53] ("Forms of Time" 84). While acknowledging the specific use of the space-time concept within relativity theory, Bakhtin claims that "What counts for us is the fact that [the *chronotope*] expresses the inseparability of space and time . . . ." ("Forms" 84). He continues, ". . . spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to

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[53] While Bakhtin specifically focuses on the *chronotope* in literature, rhetoric and composition scholars have extended this concept to non-literary genres. For examples, see Jack (2006), Mutnick (2006), and Schryer (1999).

the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin "Forms" 84). While Bakhtin is clear that he sees the *chronotope* as a "formally constitutive category of literature" and is not concerned with it in "other areas of culture" ("Forms" 84), I contend that the *chronotope* helps us understand *why* the individual enactment of these recipes matters to the cookbook authors. I view *chronotope* here in much the same way as Keith H. Basso does in his examination of the Apache people's use of geographic landmarks as sites where culturally-significant events have "fused" time and place to become repositories of narrative in order to "shape the images that Apaches have—or should have—of themselves"[54] (Basso 45). Similarly, the time and space in which a dish is cooked are inseparable from one another and allow those preparing and consuming the dish access to a larger cultural narrative. In the case of recipe preparation, the "space" half of time-space is hyper-local; it is the place in which the recipe or dish is prepared. Time is equally as specific, in that it is the moment in which a reader (or Calvo herself) actually makes the dish.

These authors claim that reader-cooks will connect with their ancestors and cultural heritage by making indigenous dishes and using ancient techniques. Sherman writes, "I began working with simple, direct cooking methods and the hand tools of my ancestors, and I learned to see the world through indigenous eyes" (11). Calvo and Esquibel claim, "When we eat, we connect to the spiritual essence of what we ingest. When we eat traditional foods, we connect to our ancestors" (17). These examples demonstrate a version of Bakhtin's motif of meeting, where, "the temporal marker ('at one and the same time') is inseparable from the spatial marker ('in one and the same place')" ("Forms" 97). In other words, by performing certain actions within a defined time-space, individuals create the conditions for a meeting. These cookbook authors

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[54] The use of "should" here expresses the perspective of the Apache people (i.e. what their own stories are meant to tell them about themselves), not how those outside of the cultural group think the Apache people ought to view themselves.

prompt reader-cooks to "meet" with their ancestors by creating space for their audiences to focus on the farming or cooking of heritage crops *in addition* to the foods themselves. I am introducing a third—and specifically culinary—element to Bakhtin's formulation for a meeting. For reader-cooks to access their ancestors, it is not simply a matter of being in the same place at the same time (as the temporal separation between present and past makes that literally impossible); rather, it is *the ritual of preparing a particular dish within that defined space and time* that results in a spiritual "meeting." Reader-cooks would be unable to journey toward physical and spiritual wellness without such a meeting because ancestral connection is so crucial to the reconstitution of cultural identity happening within these cookbooks.

The purpose of sending reader-cooks to a meeting with their cultural ancestors is ultimately future-oriented: the end goal is a future where the reader-cook experiences greater physical and spiritual wellness. This forward-looking gaze creates a utopian impulse within these cookbooks that deserves further consideration. Marlana Portolano's description of a utopic goal as "either one shared by the community or one invented by the speaker or both" (116) reminds us that utopia is constructed and can originate inside or outside of a community. Both situations are still persuasive, as the larger cultural community must still be convinced to pursue this utopic vision regardless of whether the rhetor is part of the in-group. I see these cookbooks as an attempt to realize utopia[55] for their communities—"realize" in the sense that they believe the utopian project of individual and community healing through food can eventually be achieved. These authors demonstrate a "culture of lack" (Carey) in their cookbook introductions and propose a solution for healing/wellness that will correct that lack. The hopeful, future-oriented

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[55] A definition of what I mean by "utopia" is useful here: Lyman Tower Sargent defines utopia as ". . . social dreaming—the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live. But not all are radical, for some people at any time dream of something basically familiar" ("The Three Faces" 3).

rhetoric of the cookbooks functions as utopian rhetoric by promising healing for individuals in body and spirit, and eventually for the community. Because food and recipes are embodied, the utopian realization comes from preparing the recipes and eating the food in these cookbooks.

If utopia as a concept "aims to make a better society by first imagining it" (Portolano 119), utopian and constitutive rhetorics can be utilized to make the vision a reality. The authors use these rhetorical techniques to *reconstitute* their existing communities in pursuit of realizing a utopic vision of a cultural community that is physically and spiritually well. To see how this reconstituting takes place, we need to examine what Charland calls the "illusion of narrative freedom" (141).

Ethos, Identity, and Narrative Closure

While individual members of a collective subject might think they are free to act however they wish, Charland argues that they face pressure to conform to the established group narrative. According to Charland, "Subjects within narratives are not free, they are *positioned* and so constrained. All narratives have power over the subjects they represent" (140; author's emphasis), and as a result, ". . . the subject is constrained to *follow through*, to act so as to maintain the narrative's consistency" (Charland 141). Furthermore, "Since narratives offer totalizing interpretations that ascribe transcendent meanings to individual acts, the maintenance of narrative consistency demands that a certain set of acts be chosen" (Charland 143). In other words, while individuals who consider themselves part of a collective subject might consider themselves free to act however they wish, there is at the very least a feeling of pressure to conform to the established group narrative. In the case of these cookbooks, readers who are interpellated into the cultural communities being addressed therefore are encouraged to adopt the diet being described as a way of acting out their role within the community narrative. These

cookbooks aim to strike the right balance of inviting readers to consider their proposed dietary changes while making them feel comfortable—as good hosts do their guests.

These cookbook authors, however, are not trying to establish a new community so much as to reconstitute one. This distinction reveals that a constituted group identity is not immutable or static. Group members might accept a revised version of their identity, particularly when they are successfully persuaded through rhetorics of healing that their existing community "lacks" something of importance for it to be optimally well. To correct this lack, the authors act as hosts to create a space where readers can reflect on how they might view and live their cultural identity in a new way. Even though I see these authors as reconstituting, rather than forming, a collective identity or people, the following point by Charland still holds: ". . . while classical narratives have an ending, constitutive rhetorics leave the task of narrative closure to their constituted subjects" (143). Readers of these cookbooks are encouraged to confirm their subject positions as members of the community by changing their diets and thereby closing the narrative begun in these cookbooks—moving from illness to wellness. Whether or not readers choose to make dietary changes depends on whether they are persuaded to see these changes as indications of group affiliation. The dietary change itself, brings about narrative closure *after* the reader has decided to inhabit the persona within the narrative.[56]

But is this truly persuasion? According to Charland, what is happening in the process of constitutive rhetoric is better described as a process of conversion that ". . . ultimately results in an act of recognition of the 'rightness' of a discourse and of one's identity with its reconfigured subject position" (142). The use of "conversion" rather than "persuasion" to describe this process

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[56] It is possible, of course, for individuals to purchase a cookbook with no intention of ever preparing one of its recipes. When this situation occurs, the reader has not been successfully interpellated into the group, and therefore does not feel pressured to *act* in a way that brings about narrative closure.

suggests that the means by which an audience member—or reader, in the case of these cookbooks—is convinced to act in a way that will close the narrative goes beyond (or perhaps has little or nothing to do with) the traditional building blocks of logical persuasion. This somewhat religious or spiritual tone is evident in much contemporary writing about food from activists, particularly those who adopt an anti-intellectual stance that favors personal experience and a sense of "rightness" rather than following nutritionists' or scientists' dictums.[57] We can see an example of this stance in *Afro-Vegan*, when Terry writes, "Culturally appropriate food is an important criterion for determining what is 'healthy,' and people of African descent need not look any further than our own historical foodways for better well-being" (2). It is clear from this passage that Terry believes culture and tradition are a sufficient guide for determining a healthy diet. This passage also echoes Michael Pollan's dictum to use one's great-grandmother as a guide for what to eat (148).

I want to clarify here that I am *not* suggesting that all health-and-wellness talk is inherently a rejection of science, nor that these cookbooks by Calvo and Esquibel, Sherman, and Terry are unique in using anti-intellectual appeals. I use the term "anti-intellectualism" in the same way Michael Kideckel does, to describe a "style of communication" rather than "resistance to science or an enveloping . . . identity" (45). Kideckel's overall argument is that historically, American food activists (like Pollan) and the American food industry alike have used anti-intellectual rhetoric at various times to position themselves as an authority that individuals should trust on the subject of food (44). In other words, two seemingly opposing factions have used the same rhetorical move to persuade their audiences that they—not nutritional scientists—have the true answer to the question of healthy eating. As a communication style, then, anti-

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[57] For more on this anti-intellectual legacy in American food writing, see Michael Kideckel's article "Anti-Intellectualism and Natural Food."

intellectual rhetoric attempts to shift who the audience sees as an authority on the subject of healthy eating. The cookbook authors I examine use anti-intellectual rhetoric to challenge Western authority over food and diet, creating an opportunity for themselves and their readers to consider alternatives to the dominant health discourse. Since nutritional science had much to do with the development of the Standard American Diet, a rejection of this epistemology coupled with an appeal to return to the foods of one's ancestors signals an anti-intellectual shift in whom should be viewed as an authority over healthy eating.

While a term like conversion is often associated with organized religion, the cookbook authors' calls for a reconnection with traditional foodways functions in a similar way. I am not the first to identify connections between food and cultures' spiritual and religious practices— such connections are apparent throughout the world. Rather, I am interested in how these cookbooks use the spiritual dimension of food rhetorically, as when authors describe their experience of preparing particular foods. Consider Calvo's description of cooking pre-Columbian foods: "First, we started eating simple foods: a fresh pot of beans! And then I learned how to make fresh corn tortillas from scratch. Ah! My spirit awoke" (14). Here, Calvo expresses their feeling of "rightness" when preparing and eating pre-Columbian foods.[58] Their use of the verb "awoke" implies that Calvo's spirit had up to that point been sleeping, a term implying presence but not consciousness. It is not the simplicity of the actions themselves that seem to matter; rather, these acts take on an entirely new meaning for Calvo when placed within the context of ancestral foodways. We then enter a space akin to that of ritual. Given that preparing

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[58] For more on the subject of food, ritual, and spirituality within Mesoamerican (specifically Aztec) culture, see Morán.

food involves the repetition of a set of steps or methods, it takes little imagination to see cooking as ritualistic with this spiritual layer added.

It is significant that reconstituting identity involves both ritual and narrative closure: they work together to create temporarily-fixed ground where a rhetor may host an audience. In other words, they provide the *illusion* of a stable sense of self—of a fixed identity—which combats the internal divisiveness that Alcorn believes characterizes the modern self. Since food can signal personal and collective identity, our diets are one way in which we perform these (illusory) stable identities. Ritual and narrative closure appeal to our desire to create a cohesive self-narrative, and the utopian goal of personal and community healing provides a mission, giving reader-cooks' actions a sense of larger purpose.

Consistency within a self-narrative also helps establish a rhetor's credibility in the eyes of the audience, which is one of the conditions for building the trust between rhetor and audience that is necessary for an ethotic relationship to develop. Terry appeals to a consistent self-narrative when he claims in his Introduction that *Afro-Vegan* continues his previous work of "keeping one eye on contemporary health concerns while presenting food that honors the flavors, ingredients, and heritage of the African diaspora" (3). By identifying cohesiveness across his own work, Terry draws on the credibility he established previously in an attempt to extend it to his new cookbook. In other words, he is telling his audience, "I am doing what you would expect of me based on my previous work." Assuring his audience of consistency within his own self-narrative also signals Terry's expertise on this topic—another component of developing an ethotic relationship with readers.

However, because reconstituting a group, like constituting it, requires individual action that fulfills the particular narrative at stake, ideology[59] also becomes important. Charland writes, "What is significant in constitutive rhetoric is that it positions the reader towards political, social, and economic action in the material world and it is in this positioning that its ideological character becomes significant" (141). I argue that these cookbooks ask readers to bring these actions into their interior (physical) worlds as well. While acquiring and consuming food is in itself a "political, social, and economic action" (Frye and Bruner 1; Greene 4; Goldthwaite 2), the authors of these cookbooks also call for readers who wish to adopt these diets to procure their food in particular ways. For instance, they all advocate for purchasing local, organic, and/or wild produce (and meat, in the case of Sherman) and growing one's own food or foraging to whatever degree possible, while simultaneously avoiding "big agriculture." These authors all see themselves as part of a larger mission of food justice for all people, but particularly the members of their cultural communities. Indeed, Calvo and Esquibel state that "what we need is a dismantling of our entire food-for-profit system" in order to fully "decolonize" diets and protect indigenous knowledge (17).

In some cases, such food justice endeavors manifest in actual organizations. For example, Sherman has established the North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems (NĀTIFS), an indigenous non-profit organization "dedicated to addressing the economic and health crises affecting Native communities by re-establishing Native foodways" (NĀTIFS.org). According to the website, a key part of the organization's work is the "Reclamation of ancestral education" to "[reverse] the damage of colonialism and forced assimilation" and ". . . [driving] sustainable

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[59] In the first endnote of his article, Charland notes that he uses ideology in a way similar to Anthony Giddens in *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (1979). Charland describes ideology as "a symbolic system" that, among other things "denies its historicity and linguisticality" and "legitimates and structures power relations" (148).

economic empowerment and prosperity into tribal areas through a reimagined North American

food system that also addresses the health impacts of injustice" (NĀTIFS.org). Sherman

highlights NĀTIFS in the introduction of *The Sioux Chef* (5). Terry likewise references the work

done by the nonprofit Oldways: Health Through Heritage, particularly their creation of an

African Heritage Diet Food Pyramid, which is intended as a "revision of the antiquated, one-

size-fits-all food guide pyramid"[60] (Terry 2-3). Terry sees this new food guide as a jumping-off

point, claiming "we still have much work to do" (Terry 3) to raise broad awareness of "culturally

appropriate" diets (Terry 2). His cookbook, then, becomes one more step in this process, a

continuation of this food justice work.

The cookbook authors' dedication to food justice initiatives adds another ideological

layer that readers must negotiate when encountering the cookbooks and the recipes they hold. To

return to Black for a moment, readers are not only faced with the choice of whether or not to

prepare dishes from the cookbook but also to subscribe to the underlying ideologies of food

justice and culturally-appropriate diets. However, while readers can resist this ideology, if they

are successfully interpellated into the audience they face intense pressure to create narrative

closure, as well as the comfort of ritual, which makes resisting the ideological underpinnings

quite challenging. In attempting to reconstitute their primary audiences (those who identify as

part of the same cultural group as the cookbook authors), the authors add a new valence to what

it means to be of African descent, or Chicano/a, or Native American. I use the word "new" here

deliberately and cautiously—these authors are certainly not the first to advocate for food justice

within their communities. However, the authors' explicit appeals for their primary audiences to

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[60] As Terry acknowledges, the food guide pyramid was itself abandoned on a national level in favor of the My Plate food guide in 2011.

adopt a culturally-appropriate diet in pursuit of food justice suggests that, at least in the authors'

views, these are points on which their primary audiences need persuading.

It should be noted that historic campaigns for dietary change in the U.S. have also had an

underlying political valence. Charlotte Biltekoff contends that projects seeking to change

Americans' dietary habits have historically been about more than just nutrition—they are also

"cultural, subjective, and political" (4). She asserts that ". . . the process of teaching people to

'eat right' inevitably involves shaping certain kinds of subjects, and citizens, and shoring up the

identity and social boundaries of the ever-threatened American middle class" (4). Biltekoff

defends this claim through several large-scale examples. For example, chapter four of her book

describes how food activists like Alice Waters and Michael Pollan have helped shift Americans'

focus on food and nutrition to "eating as an ethical act" and "the values of neoliberalism," the

result being a newly-created "moral hierarchy of dietary health" that reinforces distinctions

between the upper and middle classes and those with less economic means (Biltekoff 82).[61] We

can see a direct connection here between Biltekoff's view of food and dietary health as a means

of moral development and Michael J. Hyde's assertion that ethos is the place where ethical and

moral development take place (xiii).

While it might be tempting to view the "campaigns" by Calvo and Esquibel, Sherman,

and Terry in a similar way to those of Pollan and Waters, these authors are explicitly concerned

with shoring up a different facet of identity: the primary audience's cultural affiliation. Their in-

group status as members of the cultural and historically-marginalized communities they seek to

reach present another significant difference from Biltekoff's case studies. While Calvo and

Esquibel, Sherman, and Terry use very similar rhetoric as food activists like Pollan and Waters,

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[61] Her other chapters focus on turn-of-the-19th-century Northeastern US dietary reformers, WWII-era food reforms, and 21st-century national campaigns against obesity.

whose focus on "eating right," Biltekoff claims, ends up "naturalizing class" distinctions (Biltekoff 82), the work they seek to do is quite different. For these authors, rejection of the Standard American Diet and industrial agriculture are necessary because that diet and its accompanying infrastructure are deemed colonizing and physically and spiritually damaging to the members of Latinx, African American, and Native American communities.

What I think Biltekoff's analysis misses, due to its focus on class, is the way in which alternative food activists like Waters and Pollan have shifted the national conversation from processed foods back to whole foods, creating an environment that is also conducive to indigenous activists' seeking to recover their own historical foodways. By creating a national demand for resources and cookbooks that promote eating fresh, local, and whole foods, mainstream food activists have created a space within mainstream food discourse that particularly suits the projects of indigenous food activists, whose work is now more likely to be published and disseminated. I am not suggesting that such an approach to food did not or could not exist without the activism of people like Waters and Pollan—this is not a "white savior" narrative. What I mean is that such activists have created conditions where these historically-marginalized populations are able to pass cultural gatekeepers more easily because their work is part of a similar conversation. While Calvo and Esquibel, Sherman, and Terry use some of the same rhetoric and reasoning as activists like Waters and Pollan, their goal of physical and spiritual healing for their communities mean they are interested in different kinds of "recovery" projects.

Authenticity

Authenticity is a concept that is difficult to escape when discussing recipes or foods as traditional. Recent work by Carrie Helms Tippen has shown that authenticity is a complex term

that is not necessarily used in a static way within food discourse. How cookbook authors deal

with the concept of authenticity is important because authenticity is often linked to a text or

author's credibility. Authenticity contributes to a rhetor's perceived credibility and

trustworthiness, necessary qualities for establishing an ethotic relationship. This link between

authenticity and ethos is especially apparent in discussions of food. Despite "authenticity's"

popularity in food scholarship, Tippen notes that the term is difficult to define and that much

debate exists within food scholarship about whether this is even a useful concept for analyzing

people's relationship with food (*Inventing Authenticity* 13). Like Tippen, I use the five criteria

frequently employed by those concerned with evaluating a food or dish's authenticity identified

by Josee Johnston and Shyon Baumann in *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet*

Foodscape: "geographic specificity," simplicity, "personal connection," connection to a "historic

tradition," and "'ethnic' connection" (from Tippen 14). While Tippen ultimately argues that

authenticity "depends on origins deeply connected to identity and place" (14) in her evaluation of

Southern cookbooks, the cookbooks I examine are less concerned with geographic place and

more with the criteria of historical tradition, simplicity, and personal/cultural identity.

In *Inventing Authenticity*, Tippen analyzes how contemporary cookbook writers of the

American South create narratives of authenticity for their recipes through the "origin narratives"

the writer chooses to ascribe to them (12)—in effect, what makes a particular recipe inherently

"Southern." Tippen notes a trend in contemporary Southern food writing that focuses less on a

recipe or dish's historical origins as a measure of authentic Southern affiliation to one that

emphasizes the more personal association that a Southern cookbook writer has with the dish. She

attributes this shift to the difficult history of Southern cuisine and its connection to slavery,

which she believes contemporary cooks (significantly, white cooks) do not wish to dwell on.[62]

She sees cooking as a way to enact and reinforce the cultural identity of a recipe (e.g. what

makes Brunswick Stew a Southern dish) and the cultural identity of the person cooking the

recipe. While I agree with Tippen's claim that cooking can help reinforce the cultural identity of

a recipe and the person cooking it, I see an important difference between the cookbooks she

analyzes and the three I am considering. Specifically, Calvo and Esquibel, Sherman, and Terry

are trying to emphasize the difficult histories connected to their cuisines, not elide them.

Terry is perhaps the most overt in stating his choice to emphasize the pain and

complexity inherent to the development of Afro-diasporic foodways. He writes in his

introduction that he hopes readers of his cookbook can "com[e] to terms with the problematic

narratives that surround [Afro-diasporic foods and traditions]" (1). Because Terry does not fear

the messy, difficult history of his people, he need not ignore issues such as slavery, colonization,

and voluntary migration that brought African people to other parts of the globe, bringing with

them their food traditions and the resulting mixing of these traditions with those of other

cultures.

Furthermore, Terry argues that one cannot divorce a cuisine from the people who

developed it and kept it alive. He writes that, ". . . it is not enough to celebrate the food of the

African diaspora without appreciating the *people* who gave birth to this rich culinary heritage"

(1-2). Terry's use of a birth metaphor in this passage deserves further consideration. The verb

"gave birth" indicates a natural process with associations of pain and struggle. It also suggests

that what was "birthed" appeared fully-formed, rather than developing gradually as the result of

skill or learning, in a way that a construction or mechanical metaphor would not capture. Thus,

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[62] For more on the difficult history of Southern cuisine, see Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*.

the implication behind Terry's metaphor is that the culinary heritage of the African diaspora is—figuratively speaking—biologically or genetically connected to the people who created it and is therefore innate to Afro-diasporic people. Given the traditionally Western view of parent-child relationships, there is also a tinge of ownership implied by a birth metaphor—that the creator in some way "owns" the creation (at least during a period of immaturity).

However, this birth metaphor is juxtaposed with Terry's later acknowledgment of the historical and geographic fluctuations in Afro-diasporic cuisines. He writes, "In these pages, you will find imaginative vegan recipes that *highlight the interconnection, change, and growth of Afro-diasporic food over centuries*" (Terry 4; my emphasis). While Terry is concerned with showcasing what might be referred to as authentically African ingredients or preparation methods, he does not recognize a particular historical moment or geographic location as limiting what might be considered part of the African culinary heritage. The utopian impulse pervades Terry's unwillingness to establish firm parameters for defining "authentic" Afro-diasporic cuisines. Additionally, we can reconcile the birth metaphor's implications with his later emphasis on the development of Afro-diasporic foods by extending Terry's metaphor: while a child enters the world fully-formed, they grow and change through life. The proprietary sense still remains, much as parents feel an ongoing connection to and responsibility for a child throughout their lives. Terry's inclusive stance allows him to locate these foodways among a particular people, rather than base them on historical or geographic conditions, while simultaneously acknowledging the historical experiences and geographic movements of African-diasporic peoples as factors necessary in producing these foodways.

Calvo and Esquibel also refrain from using authenticity to draw firm boundaries around their diet, in part because of the cross-cultural pollination of foods that have been present in the

Americas for hundreds of years. They write, "we acknowledge the cultural mixing that forms our identities" and as a result ". . . we combine and incorporate non-native foods if they further the goal of healing our bodies and spirits" (Calvo and Esquibel 18). Thus, while foods indigenous to the Americas do make up a significant portion of their recipes' ingredients lists, Calvo and Esquibel are less concerned with capturing some sort of "authentic" past than they are with the physical and spiritual impact of the food. The criteria for deciding which foods successfully accomplish this healing is, however, unclear, beyond the authors' advocacy for a plant-centered diet and the fact that many of their ingredients are in fact indigenous to the Americas. While some readers might wish to critique the authors for placing bodily experience over a particular system of ingredient selection, I am interested in what I see as a rationale that works against a narrow definition of authenticity in cuisine. Calvo and Esquibel write a few paragraphs later: "While we are committed to reclaiming knowledge about our ancestral foods, including pre-contact food histories, we are not calling for a rejection of any food not native to the Americas, nor do we desire to recreate any one diet from a previous era. We understand that all cultures are living and evolving" (Calvo and Esquibel 18). Rather than drawing a rigid boundary around what qualifies as "authentic" Mesoamerican cuisine, Calvo and Esquibel instead use foods indigenous to the Americas and known for their use in pre-European-contact foodways as a sort of nucleus at the center of their decolonized diet, with other non-native foods orbiting and fading away from the center gradually.

The authors' consideration of the diversity of indigenous Mesoamerican cuisine is also apparent the one time that the word "authenticity" is used in the opening chapters of the cookbook, when the authors mention how common it is to hear debates about a dish's "authenticity," which they claim often reflects regional preferences. After sharing an excerpt

from the 16th-century manuscript *The Florentine Codex,* which documents Aztec life at the time

of the Spanish conquest, including much description of the Aztec diet, Calvo and Esquibel

conclude:

> By reading the codices, we've learned that indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica
> have always made many different kinds of tamales, and this encourages us to be
> creative and bold, instead of imagining that there is one "authentic" recipe that we
> need to emulate. Generation after generation, our ancestors fed their families and
> communities by being clever, adaptable, and ingenious, and by making use of
> different available ingredients. (32)

By conceptualizing their diets in this way, the authors are able to honor the variety of foods and

dishes that have long been a part of various Mesoamerican communities and to fully

acknowledge the rich and complex history of this region and its people.

These cookbook authors' calls for a return to indigenous foodways and an explicit refusal

to limit their diets to a rigid temporal or geographic boundary create a complexity that must be

negotiated. By advocating for an extremely broad definition of an historical diet as Terry and

Calvo and Esquibel do, their calls for a return to traditional foods and preparations are utopic in

nature. In other words, rather than locating their diets in a specific historical moment, the authors

construct a sort of gastronomic "no place" (to break utopia into its Greek roots) which members

of their cultural groups can access through these traditional foodways.[63] Understanding this

utopian impulse is, I believe, essential to examining how ethos and persuasion are working in

these cookbooks, for it also maps onto the contemporary audience. Appealing to readers based

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[63] I consider the authors' grounding of *ethos* within their personal and cultural identities while simultaneously avoiding situating their diets within a particular location or time period as an interesting disruption of typical locational feminist theories of *ethos* as location, as described by Ryan, Myers, and Jones (8). For more on *ethos* as location, see Reynolds.

on how they view their cultural identities allows the cookbook authors to reshape what it means to identify with a particular cultural identity, creating and then filling a cultural lack.

Sherman's cookbook, however, provides a slightly different view of authenticity. Unlike Calvo and Esquibel and Terry, Sherman more clearly draws boundaries between what is authentic and inauthentic in terms of Native American foods. He writes, "Most of what passes for Native American fare today—fry bread or Indian tacos—*is not authentic at all*. My early ancestors didn't eat the foods I grew up with or cooked in restaurants . . . . I knew little about our food culture"[64] (Sherman 4; my emphasis). In this passage, Sherman locates Native American "food culture" as something that has been disrupted or lost by European colonization and relocation of Native Americans to reservations, as well its neglect by the American restaurant industry. The foods that grew out of the reservation system, such as fry breads and Indian tacos, are here classified as inauthentic because they are connected to a way of life that violates the sovereignty of Native peoples.

We can see this before-authentic/after-inauthentic binary even more clearly when contrasted with Sherman's thoughts in the following passage:

> In my mind's eye, I could see that long ago the tribes were sovereign over their food systems, maintaining food security through a rich knowledge of the land and its food resources. They cultivated crops, foraged wild foods, hunted, and fished as good stewards. They relied on complex trade, held feasting ceremonies, and harvested food in common sites. In order to understand this cuisine, *I had to*

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[64] Fry bread (or frybread) is a particularly controversial food within Native American communities, as it was invented by Native peoples as a way to use the flour rations distributed to reservations by the American government. Some view fry bread as a "symbol of shared adversity"—a celebration of survival and community—while others view it as a symbol of the violence of forced relocation and the subjugation of Native communities (Miller "Frybread"). It is also blamed as a contributor to the higher-than-average rate of diabetes and other metabolic diseases among Native Americans. For more on this controversy, see Jen Miller.

return to its beginning and work solely with indigenous ingredients using simple tools and basic techniques. I found that, more than anything, my ancestors' work was guided by respect for the food they enjoyed. Nothing was ever wasted; every bit was put to use. This sparked creativity as well as resilience and independence. Above all else, they were healthy and self-reliant (Sherman 4; my emphasis)

As this passage illustrates, Sherman, much more so than Terry or Calvo and Esquibel, is concerned with recovering his cultural group's "original" cuisine. The statement I have emphasized above signals a fresh starting point, when Native American foodways had not yet been corrupted by European intrusion into Native communities' ways of life. This "beginning" is contrasted with the foodways that have arisen since European interference, resulting in a contaminated food culture. While Sherman does acknowledge Native people's interconnectedness through his reference to "complex trade" that likely also influenced and altered different Native American cuisines, this kind of fusion is treated as distinct from culinary alterations that occurred as a result of contact with Europeans. Even though Sherman locates a clear before-and-after for "authentic" Native American cuisine, however, the period which he defines as authentic encompasses hundreds, if not thousands, of years. This historical breadth, as well as our temporal distance from the period Sherman is concerned with, creates a similar utopic impulse to Sherman's project as it does to Calvo and Esquibel and Terry's. By recreating ancestral foodways, Sherman and others can access an era when Native American people were "healthy and self-reliant" and "were sovereign over their food systems" (4).

In attempting to reconstitute their primary audiences, Terry, Calvo and Esquibel, and Sherman invite their audiences to reconsider what it means to be of African descent, Latinx, or

Native American. While these authors are not the first to advocate for dietary changes or food justice within their communities, their cookbooks create a hospitable space in which their primary audiences can consider adopting a culturally-focused diet in pursuit of greater physical and spiritual wellness for both individuals and the larger cultural group.

Decolonial cookbooks such as these provide an ideal site for examining the rhetorical possibilities of hospitality as a basis for ethos. By sharing their knowledge of ancestral foodways with their culturally-affiliated readers as a form of Potlatch gift (Bernice Olivas), these authors negotiate the status and credibility needed to persuade their communities towards cultural transformation. Framing ethos as founded on hospitality challenges limiting notions of ethos that emphasize a rhetor's authority and credibility, which has led to ignoring or dismissing the persuasive power of rhetors whose positionality makes their voices less likely to be listened to and respected by the dominant culture. These cookbooks reveal the rhetorical power of appeals to community and belonging—values that are often ignored or denigrated by Western discourses in favor of individuality and independence. The authors invite their readers to an ethotic dinner table by constructing the illusion of a stable textual identity, hosting them as they offer arguments about their cultural communities' physical and spiritual healing in relation to pre-colonized foodways and the legacies of slavery and colonization in the U.S.

In Chapter 3, I turn my attention to four food blogs—*Budget Bytes* by Beth Moncel, *Damn Delicious* by Chungah Rhee, *Smitten Kitchen* by Deb Perelman, and *The Pioneer Woman Cooks* by Ree Drummond—in order to analyse how they construct textual personas within a digital, serially-published genre. By regularly publishing recipes accompanied by anecdotes from their daily lives, these food bloggers curate their lives in order to present a consistent and seemingly-stable textual persona, forming the basis for developing an ethotic relationship with

readers. Through analysis of four code groups I derived from a sample of these bloggers' posts, I argue that the textual personas these bloggers construct often draw on (and perpetuate) traditional markers of white femininity. These bloggers, therefore, perform a particular kind of femininity through the stories they share about their lives and their discourse, suggesting that they view this type of textual persona as necessary—or at least expedient—for developing an ethotic relationship with their readers.

Chapter Three

We Are What We Eat (and the Stories We Tell): Constructing Textual Persona and Ethos in

Food Blogs

While cookbooks and food memoirs are well-established genres, the food blog is a

relative newcomer to the food writing scene, exploding in popularity during the first decade of

the 21st century. Food blogs have a similar rhetorical purpose to cookbooks in that they feature

recipes, which are typically categorized within the website by type of cuisine, part of the meal

(e.g. side dishes, desserts), and/or by dietary restrictions (e.g. vegetarian, gluten-free). Food

blogs, however, expand the traditional recipe headnotes section to include the personal touch of

the food memoir, often including stories about mundane and significant events in the blogger's

life. These headnotes are the primary spaces where food bloggers craft a textual persona, and as a

result they are crucial to developing a blogger's ethotic relationship with readers. While

cookbooks and food memoirs also provide valuable insight into the development of an author's

textual persona and ethos, including food blogs in this analysis allows me to compare traditional

print genres to what Douglas Eyman calls "born-digital" texts (59)—texts that were originally

conceived on and developed for distribution by computers or similar technology. Blogs are

developed serially, and the digital nature of food blogs allows bloggers to modify individual

posts at will. These generic traits raise questions about the stability and cohesiveness of a food

blogger's textual persona—questions that will be attended to in this chapter.

It is important to note, however, that some of these affordances that we often consider

unique to born-digital texts are also possible in print. Newspaper columnists, including those in

the food sections of newspapers, write and publish work serially, allowing for a gradually-

developed textual persona like those of a food blogger. Newspapers also publish letters from

readers who are engaging with a previous issue's column or news coverage (although because of newspaper gatekeeping mechanisms, they are unlikely to carry the same vitriol as often appear in comment sections of blogs or news websites). The digital medium of food blogs and other websites, however, allows for a much greater volume of reader engagement because there is often no limit on the number of comments that can be posted on a particular page, and the speed at which comments can be exchanged creates the potential for more "real-time" engagement between blogger and readers (and between readers) than is typical of print genres in our current moment. The speed at which these exchanges can take place with born-digital texts provides rhetoricians with valuable opportunities to observe how bloggers construct their textual personas and negotiate an ethotic relationship at speeds that can approximate a "real-time" conversation. Chapter 4 will examine the role of the comment section in greater detail.

The primary texts under analysis in this chapter are the headnotes section of food blog posts. By headnotes, I refer to the text between the recipe title and the recipe instructions (whether in traditional recipe format or step-by-step directions), which in a traditional print cookbook provide serving suggestions, ingredient or equipment substitutions, the recipe's "origins" (see Tippen, *Inventing Authenticity*), and/or the context for why a recipe is being shared.[65] Food blog headnotes contain these same features; however, they are often much longer and more personal than the headnotes in cookbooks. A desire to contextualize a recipe is a deeply ingrained impulse, as Susan Leonardi notes in her foundational article "Recipes for Reading": "Like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be" (340). Establishing context often leads to the blogger sharing personal stories or anecdotes that they connect to the recipe.

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[65] Paula Salvio refers to this portion of the blog as the "culinary autobiography" (31), but using the cookbook genre's term "headnote" is useful to better see the parallels between the food blog and cookbook genres.

Food bloggers' personal stories and anecdotes are examples of what Martha S. Cheng calls "small stories" which "involve discourse with narrative elements or a narrative orientation" (Cheng 205).[66] Alexandra Georgakopoulou further describes small stories as ". . . an umbrella-term that covers a gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell" (Georgakopoulou 123). "Small stories" are a key way in which food bloggers create textual personas that lay the foundation for establishing ethos between blogger and audience. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, readers require that a writer project a (perceived) stable textual identity in order to create the hospitable conditions for an ethotic relationship to develop. The serial nature of blogs allows a food blogger to create a textual persona by *curating* their lives and personality traits through various small stories, which eventually accrete into a coherent self-narrative.

I have chosen to focus specifically on women-authored food blogs because women have consistently authored the vast majority of food blogs (Rodney et al.). This point is worth noting because studies consistently show that the internet is often not a safe space for women, with a 2020 Plan International[67] survey finding that more than half of their female-identifying 14,000 survey participants have been harassed online (*Free to be Online?* 7). Such harassment curtails women's participation in online spaces (*Free to be Online*; Jee). Analyzing the texts women *do* produce in digital environments is an important component of feminist digital rhetorics scholarship, which is why I have limited my focus to food blogs authored by women. My analysis of the food blogs *Budget Bytes, Damn Delicious*, *Smitten Kitchen*, and *The Pioneer*

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[66] See also Bamberg

[67] Plan International is a "a development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls" ("The Organisation").

Woman Cooks shows that women-identifying food bloggers must negotiate hegemonic femininity when constructing their textual personas, and the language they use within and around these small stories often follows gendered discourse patterns in what I argue is a concession to the dominant codes of feminine behavior in the United States. This conclusion contradicts previous claims by rhetoricians such as Paula Salvio and Elizabeth Fleitz that food blogs are necessarily a liberating public writing genre for women. Rather, the food blog genre might actually reinforce and reward performances of traditional femininity as a necessary step in attracting readers to their blogs.

Small Stories and CMC

Blog headnotes function as a digital communication space similar to the computer-mediated communication (CMC) genres Cheng studies (email, instant messages, and synchronous chat). Blog posts also qualify as "planned, formal texts" (Cheng 198), in that they are composed and capable of being edited before being shared with an audience that might or might not line up with the bloggers' expectations. However, the iterative, almost serial, nature of blog post headnotes does not contain the grand scope of a "big story"; rather, these personal anecdotes and stories accumulate to gradually construct a textual persona. These "small stories" therefore differ from the "big stories" that Georgakopoulou contrasts them with—what we often associate with traditional literary monographs and which are most relevant in this dissertation in the form of the food memoir (see Chapter 1).

Additionally, blogs offer interaction between the blogger and readers in the form of the comment section as well as direct communication via a contact form or email. A blogger therefore has the opportunity to engage with their audience directly by replying to comments or emails, or *through modifying blog post headnotes* to appeal to vocal readers. While the

interactive potential of blog comment sections will be explored in more detail in the following chapter, I bring it up here because the opportunity for digitally-mediated interaction between blogger and audience fits the description of online identity formation outlined by Cheng:

> Online identity formation (or ethos) is especially interesting since in certain forms of CMC participants lack prior knowledge of each other and it is likely they will never meet face-to-face. Thus, individuals have the opportunity to create their online personas, distinct from their personas in other forms of interaction. While the research in this area is rich and informed by different disciplinary perpectives [sic], generally it suggests that online ethos is more negotiated and interactionally developed than rhetoricians' traditional notion of ethos as planned and performed by a speaker. (Cheng 199-200)

Cheng's claim that online ethos is "more negotiated and interactionally developed" than other planned communications creates space for rhetoricians to consider the development of ethos in digital texts differently from established rhetorical strategies in print texts and speeches. This shift is important if digital rhetoricians are going to move beyond simply applying traditional rhetorical methods to born-digital texts. Considering the impact of the interaction between blogger and audience on the blogger's textually-rendered identity is therefore essential to any analysis of the born-digital medium of the food blog, and I will attend to it more closely in Chapter 4.

Cheng's observation about the opportunities CMC provides for the interactional and negotiated development of textual personas is useful in making distinctions between born-digital texts and other forms of communication; however, her claim runs the risk of discounting bloggers' rhetorical agency. While the iterative and more interactional nature of CMC allows

bloggers a more negotiated textual persona than other forms of written/spoken communication such as speeches or printed monographs, planning and performance are still very much a part of the equation, as this chapter will demonstrate. Furthermore, since all four of the bloggers I examine in this chapter are able to make a living off of their blogs, it is impossible in this case to discount the influence of late-capitalist and neoliberal discourses on the bloggers' rhetorical choices (see Rossette-Crake). While this influence will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, it bears mentioning here as a critique of Cheng.

Historic conceptions of textual personas as planned and constructed cannot be entirely discounted in CMC, and the small stories that bloggers choose to share should be considered both "planned and performed" (Cheng 200). While the serial nature of blogs certainly makes them more interactional than many other forms of communication, readers can only comment on or interact with a post *after* it has been written and posted. While bloggers can revise a post and republish it in response to audience feedback, they must make choices during the initial composition process that still bear resemblance to the rhetorical decisions of orators and authors of more traditional publications.

Food Blogs, Genre, and the Divisiveness of Headnotes

In her article "Dishing It Out," Paula Salvio argues for food blogs to be considered a form of food memoir (32). While I acknowledge the many memoirist qualities of food blogs, placing them under the umbrella of the food memoir invites us to ignore crucial differences between them. The "born-digital" nature of food blogs, in particular, distinguishes them from the traditionally print food memoir, as well as the iterative, serial-like manner of blog post publishing. Furthermore, food memoirs encapsulate a complete narrative arc, whereas food blogs have no clear "resolution" (except, perhaps, when a food blogger stops publishing, which may or

may not be formally announced to readers, or even planned by the blogger ahead of time).

Moreover, as I argued above, food blogs are characterized more by "small stories" than "big

stories"—even if some small stories connect to form a larger narrative.

I share Risa Applegarth's view that ethos is impacted by the genre(s) a rhetor uses to

communicate, as well as the audience's expectations of who is qualified to "speak" in a

particular genre (44-45). Central to my work in this chapter is expanding Applegarth's claim that

genres are ". . . spaces where rhetors adopt subject positions and access rhetorical resources to

meet social and communicative ends" (Applegarth 44). However, Applegarth focuses on the

hurdles one woman (Mary Austin) faced when trying to establish ethos in what was perceived as

a masculine genre (the nature essay). Given that women are the primary writers of food blogs, I

am interested in whether generic conventions—and reader expectations of those conventions—

ask women to perform femininity in particular ways. Furthermore, it is worth considering how

the feminized space of the food blog affects how it is perceived both by those who neither write

nor read food blogs, and as a site of scholarly examination.

While the food blog is a relatively young genre, especially compared to the cookbook,

generic expectations do exist—even if readers do not necessarily appreciate them. For example,

the headnotes of many food blogs are a divisive generic feature. Some readers might gravitate

toward a particular food blog because they find the blogger's headnotes pleasing, while others

(including many people I have spoken to while writing this chapter) find these headnotes

annoying. In *Inventing Authenticity*, Tippen notes the divisiveness of cookbook headnotes,

positing that differences of opinion on this generic feature "draw a distinction between recipe

readers and recipe *users*" (151; author's emphasis). In other words, those who simply like to

read recipes or cookbooks tend to enjoy the headnotes as well, while those looking for a recipe to execute will likely skip them.

Food bloggers themselves must also be aware of this dual readership, as so many of them feature page-jump buttons that allow readers to skip directly from the blog post title to the recipe. Both *Budget Bytes* and *Smitten Kitchen* include page-jump links to the recipe, and Perelman also includes a link directly to the comments section. However, this feature is not universal: neither *Damn Delicious* nor *Pioneer Woman* include page-jump links. Rhee of *Damn Delicious* only includes a page-jump link to the comments section. Drummond, on the other hand, does include a sort of "recipe card" along the right side of the screen, so readers can have immediate access to the recipe or read the entire post and find a printer-friendly version of the recipe card again at the bottom. Interestingly, this right-justified recipe card does not appear to be original to the blog but rather a later addition: a few of the oldest recipes do not feature one at all (e.g. "Bread Pudding" from 6 June 2007), while other older recipes have ones dated later than the original blog post (many of these posts seem to have been updated with this recipe card in 2009, for instance). This evidence suggests either a shift in readers' desire towards a more transactional experience over time (i.e. "just give me the recipe") or perhaps the extensive headnotes were a feature of the original, more journal-style blogs from which food blogs spun off (an explanation supported by Laperruque and Sellers[68]).

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[68] Sellers also argues that the part of the reason the long-form headnotes persist has to do with Search Engine Optimization (SEO), which allows content to be found online through search engines like Google. As Seller explains, ". . . long-form content corresponds to higher search rankings. Search engines assume that web pages with longer content are more likely to fully answer a user's question" and "Search engines also reward original content (and penalize what experts call duplicate content) . . . . recipes tend to be copied and shared. That recipe for zucchini bread might be almost exactly the same across ten different blogs. But the addition of original long-form narrative content—called headnotes—boosts its SEO" ("Why Are Food Blog Recipes So Long?"). Another important factor that Sellers does not mention is that recipes themselves are not copyrightable, which is a key reason for their duplication.

The criticism of extensive headnotes might, however, be evidence of a more insidious problem in the form of sexism. Katharine McCain notes the gendered nature of criticism to women's food blogs that feature long headnotes in her October 2019 post, "'Recipe or Shut the Fuck Up': Women's Writing, Fandom, and the Art of Food Blogging." Gendered criticism exists despite the fact that sharing personal stories before a recipe is not only common among female food bloggers, it is also a common practice by Food Network celebrity chefs, both male and female (McCain). McCain notes, "It's only when women as amateur cooks [share personal stories or anecdotes] for free that people feel entitled to express, usually through GIFs, how much they want to stab them or chuck them out a window." Emily January Petersen's analysis of "mom blogs" as technical communication is one way to examine this phenomenon. Petersen argues that women who blog about their experiences as mothers are stigmatized and considered amateurs because their work takes place in the home and because the blog is not typically viewed as a professional writing space—even though they engage in many of the same tasks as professional writers in a traditional workplace ("Redefining" 278). While the focus of mom blogs and food blogs differs, the conditions under which the two operate are quite similar, as food bloggers also generally perform their recipe testing and writing at home, food preparation in the home is a domestic task and therefore traditionally considered feminine, and food bloggers are overwhelmingly women. Therefore, it is not overreaching to posit that the general perception of food blogging is more hobby than profession, despite the fact that some food bloggers generate enough revenue from their blogs to make it their full-time occupation (including all of the bloggers I examine in this chapter).[69]

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[69] Julie Powell's 2002 food blog *The Julie/Julia Project* was another important early food blog that shaped many of food blogging's generic conventions. Her blog resulted in a book contract (for *Julie & Julia*, published in 2005), which was later adapted into a 2009 film starring Amy Adams and Meryl Streep. Food writer Dianne Jacob refers to Powell as the person who "put a public face on food blogging" ("Julie & Julia").

This perception might also be a holdover from the early days of food blogging. In a 2017

post, Sarah Walker Caron, author of the *Sarah's Cucina Bella* food blog, mourns what she feels

is a loss of community within the food blogging sphere since the "early days" of food blogging.

She writes that, "[When I first started blogging about food in 2005] There was just writing, food

and the occasional picture. It was simple and unadulterated. It was an earnest community built by

people who truly loved food, loved cooking and loved sharing it. We talked about our families

on our blogs because in real life food and family go hand in hand. Where did that go?" (Caron).

Later in the post, Caron attributes the change in part to the monetization of blogging. In a

comment left on this post, Carrie @ Poet in the Pantry echoes Caron's sentiments: "I'm with you

on this. It's part of why I stepped back [from blogging] 6 months ago . . . . Because it simply

isn't what it was in 2010 when I began. I miss the personal connections. I miss getting to know

each other. I miss the life part of it" (Carrie). Likewise, commenter Kelly writes:

> . . . as the tide toward monetization came along I got swept up with it, even
>
> though it was never my ingoing goal. I felt the pressure to make things look more
>
> and more professional. Conversations became less and less about the food or the
>
> friendships and more about audience #'s ads, and money. I remember a blogger I
>
> had really liked and respected basically laughing in my face when I told him I
>
> didn't want to make my blog my career. (Kelly)

The post and comments above highlight changes that food bloggers are noting about food

blogging in general. The ways in which bloggers like Moncel, Perlman and Rhee have adapted to

this seismic shift across the genre is the subject of the next chapter; my point here is to

acknowledge that even in its relatively short lifetime, food blogging has evolved a great deal—at

least from the perspective of some of its earliest practitioners. This change in the way food blogs

operate has likely shaped (and been shaped by) audience interests and expectations of what food blogs should do and provide to their readers.

Food Blogs and Gender

The criticism of food bloggers sharing their "small stories" and its connection to the gendered nature of food blogging compels me to situate this chapter among those who have attended to the relationship between food writing and gender more broadly, particularly in the realms of technical and professional communication. Paula Salvio's article "Dishing It Out: Food Blogs and Post-Feminist Domesticity" is one such important piece. Near the end of her article, Salvio concludes:

> . . . we can see that many of the female bloggers transform domestic experiences into a form of domestic authority that is expressed through a mix of humor, memoir, food writing, and serial romance literature. This hybrid form can be read as a gesture of self-invention that establishes a degree of self-determination from having created a lucrative writing career. By securing an income for domestic labor, many of the most popular female bloggers who market a post-feminist subjectivity can also be read as challenging the status quo of gendered domesticity by fracturing the split between the public and private spheres. (Salvio 38).

By "post-feminist," Salvio refers to the return in recent years of the idea that "natural sexual differences" exist between men and women (35). While Salvio sees post-feminism as problematic, she also argues in the passage above that food bloggers who publicly transmit this idea in their writing can still be subversive by financially profiting off of communicating their own domestic labor. I acknowledge that Salvio certainly qualifies her argument for the liberating potential of such post-feminist rhetoric; however, I believe the situation is even more

problematic than she admits. By profiting from their performance of traditional domesticity, these bloggers also reinforce this historically-dominant "script" of feminine behavior. Women who read their blogs and aspire to the same degree of domestic achievement as these bloggers are likely not benefitting economically from their pursuit of domestic perfection. In other words, the relatively few women who might profit from publically displaying their performance of domesticity pales in comparison to the many readers who might be influenced to invest more of their time and energy in pursuing domesticity without monetary compensation.

Elizabeth Fleitz sees female-authored food blogs even more positively than Salvio. According to Fleitz, "Now that [cooking] has been accepted into the public sphere, on television and on the Web, cooking is one area where women are allowed full reign to compose and produce, without the previous limitations imposed on them by men and patriarchal forces" (Fleitz 3). I find Fleitz's view overly-optimistic, as my food blog analysis demonstrates that female food bloggers often deploy traditional markers of femininity. Such deployment shapes the bloggers' textual personas and in many cases lends itself to the creation of ethos for a particular reader. By casting many food blogs authored by women as "challenging the status quo" through "fracturing the split between the public and private spheres" (Salvio) and as a space where women are not bound by "limitations imposed on them by men and patriarchal forces" (Fleitz), we risk ignoring gendered patterns in food blogs that are not consistent with such an emancipating narrative.

My skepticism about the liberating potential of food blogs is shared by other scholars. For example, Marie Moeller and Erin Frost argue that, ". . . cookbooks may, indeed, be liberatory texts and cooking a liberatory activity. However, we recognize that context matters and so we are arguing that technical communicators must be careful to trouble narratives that

(re)classify entire genres as liberating" ("Food Fights" 1). Taking Moeller & Frost's warning seriously requires that this chapter consider the ways in which food bloggers might still perform (and perhaps be *required* to perform) hegemonic femininity in order to establish ethos between themselves and their audience *in addition* to the food blog's "liberatory" potential. A recent interpretive discourse analysis of 22 award-winning, women-authored food blogs performed by Rodney et al. has begun this work. The authors of the study note that, "Food blogs . . . *socially construct and legitimizte [sic] particular representations of women*" (Rodney et al. 690; my emphasis), and their study revealed that, "When foodwork is framed [by bloggers] as pleasurable, leisurely, and a matter of choice . . . traditional gender roles that situate women as disproportionately responsible for a family's social reproduction remain unchallenged and further entrenched within a postfeminist context where change is not seen as urgent or even necessary" (Rodney et al. 701). Rodney et al.'s study does important work and uses similar methods to those in this chapter for its analysis (manual coding of sample posts from each blog using grounded theory), their approach is more narrowly focused than my own in its specific focus on gendered discourse. This chapter, on the other hand, situates this gendered discourse within a larger discussion of textual persona construction by food bloggers and how ethotic relationships are developed in food writing more broadly.

Method and Methodology

In the subsections below, I outline the method and methodology I used to analyze the food blogs by Drummond, Moncel, Perelman, and Rhee. My use of the terms "method" and "methodology" reflects the differences in these terms articulated in Stuart Blythe's "Coding Digital Texts and Multimedia": by "method," I refer to the "procedures" and "techniques" I used for data collection and analysis, while "methodology" refers to the "assumptions" and "theories"

underlying these procedures and techniques (Blythe 205). Blythe states that coding allows

researchers to measure patterns across large quantities of text and is especially useful for tracking

the frequency with which a word, phrase, or idea appears in source texts (222). One way of doing

this is by using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), such as NVivo,

which allows researchers to compare the larger themes and particular frequencies of words or

phrases across a large collection of texts. In this dissertation, I chose to use manual qualitative

coding[70] methods on a smaller set of texts and to compare rhetorical patterns *within* this text set,

not to other blogs outside of it, in order to conduct what might be called an "augmented close

reading." The benefit of this method is that it allows me to be precise in my descriptive claims

within the set of texts I am looking at and notice patterns within the text set that might be

overlooked through more traditional close reading approaches. In other words, the specific

deployment of qualitative data coding I use in this dissertation does not enable me to compare a

large number of blogs so much as closely examine the rhetorical practices of a select number of

bloggers.[71]

In this chapter, I employ manual qualitative data coding techniques to analyze 120

headnote samples taken from four food blogs (30 samples/blog) in MS Word.[72] Beginning with

manual coding of a smaller textual sample using grounded theory[73] techniques helped control for

the possibility that I would superimpose my research question onto the data and meant that I was

attending to *context* as well as *content* during first-and-second-cycle coding. With so many food

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[70] I use Johnny Saldaña's definition of "coding," which he describes as "a heuristic . . . an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas or algorithms to follow" (8).

[71] For the next phase of this project, I plan to use CAQDAS to compare a greater number of food blogs using the rhetorical patterns I have noted within my text set as a guide.

[72] While some food-related blogs do engage more explicitly with feminism and gender (e.g. *Sistah Vegan*, *Feminist Food Journal*, *The Feminist Kitchen*), those that I have found are not focused on creating and sharing recipes, which are the type of food blogs I am interested in for this dissertation.

[73] According to Saldaña, grounded theory is "a systematic methodological approach to qualitative inquiry that generates theory 'grounded' in the data themselves" (270).

blogs to choose from, I narrowed my focus to blogs that, as of February 28, 2020, were listed in

the top 20 most popular and influential food blogs, according to statistics compiled by *American

Food Bloggers.* I further narrowed my selection pool by focusing on blogs that are single-

authored and whose primary purpose is recipe-sharing. Finally, I chose blogs that are not

specialized in food type or cuisine (as opposed to blogs that specialize only in baking, for

example)[74] and where the blogger and audience were primarily based in the U.S.[75] The

geographic restriction reduces cross-cultural differences in feminine expression, and single-

author blogs make it easier to trace a particular blogger's development of a textual persona.

Furthermore, like Salvio, "I'm drawn to the autobiographical features of many of the food blogs

written and read by women that appear to celebrate women's place in the kitchen as home cooks,

mothers, and weekend hosts" (32). In this sense, then, the blogs I have selected for this chapter

are representative of a particular type of woman-authored food blog in their domestic focus, yet

they are also unique in their widespread popularity.

The resulting four food blogs I examine in this chapter are *Budget Bytes* by Beth Moncel

(blog started in 2009),[76] *Damn Delicious* by Chungah Rhee (blog started in 2011),[77] and *The

Pioneer Woman Cooks* by Ree Drummond (blog started in 2006; first recipe posted in May

2007).[78] I also added a fourth blog, *Smitten Kitchen* by Deb Perelman (blog started in 2006)[79]

because, while not in the Top 20 at the time of selection, it is one of the longest continuously-

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[74] While this criterion is perhaps not entirely necessary, I wanted to control for difference in audience composition or expectations that might arise around a more niche food/recipe topic. My assumption is that a more diverse audience frequents general food blogs than specialized food blogs, which may influence both the readers' reactions to and expectations of content and the blogger's rhetorical choices.

[75] From June through August 2020, over 70% of total web traffic for these blogs came from within the United States (SimilarWeb).

[76] ranked #17, as of February 28, 2020; #19 as of June 19, 2020

[77] ranked #6, as of February 28, 2020; #11 as of June 19, 2020

[78] ranked #19, as of February 28, 2020; #32 as of June 19, 2020

[79] ranked #33, as of February 28, 2020; #39 as of June 19, 2020

operating food blogs and considered by some to be the "ur-food blog"[80] (Gould). Each of these

blogs is well-established and receives millions of page visits each year,[81] with hundreds-to-

thousands of individual posts. All of these food bloggers have also published cookbooks

following the success of their respective blogs. The blog-to-cookbook publishing order is

significant, as it means these bloggers constructed their textual personas and developed an

ethotic relationship with readers *prior* to external credentialing by the publishing industry (or in

Drummond's case, *The Food Network*). It was the success of their food blogs that brought on the

book deals, not the reverse, indicating that it was the textual personas they built through their

blogs that established their audience, not traditional publishing channels.

For the sake of space and ease of comparison, I include salient details about Moncel,

Rhee, Drummond, and Perelman's food blogs in Table 1 below. The majority of this information

is available on the blogs themselves, though some information (e.g. Ree Drummond's education)

was gleaned from online interviews.

Table 1: Food Blog and Blogger Information				
	Budget Bytes	**Damn Delicious**	**Pioneer Woman**	**Smitten Kitchen**
Blog Author	Beth Moncel	Chungah Rhee	Ree Drummond	Deb Perelman
Age	Mid-30s (approx.)	Mid-30s (approx.)	51	43
Blog Started	2009	2011	2006	2006 (food blog iteration)
Current Blogger Location	Nashville, TN	Chicago, IL	Pawhuska, OK	New York, NY
Published Cookbooks	1 (latest published in 2014)	2 (latest published in 2019)	6 (latest published in 2019)	2 (latest published in 2017)
Educational Background	B.S. Nutritional Science from Louisiana State University (2007); B.S. Clinical	Bachelors implied; Masters in Public Health (2012)	University of Southern California, Gerontology (1991)	B.A. in Psychology with a Minor in Fine Arts from George Washington University; Masters in Art Therapy

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[80] Vying with Powell's *The Julie/Julia Project* for that honor. Powell's blog was not part of my sample because her focus was on cooking all of the recipes in Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, not creating and sharing recipes.

[81] Website analytics show the following number of page visits for June-August 2020: *Budget Bytes*, 12.23 million; *Damn Delicious*, 22.66 million; *Smitten Kitchen*, 4.179 million; *Pioneer Woman*, 7.832 million (SimilarWeb).

	Laboratory Science from Louisiana State U (2011)			
Blog Instructional Methods	Traditional recipes; step-by-step directions with photos; video demos	Traditional recipes; occasional videos	Traditional recipe; step-by-step instructions with photos; videos	Traditional recipes; video demos on Instagram (some videos on her blog as well)
Social Media Presence	Instagram; Facebook; Twitter; Pinterest; YouTube; App	Facebook; Instagram; Pinterest; Twitter; YouTube	Facebook; Twitter; Pinterest; Instagram; Tiny Kitchen	Facebook; Twitter; Pinterest; Instagram; YouTube

As a qualitative analysis of all of the posts from each blog is beyond the scope of this project, I developed a schema for post selection. While all of the bloggers date their posts, a purely chronological selection (to track development of authorial persona over time) was not ideal because many readers of food blogs are not regular readers and do not peruse blogs chronologically. In fact, many readers are directed to blogs through other channels, such as through seeing a recipe on Pinterest or performing a Google search for a recipe for a specific dish. I elected to randomly select three posts across 10 recipe categories[82] (chicken, desserts, etc) of each blog, which would come close to replicating the experience of random visitors.[83] My final text set consisted of the headnotes from 30 posts from each blog (for a total of 120 individual blog post headnotes). [84] I then conducted a first round of open coding that consisted of

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[82] I landed on the number 10 because the blog with the fewest recipe categories (*The Pioneer Woman*) has only 11 main recipe categories. *Smitten Kitchen*, on the other hand, has 171 categories, some with as few as one recipe (e.g. parsnips, ramps) and the largest having 312 (Vegetarian) ("Recipes—*Smitten Kitchen*"; accessed 3 Feb. 2020).

[83] Within these categories, I selected posts published in different years, ranging from early in the blog's history to 2019, so as to not favor any particular era of the blog. Finally, within these categories I selected recipes with a minimum of 50 ratings or comments, to ensure the post was widely viewed. As I do not have access to the blog's server, it is difficult to otherwise track page views for a particular blog post. Additionally, comments and ratings signify that readers took time to interact with the blog beyond simply viewing the recipe.

[84] I copied the headnote text from each blog post in my sample and pasted it in a Word document. This method gave me a static data set to work from, in case any of the bloggers updated these posts during my analysis. While updates to posts might not significantly affect my analysis, such as in the case of updating photography, significant changes to the recipe itself might result in a revision of the blog headnotes as well. In fact, my initial headnotes sample does include some recipes that had previously been updated by the blogger. A perfect example of the importance of

closely reading the headnotes for each blogger, noting content that seemed particular to each blogger, as well as features that seemed common across the blogs (e.g. the use of personal anecdotes or hyperlinks).[85]

I completed a second round of coding (1CR2) using a combination of Narrative and, to a lesser degree, Values Coding methods.[86] I chose these methods based on the patterns I noticed in my first round of open coding, particularly the bloggers' tendency to begin each post with a "small story" (Cheng). These stories shape the bloggers' textual personas, and the ways bloggers describe themselves and their lives reveal their values—which again inform their textual personas. I transferred these codes[87] to an Excel Spreadsheet and sorted each code into one of six categories: Generic Markers, Authorial Persona, Literary Elements, Narrative Elements, Audience Engagement, [88] and Tone.[89] In this chapter, I focus on codes from the Authorial Persona, Literary Elements, and Narrative Elements categories, attending to how they shape each blogger's textual persona and encourage the development of ethotic relationships between blogger and reader. I selected these categories because they provided the richest sites for analysis of the blogger's rhetorical choices.

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creating a static data set occurred in May 2020, when the *Pioneer Woman* blog was given a complete overhaul, resulting in readers losing easy access to her old posts unless they know the specific titles to search for.

[85] A form of Initial Coding, as described by Johnny Saldaña in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (100-105). He notes that elsewhere (including the first edition of his own book) this coding technique is called Open Coding.

[86] According to Saldaña, "Narrative Coding applies the conventions of (primarily) literary elements and analysis to qualitative texts most often in the form of stories" (131) whereas "Values Coding is the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflects a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview" (110).

[87] I likewise use Saldaña's definition of "codes": "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (3).

[88] The ways in which these bloggers engage with their audiences is a key focus of Chapter 4, and some of the elements of Audience Engagement I found through my coding overlap with other categories discussed below. As a result, I did not analyze Audience Engagement separately in this chapter.

[89] See Appendix for these Word and Excel documents.

Before I continue, however, I want to digress for a moment to note the important role that blog authors' biographies (typically found on an "About Me" page) play in constructing their textual personas. These mostly-static pages give the bloggers a chance to summarize their textual persona for readers and typically give an overview of their lives, highlight their reason for blogging, and "brand" their blog—distinguishing it from other food blogs.

Figure 1: *Budget Bytes* Screenshot. Beth Moncel's "About" page, taken 19 June 2020

Beth Moncel of *Budget Bytes,* for example begins her profile with "I'm a food lover, number cruncher, and meticulous budgeter" (as illustrated in Fig. 1 above; Moncel "About"). By contrast, Deb Perelman introduces herself in the following way: "Deb Perelman is the kind of person you might innocently ask what the difference is between summer and winter squash and she'll go on for about twenty minutes before coming up for air to a cleared room and you soundly snoring" (Perelman "About"). I compare Moncel and Perelman as a brief example of how "About" pages contribute to textual identity formation in food blogs. Each blogger's self-

characterization is individualized and tonally consistent with their blog posts: Moncel's driving theme is tasty, healthy-ish food on a budget (including a price breakdown for each recipe), whereas Perelman is known for her self-deprecating humor and charm. While many blog readers might not peruse the bloggers' "About" pages, they function as an encapsulation of each blogger's textual persona. Discrepancies between the "About" pages and the rest of the bloggers' posts would destabilize these personas, resulting in a more true-to-life portrayal of the writer but eroding the consistency readers depend on to make sense of the author.

Blog Analysis: Results of Sample Manual Coding

In this section, I analyze the results of my second round of first-cycle coding (1CR2) of the headnotes from 30 sample posts each from *Budget Bytes*, *Damn Delicious, Pioneer Woman,* and *Smitten Kitchen*. I attend to the ways in which each blogger incrementally constructs a textual persona through their post headnotes through self-characterization in the form of 1) personality traits and characteristics, 2) values communicated through descriptive language, 3) personal anecdotes and small stories, and 4) use of figurative language (such as hyperbole and metaphor). In each case, I also attend to the gendered discourse patterns of each food blogger. I have elected to organize this section by the strategies used rather than by blogger to better compare the degree to which each blogger uses these techniques and how the same techniques yield different textual personas depending on how they are employed by the blogger.

Personality Traits and Characteristics

All bloggers convey personality through the tone and self-description used in their blog posts. The stories they tell about themselves also factor into their authorial personality, so there will be some overlap between this subsection and the next; however, my primary focus in this subsection is to look at the implicit and explicit self-description used by Moncel, Rhee, Perelman, and Drummond. "Implicit" in this context refers to personality traits and

characteristics that can be inferred from the bloggers' language (e.g. use of trust-based language like "I promise" or "honestly, guys" portrays the blogger as someone who is trustworthy or honest). "Explicit" self-description, on the other hand, refers to moments when the bloggers directly describe or characterize themselves in a particular way (e.g. physical characteristics, "I'm a messy person"). Table 2 below shows all of the Personality Traits and Characteristic codes and sub-codes for each blogger.[90]

Table 2: Code Map Comparisons from Category 2: Authorial Persona, Sub-category: Personality Traits/Characteristics*		
Blogger	**Code (Code Frequency)**	**Sub-Code (Sub-Code Frequency)**
Moncel (*Budget Bytes*)	Budget-Conscious (17)	
	Trustworthy/Honest (7)	Intellectual Honesty (6) Helpful/Guide (1)
	Other (18)	Innovative (3) Anti-Food Waste (3) Topical Expertise (3) Health-conscious (2) Values Simplicity/Ease (2) Loves pizza (2) Confident (1) Reasonable (1) Rises to a challenge (1)
Rhee (*Damn Delicious*)	Trustworthy/Honest (20)	General (15) Intellectual Honesty (2) Helpful/Guide (2) Self-Revision (1)
	Health-Conscious (10)	General (8) Calorie-Conscious (2)
	Other (11)	Budget-Conscious (3) Self-Aware (2) Self-Deprecating (2) Californian (2) Procrastinator (1) Thorough (1)
Perelman (*Smitten Kitchen*)	Self-Deprecating Humor (35)	
	Trustworthy/Honest (22)	Intellectual Honesty (12 General (8) Helpful/Guide (2)
	Other (20)	Humility (3) Topical Expertise (3) Integrity (1) "Smartass" (1) Anti-Food Waste (1)

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[90] I grouped any code with fewer than 5 instances as a sub-code under "Other." I also use color to emphasize the most prominent codes for each blogger.

		"Nervous Wreck" (1) Considerate (1) Flexible (1) Lazy (1) Realistic (1) Thorough (1) Polite (1) New Yorker (1) Innovative (1) Naively Optimistic (1) Focused Shopper (1)
Drummond (*Pioneer Woman*)	Self-Deprecating Humor (8)	
	Wholesome/Folksy (7)	
	Trustworthy/Honest (5)	General (3) Helpful/Guide (2) Intellectual Honesty (1)
	Other (16)	Physical Description (3) Budget-Conscious (2) Innovative (2) Educated (2) False Portrayal of Self (2) Old-Fashioned (1) Down-to-Earth (1) Spontaneous (1) Imaginative (1) Always Hungry (1)

* See appendix for full Category Maps

A review of all of the codes and sub-codes in Table 2 reveals similarities and differences in the ways each blogger characterizes herself. For instance, some form of trustworthiness and honesty is conveyed by each blogger; in fact, in each case it is one of the top two or three codes in this category. This pattern suggests that building trust between blogger and reader is important—if not essential—to establishing an audience and convincing readers to try the blogger's recipes. An emphasis on trust makes sense in terms of developing an ethotic relationship between rhetor and audience: classical definitions of ethos, after all, depict ethos as relating to the credibility of the rhetor. A general example of bloggers using trust-based language is when, in her recipe for "Instant Pot Swedish Meatballs," Rhee writes, "But don't worry. This is a good Swedish meatball. I would never steer you wrong". In addition to general reassurances of the blogger's credibility, there are also instances of what I code as "Intellectual Honesty,"

which are when the bloggers give credit to others for the recipes or recipe improvements they share. For instance, in her recipe for "'The One' Chocolate Mug Cake," Moncel credits blogger Jessie of the blog *Made from Scratch* for developing the mug cake recipe she is sharing that day. Another variation on intellectual honesty is when bloggers admit their own limitations or lack of knowledge, such as when Drummond confesses that she does not actually have a reason for her preparation requirements for making "Onion Strings." Admittedly, this last example could also be interpreted as a refusal to share knowledge with readers (if we read her statement as tongue-in-cheek), which does crop up in the blogs at times—though very infrequently in my samples.[91] Overall, though, trust-and-honesty language used by these bloggers suggests that credibility, while not the essence of ethos, is still very much a component.

Another similarity across these codes is both Perelman and Drummond's use of self-deprecating humor. The use of such humor can make a blogger seem more approachable to her audience, such as when Perelman confides, "(Yes, I know not liking cheese-filled things is crazy, but I've never feigned to be anything but.)" ("Artichoke Ravioli") or when Drummond says, "That doesn't mean I'm good at math or logic—it simply means I'm good at eating" ("Chicken Alfredo"). In their analysis of the relationship between humor and food in Great Britain, Peter Jackson and Angela Meah found that the instances of self-deprecating humor in their study ". . . [stem] from the 'background disposition' of food's social value and its central place within the moral discourse attached to 'feeding the family'" (269). While I do not dispute the "moral discourse" surrounding food, my analysis reveals a different use of self-deprecating humor; namely, that self-deprecating humor is one way in which Perelman and Drummond make

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[91] I coded such omissions as "Withholding Information" under Category 5: Audience Engagement, Sub-Category Audience Interaction (see blog Category Maps in appendix). Drummond, for instance, only withholds information once (twice if you count the above example).

themselves appear more relatable and "likeable" to their audience. These particular deprecations also play into gender stereotypes, with the bloggers portraying themselves as either "crazy" or bad at math and logic. While not every instance of self-deprecating humor used by Perelman and Drummond is necessarily gendered, these tongue-in-cheek self-portrayals show them constructing a persona that is at least in part stereotypically-feminine. Combining the likability factor of self-deprecating humor with stereotypical gender traits suggests that to some extent, Perelman and Drummond's likeability is contingent on not straying too far from feminine stereotypes.

Furthermore, as Matwick and Matwick argue, self-deprecation is used more frequently by women than men and that humor, at least in single-host cooking shows, can "[offer] the host a safe way to present a certain identity" (34). The cooking show studied by Matwick and Matwick is, in fact, *The Pioneer Woman*, and the authors conclude that Drummond's use of self-deprecating humor on her cooking show "[creates] a pseudo-relationship between the celebrity chef and the audience" and makes her (and other celebrity chefs) "more normal and thus more likeable" (34). While a TV show is generically quite different from a food blog, I believe it is safe to extrapolate their conclusions between the two in this instance.

Self-deprecating humor in *Smitten Kitchen* and *Pioneer Woman* posts also took the form of making fun of themselves for supposedly lacking skills related to running a blog and/or giving demonstrations of their cooking— skills associated with the bloggers' *professionalization*. When advertising an upcoming demonstration and audience meet-and-greet, for example, Perelman writes that her demonstration, ". . . should be entertaining as I've never demoed anything in my whole life" ("Pickled Grapes"). In one of her posts, Drummond pokes fun at her own writing by commenting that her previous paragraph ". . . made no sense. What a great (and fitting) way for

me to kick off Monday morning!" ("Chicken Mozzarella Pasta"). To circle back to a point made earlier by Petersen, women who blog about domestic life are still more often viewed as hobbyists than professionals—even if they derive income from those blogs. Why, then, would professional food bloggers actively downplay their own professionalism in the content of their blogs? I argue that this downplaying is one way even wildly-successful food bloggers send the message that food blogging is more "hobby" than "profession" and therefore still performs domesticity.

It might seem contradictory that bloggers like Perelman and Drummond would make an effort to cultivate trust between themselves and their readers and then seemingly undermine that trust by (good-naturedly) mocking their own abilities. However, this apparent contradiction makes more sense if we consider the discourse strategies women often employ to appear humble about their own abilities and successes, particularly to ward off unwanted criticism (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 60) and make themselves appear relatable (Matwick and Matwick 34). Hedging and diminishing one's successes are both strategies that project humility, although they also risk portraying the speaker as less capable or confident in her abilities. However, as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet note, humble or self-deprecating language does not only function to place the rhetor in a less-powerful position (158-159). Such a communicative style can also make the rhetor appear more oriented towards relationship—genuinely caring about her audience—than a more assertive or authoritative style (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 160). Readers might find a more assertive blogging persona less welcoming of their own prior knowledge or needs, making the interaction between blogger and reader feel more one-sided and less equal. In other words, food bloggers like Perelman and Drummond are in a much more complex rhetorical situation than they are often given credit for—they need to strike a delicate balance of projecting themselves as both competent and humble; aspirational and relatable. The demands of this

rhetorical situation limit the "liberating" potential of the genre for these bloggers in regards to gendered discourse, at least at this current moment in time.

Values Communicated through Description

In this section, I wish to add another dimension to the bloggers' development of their textual personas: their values, especially as communicated through descriptions of food. In other words, while a significant trope of food writing is vividly describing the dishes being prepared (in food blogging specifically to tempt readers to make the recipe themselves), the descriptive language chosen can reveal the bloggers' values, further contributing to the construction of their persona. Table 3 below shows all of the Description codes and sub-codes for each blogger.[92]

Table 3: Code Map Comparisons from Category 3: Literary Elements, Sub-category: Description*		
Blogger	**Code (Code Frequency)**	**Sub-Code (Sub-Code Frequency)**
Moncel (*Budget Bytes*)	Flavor (25)	
	Aesthetic (14)	
	Texture (12)	
	Healthy (6)	
	Versatility/Flexibility (6)	
	Simple/Unfussy (6)	
	Substantiality (5)	
	Easy (5)	
	Ingredient Uses & Characteristics (5)	
Rhee (*Damn Delicious*)	Superlative (36)	Amazing (11) Perfect (9) Best (6) Favorite (5) Easiest (3) Most ____ (3)
	Texture (34)	
	Fast (22)	
	Flavor (19)	
	Easy (18)	
	Healthy (16)	

[92] For the sake of space, I omitted the "Other" codes and sub-codes from this table (see Category Maps in appendix for full list of description codes/sub-codes). As with Table 2, I grouped any code with fewer than 5 instances as a sub-code under "Other." I also use color to emphasize the most prominent codes for each blogger.

	Recipe Components (15)	
	Simple/Unfussy (15)	
	Versatility/Convenience (15)	
	Comfort Food (13)	Nostalgia/American Pastoral (7) General (6)
	Ingredient Uses/Characteristics (8)	
	Cooking Method (7)	
	Aesthetic (7)	
	Size/Quantity (6)	
Perelman (*Smitten Kitchen*)	Aesthetic (40)	
	Flavor (40)	
	Texture (30)	
	Superlative (22)	
	Recipe Components (16)	
	Size (11)	
	Delicious (10)	
	Easy (7)	
	Simple/Unfussy (7)	
	Comfort Food (6)	Nostalgia (4) General (2)
	Seasonality (5)	
	Substantiality (5)	
Drummond (*Pioneer Woman*)	Superlative (15)	
	Delicious (15)	
	Comfort Food (13)	Nostalgia/American Pastoral (9) General (4)
	Flavor (10)	
	Simple/Unfussy (8)	
	Texture (7)	
	Versatility/Convenience (7)	
	Size (6)	
	Aesthetic (5)	
	Easy (5)	

* See appendix for full Category Maps

I begin my analysis by acknowledging some broad patterns, starting with the lowest-hanging fruit: it is common across all of these blogs to share recipes that the bloggers describe as flavorful or delicious. This is probably unsurprising, since it would be poor marketing to share recipes that were not tasty! Another common theme is recipes that are "easy" and/or

"simple/unfussy" (and "versatile/flexible," in the case of Moncel and Rhee). This commonality is also not difficult to understand: Americans are time-crunched, and most people (especially working parents with children) are looking to save time and effort on meal preparation.[93] The bloggers themselves are also busy juggling children (in the case of Drummond and Perelman) and, at least at the beginning of their blogs, other jobs or school (in the case of Moncel, Rhee, and [as far as I can tell] Perelman). In addition to developing recipes for their blogs, the bloggers also have responsibilities for the blog's operation, whether they do all of the work themselves (as Perelman continues to do) or communicate with a team (as Moncel and Rhee do).[94] Balancing these various responsibilities suggests that the bloggers share their audience's desire for meals that are fast, easy, and delicious. Seeking to meet this audience need shows both business-savvy and an attempt to meet readers where they are, which shows attention to relationship.

While it is not a dominant code for any of the bloggers, an interesting pattern shows up under the code "Comfort Food." In the case of both Rhee and Drummond's posts, I noticed a sub-code group that I have labeled "Nostalgia/American Pastoral." The "American Pastoral" half of the code refers to language that either explicitly or implicitly appeals to a nostalgic American past.[95] For example, Rhee describes her recipe for "Best Ever Classic Macaroni Salad" as "The best + easiest old-fashioned macaroni salad to bring to all the BBQs/potlucks!" While words

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[93] It should be noted that this is not necessarily the target audience of all of the food blogs I examine. In a 2017 profile on Perelman for *Bon Appetit,* Alex Beggs notes that Perelman's second cookbook (released in 2017), ". . . reflects a shift in Perelman's life. Motherhood, the Sequel: Things Are Crazy Busy Here. *Before, recipes had the leisurely pace of someone who didn't mind eating at 9, 9:30. But kids gotta eat . . . .* The recipes in the book have a quick weeknight focus, though not all (see the amazing pretzel linzer cookies below)" (my emphasis).

[94] When I conducted my coding in early May 2020, it was unclear whether Drummond had additional team members, though Drummond's husband was rumored to help her manage her blog and brand (see Shah). However, in late May 2020 Drummond's website was radically reimagined (it is now published by Hearst Digital Media) and lists both a website and magazine team ("Welcome to The Pioneer Woman!").

[95] While Perelman also appeals to nostalgia, I did not notice it in the "pastoral" sense. If anything, her nostalgic moments center on New York City specifically, not a broader sense of "Americaness."

such as "classic" and "old-fashioned" do not inherently imply an American-specific past, when placed in context with "BBQs/potlucks," they take on that shade of meaning.

An even more interesting example occurs in Rhee's "Breakfast Meal Prep" recipe, when she contrasts the pineapple buns she ate on a recent international trip to "The All-American Breakfast Diet," which is described as including eggs, potatoes, and bacon, among other ingredients. She also specifically contrasts this hearty breakfast with "sugary breakfast bars" (and, by extension, sugary breakfast cereals), which one might say is the more contemporary "American Breakfast" than one that needs to be cooked. The classification of an eggs-bacon-and-potatoes breakfast as "All-American" raises interesting questions about national and cultural identity: whose "Americanness" is being labeled as quintessential? Pineapple buns, for instance, are popular in Asian countries like China and Singapore—populations which are certainly represented in the United States. Rhee herself is second-generation Korean-America and describes herself on her blog as being from "a very traditional Korean household" ("About Chungah"). While racial, cultural, and national identities are neither clear-cut nor all-encompassing (especially in the U.S.), it is worth noting Rhee's rhetorical choice to promote a specific kind of American identity as represented through her recipe components. Public food historian Eric Colleary traces the rise of the "eggs and bacon" breakfast tradition in the US to the early twentieth century thanks to Edward Bernays, the "grand-daddy of public relations and advertising,"[96] after he was hired to promote bacon by the Beach-Nut Packing Company ("'Bacon and Eggs'"). This breakfast tradition also has European cousins in the "full English" and "full Irish" breakfasts, in which bacon (or sausage) and eggs are components.

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[96] Bernays was also a nephew of Sigmund Freud.

One could argue that by promoting the "All-American" label on her recipe, Rhee is simply attuned to the bacon-and-eggs breakfast as an American symbol. However, as I am arguing in this chapter, the language choices made by food bloggers are crucial to the construction of their textual personas, as readers are unlikely to know or meet them in "real life." Even though Rhee expresses in her post that she would rather be making pineapple buns, she juxtaposes them with her "All-American" breakfast, casting them as "other" (and, because of the nationalistic label of her own recipe, as foreign). In doing so, Rhee homogenizes herself within a stereotypical (and white/European-coded) idea of White/European-descended "Americanness" as part of her textual persona.

Drummond also uses language that I coded as "Nostalgia/American Pastoral," although her deployment of it differs slightly from Rhee within my sample set. Even the title of her blog— *The Pioneer Woman*—evokes nostalgia. In many cases, Drummond draws on old-fashioned recipes of the past as a contrast to contemporary "foodie" culture, resulting in a textual persona that skews anti-foodie. For instance, in her recipe for "Mystery Rolls" (which she also describes as a recipe from her mother), Drummond writes, ". . . isn't this [recipe] just perfectly representative of how *simple* things used to be? And how unconcerned people were with culinary pretension?" In her recipe for "BBQ Comfort Meatballs," Drummond opens her post with the dramatic warning, "Foodies, please cover your eyes! Shield yourself from the deadly rays of prosaic 1960's cuisine! We're about to dive into the world of comfort food." This eschewing of "foodie culture" (and its juxtaposition to supposedly simpler "comfort food") appears part of a larger self-narrative of turning away from the busy urban life to a quieter, old-fashioned life in the country—or in Drummond's words, her "long transition from city girl to domestic country wife" ("About Pioneer Woman"). Indeed, Drummond consistently portrays herself on her blog as

a housewife and mother who cooks butter-centric, "cowboy-friendly dishes" ("About Pioneer Woman").

Drummond's textual (and television) persona is charming and wholesome, and seems to generate a following from people who desire an idyllic fantasy of a simple, pastoral or agrarian life. On a visit to Pawhuska, OK to see Drummond's recent addition to her brand—a "mercantile" and restaurant—journalist Khushbu Shah interviewed the "Merc's" director of operations, who said a number of their visitors "have saved for months to be able to come and see [the Merc]" ("Pawhuska or Bust")—an indication that many of Drummond's fans do not share her level of affluence.[97] Images of Drummond cooking in her "farmhouse chic" kitchen[98]—as well as her TV show, which is filmed in "The Lodge" (the ranch's guest house)—portray a level of spaciousness and elegance that her average fan likely does not have in their own kitchen. In fact, Drummond's particular portrayal of "simple living" might very well only be achievable these days with a great deal of wealth. However, as mentioned at the end of the previous subsection, we can see this disparity as another example of Drummond balancing being relatable with being inspirational.

The Merc's director of operations also ascribed Drummond's appeal to her evocation of ". . . a 'real America' where recipes are free from 'scary, foreign' ingredients and made by hard-working 'prairie folk' with 'good Christian values' (quoted by Shah; "Pawhuska or Bust"). The xenophobia underlying this description of Drummond's appeal is hard to miss, and according to Shah this appeal was echoed by many of the fans Shah interviewed. While Drummond has rarely

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[97] Ironically, the website *Celebrity Net Worth* estimates Drummond's 2020 net worth at $50 million ("Ree Drummond"), and her husband Ladd's at $200 million ("Ladd Drummond"). Rhee, Moncel, and Perelman, by contrast, do not even appear on the site.
[98] For a look at Drummond's fantastic kitchen, see Drummond's recent appearance on *The Today Show*, shared on *The Pioneer Woman* website (Stein).

exhibited overt xenophobia or racism on her show[99] (or in other contexts, unlike her Food

Network predecessor Paula Deen[100]), the food she cooks is certainly meat-and-potatoes- and

casserole-centric (e.g. Scalloped Potatoes and Ham or numerous iterations of baked or stuffed

potato skins). When it does engage with dishes that emerged from non-European culinary

traditions, they are in a very "white-washed" form of the cuisine—in other words, avoiding an of

the "'scary, foreign' ingredients" alluded to in Shah's article.[101] Drummond's choice of recipes

and appeals to a nostalgic [white][102] American past (both in her blog and TV show) contribute to

her textual identity and particular ethotic relationship she is building with her audience.

Furthermore, this example shows that that it is not just the type of ethotic relationship that

is significant—we should also keep an eye on *who is attracted to this particular relationship*. By

this I mean, it is not just the relationship itself that should matter to rhetoricians, but who that

relationship is with. As Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede write in their influential article,

"Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked," "The addressed audience—the actual or intended

readers of a discourse—exists outside of the text. Writers may analyze these readers' needs,

anticipate their biases, even defer to their wishes. But it is only through the text, through

language, that writers embody or give life to their conception of the reader" (Lunsford and Ede

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[99] With the notable exception of the 2017 Asian hot wings scandal focused on a second-season episode of her show (see Morabito and Shah).

[100] In June 2013, *The Food Network* announced that it would not be renewing Deen's contract for her long-running cooking show *Paula's Home Cooking* after she became embroiled in controversy over racist incidents (e.g. use of the "n" word, wanting Black servers to dress as slaves for a plantation wedding, etc). For a full timeline of these events, see Koman.

[101] See, for example, her 2009 recipe for "Lazy Chiles Rellenos" or her 2004 recipe for "Summer Noodle Salad with Soy-Ginger Dressing" (formerly titled "Asian Noodle Salad"—this name change happened within the past two years, perhaps in response to critiques from people like Mei-San Janey Wong, but there is no mention of the change in the current iteration of the post).

[102] As Ali Seiter notes, "Additionally, since the food blogging community has established itself as a predominantly white one – not only in numbers, but also in values and practices – it would also make sense that people of color might not even wish to participate in the space of food blogging. If this is the case, then **food bloggers have unintentionally created an unwelcoming space for people of color** in an Internet world that people of color often otherwise depend upon for autonomy and activism" (author's emphasis). For more on the predominance of whiteness in the food blogging community, see Seiter and Wong (and for a satirical take, see Machaca).

167).[103] Drummond's textual persona likely does not appeal as well (or as fully) to the adventurous foodie; rather, she would appeal more organically to a White, Christian reader attracted to a pastoral, "good ol' days" lifestyle. There are risks, of course, to assuming characteristics of actual or intended audiences; however, I return to Edwin Black's argument cited in Chapter 2 of this dissertation that when confronted by discourse, an audience is asked to accept not only the conclusion put forth by the rhetor, but also the ideology underlying the language used to present the conclusion (113). We therefore cannot simply dismiss Drummond's self-fashioning as entirely innocent or lacking in rhetorical power.

The final prominent Description code among the food bloggers that I examine is the use of the superlative; however, because of the superlative's connection to hyperbole, I will discuss it in the final sub-section on Figurative Language.

Personal Anecdotes and Small Stories

Moncel, Rhee, Perelman and Drummond all use "small stories" (Cheng) and personal anecdotes to contextualize the recipes they share with readers. In this subsection, I show how patterns in the content of these stories often reveal a performance of domesticity that conflicts with Fleitz and Salvio's characterization of the food blog as a liberating, post-feminist space. As Table 4 illustrates, [104] Perelman and Drummond's dominant codes in these categories are quite different from Moncel and Rhee's. Drummond and Perelman's small stories and anecdotes, for example, reveal a focus on their families (and, to a lesser degree, their careers as food writers) that is comparatively absent in Moncel and Rhee's posts.

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[103] This section continues: "In so doing, they do not so much create a role for the reader—a phrase which implies that the writer somehow creates a mold to which the reader adapts—as invoke it. Rather than relying on incantations, however, writers conjure their vision—a vision which they hope readers will actively come to share as they read the text—by using all the resources of language available to them to establish a broad, and ideally coherent, range of cues for the reader" (Lunsford and Ede 167).

[104] As with Tables 2 and 3, I grouped any code with fewer than 5 instances as a sub-code under "Other." I also used color to emphasize the most prominent codes for each blogger.

Table 4: Code Map Comparisons from Category 2: Authorial Persona, Sub-category: Personal Anecdotes* and Category 4: Narrative Elements, Sub-category: Small Story*		
Blogger	**Code (Code Frequency)**	**Sub-Code (Sub-Code Frequency)**
	Personal Anecdotes	
Moncel (*Budget Bytes*)	Sudden Insight (10)	
	Personal Preferences (7)	
	Dish Preparation (5)	
	Other (10)	Personal Experience (Adulthood) (4) Personal Diet (2) Childhood Memory (1) Temptation (1) Travel (1) Purchasing Decisions (1)
	Small Story	
	Contextualization of Recipe (17)	
	Other (8)	Hypothetical Situation (4) Continuation (3) Recipe Preparation (1)
	Personal Anecdotes	
Rhee (*Damn Delicious*)	Personal Preferences (10)	Food (9) Identity (1)
	Travel (7)	
	Other (10)	Significant Life Events (3) Dish Preparation (3) Personal Diet (2) Work (1) Cleaning (1)
	Small Story	
	Contextualization of Recipe (21)	
	Other (5)	Continuation (3) Hypothetical Situation (2)
	Personal Anecdotes	
Perelman (*Smitten Kitchen*)	Work (27)	Blog (15) Cookbook (6) Recipe Development/Testing (3) Other (3)
	Family (26)	Has Kids (13) Is Married (10) Family Food Preferences (3)
	Personal Preferences (25)	Food (18) Other (7)
	Dish Preparation (10)	
	Other (19)	Misc. (9) Travel (4) Emotions (4) Events (2)
	Small Story	

	Contextualization of Recipe (26)	
	Second Small Story in Post (5)	
	Other (8)	Hypothetical Situation (4) Continuation of Story (3) Self-Promotion (1)
	Personal Anecdotes	
Drummond (*Pioneer Woman*)	Personal Preferences (24)	Food (18) Other (4) Dish Preparation (2)
	Family (25)	Family Food Preferences (6) Is Married (5) Has Kids (5) Loves Family (3) Has Family (General) (2) Breastfed Children (1)
	Work (6)	Blog (4) TV Show (1) Cookbook (1)
	Other (6)	Dish Preparation (4) Party/Event (1) Home During Day (1)
	Small Story	
	Contextualization of Recipe (19)	
	Other (5)	Hypothetical Situation (4) False Story (1)

* See appendix for full Category Maps

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, food bloggers follow the tradition of food memoirists and cookbook authors in contextualizing the recipes they share with readers, giving them a ". . . a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be" (Leonardi 340). While Leonardi's focus is on how contextualization makes the recipe an "embedded discourse" that has "a variety of relationships with its frame, or its bed" (340), I attend to the role these "frames"— or to use Cheng's language, these small stories—play in developing the textual persona of the blogger. In other words, what do we learn about a blogger's stable-for-now textual identity based on the stories they choose to tell readers about themselves and their recipes? Furthermore, what do these stories reveal about the kind of audience the blogger might appeal to and the type of ethotic relationship cultivated between the blogger and this audience?

Moncel, Rhee, Perelman, and Drummond all overwhelmingly use small stories and anecdotes to contextualize their recipes (as seen in Table 4). A dominant code for all four bloggers, for instance, was their personal preferences (such as for a specific food or for techniques used in a recipe)—that is to say, they are very open with readers about their likes and dislikes. At times, these preferences are the main justification for the blogger sharing a particular recipe, such as when Moncel describes her recipe for "Cowboy Caviar" as the "go-to healthy meal prep item in my kitchen!" in the opening paragraph of the recipe's headnotes. Contextualizing a recipe using the blogger's enthusiasm for the dish makes sense as a rhetorical choice to motivate readers to prepare the dish themselves (though it might also seem redundant, as why would someone share a recipe they don't like?). Moncel and Rhee in particular use this strategy to contextualize their recipes for readers. The bloggers' expressions of enthusiasm for their recipes often tip into hyperbole, which I will explore in detail later in this chapter.

While Perelman and Drummond also share their personal preferences with readers, they more often contextualize their recipes within a larger sphere of domesticity. The anecdotes that showed up in my samples revealed a much stronger focus on these bloggers' nuclear families[105] (and, to a lesser extent, extended families) and the way the recipes they were sharing fit into the day-to-day of their family life. See, for instance, the opening paragraph for Perelman's recipe for "Spaghetti with Broccoli Cream Pesto," where she explains that her many recent broccoli-related recipes spring from her toddler-aged son's preference for the vegetable, or Drummond's recipes for "Individual Sausage Casseroles" (in which she shares her children's love of the dish) and

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[105] It should be noted that some (though relatively-few) male-authored food blogs also situate their male authors as the person primarily in charge of food preparation in their households. One example is Stacey Little, author of the blog *Southern Bites*, who states on his "About" page that, "My goal in blogging is to get families back to the supper table to reconnect, without texting, apps, and games. And sometimes in our busy lives, we need something easy. Easy is what I'm good at, so that's what you'll get from me… easy, quick recipes to help you feed your family" (Little).

"Chicken Bacon Ranch Panini" (a recipe she "invented" when raiding her refrigerator to cook a quick dinner for her children). References to family also frequently include the bloggers' husbands, such as in Drummond's recipes for "Ladd's Grilled Tenderloin" and "The Marlboro Man Sandwich," and Perelman's "Creamed Chard and Spring Onions" and "Artichoke Ravioli with Tomatoes."

Cooking for a family on a daily basis, including taking these family members' likes and dislikes into account, is a reality that many people—and women in particular—can relate to. It is also a reality with which many women struggle. Planning and preparing daily meals is both mentally and physically taxing and continues to be a task disproportionately performed by women, according to a 2019 Pew Research Center analysis of a 2014-16 Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use survey (Schaeffer).[106] By connecting their roles as wives and mothers to the recipes they share, Perelman and Drummond cast themselves as relatable to women in similar roles; furthermore, by sharing recipes that their partners and children allegedly love, Perelman and Drummond portray themselves as *succeeding* at this challenging task, casting themselves as inspirational. While these narratives of success could be viewed as liberating, my findings support Rodney et al.'s claim that, ". . . the female blogosphere . . . *may inadvertently entrench gendered inequalities and broaden feminine expectations*, even as it seeks to re-value feminine care work like cooking" (687; my emphasis). Nowhere in my food blog sample posts did I notice a blogger calling attention to or criticizing the fact that she was the primary meal planner and cook for the household, even as their anecdotes and small stories made clear that this was the case. This silent acceptance of gendered labor indicates that these bloggers are not

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[106] According to this analysis, 80% of mothers and 75% of cohabiting women without children reported being the primary meal prepper. Additionally, 80% of mothers and 68% of cohabiting women without children reported being the primary grocery shopper.

cultivating an ethotic relationship with readers based on challenging the status quo but rather on accepting this reality and striving to "succeed" within it.

While Salvio notes that Perelman and Drummond ". . . often exercise rhetorical strategies to emphasize, and at times exacerbate, the differences (and downplay the similarities) between men's and women's bodies and the food they eat" (34), I want to be clear that I am *not* arguing that bloggers like Perelman and Drummond are deliberately trying to uphold gendered divisions of domestic labor. However, this discourse is successful *because* it taps into a broader and embedded post-feminist discourse of the early 21st century: "the new domesticity," which Emily Matchar defines as "our current collective nostalgia and domesticity-mania" (4).[107] The subject matter of the food blog genre (sharing recipes and preparing food) coupled with the food blogs' rise during the same period as a renewed interest in feminine-coded domestic tasks has resulted in traditional gender roles becoming an integral part of the "frame" (Leonardi) of the genre. This framing restricts the acceptable "social positions" and "rhetorical resources" female food bloggers can tap into to "meet [their] social and communicative ends" (Applegarth 44). Food bloggers—particularly those who cohabitate and have children—are therefore pressured by the norms of the genre to attend to these conventions, even if they occasionally subvert or push back against them.

What, then, are we to make of food bloggers like Rhee and Moncel whose posts do not focus so clearly on family members? While it is difficult to extrapolate much from a sample of four food bloggers, a few of the obvious differences between Rhee and Moncel as compared to Perelman and Drummond are age and marital/parental status. As shown in Table 1, Rhee and Moncel are in their mid-30s, whereas at the time of this writing, Perelman is 43 and Drummond

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[107] Matchar attributes the rise in the new domesticity to ". . . a longing for a more authentic, meaningful life in an economically and environmentally uncertain world" (5).

is 51. The age difference could suggest that the younger bloggers do not face the same pressure to perform a certain type of domesticity.

I suspect, however, that the difference in marital and parental status is actually the bigger factor here. Moncel is unmarried and childless; Rhee married in June 2020 and is also childless (though she strongly identifies as a "dog mom" to her corgis, Butters and Cartman). Her blog's "About" page was updated over the summer to reflect this change in marital status: "Due to COVID-19, our wedding celebration with friends and family had been postponed (and now cancelled) but Butters and Cartman still threw on their grey tuxedos as we exchanged vows in a small intimate ceremony at our rooftop home on June 20, 2020" (Rhee "About"). A quick scan of Rhee's post-marriage blog posts shows little-to-no change in her writing style or anecdotes (no direct mention of her husband, for example); however, her Instagram heavily features both her corgis and her husband. For instance, her August 26, 2020 post shares a photo of her dogs for "National Dog Day" and labels her husband as her dogs' "dad" (Rhee, Chungah [damn_delicious]). The label "dog mom" has grown in popularity in recent years and is largely used by Millennials.[108] On social media, at least, Rhee is constructing herself as maternal in a way that is highly specific to her peers and (likely) target audience.

Moncel, then, becomes the true outlier in this area: if she does not talk about her nuclear family, then what kinds of anecdotes and stories does she share? Returning to Table 4, the Personal Anecdotes code that appears most frequently for Moncel is what I have called "Sudden Insight." This code groups moments where Moncel casts herself as having an abrupt realization

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[108] The Millennial generation has statistically been marrying later and becoming parents later (if at all) than previous generations due to a variety of factors, such as their coming-of-age during the Great Recession and a stronger focus on career development (especially for women). One way to feel like they are still hitting some of these "adult milestones" could be to treat their pets—namely dogs—as pseudo-children (often called "fur-children" or "fur-babies"). "National Dog Mom Day" became a recognized holiday in the U.S. in 2018 and is celebrated the second Saturday of May (the day before Mother's Day) (Moreira). We might even see the "dog mom" phenomenon as another way in which "the new domesticity" is shaping feminine discourse and expectations.

or moment of inspiration, often in relation to her own recipes. In her recipe for "Moroccan Lentil and Vegetable Stew," for example, Moncel writes, "Then, after making [the stew] and wolfing down a bowl, I noticed that, 'Hey! This is vegan!' That's the best type of vegan food—the kind that's so good that you don't even notice till you stop and think about it." She portrays herself as surprised by the lack of animal products in her recipe, suggesting that she did not set out to design a dish that was vegan—it just "happens" to be so.[109] Rhetorically, this choice communicates a type of artlessness that could be interpreted as an attempt to mask expertise or professionalism, as these are not considered traditionally feminine traits. This is not to say that Moncel never acknowledges her own knowledge or skill, but by downplaying it at particular moments, Moncel can cast herself as relatable and accessible to readers (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet; Matwick and Matwick). Her "About" page, after all, positions her as a "learner" rather than an expert: "I love to create, problem solve, and learn new things . . . Want to learn with me?" (Moncel). The ways in which these bloggers negotiate positions of expertise and professional identity are the focus of the next chapter.

Describing moments of inspiration that lead to recipe development is also a way in which Moncel pulls back the curtain for her readers. Sometimes, this inspiration comes from interaction with her readers. For instance, she begins her post for "Spinach White Bean Enchiladas with Pepper Jack Sauce" with, "Someone emailed me recently and said that they use white beans in place of chicken in recipes and I was like, 'Wait, whoa, why haven't I done that?' . . . Well, today I tried it with these Spinach White Bean Enchiladas and it was AWESOME." By showing how reader interaction can influence the development of new recipes, Moncel subtly encourages readers to reach out to her and share their ideas, inviting them to be part of the creative process.

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[109] In this particular instance, Moncel might be trying to head off critique or concern from readers who are not vegan (or even anti-vegan), as her blog does not target a vegan audience.

In another post, Moncel describes being inspired to create a recipe based on a television show she is watching:

> So I was sitting around last night watching the newest season of Master of None when I *should* have been figuring out what I was going to cook this week. But then inspiration hit when a character in the show made a joke about how bougie young women in NYC are obsessed with grain bowls. After my initial defensive, 'Hey, grain bowls are delicious AND healthy!' my brain switched to, 'Oh, I definitely need to make a grain bowl tomorrow.' So I spent the rest of the evening brainstorming about these Sweet Potato Grain Bowls with Green Tahini Sauce. ("Sweet Potato")

This example provides a different kind of glimpse into Moncel's recipe development process, but one that is again very relatable—she participates in and is influenced by popular culture. Readers who also watch *Master of None* likely feel a moment of connection with Moncel and might feel even more interested in making the grain bowl recipe themselves as a result. By letting readers in on her process for creating recipes, Moncel breaks down the barrier between rhetor and reader, expert and novice, creating a welcoming environment (especially for those new to cooking).

Figurative Language

The final group of codes I focus on in this chapter are from Category 3: Literary Elements, Sub-Category: Figurative Language. Attending to food bloggers' use of figurative language is important because food blogs (and related genres like the cookbook) are often classified by composition and rhetoric scholars as predominantly technical texts. The controversy surrounding the inclusion of personal stories and details in the headnotes section of food blogs suggests that a portion of the general population also holds this view. In fact, I argue that a

primary reason for the controversy surrounding personal stories in headnotes is rooted in generic

expectations of the food blog as, first-and-foremost, an example of technical writing.[110] While

the food blog certainly should be considered a technical genre, it is vital not to ignore the

discursive patterns that do not fit our expectations of a particular genre. Technical writing is not

typically noted for its literary flourishes; however, that does not mean types of technical writing

do not contain them. Furthermore, it allows us to ask what the inclusion of literary elements such

as figurative language brings to forms of technical writing. Table 5 below shows all of the

Figurative Language codes and sub-codes for each blogger.[111]

Table 5: Code Map Comparisons from Category 3: Literary Elements, Sub-category: Figurative Language*		
Blogger	**Code (Code Frequency)**	**Sub-Code (Sub-Code Frequency)**
Moncel (*Budget Bytes*)	Hyperbole (9)	
	Simile (7)	
	Metaphor (5)	
	Other (5)	Pun (2) Personification (1) Analogy (1) Idiom (1)
Rhee (*Damn Delicious*)	Superlative (36)	
	Hyperbole (19)	
	Metaphor (10)	
	Simile (3)	
Perelman (*Smitten Kitchen*)	Metaphor (25)	
	Superlative (22)	
	Simile (11)	
	Hyperbole (8)	
	Personification (5)	
	Other (2)	Analogy (1) Idiom (1)
Drummond (*Pioneer Woman*)	Hyperbole (25)	

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[110] Headnotes are not required to be engage with the blogger's personal life, of course—in many cases, they only provide further information on techniques or ingredients included in the recipe. I am speaking here specifically about blog headnotes that *are* memoiristic.

[111] As with Tables 2-4, I grouped any code with fewer than five instances as a sub-code under "Other" (with the exception of *Damn Delicious* in this instance, as the only code under five was "Simile." I also use color to emphasize the most prominent codes for each blogger.

	Superlative (15)	
	Other (5)	Metaphor (3) Simile (2)

* See appendix for full Category Maps

One of the distinguishing features of *Damn Delicious* and *Pioneer Woman* as compared to the other food blogs analyzed in this chapter is the frequent use of hyperbolic language. See, for example, how Rhee describes her "Garlic Butter Shrimp Scampi" recipe from 4 February 2019: "*The garlic butter sauce is TO DIE FOR – so buttery, so garlicky/lemony + so perfect!*" While it could be argued that the use of such extreme language is indicative of poor writing, I believe it is actually a deliberate rhetorical strategy. In their analysis of hyperbole in college student writing, Zachary Beare and Marcus Meade describe hyperbole as "a legitimate and expressive trope" that the students they interviewed saw as a form of shorthand that more quickly and concisely conveyed both information and affective experience to readers (73). Furthermore, Beare and Meade's interviews with student writers revealed that these writers believed in ". . . the effectiveness of hyperbole in terms of its ability to bridge a gap in meaning created by the disparity between language and felt experience" (78). While food blogs are of course a different genre than student essays, both genres are stigmatized as less than "professional"—the former because the writing is self-published in a feminine-coded and hobby-associated genre, and the latter because of the writer's lower hierarchical positioning as a "student," which emphasizes their *lack* of expertise and competence. Viewing hyperbole as a valid and *useful* rhetorical strategy, then, reorients us from assuming sloppiness and inexperience to assuming purpose and skill. If we default to viewing food bloggers' use of hyperbole as intentional, we are better positioned to examine its rhetorical power.

What, then, is the purpose of hyperbolic language in food blog writing? One compelling theory is that home cooks are not looking for merely serviceable recipes; rather, they want truly

great ones. In an article for *Slate*, Laura Miller posits that "If we're going to go to all that trouble [to make a meal from scratch], online food writers seem to think, the results had better be *objectively* sensational, not just the cornbread our little group likes the best, but the best cornbread ever by popular and expert acclaim" (author's emphasis). She also argues that hyperbole is an attempt to make one's recipe stand out from the thousands (if not millions) of similar recipes now populating the web (Miller, Laura). In other words, in a space saturated with recipes for a specific dish (e.g. shrimp scampi) or featuring a particular ingredient (e.g. shrimp), food bloggers resort to hyperbole in an attempt to make their version stand out from the crowd—to persuade readers to make *their* version instead of someone else's. It is of course debatable whether such a trope is effective, especially if it is being used by many other food bloggers; however, if we compare the *Damn Delicious* example above to a more muted version (e.g. the garlic butter sauce is buttery, garlicy, and lemony), which do we think the average reader is likely to prepare first?

While simply claiming that a recipe is "the best" of its type obviously does not make it so, food bloggers are faced with the dilemma of being unable to prove the quality of their recipe unless readers make the dish for themselves.[112] Hyperbole, then, becomes an expedient way for bloggers to hook readers into making their recipes. I want to qualify, however, that I do not see bloggers' use of hyperbole as therefore inherently misleading—at least, not in the negative way we might initially assume. Instead, I find it useful to sit with Joshua Ritter's description of hyperbole, where, drawing on Quintilian, he writes, "[Hyperbole] is not intended to deceive but to reveal. Hyperbole speaks a double language of transcendence at the limits of figuration, a

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[112] Although the role of food photography and food styling is one way bloggers attempt to convey the deliciousness of their recipes, it is limited as a visual medium. While visual aesthetics certainly plays a role in making food appealing, it cannot make up for an otherwise unappetizing dish nor capture other important sensory experiences such as aroma and taste.

language that offers a different way of perceiving and thinking about convention and normative frameworks of knowledge" (420). Food bloggers and food blog readers are aware that the recipes they post or encounter are not literally meant to be "the best"; rather, this hyperbolic language is intended to tap into reader-cooks' desire for an elevated culinary experience—one that shifts the daily grind of preparing yet another meal into something "transcendent," something that transforms the everyday into the extraordinary. Hyperbole in food blogs (and food writing more broadly) can, then, change the way reader-cooks "perceive and think about" the seemingly mundane actions of daily life.

Hyperbolic language related to recipe quality contributes to food bloggers' textual personas by obliquely portraying themselves as trustworthy sources of recipes. Portraying themselves as trustworthy or honest through hyperbole complements the direct trust-based language used by many food bloggers. In the *Damn Delicious* sample posts, Rhee uses trust-based language to describe herself 20 times within my headnote sample set, and Perelman of *Smitten Kitchen* uses such language 22 times. For example, Rhee reassures readers that she "would never steer [her readers] wrong" ("Instant Pot") and Perelman tells readers that she hasn't re-photographed a recipe from her cookbook because she's "stubbornly hanging [onto the] insistence that my photos represent things that happen in real, imperfect kitchens" ("Caesar Salad"). Labeling their recipes as "the best" or "perfect" also lends an ironic sense of *curation* to their blogs (at odds, perhaps, with the thousands of recipes they have posted). In an online landscape saturated with recipes, labels of quality (even if readers understand them to be hyperbolic) are a way to make their own recipes stand out as more special. It might also create a sense of "FOMO" (fear of missing out) in readers—after all, the "risk" of missing out on a "truly delicious" roast pork recipe seem higher than not making roast pork for dinner tonight in the first

place. Furthermore, if a recipe labeled as "perfect" or "the best" proves underwhelming to reader-cooks who prepare it, they can (and often do) make the results known to both the blogger and other readers in the comments section. As Roxanne Harde and Janet Wesselius note in *Consumption and the Literary Cookbook*, "Recipes that fail . . . might damage a relationship between cook and cookbook" (2). The same possibility applies to food blogs. Too many "corrective" comments impact a blogger's credibility, so bloggers' use of hyperbolic language is not without risk.[113]

This is not to say that food bloggers would be unable to convince readers to make their recipes without the use of hyperbole; rather, I illustrate the trope's advantages to show that hyperbole need not be an indication of an unpolished writer or amateur rhetor. While a food blogger likely is not thinking in as deliberately strategic way as the previous paragraph might indicate, food bloggers—like any savvy writers—pick up on rhetorical trends when they appear advantageous to their rhetorical needs. Hyperbole is also not the only stylistic flourish employed by food bloggers: they also regularly employ figurative language like metaphor, simile, personification, and analogy.

After hyperbole, metaphor is the next most frequently used type of figurative language in this dataset. In my samples for each blog, Perelman used 25 metaphors, Rhee used 10, Moncel used 5, and Drummond used 3. In many cases, these metaphors are tied to descriptions of food. For example, in her headnotes for her recipe for "Miso Sweet Potato and Broccoli Bowls," Perelman writes, "Before one *swan dives* into a vat of thick cream and baked cheddar and *passes out* on a Yorkshire pudding *pillow* only to *revive oneself* with a deep inhale of horseradish-triple cream sauce, one must *reset their system*, so to speak" (my emphasis). This passage humorously

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[113] The interactivity promoted by the commenting feature will be touched on more deeply in the next chapter.

explains to Perelman's readers why the first dish she made upon returning from a trip to the UK was this virtuous-seeming vegetable dish, rather than one of the many British dishes she initially intended. Perelman's use of metaphor in this passage is certainly hyperbolic, but it also moves readers through a selection of perfectly-prepared British dishes—conjuring up not just the dishes themselves, but a particular experience of enjoying them. As discussed in the previous chapter, metaphors do more than describe at a heightened level—they structure our thinking about the things being represented through metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson). In this case, Perelman's metaphors establish proper texture for Yorkshire pudding ("pillowy") but also invite readers to think of—and perhaps long for—an experience of culinary extremes ("swan dives," "passes out," "revive oneself").

While Perelman is describing an idealized version of these dishes, not the direct results of recipes she developed, her use of metaphors to heighten a culinary experience is not limited to dishes she consumed while traveling or in restaurants. See, for instance, the headnotes for her recipe for "Warm Lentil and Potato Salad" where she compares a particular variety of lentils to "caviar." In a similar vein, Rhee describes the peanut sauce for her "Chicken Satay with Peanut Sauce" recipe as ". . . tak[ing] the chicken to the next level of flavor town," and Moncel describes her "Luscious Homemade Lemon Curd" as "a little jar of velvety sunshine." Like hyperbole, the food bloggers' use of metaphor in these cases paints their recipes in the best possible light, using metaphor's inherent ability to shape our thinking to their advantage. I am not suggesting that these food bloggers are necessarily conscious of *why* they select elevating metaphors, only that these rhetorical techniques are available and, as savvy writers, they are implicitly drawn to using them for their rhetorical power. The difference in frequency with which metaphors appear in these four food blogs also corresponds with the relative "literariness"

of each blog. Perelman dominates the category and also uses more similes, personification, and other instances of figurative language (with the exception of hyperbole) than the other bloggers I examined, and her writing in general is more evocative and polished than Drummond's (who uses the fewest metaphors).

This is not to suggest that Perelman is a "better" food blogger than Drummond, or that Perelman is inherently more persuasive than Drummond. Figurative language is not the only tool food bloggers can use to convince readers to try their recipes—but it is a tool that traditionally has more prestige in the literary community (with the exception of hyperbole). Different tools and strategies appeal to different audiences, and a blogger must therefore curate their tools in order to *address* and *invoke* different audiences (Ede and Lunsford). While bloggers, like other writers, draw from the same set of tools, the mixture will be suited to their particular needs. A blogger who seeks to appeal to a universal audience will likely appeal to no one strongly enough to be noticed among myriad other food blogs. As discussed earlier, the necessity to differentiate oneself from the crowd also applies to how food blogger's curate their own personalities and life experiences into a textual persona that appeals to particular audiences.

Food blogs share generic features of both the cookbook and the food memoir, so it is not surprising that many food blog authors focused on recipe-sharing blend rhetorical conventions from both genres. Other types of food blogs do, of course, exist, and if I had selected examples of these other types of blogs, the results of my analysis would look quite different (if I had selected food blogs that focused on a particular cultural or ethnic cuisine, for example). My analysis of Drummond, Moncel, Perelman, and Rhee's food blogs demonstrates that constructing a textual persona is a complex rhetorical act for food bloggers, particularly as they both conform

to and resist hegemonic perceptions of feminine behavior and discourse. Food bloggers must construct a textual identity that readers find both relatable and inspirational in order to welcome readers to their table (metaphorically speaking). These textual personas in turn are used to curate the bloggers' audiences, but creating a welcoming space for a particular audience requires a food blogger to maintain this textual identity (or only change it gradually) in order to maintain narrative stability.

In the following chapter, I shift to an examination of how Moncel, Perelman, and Rhee transitioned from blogging as a hobby to blogging as a full-time profession. Specifically, I analyze the degree to which they position themselves as experts in recipe development and "professional" food bloggers. I focus on what I see as three key tools these food bloggers use in this negotiation of expertise and professional identity: the narratives they tell about their professional journeys, the comment section, and sponsorship. Attention to all three areas is required for food bloggers to manage their textual personas in such a way that readers trust the content they are providing while not feeling dismissed or subordinate in the blogger-reader ethotic relationship. Chapter 4, then, builds on the previous chapters by examining the relationship between expertise, professionalism, and traditional notions of ethos within TPC and rhetoric *as well* as the challenges issued by decolonial and cultural rhetorics. Furthermore, I draw on examples from the food blogs analyzed in Chapter 3 to show how historically-marginalized rhetors within food writing genres negotiate, resist, and sometimes defy traditional conceptions of ethos, professionalism, and expertise in order to gain readership or viewership. Chapters 1 and 2's emphasis on personal and communal identity is picked up to illustrate how writers in historically-marginalized social positions might take a strength-in-numbers approach to establishing credibility. Finally, I examine how the digital affordance of the comment section can

both help and hinder a food blogger's ability to claim expertise and create a welcoming space for

their readers.

Chapter Four

Professional Journeys, Comment Sections, and Sponsorship: How Three Food Bloggers

Navigate Expertise and Professionalism

In this chapter, I continue my examination of the food blogs *Budget Bytes, Damn Delicious,* and *Smitten Kitchen*[114] but shift my focus to the ways in which these bloggers navigate expertise and professionalism in their roles as full-time food bloggers. While the cookbook, food memoir, and food blog are different genres, encompass different modalities (print and digital), and attract different kinds of rhetors, they also have more in common than their topical focus on food. All of the textual instantiations I examine show how different kinds of marginalized rhetors "disrupt" simplified notions of ethos-as-credibility or authority. Since these authors occupy marginalized positions in the U.S. due to their race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and/or formal training, they lack the traditional credibility from which to speak due to their positionality within the dominant power structure and so must find other ways of persuading audiences to read their works and prepare their recipes. In other words, these authors have never been able to simply rely on being seen as an inherent authority on the subject of food because they do not exist in the world as white, heterosexual, professionally-trained men.

Privileging white, heterosexual, and male rhetorical strategies[115] upholds traditional conceptions of ethos that limits scholars' ability to appreciate the wide variety of rhetorical

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[114] In a departure from Chapter 3, I will not be discussing Ree Drummond or her blog *The Pioneer Woman Cooks* in this chapter, due to the fact that I have lost access to her blog. In May 2020, Drummond's site underwent a dramatic transformation—or, "corporatization"—and is now managed by Hearst Magazine Media, Inc. The blog portion of her site has virtually disappeared, with only a small portion remaining under on the "Confessions" page—and the narrative headnotes that used to accompany recipes do not appear in the ones published since the site transition. In essence, her site is now less a blog than a site devoted to her brand and no longer really fits with *Smitten Kitchen, Damn Delicious,* and *Budget Bytes.* In a sense, we might think of Ree Drummond as a food blogger who has moved beyond the blog form as a professional communication genre.

[115] The absence of obvious rhetorical strategies among this demographic is precisely the point: their strategies are the invisible "default" because of their privileged positionality.

strategies actually used—and used effectively—in everyday communication, as the primary texts I have examined in this dissertation illustrate. Broadening our understanding of ethos allows we rhetoricians and TPC scholars to attend more closely to how rhetors from underprivileged and/or undervalued identity positions can carve out space for their voices to be heard and taken seriously. Such work would better align rhetoricians and TPC scholars more broadly with the work being done by cultural and decolonial rhetorics[116] and with decolonial and social justice work within TPC.[117] In a cultural moment where we as scholars and teachers are being challenged more than ever to be allies in the work of anti-racism, feminism(s), and queer theory, we must examine historical disciplinary *practices* of knowledge-making and dissemination as well as the *products* of our research themselves.

"Micro-Celebrities," "Lifestreaming," and the Digital Environment

Before moving into my analysis, however, I need to introduce a few terms and concepts related to the digital environment. One of those is the "micro-celebrity," which Stephanie Baker and Chris Rojek describe as a "lifestyle guru" with a relatively large following. As Baker and Rojek write, "Micro-celebrities may have a relatively small following compared to mainstream celebrities, but they typically share in-depth information about their personal lives online from what they eat, to where they shop and how they feel. These revelations facilitate the perception of intimacy with their followers" (53). Communication and media studies scholar Alice Marwick calls this sharing of personal life information "lifestreaming" and argues that "lifestreamers . . . create content with their audience in mind" (213). In their study of technical communication

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[116] See, for instance, Brown (2019), Cobos et al. (2018), Cushman (2008, 2013), Lee and Kahn (2020), Privott (2019), Tuck and Yang (2012), and Walker (2003).

[117] See, for instance, Agboka (2014; 2021); Colton and Holmes (2018); Cox (2019); Edenfield, Colton, and Holmes (2019); Haas (2012); Itchuaqiyaq and Matheson (2021); Jones (2016; 2017); Jones, Moore, and Walton (2016); Petersen and Walton (2018); Petersen and Moeller (2016); Spinuzzi and Jones (2017); Williams and Pimentel (2012, 2014)

bloggers, Davidson and Vaast concluded that, "A significant structural feature of this discourse community is the existence of a core of elite, A-list bloggers, reinforced by the social practices of community members as well as by blogging software and other technologies . . . ." (56). This is likewise true of the food blogging community, and it is these "A-list bloggers" of the food world whom I categorize here as micro-celebrities.

The access that audiences feel they have to micro-celebrities' lives—and their ability to potentially interact with them in online spaces, creates "networked audiences,"[118] and Baker and Rojek cite social media as an important technology for "[configuring] how authority and influence is constructed online" (41).[119] The food bloggers, as well as the cookbook and food memoir authors, that I examine all use some form of social media to engage with their audiences and promote their books and/or brands. I will touch more on these writers' uses of social media later in this chapter, but for now it is enough to say that social media engagement is essential for micro-celebrities in the current technological and cultural moment.

Due to the rise of Web 2.0,[120] Baker and Rojek claim that, "Expertise, which was traditionally confined to those with authority or professional training in a specific area, has been replaced by knowledge formed through experience, what we refer to as 'native expertise'" (55).

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[118] "Networked audience" differs from another common term in digital communication studies: "networked publics." Marwick cites danah boyd's definition of "networked public" as "…the social space created by technologies like social network sites and the imagined community that thrives in this space" (Marwick 213). Marwick thinks the term "networked audience" is more accurate for describing lifestreaming, as the "networked audience moves across sites" whereas the "networked public implies a set of people communicating through a single technology" (213).

[119] Baker and Rojek draw from the work of Marwick and danah boyd in the following explanation: "Social media afford new possibilities for people to make themselves visible and to connect with a wider public, referred to as 'networked publics'. The term refers to the social space constructed by networked technologies and the imagined community that emerges as a result (boyd 2010). The space exists because of the intersection of people, technology and practice. When this communication occurs across social media sites, it is referred to as a 'networked audience' (Marwick 2013: 213)" (Baker and Rojek 46). Further discussion of networked audience can be found in Marwick pp. 211-213.

[120] According to Baker and Rojeck, Web 2.0 is an internet phase ". . . characterised [sic] by the rise of user-generated content, usability (ease of use by non-experts) and the growth of social media" (47).

While I do not dispute that personal experience forms the backbone of much online rhetoric, especially within the lifestyle guru community that Baker and Rojek study, there are still many nuances at play regarding whose native expertise is effectively persuasive. Much depends on how rhetors position themselves and how the audience receives these claims to lived experience, as the following case studies reveal.

Expertise, Professionalism and Ethos in Rhetoric and TPC

To demonstrate the value of such a broad set of criteria for defining professionals and professional writing to the field of TPC, I now turn to the authors of the primary texts I have examined in previous dissertation chapters to show how their communication practices as professional food writers provide a rich site of exploration for TPC scholars. By including food writers who might identify as formal professionals, quasiprofessionals, *and* contraprofessionals (Carliner)—or who wish to be perceived by their audience as such—we can see just how vital it is to view professional communication and communicators as relationally bound. As mentioned in the Introduction, I include formal professionalization, quasiprofessionalization, and contraprofessionalization under the umbrella of the terms *professional* or *professional identity*, unless otherwise specified, as I am concerned with all three channels as professional activity. These three types of professionalization also function in relation to one another. Furthermore, these different types of professionalization can be utilized by individuals who do not necessarily occupy the position they project. While I do not focus on her in this chapter, food blogger-turned-Food-Network-star Ree Drummond is an excellent example: she would seem to be aligned with the formal professional camp because of her celebrity status, her multiple book deals, and her various product lines;[121] however, she often co-opts aspects of

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[121] For example, Drummond's product line at Walmart includes cookware, spice blends, home décor, and apparel. She also has a dog treat line in partnership with Chewy.

contraprofressionalization to appeal to her audience. These contraprofessional characteristics include disavowals of expertise and just-like-you appeals to her audience—she seeks to build an ethotic relationship founded on similarity in values and a certain kind of American nostalgia (as mentioned in Chapter 3). In other words, Drummond wants to be seen by her audience as a fellow home cook whose focus is preparing delicious meals for her family, not as a celebrity or food personality with her own cooking show. Drummond is also the perfect example of how personal branding is becoming increasingly important, especially online, rather than (or in addition to) institutional affiliation, formal education or training, or other characteristics of formal professionalization. While Drummond exemplifies how formal professionalization, quasiprofessionalization, and contraprofessionalization are perhaps not as easily differentiable as Carliner suggests, the different points on the professionalization spectrum define each other through their tensions.

In the pages that follow, I particularly attend to the online presence of and communication strategies used by full-time food bloggers Moncel, Perelman, and Rhee. Web 2.0 has reshaped the affordances available to professionals—especially professional writers. In particular, the ability for audiences to interact with and potentially influence how food writers communicate their content—in a much more rapid fashion than in traditional print modalities—and the immediate feedback they can give to the writers is a product of Web 2.0 that has transformative capabilities for professional identity and communication. While expertise, credentialing, and trust are all components of establishing an ethotic relationship between these bloggers and their audiences, I argue that this relationship is ultimately composed through the accretion of all of these concepts as enacted and expressed in the "little moments" of communication by the rhetor's textual persona.

In the remainder of this chapter, I examine three key components—and potential threats—to the ethotic relationships that full-time food bloggers must manage in order to cultivate and maintain their relationship with readers: their professional journey, the comment section, and sponsorship.[122] These three components can function as both opportunities and pitfalls for the blogger in developing an ethotic relationship with readers, and the comment section in particular is a site where we can see the ethotic relationship in action.

Food Bloggers and Professional Identity

As any food blog reader knows, there is quite a range in the quality and style of food blogs as well as in their longevity and popularity. Many aspiring bloggers have started food blogs, perhaps posted content for a couple weeks or months, and then lost interest or time to devote to them. A successful food blogger like those I examine in this chapter builds up a reputation within the larger food blogging community, creating what Mackiewicz calls "situated credibility," and reinforces this credibility through individual posts. By contrast, "invented credibility" is the term Mackiewicz uses for the type of credibility described within the Aristotelian tradition. [123] The "invented credibility" of individual posts can also help attract new blog readers—such as those who were searching for a recipe for a particular dish included on the food blog—who, if they successfully execute the dish, might turn to the food blog for other

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[122] There is also a boundary and range between distance and familiarity (or, the professional and personal) that bloggers must navigate—how much personal disclosure is too much, or not enough, for their audience? As mentioned in Chapter 3, there will always be a segment of the food blog readership that is not interested in developing a relationship with the blogger—the "I just want the recipe, not to know you" crowd—that will be critical of nearly any level of personal disclosure on the part of the blogger. However, in this chapter I am primarily concerned with the development of the ethotic relationship and will maintain focus on the portion of the audience who does come to these blogs at least partially for the personal content.

[123] Mackiewicz distinguishes credibility from trustworthiness in her article. She describes a trustworthy person as one who "is sincere and honest when making assertions, but it does not mean that a trustworthy person's assertions are necessarily accurate. Rather, they are what the trustworthy person considers accurate" (407). Credibility, on the other hand, has to do with the accuracy of the information conveyed. Therefore, an expert in Mackiewicz's mind is one who knows enough about a topic to convey accurate (credible) information (407).

recipes in the future. Likewise, a food blog that readers feel fails to provide consistently good recipes could easily find itself losing situated credibility, thus having a more difficult time inventing credibility in the future.

A small subset of food bloggers have been able to garner such large followings and popularity that they were able to monetize their blogs and turn managing them into a full-time career. In Chapter 3, I argue that food bloggers, Deb Perelman, Chungah Rhee, and Beth Moncel strategically use techniques such as crafting "small stories" and literary devices to create a textual persona through the headnotes sections of their blog posts. In this section, I delve in to their move from food blogging as a hobby to food blogging as a career, and the accompanying shift in professional identity that this transition involved. I am particularly interested in the perspectives of the bloggers themselves about this transition—at least in how they communicate the journey to audiences—because the stories they tell about their professionalization also continue to impact the textual persona developed through their blog and, therefore, their ethotic relationship with readers.

Deb Perelman and Smitten Kitchen

Perelman, often considered one of the earliest and most prominent food bloggers, like nearly all food bloggers started out by blogging as a hobby. In a 2020 podcast interview with *The Feedfeed*,[124] she reveals that she left her job in art therapy to run her blog full-time when her site was generating enough ad revenue to match her existing salary and pay for insurance, which happened in 2008 (Cohen, 00:07:04-00:07:54). While she still does all of the recipe testing, writing, and photography herself, by 2020 she has progressed to having an ad team, a part-time personal assistant, and a kitchen assistant (Cohen, 00:34:51-00:36:33).

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[124] Direct quotes from this podcast interview were transcribed by Thielen and edited for clarity.

Shortly after taking on the blog full-time, she began writing her first cookbook, *The Smitten Kitchen Cookbook*, which was released in 2012 and won the 2013 International Association of Culinary Professionals' (IACP) Julia Child Award for a first book. Writing the cookbook and shifting to running her blog full-time allowed Perelman to focus more on recipe-testing and development, a process that also shifted over time (Cohen, 00:08:59-00:09:40; Jacob[125]). For instance, the frequency with which she publishes recipes has decreased over time (now only about once a week), in a pursuit of quality over quantity, or, as she says, ". . . the level that each recipe needs to be is a little bit higher. I don't ever want filler; I also don't *need* to make filler. The website is old and there's like a 1000+ recipes on it. I need to make really good additions to make you show up . . . ." (Cohen, 00:11:31-00:12:02). Here, then, we can see the way that moving between genres, as well as extra-institutional and institutional publishing spaces, has impacted Perelman's approach to generating content. Recognizing this shift in institutional affiliation is important because it illustrates how career trajectories have changed, especially with the affordances of digital technologies. These changes in how individuals progress through their working life also challenges traditional notions of professionalization.

During her interview with Cohen, Perelman repeatedly emphasizes her commitment to quality. Despite the fact that she's not a professionally-trained chef or recipe developer, Perelman indicates a strong desire to produce quality recipes for her audience and curate an authentic authorial voice: "I really only care about quality, and I only care about it, like, sounding like me and being something I believe in, and I won't publish something I don't feel

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[125] In a 2011 interview with Dianne Jacob prior to the release of her first cookbook, Perelman states, "Writing the book has changed the way I do the site. I've gotten more aggressive with my recipe testing and my writing. My recipes in the last 1.5 years are different. The first couple of years, I was clueless about recipe copyright and adapting. I would use a recipe from somewhere and change very little. I used to feel it was disrespectful to the cook to change the recipe—that you're supposed to give credit and compliments. As the site went on, I became a better cook. Now I'm working hard on recipe development."

strongly about" (Cohen, 00:23:28-00:23:40). This desire for quality is driven by how she views

her relationship to her audience: "What you hope you're building is a trust. So . . . you would

know that if I published [a recipe], like I feel very strongly [that] it's not going to make you

angry and ruin your evening . . . that's kind of this little promise I've made, and I think about that

all of the time when I write recipes" (Cohen, 00:21:20-00:21:39). For Perelman, an essential

component of creating trust with her readers is producing quality content, which she is able to do

despite not having professional training in recipe writing or development. Her years of blogging

as a hobby helped her develop native expertise, and her candid posts detailing the process of

developing her recipes has given her a readership far beyond that of many professionally-trained

chefs. She even attributes some of her success (and the success of food blogs in general) to her

individual writing voice: "I feel like that's what blogs have always known, that individual voice

is far more interesting than editorial voice" (Cohen, 00:16:00-00:16:08). And as Cohen points

out, food writing magazines and other, more traditional, publications have likewise shifted away

from the editorial voice towards a more individual and personal-sounding voice for their staff

writers (00:15:45-00:16:02). Thus, we see the influence of quasiprofessionals like Perelman

influencing more traditional professional practices.

Social media has also played a role in Perelman's professional practices. When asked

how the rise of social media influenced the way she approached blogging, Perelman responded,

> I haven't changed what I do, I just—if you want to be on Twitter, I'll show up on
>
> Twitter, if you want to be on Instagram, I'll show up in Instagram and Facebook,
>
> so I've always just wanted to show up where people are, um, if this is how you
>
> want to get your news. Like when I first started, RSS was like this really big
>
> thing, and so I made sure my RSS feed worked the way I wanted it to, and then

there were like email RSS, and I think it was Facebook, and after that it was

Twitter, and then it was Instagram, and now it's—I mean I guess Pinterest was in

there too; I never went really hard on the Pinterest strategy—so my feeling is just

meet people where they are. (Cohen, 00:14:06-00:14:43)

I quote this passage at length because it illustrates Perelman's continued faithfulness to her

textual persona and the ethotic relationship she has built with her fans. At the beginning of

Perelman's response, we see her once again emphasize her commitment to producing quality

content ("I haven't changed what I do"). This statement is a reassurance that her commitment to

her audience is not something that will be changed by emerging platforms—the way readers

have come to view her will not (in Perelman's opinion) be changed by the fact that she also

engages with social media. Rather, she spins the impact of social media into an affordance that

once again places her audience at the center of her focus: to "meet people where they are." Even

though she mentions that there was strategy involved with her use of RSS, Facebook, and

Twitter, Perelman circles back to the idea that this strategy was more about reaching her

audience than anything to do with the recipes she developed or her writing style. In other words,

she frames social media platforms as tools that bring her in touch with her readers, rather than

rhetorical situations in themselves.

While Perelman might wish to dismiss social media platforms as new rhetorical

situations, other perspectives call this distinction into question. In a 2017 interview with

Perelman for *Bon Appetit*, Alex Beggs describes *Smitten Kitchen* in much more brand-centric

terms and points to Perelman's strategic use of social media to promote *Smitten Kitchen*: "The

separation [of Perelman's personal and brand Instagram accounts] shows how huge Smitten

Kitchen, the brand, has grown. The audience is more on the scale of a large company or

magazine,[126] and with that, comes a tighter strategy. It's carefully edited for a wide audience. It's

consistently delicious, upbeat, apolitical" (Beggs). The "audience" Beggs refers to is not the

audience of Perelman's personal Instagram account but rather that of her *Smitten Kitchen*

account. The posts on her *SK* account exclusively feature recipes and dishes from her blog,

whereas her personal account features photos of travel and her family (and occasionally food,

usually in the context of travel photos or family meals), illustrated in Figure 2 below:

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[126] As of October 14, 2021, the Smitten Kitchen Instagram account (@smittenkitchen) has 1.5 million followers. Her personal account (@debperelman), on the other hand, has 184,000 followers as of the same date.
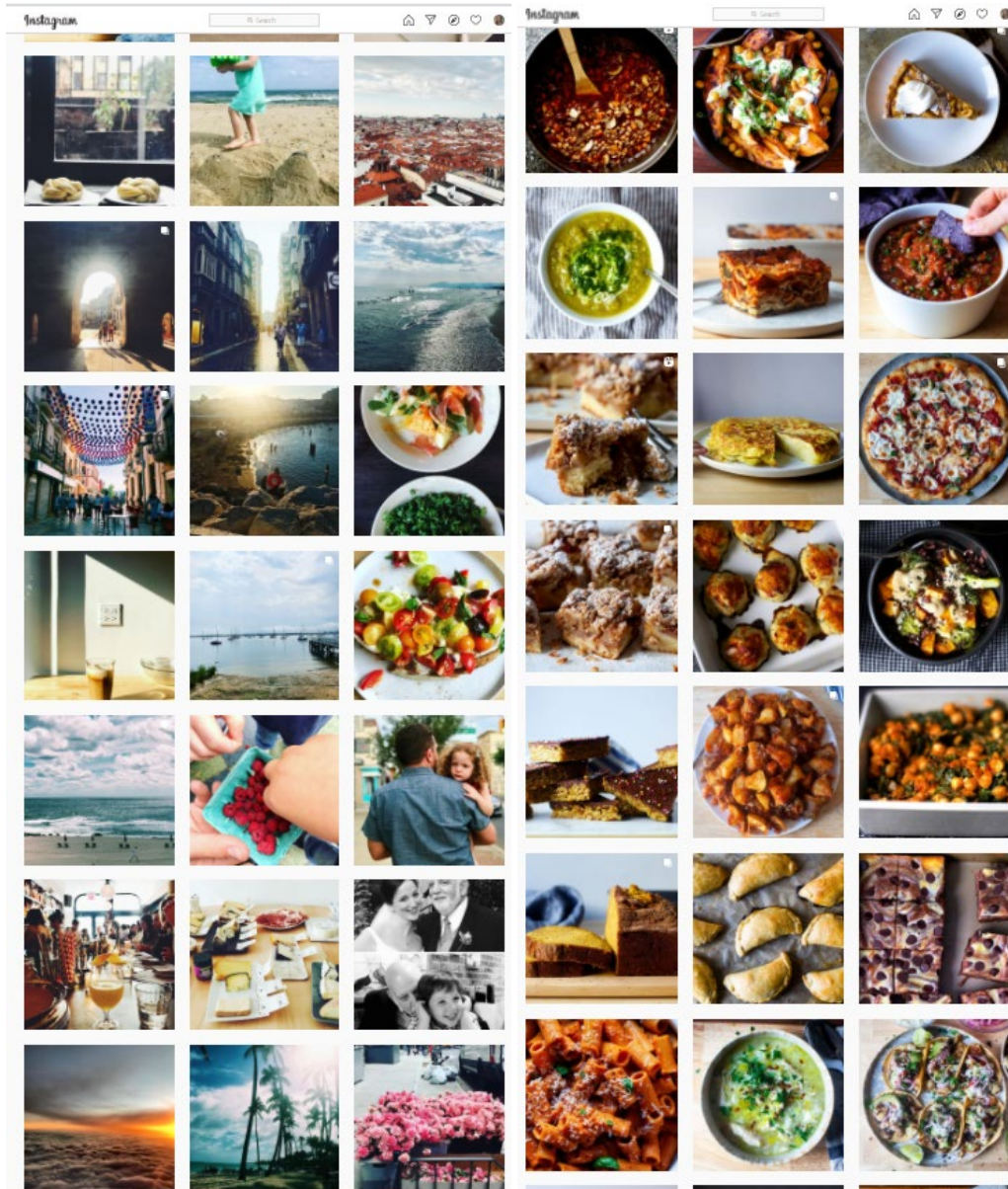
Figure 2: Deb Perelman on social media. A side-by-side comparison of recent posts from Perelman's personal Instagram account (left) and her *Smitten Kitchen* account (right). Both screenshots were taken on October 14, 2021.

Additionally, the Instagram button on the *Smitten Kitchen* website takes readers directly to her @smittenkitchen Instagram account, rather than her personal one (the same is true of the Facebook and Twitter buttons). The separation between Perelman's personal and *Smitten Kitchen* social media accounts might suggest an attempt to distinguish Perelman the person from Perelman the textual persona behind *Smitten Kitchen*; however, it is really a false distinction that

actually requires Perelman to maintain her textual persona from the blog on her personal social media accounts as well. The interconnected nature of digital spaces—and of social media in particular—collapses the boundaries between personal and professional spheres. The absolute necessity for bloggers to drive web traffic to their sites in order to generate ad revenue demands, in a sense, that successful bloggers have a social media presence that encourages the audiences who find them on these platforms to migrate to the *Smitten Kitchen* blog itself (see Figure 3 below for an example). By contrast, the @smittenkitchen Instagram profile does *not* encourage followers to also follow Perelman's personal account (see Figure 4).
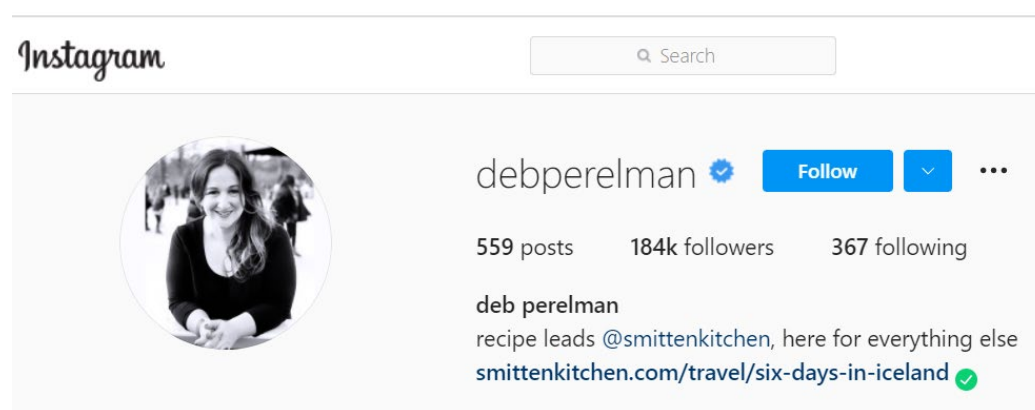

Figure 3: Perelman's personal Instagram banner. The profile banner for Perelman's personal Instagram account clearly links to her *Smitten Kitchen* account, as well as a recent post on the blog itself (accessed 15 October 2021).

Figure 4: *Smitten Kitchen* Instagram banner. This banner does *not* link followers directly to her personal account (accessed 15 October 2021).

The intertextual linkages that promote the *Smitten Kitchen* blog over Perelman's personal accounts suggest that Perelman is using the rhetorical affordances of social media to further her identity as a professional—elevating this identity in the public eye over her other positionalities as a wife, mother, traveler, etc. These distinctions, however, are messy and blurred by the inherent interconnectedness of online spaces, and therefore, of online personas.[127] As a result, savvy social media users understand that who they are outside of their professional identity—including how they speak and behave online—impacts their professional identity, resulting in pressure to maintain at least a semi-professional identity in all the public-facing aspects of their lives.

Chungah Rhee and Damn Delicious

In a marked contrast to Perelman, Rhee is very open about how she uses the online landscape, and social media in particular, to develop her identity as a professional food blogger. But much like Perelman, Rhee did not have any formal training in cooking or recipe

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[127] An illustration of this interconnectivity between online personas can be found in a simple Google search. Searching for an individual will call up personal *and* professional activity associated with that name; search results are not designed to distinguish between these spheres.

development (or in writing, for that matter); prior to blogging full-time, Rhee worked as an

epidemiologist. A 2016 exposé on *Delish* describes Rhee's transition from blogging as a hobby

to blogging as a profession:

> At that point, the site stopped being a hobby, and Rhee started getting strategic.
> As much as she enjoyed baking, her savory dishes were what really resonated
> with people, so she centered her brand on quick, easy dinners you could cook in
> 30 minutes or less. With that as her guiding mantra, the site started to take shape.
> "You've got to pay attention to trends, because if you don't, who cares about your
> posts?" Rhee says. "There was a kale trend, a one-pot trend, now it's a sheet pan
> trend, where everything's made on a sheet pan. I just go with the flow of the
> trends, and put my own twist on it." (Davison)

This passage highlights how Rhee used knowledge of her blog's traffic and larger cooking trends

to alter the content she was producing to better respond to audience interests. She shifted from

publishing recipes based on what she wanted to make to publishing recipes based on what her

audience wanted. The ability to respond to trends is an advantage that online publishing channels

have over traditional print publishing—it would be much more difficult for a print cookbook

author to determine which particular recipes from their cookbook were causing readers to buy it

in order to develop more of them. The speed of audience feedback and web traffic analysis

enables food bloggers to be much more responsive to their audiences' interests.

In her transition from hobby blogger to professional, Rhee developed new skills—often

self-taught (an example of quasiprofessionalization)—until she was earning enough "through

ads, sponsored posts and recipe development deals" to run the blog full-time (Davison). Rhee

improved her food photography skills because so much of her blog traffic was based on referrals

from Pinterest[128] (see Figure 5 below), and she taught herself search engine optimization (SEO) to generate traffic from other channels as well (Davison). She currently has a team of three employees listed on the blog's website (not including her dogs, who are also listed), who help her manage the site, develop recipes, and style food ("Meet Our Team").

Figure 5: *Damn Delicious* Photo Comparison. A 2019 photo accompanying Rhee's recipe for "Cilantro Lime Chicken" (left) compared to a 2011 photo for "Asian Inspired Braised Short Ribs" (right) ("Best of 2011"). The later photo exhibits more sophisticated lighting techniques and sharper image quality, which highlight each individual piece of chicken. The photo for the chicken dish also features more artful plating and brighter pops of color from the lime wedges and cilantro. The lower image quality and sauce-heavy plating of the short ribs, by contrast, creates a gloopy look that is less refined.

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[128] Pinterest is a social media platform that functions like an online bulletin board, where users can "pin" images from websites that can then take the user back to that particular webpage in the future. Hence the importance of food photography.

The inclusion of Rhee's corgis within her team deserves further attention, as it is a notable example of the ways in which Rhee participates in "lifestreaming" as a way to attract and connect to her audience (see Figure 6 below). Of the food bloggers I examine, Rhee is by far the most emblematic of lifestreaming, through her blog as well as through social media platforms, particularly Instagram. The profile photo for her @damndelicious Instagram account is a photo from her wedding in June 2020. Unlike Perelman, Rhee does not have separate personal and professional social media accounts (see Figure 7 below); her @damndelicious account features her personal life as much—or more—than food-blog-related content (see Figure 8 below). Her corgis, Butters and Cartman, are frequently featured on both her blog and in her Instagram posts and stories. In fact, even though Rhee has an Instagram account dedicated to the dogs themselves (@butterscorgigram), their presence dominates her @damndelicious account. Her account's tagline reveals Rhee's own awareness of her dogs' presence: "40% recipes 60% corgis."

MEET OUR TEAM

CHUNGAH RHEE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Chungah is the founder and creator of Damn Delicious, established in 2011. She currently resides in Chicago, splitting her time in Los Angeles, and loves tacos, donuts and the Dodgers.

JANA NAWARTSCHI
BIELEFELD, GERMANY

Originally from Germany, Jana is a Boston-based actress, artist, and writer. When she is not on set or roaming the stage, Jana works behind-the-scenes, taking care of all things operational at Damn Delicious.

MARIAN COOPER CAIRNS
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Marian is the food stylist and recipe developer at Damn Delicious. Based in Los Angeles, you can typically find her eating nachos, pizza and hot dogs for breakfast.

MICHELLE FERRAND
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

When Michelle is not on set as an assistant food stylist, she is cooking up a storm on her own blog to help you host killer party food and cocktails!

BUTTERS AND CARTMAN
COLFAX, CALIFORNIA

Butters and Cartman are employees of the year for Damn Delicious. You can find them typically sleeping on the job by the toilet or stealing all the underwear and socks.

Figure 6: *Damn Delicious,* "Meet Our Team." A screenshot of the "Meet Our Team" page on Rhee's blog, with her corgis featured at the bottom. (accessed 18 October 2021)
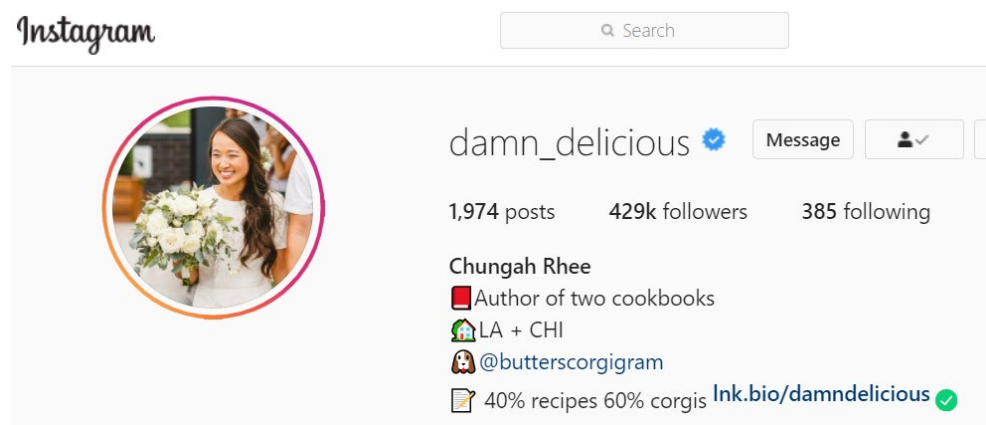
Figure 7: Chungah Rhee's Instagram Banner. Rhee does not have separate personal and professional Instagram accounts; rather, her personal life and blog promotion all occur within the @damn_delicious profile (accessed 15 October 2021)
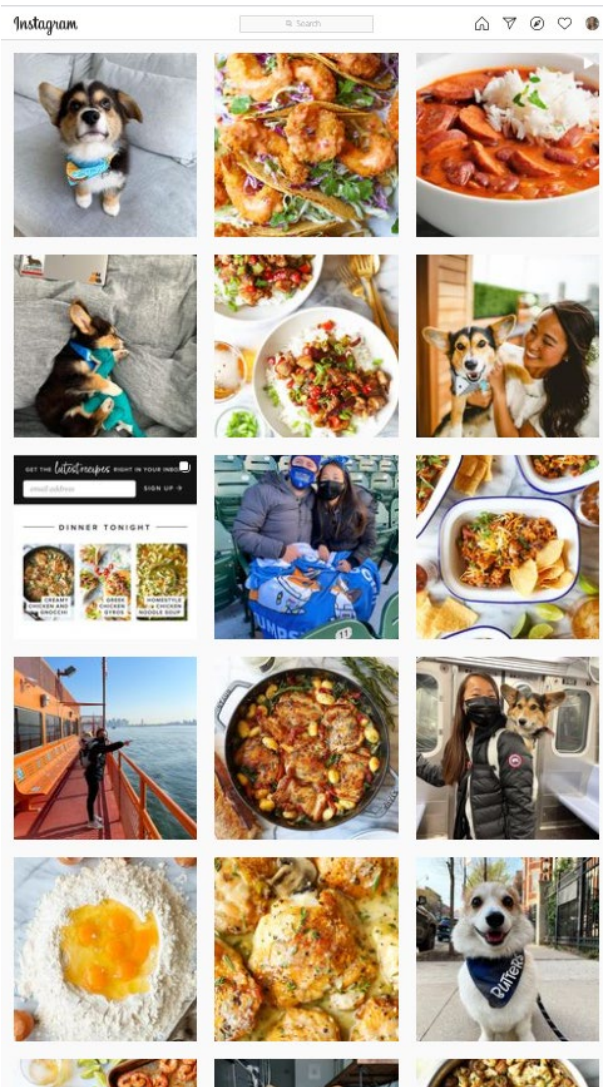
Figure 8: Chungah Rhee's Instagram Photos. A screenshot of representative recent posts on Rhee's @damndelicious Instagram account, which shows the mix of blog-promoting content through recipe photos and Rhee's corgis and personal activities (accessed 18 October 2021)

The lack of division between Rhee's personal life and blog promotion exemplifies lifestreaming. Marwick argues that, "Lifestreaming is the sum of a person's digital parts, aggregated and monitored by others. The 'digital self' that results is composed of particular types of information . . . casting certain aspects of life into sharp relief but obscuring others" (211). Marwick acknowledges that while people who participate in lifestreaming attempt to control this "digital self" through the curation of what they post online, their online presence and its reception are not completely within their control (211). Furthermore, she writes, ". . . this

management, if done 'correctly,' requires frequent, ongoing emotional labor. The lifestream is not a direct reflection of a person, but a strategic, edited simulacrum, one specifically configured to be viewed by an audience" (211). In other words, what we (the audience of Rhee's blog and social media accounts) see is a curated view into her personal life comprised of fragmented glimpses. Rhee's corgis, by virtue of their recurrence, act as a sort of through-line that gives Rhee's digital self within and across platforms a sense of cohesion. By giving her audience frequent access to her daily life, Rhee creates a perception of intimacy between herself and her readers/viewers. This access is, of course, one-sided: Rhee's audience can feel they know a lot about what is going on in her life, but Rhee does not receive this same access and insight into the lives of her fans. This last point reminds us that the ethotic relationship developed between rhetor and audience is mediated by the *textual persona* of the blogger and the audience. Even readers who might know Rhee in real life (e.g. a friend, her mother) are engaging with the *curated* simulacrum, to use Marwick's term, when they read her blog.

Rhee's textual persona as expressed through her blog and public-facing social media platforms is more casual than traditionally professional. Her blog headnotes exemplify casual "millennial-speak" rather than a more formal, detached tone traditionally associated with professional communication. Take, for example, this description of how to finish a recently-posted recipe for Fried Chicken Sandwiches: "To top it off, these bad boys are served on the butteriest brioche buns slathered with Sriracha mayonnaise (please feel free to add as little or as much Sriracha as your heat tolerance will allow you to do so), coleslaw (homemade or store-bought is totally fine here) and ALL the dill pickle chips" (Rhee "Fried Chicken Sandwiches"). Despite the casual tone, however, the instructions are still clear (and they are reinforced in the actual recipe that follows, using the instructional tone typical of recipes). Like Perelman, Rhee

positions herself as a friend to her audience and tends to eschew an authoritative writerly voice. This choice, in conjunction with a social media presence that interweaves the personal and professional, make it difficult for a reader to tell where Rhee as a "person" ends and the *Damn Delicious* brand begins—and this blurring, I argue, is part of the point, as it masks the savvy businesswoman behind a friendly face. Readers can easily forget (or remain completely unaware) of the behind-the-scenes strategic acumen that go into running *Damn Delicious,* as Rhee uses contraprofessionalization techniques to appear, deceptively, unprofessional.

Beth Moncel and Budget Bytes

Finally, we come to Beth Moncel of *Budget Bytes*. While like Rhee and Perelman, Moncel initially began her blog as a hobby, she quickly realized that her hobby had potential as a full-time career. In a 2018 email-based interview, she describes these early years and the gradual process of shifting from blogging as a hobby to a career:

> Very early on, maybe within the first year, I realized there was an *enormous* need for the information I was providing on my blog (low cost, satisfying, well balanced recipes with detailed instructions for new cooks). I knew at that point it *could* turn into something very big if I put in the work. It wasn't until maybe four or five years later that I figured out how to make it a "career" or earn enough to support me working on it full time. Seeing published income reports from other bloggers . . . helped me figure out how to make it work. (Russell)

Right away, I want to note the use of scare quotes around the word "career" in Moncel's written response, as they point to a potential uneasiness with identifying blogging as a career or her role as a professional blogger. George Dillon compares this use of quotation marks (what he calls "perverted commas") to ". . . the Heideggerean/Derridean notion of words under erasure—

perverted commas enclose words that are used/not used by the speaker; they are usage under erasure—Not-Self intruding into the Self's discourse, but also being made a part of it" (66). Moncel's use of scare quotes around the term "career," then, suggest that she is not entirely comfortable identifying as someone who blogs professionally, or at least wants to distance herself from associations with careerist blogging that the interview readers and fans of her blog might have. Immediately after her use of "career," Moncel offers an alternative to the term in the form of the phrase "or earn enough to support me working on it [the blog] full time." We might view this addition or rephrasing as a way of defining the word "career," as well as directing attention away from herself and back to the blog (i.e. "usage under erasure"). She makes a similar move in her answer to a question about her plans for the blog and how she made it "successful":

> I feel like my blog has always had a life of its own and I've been scrambling just to keep up with it. I'm always running to catch up with where it's going, never planning ahead to intentionally make it into something that I envision. I honestly think that I just landed in the right place at the right time (the beginning of the big recession) and because I worked hard and stayed dedicated to always improving, success just happened. It's been a healthy mix of luck and hard work. (Russell)

Once again, Moncel's description of her blog's rise in popularity places herself in the background: the blog "had a life of its own" and Moncel was "running to catch up" and she disavows having any sort of long-term strategic plan. This narrative of a text having a sort of life of its own independent of the author bears resemblance to popular descriptions of creative writers discussing the inspiration for their pieces. While a full discussion of this comparison is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is enough to note that such attempts to direct attention

away from Moncel's role as author and creator of the blog function as a kind of mythologizing of the blog's origins, causing its existence to seem more natural than constructed. While later in her response Moncel does acknowledge that she had to put in "hard work," this admission is tempered by surrounding appeals to being "in the right place at the right time" and "luck" so that "success just happened."

Likewise, in a 2019 interview with *The Blogger's Digest*, Moncel states, "In 2014, I figured out how to properly monetize the blog and was able to make it a full-time gig soon after" (Lacy). Here, it's the phrase "I figured out how to properly monetize the blog" that catches my attention. Moncel's phrasing suggests a process of discovery ("figured out") that brings the blog into a state of monetization. Furthermore, her use of "properly" connotes both correctness and genuineness, as if it is in the blog's nature to be monetized and Moncel was just helping it find its *raison d'être*. In both explanations, the blog is presented as the thing that ultimately benefits from Moncel being able to devote herself to it full time, now that she is no longer "distracted" by working on another full-time job in order to live, while redirecting attention away from herself as agent and professional.

Figure 9: *Budget Bytes* Photo Comparison. Side-by-side comparison of the primary photo accompanying Moncel's recipe for "Lemon Parsley Pasta." This recipe (with the photo on the left) was initially published on 3 September 2009 and was updated with new photos (see the image on the right) on 16 March 2021. The original photo was accessed using the *Wayback Machine*. The earlier photo features an aerial view of the dish, with the left half in shadow, whereas the updated photo is taken at an angle more similar to a seated diner's perspective of the dish and the lighting is even. The updated photo also features more stylish plating, with lemon wedges scattered throughout to visually break up the mound of pasta, as well as a fork artfully twirling the pasta and giving the impression that a diner is about to take a bite. Because of the angle of the photo, the viewer is the implied as the person about to eat the finished pasta dish, creating a participatory feel that is absent in the original photo.

Moncel also describes the changes in blog composition and dissemination that she had to navigate as part of her professional journey. In her *Blogger's Digest* interview, she notes that it was initially unnecessary for food blogs to feature high-quality photos or videos alongside recipes, but this reality changed as bloggers became increasingly dependent on social media to direct traffic to their blogs (Lacy). This new reality meant that Moncel, like Rhee, needed to develop new skills to grow her audience and remain relevant (see Figure 9 above). In this interview, Moncel is much more transparent about the work she needed to put in to produce her content:

> I've always been interested in photography, so I knew how to use a manual camera and work with Photoshop before I began, but it had been at least ten years since I had actively taken photographs. So I've been learning as I do. I always take mental notes when I look at other food photographs and have watched and read a few tutorial [sic] online. When I started the blog I only had a camera phone (we're talking low resolution, non-smart phone camera), but soon invested in a cheap point and shoot digital camera. As the blog progressed, I realized how important the photographs were, so as soon as I could afford it I invested in a base level DSLR (Nikon D3100). (Oh)

Moncel's greater transparency into the nuts-and-bolts of how she developed her food photography skills in this interview could well be due to the venue: *The Blogger's Digest*

describes part of its mission as helping readers "learn about the writers behind the blogs they read" as well as helping the bloggers featured "reach a larger audience and get more eyeballs on their work" ("About the Blogger's Digest"). Therefore, it is not so easy as to say that it is always in a blogger's best interest to obscure their process of professional development: different rhetorical situations necessitate different degrees of mythologizing and disclosure.

In her interview with *The Blogger's Digest*, Moncel continues to be more open about the "realities of food blogging" (Lacy). For instance, when asked about her team, Moncel responds:

> At some point you have to admit to yourself that you *can't* be an expert at everything, and there *aren't* 100 hours in the day, so you do have to hire help. The first person I hired was my social media manager. She stays on top of the rules, regulations, and best practices for each social media platform, all of which are constantly changing, and she helps me schedule posts to various platforms . . . . I also have a business or operations manager that started with me about a year ago. She helps me manage my email inbox, coordinate projects, research opportunities, and brainstorm content (among 100 other things). She's basically like my second brain because there just aren't enough hours in the day for me to do everything! I have a web designer, of course, because I wouldn't be able to come even close to building a website myself, and I have hired services for things like website hosting, and WordPress tech support. (Lacy; original emphasis)

Much like Perelman, Moncel admits to hiring help for tasks related to the blog's function and accessibility, as well as to more managerial and organizational tasks. The implication is that delegating these tasks frees up time for Moncel to devote to the more "creative" aspects of

generating blog content and reassures readers that they are still getting content that is "authentic" to Moncel.

Moncel, Rhee, and Perelman all use contraprofessionalization techniques strategically to mask the professional aspects of being successful, full-time food bloggers. This evidence suggests that there is an expectation that food blogs are an inherently "non-professional" space that prominent food bloggers feel they must respect, even as they take steps to professionalize in specific ways to grow their audiences and generate a livable revenue from their blogs. The ways in which these bloggers describe their journey from blogging as a hobby to blogging as their primary career, then, are rhetorically constructed to mask the ways in which they participate in professionalization. That this professionalization often occurs not through formal channels (such as attending culinary school or earning some sort of certificate or accreditation) but through personal trial-and-error before a "live audience" of readers speaks to the value readers of food blogs place on learning through experience, or "native expertise." In order to cultivate an ethotic relationship with their readers, then, food bloggers might feel pressure to obscure their own professional development activity so that readers feel they are engaging in a personal, rather than consumer-based, relationship with the blogger.

Online Commenting and *Ethos*

Responding to reader comments is another way that food bloggers build and maintain an ethotic relationship with readers, and it is also a way for them to negotiate expertise. The back-and-forth that takes place between bloggers and readers in the comment section negotiates the ethotic relationship—what and how a blogger responds to readers in this space can both bolster or harm her credibility and perceived authority with readers. The exchanges that take place in the comment section also contribute to the blogger's textual persona, as discussed in the previous

section. Jeffrey Grabill and Stacey Pigg's analysis of similar back-and-forth participation

between original poster and audience in the *Science Buzz* online forum led them to argue: ". . .

identity performances are not only important for establishing individual credibility, but [are] also

central to sustaining the conversation that unfolds within *Science Buzz*" (104). The authors of

food blogs, which exist in an online environment and develop serially, also use the accretion of

individual identity performances to both establish credibility and "sustain the conversation"

taking place on their blogs. I touched on the serial nature of food blogs briefly in Chapter 3,

where I noted that food bloggers can revise and republish individual posts in response to reader

feedback, as well as curate their lives in order to construct a textual persona with whom their

readers can develop an ethotic relationship. In this section, I look at a number of different types

of comment exchanges—complimentary, inquisitive, and critical—to illustrate how this digital

affordance impacts the ethotic relationship.

Comments left by readers of a food blog shape the blogger's credibility by affirming (e.g.

"This dish was fantastic!"), criticizing ("This dish was very bland"), or questioning ("Can I

substitute gluten-free flour?") a blogger's recipe. Take, for instance, the exchange between a

reader, Yve, and Rhee from February 3, 2020, captured as a screen shot in Figure 10 below.

Dear Ms Rhee

I have just purchased a copy of your meal prep cookbook. I love the look of the recipes but I have a problem. The first one to catch my eye for a better look was the miso salmon tray bake. Yum, I thought, then I looked at the nutritionals. Hmm, I thought... you specify a 6oz salmon fillet per portion yet give calorie count for whole meal (one portion) of 253 calories. How can the be? Salmon provides approx. 55 cals per oz, which would give a count of 330cals just for the salmon, before we even reach for the honey etc.

Now I'm wondering about the nutritionals quoted for all the other recipes. I hope it's a pesky typo, but now (I too am a type A person, and Scottish to boot = type AA) I shall have to check them all. Boo. Still gorgeous recipes though! I adore your dogs. Have a superb wedding day.

Yve, the nutritional information is correct and has been triple checked. Please note that different types of salmon have different amounts of calories. For example, 6 ounces of king (chinook) salmon contains 304 calories, coho (silver) salmon contains 248 calories, and pink (humpy) contains 197 calories.

Figure 10: (Yve. Comment on "About")

I selected this exchange in part because the commenter is primarily addressing a recipe in one of Rhee's cookbooks (not a recipe from the blog), which reveals how readers cross between platforms and modalities: in this case, using an affordance of the food blog to seek clarification on and "correct" what they perceive as an error in the printed book. While commenter Yve ultimately phrases her concern as a question ("How can that be?"), in context what we really see is Yve critiquing the nutrition information provided in the cookbook. Yve's question and critique not only reflect her own doubt about the reliability of Rhee's cookbook—if left unchecked, they could cause other blog readers to question Rhee's expertise and credibility as well. Rhee responds to Yve by asserting the accuracy of the nutrition information ("[it] is correct and has been triple checked") and offers an additional explanation that makes her seem more knowledgeable than Yve by listing the calorie content of different types of salmon. As a result, both Yve and Rhee come across as knowledgeable about cooking and nutrition, but Rhee's

correction of Yve lends her greater authority (especially since Yve did not respond). Readers of

this exchange are reassured of Rhee's credibility and expertise, in addition to being made aware

of another venue for accessing Rhee's recipes (the print cookbook, specifically *Damn Delicious:*

115 Easy Recipes for Low-Calorie, High-Energy Living).

Another interesting aspect of this exchange is found in what Rhee *does not* respond to:

Yve's comment on Rhee's dogs and her upcoming wedding. In fact, a casual perusal of the 645

comments currently (as of 2 Sept. 2021) on Rhee's "About" page shows only five instances

where she responds to a reader's comment or question about her personal life. Likewise, a

review of the 127 comments currently (as of 2 Sept. 2021) on Moncel's "What is Budget Bytes?"

page[129] yielded zero instances of Moncel responding to reader comments or questions about her

personal life.[130] While a more dedicated survey than I can provide here is needed to truly answer

this question, it would seem that it is fairly common for food bloggers not to respond to

comments about or expand on their personal lives, suggesting that they prefer to convey a more

curated self-presentation within the contents of blog posts.

Comment section exchanges can also be used by readers as an attempt to control a

particular dish or recipe by publicly disagreeing with the ingredients or techniques the blogger

uses in her recipe. For example, the comment section under Perelman's most recently-posted

cornbread recipe was repeatedly used by readers to debate the authenticity of using sugar in

cornbread. Readers who identified as being from the American South insisted that sugar was

anathema to cornbread (and that using it changed the product from a cornbread to a cake or other

dish). For example, reader PJCAMP posts, "No, no, no, no! That isn't cornbread. It is a giant

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[129] Moncel's "About Beth" page does not have commenting enabled; her "What is Budget Bytes?" page is the closest equivalent with this feature. Perelman's "About" page also does not allow for commenting.

[130] To be fair, though, Moncel writes about her personal life the least of any of the four food bloggers examined in this dissertation.

corn flavored biscuit and it's just wrong. The reason you had to add sugar is because you added

flour. Don't add either. Corn is plenty sweet on its own" (Comment on "perfect, forever

cornbread"; see Figure 30 in appendix). PJCAMP then goes on to provide their own recipe and

technique for making cornbread in the way they consider authentic. Another reader, Robert,

comments, "This is the worst advice on making cornbread EVER! There's no sugar in cornbread.

That is cake. Sweetie, come on down to Memphis and we'll teach you how to make it. All you

need is a fork, a bowl, and a cast iron skillet. May God have mercy on your soul" (Comment on

"perfect, forever cornbread"; see Figure 27 in appendix). Robert's comment invokes location in

the South (being from Memphis) as well as uses the diminutive term of endearment "sweetie" to

refer to Perelman, both of which are attempts to check Perelman's authority on the subject of

cornbread (and, in the case of "sweetie," her authority more generally). These are but two of a

number of examples of readers censuring Perelman for including sugar in her cornbread recipe.

Other readers subsequently jump in to defend Perelman and/or to argue that there are

many varieties of cornbread across regions and that the American South does not "own"

cornbread as a dish (see Figures 26-30 in the appendix for sample screenshots of this debate).

Reader Laura, for instance, apologizes to Perelman for these critical comments: "Wow…all the

hate and judgement over 3T of sugar is really unfortunate. I'm sorry you've been treated like

that, Deb, especially when you work so hard to encourage readers to adapt your recipes to suit

their preferences. Yet, somehow, you're not allowed to have preferences and adapt recipes to suit

them?!?! Ridiculous" (Comment on "perfect, forever cornbread"; see Figure 29 in appendix).

Laura's use of "Deb" to address Perelman suggests that they feel close enough to her to be on a

digital "first name basis," and the fact that she also defends Perelman and refers to Perelman's

advice in other blog posts ("to encourage readers to adapt your recipes to suit their preferences")

suggests that she's a returning, rather than first-time, *Smitten Kitchen* reader. Furthermore, the style of the comment seeks to reaffirm Perelman's authority as a recipe developer and addresses dual audiences: Perelman, in its apology, as well as the readers who have been leaving critical comments with a "shame on you" subtext.

Another reader, JNH, defends Perelman's use of sugar by also citing their geographic roots: "I grew up with a similar tradition to you [commenter Kim, to whom JNH is directly responding] (0-3 tbs depending on what you're serving it with), growing up in southern appalachia" [sic] (Comment on "perfect, forever cornbread"; see Figure 28 in appendix). JNH's appeal to both their own location as well as acknowledging the Southernness of commenter Kim is consistent with and extends Helms Tippen's claim that, "The act of repeatedly naming cities . . . in narratives, headnotes, and titles is one way that chef-authors [and in this case, food blog commenters] can emphasize their personal authenticity as dwellers in the South" (136). JNH then bolsters her claim that sugar is indeed part of the history of cornbread in the South by linking to a 2016 article in *The Charlotte Observer*, "Why Does Sugar in Cornbread Divide Races in the South?," which quotes food historians Michael Twitty and Adrian Miller, among others.[131] Other readers (though, notably, none of the vocal critics) respond favorably to JNH's article link, thanking them for educating them about the roots of this debate.

Perelman herself, interestingly, mostly stays out of the debate. Of all of the comment threads to date (28 October 2021) that criticize her use of sugar, Perelman only responds once (to the aforementioned Robert):

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[131] While the article concludes that there is no easy answer to this question, Twitty believes sugar was a later addition to cornbread arising from a change in the type of corn used to make cornmeal and price differences between the older, sweeter corn meal and newer, non-sweet corn meal. He argues that black home cooks were less likely to be able to afford the more expensive, sweeter corn meal and used sugar to compensate. Miller posits that the greater prevalence for sugared cornbread in the American North came about as a result of the Great Migration (Purvis).

I've written about how classic Southern cornbread doesn't have sugar in it several times [hyperlink removed] on this site; I merely skipped the disclaimer this time because it was feeling redundant and this recipe makes no claims to being proper, authentic Southern cornbread. If it did, I would expect a lot of well-deserved consternation, as I would if I called something pad thai or falafel that wasn't. But that's not what this is. This is the perfect cornbread for me. It's absolutely okay to skip the sugar, or skip the recipe entirely. I do, however, love a lively comment section full of opinions, as long as they're friendly and good-natured. (Deb, Comment on "perfect, forever cornbread").

In her response, Perelman acknowledges that Southern-style cornbread often does not include sugar but defends her recipe by stating that she never claimed it was representative of "proper, authentic Southern cornbread." This acknowledgement, coupled with her expressed expectation to be called out for misrepresenting a dish, tells both her critics and defenders that she understands the importance of accurately representing a dish, but that is not what she seeks to do with this recipe. However, other commenters' responses claiming that they both live in or are from the South *and* use sugar in their cornbread disrupts Perelman's attempt to appease her critics through upholding the idea that "authentic" Southern cornbread lacks sugar. While Perelman's response might pacify some of her critics by acknowledging their "rightness" about the authenticity of sugarless cornbread, readers who do not see using sugar in cornbread as in conflict with their Southern identity are likely to be agitated further. Given the potential damage to her perceived credibility and her relationship with readers on either side of the debate, it is perhaps unsurprising that Perelman only defends herself once.

Given that readers frequently use the comment feature on food blog posts to point out real or perceived inaccuracies, errors, or typos, it is worth asking how food bloggers feel about this practice. In a 2012 interview with *NPR,* Perelman discusses the benefits she's received from reader comments: "I think that the comments over the years have been a huge help in developing, I think, my cooking meter. Because I know what I want to cook but I don't really know all the ways that other people are going to have trouble with it, until I read the comments . . . . I hope that it's helped me become a better recipe writer" ('Smitten Kitchen'). Moncel has also expressed her attention to comments in a 2019 *The Blogger's Digest* interview: "I still answer all comments and questions on social media myself, though. I think that's important for me to stay in touch with my readers and get feedback on my recipes" (Lacy).[132] Blog readers themselves might also wonder whether such comments would be welcomed by the blogger, as *Smitten Kitchen* reader Annie does in Figure 11 below:

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[132] Indeed, this back-and-forth interaction between writers and readers is a common characteristic of Web 2.0. Ledbetter, for instance, found that the video creators participating in her YouTube study, ". . . reported that they engaged in dialogue with audience members and received feedback that shaped the content of their procedural discourse" (294). I have also participated in such correspondence with food bloggers: in July 2020, I submitted a contact form on the *Budget Bytes* website with a suggestion for a dish that Moncel might consider designing a recipe for on her site. Moncel—or someone writing on her behalf—responded via email to my suggestion (see Figure 26 in the Appendix). As a reader of the blog, the perceived direct contact with the blog's author responding to my idea made me feel like I was helping to shape the blog in a small way, even if she did not take my suggestion at the time. Furthermore, her response that she first wanted to ". . . eat [it] in an authentic restaurant before attempting myself, lest I totally botch and misrepresent another culture's food" (Moncel "Re: Submission from Contact") strengthened my impression of her as a credible and trustworthy source of recipes, since I value this kind of cultural respect.

ANNIE

Hi there. While this slaw looks delightful, I write for another reason.

I frequent a number of food blogs, and I often wonder about the corrections that readers write into the authors about their posts. Wondering if you find the corrections/suggestions to be irritating or informative (or maybe a mix of both)? Just curious.

And, really, the slaw is now on my to-do list.

JULY 8, 2010 AT 3:30 PM · · REPLY

ST

Is that a plain old veggie peeler I spy, or something more?! I always have problems removing the flesh from the pit/peel. The cut-twist-score flesh-scoop method hasn't been kind in the past because, let's face it, I'm a noob. Is there a trick to successfully (and er easily) undressing my saucy llittle mango?

JULY 8, 2010 AT 3:36 PM · · REPLY

> **DEB**
>
> ST — It's a Y-peeler. So just like a vegetable peeler but the handle is in a different direction. I just got it a few weeks ago and I do find that it makes peeling thicker-skinned things easier (I peel butternuts, also, asparagus). If I were just using a regular one, I would peel it twice.
>
> Annie — I hate making mistakes, so I appreciate it. But I am not always sure that it is clear that this isn't a magazine with an editorial staff (though I'm flattered that anyone would think that), it's just me; I juggle a lot of work, a pretty fast pace of updates and a small child. I can pretty much guarantee there will be a typo in every post.
>
> JULY 8, 2010 AT 5:50 PM · · REPLY

Figure 11: (Annie. Comment on "mango slaw with cashews and mint")

Perelman responds to Annie's question as part of her reply to Reader ST, so it is quite probable that Annie never saw her response. And while Perelman does not speak on behalf of all food bloggers (and more than 10 years have elapsed since this exchange), her answer is worth noting as it relates to the question of professionalization. Perelman starts by saying she appreciates reader comments that reveal errors but qualifies her response. Perelman's positive response to reader corrections are encouraging to readers who might want to submit such a comment. However, she also reminds Annie (and other readers) that she is a one-woman operation, and though she might strive for editorial perfection, she does not have the resources to ensure that her

content will always look as professional as a "magazine" (Annie). Of note, then, is Perelman's expressed *desire* to achieve a level of professionalism in her blog content, placing her on the professionalization spectrum somewhere between quasiprofessionalization and contraprofessionalization: she wants to offer "professional" content but is not part of an institutional framework that would better support her goal (i.e. lacking an editorial staff). She is attempting to be an extra-institutional professional, and her response to Annie shows the challenges and limitations that come with such extra-institutionality.

On occasion, bloggers will even rewrite the recipe, or change or add information to the headnotes, to address reader comments. For instance, in July 2020, Moncel updated her recipe for "Sesame Cucumber Salad" (originally published in July 2009 as one of the very first recipes she posted), adding a section to the headnotes called "Do I have to use rice vinegar?":

> I strongly urge you not to substitute the rice vinegar [hyperlink removed] in this recipe. Rice vinegar has a uniquely mild flavor and acidity that is just perfect for this recipe. While people have substituted the rice vinegar with white vinegar or apple cider vinegar, I find them both a bit too strong for this recipe. Also, be mindful not to use "seasoned" rice vinegar, which has other ingredients added and tastes quite different. ("Sesame Cucumber Salad")

The "people" she mentions are commenters who either ask about substituting a different vinegar for the rice vinegar, or who post about making the substitution (see Figure 31 in the appendix for an example). Moncel asserts her own authority by explaining why she does not recommend a substitution for the rice vinegar, arguing that their flavor is too "strong" for the recipe. She even includes a hyperlink directing readers to an explanatory Wikipedia page on rice vinegar, implying perhaps that readers who are educated about rice vinegar understand why it is

important not to substitute. She also specifies that unseasoned rice vinegar should be used for the correct flavor profile.[133] By providing an explanation and defense for using unseasoned rice vinegar to prepare the dish, Moncel asserts her authority as recipe writer and protects against readers criticizing her recipe because they substituted a different vinegar and were unhappy with the result.

Blog comment exchanges can also provide opportunities for other readers to answer questions and directly share their experiences, resulting in a negotiated expertise not unlike that developed between the physician and Parkinson's patients in the online support forum (Bakke). The following screen shot (Figure 12 below) captures an exchange between Beth Moncel and two *Budget Bytes* readers (one of whom is also named Beth) regarding the possibility of using a "vegetarian meat substitute" in Moncel's recipe for "Country Sausage Gravy."

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[133] Ironically, a few days after the update was published, a reader inquired about how to "dial back the sour acidity of the rice vinegar." Another reader responded with the suggestion to "use the seasoned rice vinegar; mild and sweet" (Leigh. Comment on "Sesame Cucumber Salad").
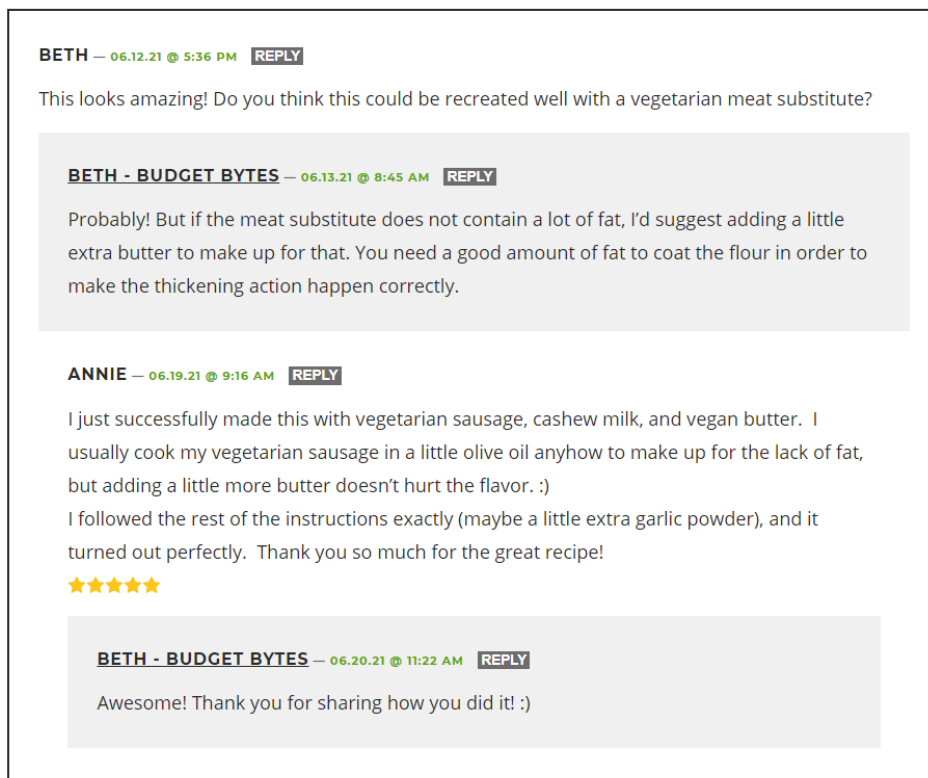
Figure 12: (Beth. Comment on "Country Sausage Gravy")

Moncel attempts to answer Reader Beth's question before another reader, Annie, chimes in with her method for using a vegetarian sausage substitute, which affirms Moncel's answer. Annie's confirmation (through her own experience) of Moncel's suggestion makes both of them appear knowledgeable and credible. Moncel's follow-up thanking Annie for sharing her process creates further good-will between all parties, and the public display of this exchange makes Moncel seem welcoming of interaction from her audience.

Food bloggers can also affirm their expertise even when admitting they cannot confidently answer a reader's question, as in Perelman's response to blog reader "Tanalicious's" question about her recipe for soft pretzels (see Figure 13 below):

TANALICIOUS

deb, my husband is on a diet that prohibits white flour. would it be possible to use whole wheat or white whole wheat instead? or would it just ruin it altogether? i tried a different recipe once before, but it wasnt very good. i'd love any input you have. thanks.

FEBRUARY 26, 2009 AT 10:16 PM · · REPLY

> **DEB**
>
> I haven't tried it with whole wheat. Usually when people want to swap it in, I recommend starting with only a 1/3 or 1/2 swap, to see the results as a full swap can make it too coarse, but in your husband's case, I'm not sure. You can always try a half or quarter-batch and see how they work.
>
> FEBRUARY 26, 2009 AT 11:46 PM · · REPLY

Figure 13: (Tanalicious. Comment on "soft pretzels, refreshed")

By acknowledging the limits of her own native expertise while sharing a general guide that the reader could apply to their specific situation, Perelman positions herself as someone who is knowledgeable about cooking and baking generally but will not make claims that she cannot support from personal experience. As a result, she privileges native expertise and encourages Tanalicious to cultivate their own native expertise in this area by experimenting with the ingredient swap themselves. However, by admitting the limits of her own native expertise, Perelman protects her credibility. I see this as a calculated move on Perelman's part as a savvy rhetorician—she believes it would be more damaging to her credibility for her to give advice that could result in a complete failure of the recipe's execution, rather than admitting she does not have the necessary first-hand experience to answer the question.

Another example of this technique comes from Rhee at *Damn Delicious*. In addition to receiving questions about ingredient substitutions, food bloggers are frequently asked whether a recipe that features a specific kitchen appliance or tool, such as the Instant Pot or Slow Cooker,

can be prepared with a different appliance or tool. Figure 14 below captures just such a question from reader Robert Johnson:

ROBERT JOHNSON — JULY 9, 2018 @ 8:12 PM REPLY

Can you use a slow cooker and how much time?

CHUNGAH @ DAMN DELICIOUS — JULY 10, 2018 @ 8:47 AM REPLY

Hi Robert! Unfortunately, without further recipe testing, I cannot answer with certainty. As always, please use your best judgment regarding substitutions and modifications.

Figure 14: (Robert Johnson. Comment on "Instant Pot Shrimp Boil")

Rhee's response mimics Perelman's above, calling on the reader themselves to experiment. She also includes language that alludes to a sort of recipe substitution policy. The "as always" language risks being interpreted by readers as impatience with the question, although Rhee's friendly and enthusiastic "Hi Robert!" greeting at the beginning of her reply likely encourages her comment to be taken in a friendlier tone.

Moncel and Perelman typically take a similar approach in responding to reader's equipment-substitution questions. However, they do occasionally offer some advice, as Moncel does to reader TJ in Figure 15 below:
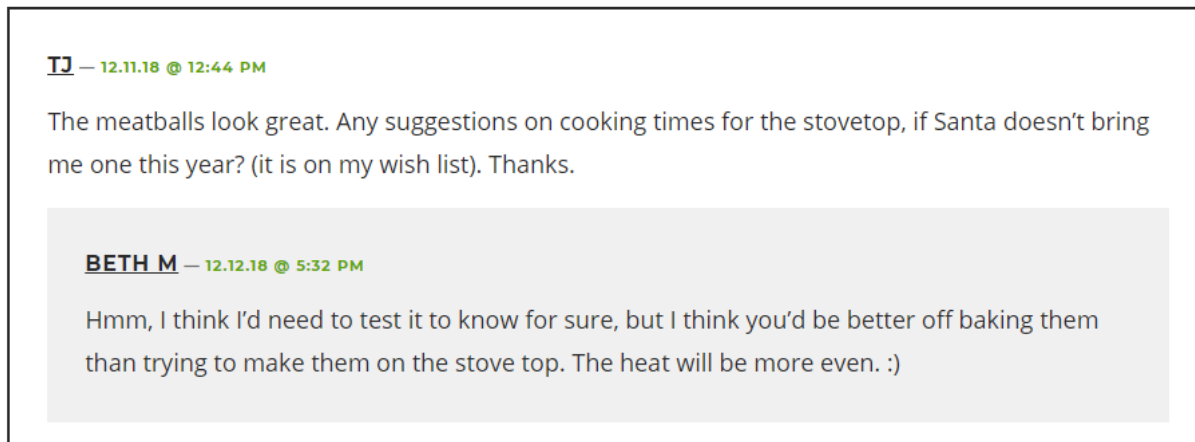
> **TJ** — 12.11.18 @ 12:44 PM
>
> The meatballs look great. Any suggestions on cooking times for the stovetop, if Santa doesn't bring me one this year? (it is on my wish list). Thanks.
>
> > **BETH M** — 12.12.18 @ 5:32 PM
> >
> > Hmm, I think I'd need to test it to know for sure, but I think you'd be better off baking them than trying to make them on the stove top. The heat will be more even. :)

Figure 15: (TJ. Comment on "Giant Slow Cooker Meatballs")

In responding to TJ's question, Moncel provides a warrant for her suggestion, even as she qualifies her answer by indicating that she lacks the first-hand experience of making this exact equipment exchange for this specific recipe. Moncel has attempted to temper TJ's expectations, in case they should take her advice and not be happy with the result.

As evidenced by this sample, readers comment on food blogs for a number of reasons, and food bloggers choose to respond to them (or not) in a variety of ways. Successfully navigating these comment exchanges often requires bloggers to assert a degree of expertise that they might otherwise hesitate to display, especially in the blog posts themselves. Failure to appear credible to readers in these exchanges, moreover, can result in damage to the ethotic relationship being cultivated not only between the blogger and the writer of a particular comment, but also with every subsequent reader who might stumble upon the exchange.

The Risks of Sponsorship

A third potential threat to the ethotic relationship between bloggers and readers lies in the common practice I am collectively referring to as "sponsorship." I use this term to cover a couple monetizing activities in which bloggers can participate, most notably brand sponsorship and participation in affiliate programs (where the blogger earns a small commission whenever a

reader buys a product using the affiliate hyperlink). These practices differ from a monetizing strategy such as advertising using a program like GoogleAdSense, and advertising deals are crucial for any blogger who wants to generate revenue. According to Brett VanderMolen in a guest post on monetizing food blogs, "The main ways to make money from a blog are display ads, sponsored content, affiliate marketing, and selling a product" ("How We 5X'd Our Food Blog Income"). *Budget Bytes, Damn Delicious,* and *Smitten Kitchen* all feature ads, with Perelman specifying on her FAQ page that the company Hashtag Labs handles the advertising on her site ("Frequently Asked Questions"). Perelman structures the FAQ page on her blog with pastiches of the most common questions she apparently gets from readers. One specifically addresses a hypothetical reader complaint about the ads featured on her site (see Figure 16).

I saw an ad on your site that offended me. I cannot believe you're taking money from that terrible political candidate/evil corporation/people who kick puppies! I know that you have bills to pay but... Wait, stop. First, ugh, I am very sorry. Believe me, the last thing I want on the site is political or other offensive ads, ever, and never once have I said, "Let's put up a really obnoxious ad because MONIES are the most important thing in the world." My ads are served by large networks that buy in bulk; sometimes these slip through and we can't remove them until they are brought to our attention. There are no direct transactions; the following scene has never/does not ever/would never happen:

> Evil Congressional Candidate: I'd like to buy an ad on your site.
> Deb: You have very divisive views and I disagree with your politics, so, no.
> ECC: But I will offer you a LOT of money. You will be rich!
> Deb: Hokay, then! Why not?!
> [Fades ominously to black.]
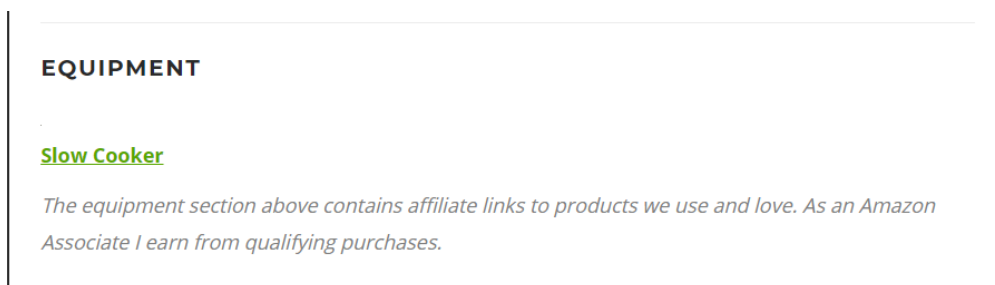
Finally, many ads are targeted either by region or browsing history (i.e. people who go to any political sites are likely see political ads; I, predictably, see ones for cookware) so I actually don't see what you're seeing. Nevertheless, shoot me an email the moment you see something you don't like and I will immediately do everything in my power to have it taken out of the rotation.

Figure 16: (Perelman. "Frequently Asked Questions")

In response to this hypothetical reader question, Perelman takes the time to explain how ad placement works and also provides an avenue of recourse for readers offended by a particular ad. This explanation serves to educate a (possibly disgruntled) reader about the logistics of blog advertising and gives frustrated readers a sense of participation and control in the invitation to reach out to Perelman with information about an offensive ad. The ridiculous aspect of the exclamation, "I can't believe you're taking money from . . . people who kick puppies!" injects some of the humor for which Perelman is known, helping keep her "voice" and textual persona consistent on a static page of her website.

While bloggers have little-to-no control over the particular ads featured on their site, they do have control over sponsorship-related activities. In the previous section, I touched on how food bloggers handle equipment substitution questions, and it is important to note here that food bloggers often have a financial incentive to promote particular cooking equipment or food products for recipes. For instance, Moncel participates in the Amazon Influencer Program and links products used in her recipes to where readers can purchase them on Amazon, as she does in the recipe for "Giant Slow Cooker Meatballs" (see Figure 17).

EQUIPMENT

Slow Cooker

The equipment section above contains affiliate links to products we use and love. As an Amazon Associate I earn from qualifying purchases.

Figure 17: *Budget Bytes* Hyperlink. The "Slow Cooker" hyperlink in the upper screen shot (Moncel, "Giant Slow Cooker Meatballs") links to the Amazon product page in the lower screen shot ("Hamilton Beach")

Moncel even has a main menu button called "Shop" that takes readers to a page dedicated to product links, and where she once again discloses her Amazon Associate status.[134] This product page is an example of how a blogger can monetize her blog by "selling a product" (VanderMolen) and taking advantage of affiliate programs. An even more explicit way that these three bloggers sell products, however, is through promoting their cookbooks. Moncel links to her cookbook on both the Amazon Shop and her "About" page, whereas Rhee and Perelman have menu links to their cookbooks (called "Cookbooks" and "Books," respectively). Purchasing cookbooks through these site links will benefit the bloggers through affiliate dollars as well as from the royalties they receive from the book sales.[135]

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[134] According to Amazon, "The Amazon Influencer Program is an extension to the existing online Associates program for qualifying social media influencers" ("How is the Amazon Influencer Program"). Amazon Influencers receive a special vanity URL and a customizable Amazon "shop." Moncel's Amazon shop can be found at https://www.amazon.com/shop/influencer-14578421. Note: Amazon Associate and Amazon Affiliate appear to be interchangeable terms: "The Amazon Associates Program is one of the largest affiliate networks in the world that helps content creators, publishers, and website owners monetize their traffic. ("What is the Amazon Associates Program?").

[135] According to business attorney Jasmine Moy, "For sold cookbooks, royalties are often in the range of 8 percent to 10 percent of the cover price. The advance the publisher gave the author is an advance against future royalties, so publishers pay themselves back before authors see any money. Most authors *never* see royalty payments, because

Perelman and Rhee also share links to specific products on their blogs, even though Perelman describes her site as a "sponsored endorsement-free zone" ("About"). Despite this statement, she also appears to be an Amazon Affiliate.[136] Some blog readers are aware that they are being influenced to buy particular products because the blogger receives a commission through affiliate programs. Take, for instance, reader Alexandra's comment on Perelman's "eggnog waffles + a few favorite kitchen things" post (Figure 18 below), where she recommends a selection of kitchen tools and equipment[137]:

ALEXANDRA

Deb, this is a truly awesome and useful gift guide. I really appreciate how you took the time to talk about your personal relationship to each item, instead of just posting links like most blogs and hoping to make some affiliate dollars.

Just bought some Picardie glasses recently, and aren't they just a pleasure to drink from? Very intrigued by this 'pancake' lens... I thought the name meant it's perfect for shooting pancakes... lol :)

Happy holidays!

DECEMBER 15, 2015 AT 6:38 AM · REPLY

Figure 18: (Alexandra. Comment on "eggnog waffles")

Reader Alexandra's note that she appreciates that Perelman contextualized why she recommended each item reveals how common it is for food bloggers to earn some of their blog's income through affiliate programs. Readers like Alexandra appear to value more information from the blogger as to why a product is recommended, presumably because they find the contextualized recommendations more credible and authentic. While readers might feel more

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the books don't sell enough for publishers to have fully recouped the advance" (Chopra). Given this reality, it is likely the affiliate dollars matter more to the bloggers than the actual cookbook sales.

[136] Perelman's Amazon Affiliate status is neither obvious nor disclosed to the reader; I used information from J.J. Pryor's article on how to spot Amazon Affiliate URLs to make this determination. See, for example, her link to Victorinox Swiss Army Cutlery Straight Paring Knife, 3.25-Inch in her post "eggnog waffles + a few favorite kitchen things." Interestingly, by not disclosing her Affiliate status, Perelman might be in violation of Amazon Associate requirements ("Why do I have to identify").

[137] This post also links to another post, "build your own smitten kitchen," which is dedicated to specific kitchen-related product recommendations and links.

cynicism towards bloggers who recommend products through affiliate programs, bloggers like Perelman who share stories or connections to particular products are instead leveraging their personal lives (or deploying "situated credibility," to use Mackiewicz's term) in a way that creates profit for other businesses. The strategies might be similar, but if readers buy the products, then the effect is the same. Ironically, it appears that Perelman is actually an Amazon Affiliate, as her links to products on Amazon within this post contain affiliate markers in their URLs (see Footnote 32 and Pryor). The fact that Perelman uses affiliate links without disclosing this practice to her readers might result in a break in trust with readers like Alexandra, should they ever find out.

In addition to affiliate programs, food bloggers can also partner with brands or companies to promote their products. Often, this sponsorship manifests as the blogger designing a recipe to feature a particular food product, such as in Moncel's recipe for "Roasted Apple Cranberry Cornbread Stuffing," sponsored by Aldi, shown in Figure 19 below:

BUDGET BYTES » RECIPES » HOLIDAY RECIPES » ROASTED APPLE CRANBERRY CORNBREAD STUFFING

⬇ JUMP TO RECIPE   + GROCERY LIST   ❤ FAVORITES

My philosophy on Thanksgiving is to keep it simple. Simple is elegant, simple is cost effective, and simple is *easy* (because hey, the cook wants to enjoy the day, too). I like to take super simple recipes and add just a little somethin-somethin' to make them special, without making them overly complicated or expensive. For this Roasted Apple Cranberry Cornbread Stuffing, I've transformed a simple box of cornbread stuffing mix into a vibrant and flavorful Thanksgiving side dish with just a few fresh and *affordable* ingredients.

This post is sponsored by ALDI—my "secret weapon" for keeping this year's Thanksgiving feast easy and super affordable, without sacrificing quality or flavor.

Figure 19: (Moncel, "Roasted Apple Cranberry Cornbread Stuffing")

The hyperlink embedded in the word "flavor" brings readers to a now-defunct page on Aldi's website that seems to have been focused on Thanksgiving-related products and deals. The 22 reader comments on this post are a mix of positive reviews and questions, with reader Carol S-B commenting specifically on the Aldi promotion: "Oh, this looks amazing. I wish we had ALDI in

my city! I'm going to try this with leftover cornmeal muffins (cube and dry out in oven) plus sage, savory etc… wish me luck! ALDI's prices are SO reasonable" (Comment on "Roasted Apple Cranberry"). There are no reader posts criticizing her promotion of Aldi, and Carol S-B's comment, at least, echoes the budget-friendly prices at Aldi, even as she explains that she is going to substitute the primary ingredient because she lacks access to an Aldi. It is also worth noting that Carol S-B's comment indicates that she will not be using the recipe's sponsored ingredient, even though it is one of the key components of the dish. While Carol S-B does not leave a follow-up comment indicating whether she actually made the dish and whether her proposed substitution was successful, her intent to make the recipe despite lacking the sponsored ingredient shows the limitations of sponsored posts in promoting the product itself (even if the bloggers ultimately benefit from the traffic).

Rhee also has a number of sponsored posts and giveaways, such as in her recipe for "French Onion Chicken Noodle Casserole," which includes a sponsorship disclaimer (see Figure 20 below):

Figure 20: (Rhee. "French Onion Chicken Noodle Casserole")

Rhee's disclosure statement is placed at the top of the post, so it is one of the first things readers see when they navigate to this page. She includes language in her disclosure that is meant to

reassure readers that she will not promote just any product or brand. She also explains why she participates in these partnerships ("French Onion Chicken"). Rhee deftly shifts her pronouns from "me" to "us" in this statement, a rhetorical move that places the audience in line with her as the rhetor. As a result, Rhee's explanation not only shows how *she* benefits from sponsorships and partnerships but how her audience benefits as well. Her closing assurance is also meant to reassure readers of her credibility—even though she's being sponsored, she has not been "bought." The juxtaposition of the more formal tone of this disclosure with her typical, more casual tone of the recipe description immediately following is rather jarring; the disclosure therefore feels like a disruption within Rhee's standard content.

While the eight reviews for this recipe are overwhelmingly positive, several readers commented that they substituted or omitted the Kettle Brand Salt & Fresh Ground Pepper Krinkle Cut Potato Chips that are the sponsored ingredient in the recipe. Reader Mary, for instance, could not find the chips and so substituted an extra sprinkling of black pepper on top of the casserole, and Reader Marilyn substituted Kettle Brand Jalapeno chips (Comment on "French Onion Chicken"). Unlike Moncel's stuffing recipe, the sponsored ingredient in this case is a garnish rather than an essential ingredient; however, the effect is still that the blogger perhaps benefits more than the brand from the sponsorship.

An even more explicit type of sponsorship is exemplified by Moncel's "Baked Spicy Chicken Sandwiches and My Stonyfield Organic Experience" post from June 2019 (see Figure 21 below).

ORGANIC EXPERIENCE

$6.93 RECIPE / $3.47 SERVING

BUDGET BYTES » RECIPES » MEAT RECIPES » CHICKEN RECIPES » BAKED CHICKEN RECIPES » BAKED SPICY CHICKEN
SANDWICHES AND MY STONYFIELD ORGANIC EXPERIENCE

⬇ JUMP TO RECIPE   ✚ GROCERY LIST   ❤ FAVORITES

I bet you've never had a spicy chicken sandwich with yogurt in it before! Sounds weird, but stick with me. I love using basic pantry staples in fun new ways, so when Stonyfield Organic asked if I wanted to collaborate, I was *all in*. I created these Spicy Chicken Sandwiches to show how versatile yogurt can be and how it can be used in both sweet and savory recipes. Because the more versatile an ingredient it, the less likely it is to go to waste, and we don't like food waste around here!

This blog post is sponsored by Stonyfield Organic. In addition to creating a recipe using their yogurt, Stonyfield Organic invited me out to Stowe, Vermont to tour a couple of the farms that supply their dairy, learn about organic dairy farming, what their company is doing to promote healthy food, a healthy planet, and healthy people, and what we can do to help.

Figure 21: (Moncel, "Baked Spicy Chicken Sandwiches")

As Moncel discloses, not only did Stonyfield Organic sponsor this recipe post, they also brought her to some of their dairy farms for a tour and information about their company. Moncel writes a much longer than usual post detailing her visit, promoting organic farming practices, and explaining how Stonyfield fits into a more sustainable agricultural model. She describes the visit as "transformative," and near the end of the post, she encourages readers to do what they can to support organic farming practices: "The industry reacts to where we spend our dollars much faster than laws and regulations can be changed, so I'm going to do my part by voting with my dollars. If you have the means, I hope you will join me. If you don't have the means, join me in spirit, and do what you can when you can in the future" ("Baked Spicy Chicken Sandwiches").[138] This is a rare example of Moncel encouraging her readers to spend *more*

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[138] While the majority of Moncel's recipes featuring organic ingredients do appear to be published after this post in 2019, there is evidence that she was supportive of organic and sustainable agricultural practices prior to this point. Take, for instance, this statement in her June 2016 post for "Pressure Cooker Chicken and Rice": "I bought cage-free organic chicken because my budget allows it and that's important to me . . . ." Therefore, calling this Stonyfield Organic farm visit "transformative" might be rather hyperbolic and in service of painting the brand in a favorable light rather than indicative of her own history.

money on food, while still acknowledging the financial constraints that bring many people to her recipes in the first place. While the majority of reader comments on this post strictly engage with the recipe itself, a couple of readers responded to Moncel's information on organic farming (see Figures 22 and 23 below).

MARY — 07.01.19 @ 10:49 AM REPLY

Hi Beth! I just want to say a huge thank you because your recipes have literally changed my life! I cook one of your recipes for dinner 90% of the time that I cook at home, and it has saved us a ton on groceries and eating out! Following your recipes has taught me how to be a better cook.

I love your post about Stonyfield and organic farming, and it is important to me to shop sustainably. I am also interested in learning more about how to find ethically raised meat because I feel that is harder to identify, so if you're interested in doing more educational posts like this, I'm all in!

I'm not sure if you meant to do this or maybe I'm missing something, but I don't think you included buns on the list of ingredients. While it might seem like common sense, I create my grocery list by copying/pasting from your recipe into my google keep list, so if the buns aren't there, I won't think to buy them. Not sure if you want to add them, but just thought I'd point it out for people who grocery shop like me.

Thanks again for your amazing recipes and blog! I don't know what I'd do without BudgetBytes!

> **BETH M** — 07.05.19 @ 11:09 AM REPLY
>
> Thanks Mary!! And thanks for catching that typo in the ingredient list! I'll have to double check my paper notebook where I do my calculations, but I bet I had it written in there and just forgot to type it into the post. I appreciate you letting me know!!

Figure 22: (Mary. Comment on "Baked Spicy Chicken Sandwiches")

ANNE STEARS — 06.25.19 @ 1:38 PM REPLY

Thank you for the well thought information about commercial dairy practices. Since you featured a chicken sandwich, would you consider a future article about commercial practices for raising chickens (and eggs) as well as beef, pork, etc?

> **BETH M** — 06.28.19 @ 8:52 AM REPLY
>
> If I have a chance to go learn more about chicken farming, I'd consider it. :)

Figure 23: (Anne Stears. Comment on "Baked Spicy Chicken Sandwiches")

In the case of Mary's comment, her reaction to Moncel's discussion of organic farming is framed by her general praise for Moncel's recipes and reporting an error in the recipe's ingredients list. Anne Stears, on the other hand, writes exclusively about the farm visit (or as she puts it, "commercial dairy practices") and inquires about the possibility of Moncel writing a similar piece on commercial meat production. In these instances (and in other similar comments), Moncel's promotion of organic dairy companies like Stonyfield maintains or increases the respect they have for Moncel and her blog, as she aligns herself with the organic and sustainable food movements.

While the vast majority of comments on this post are positive, readers are not universally in favor of her promotion of organic dairy farming—or rather, of promoting any aspect of the dairy industry. Take the comment exchange initiated by Reader Falynn in Figure 24 below:

FALYNN — 06.22.19 @ 9:51 AM REPLY

I am sorry to all the cows that have to spend their lives pregnant and never even get to be with their babies in order to make dairy happen. Organic and pasture raised or not... I can imagine they are happy being on a constantly fluxuating hormonal rollercoaster, giving birth, and then being depressed because they cant even lick the babies face. If the baby is lucky, its female. Then it at least gets to live... Im sorry Beth, I love your recipes and I get that people eat dairy... But to promote it like this is difficult to accept. There is no humane way to do dairy. Period.

LAURA — 06.22.19 @ 11:25 AM REPLY

My mother was raised on a dairy farm. My father is a veterinarian who works for many dairy farms. I have heard of large scale dairies that practice the way you are talking about but I have never been to a farm that separates the babies from the mother. As long as they are nursing they produce milk and dairy cows are bred to produce so much milk that there is no way that one calf can consume it all.

SOAP-ON-A-ROPE — 06.24.19 @ 10:24 AM REPLY

WWWWWWWWWWWWWWWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGGGGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

"People are eating something I don't like!"

WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGGGGGGGGGGGHHHHH

"How dare you"

EMMA — 06.24.19 @ 12:13 PM REPLY

Thank you for this. I love this blog and myself am not vegan, but I find it distressing when trusted people make claims about having your cake and eating it, too. No, you can't. There are certainly BETTER ways to do dairy, but the fact remains that there will always be some animal suffering baked into the equation, too.
I think I will stick with Beth's vegan recipes.

Figure 24: (Falynn. Comment on "Baked Spicy Chicken Sandwiches")

Readers Falynn and Emma express unhappiness that Moncel promotes dairy farming on animal cruelty grounds, while Reader Laura responds to Falynn in an attempt to "correct" their impression of dairy operations. Reader Soap-on-a-Rope appears to be a troll who is haranguing Falynn for expressing their views. Falynn and Emma both appear to lose some of their trust in Moncel because of her post. Negative reader comments that take an anti-animal-cruelty stance do not generally appear on Moncel's posts for meat-based recipes, and it seems from the language Falynn and Emma use that they likely would not have commented at all if Moncel had not

written about her dairy farm visit or praised animal husbandry (organic or not). This exchange, then, reveals the risks food bloggers can run by writing sponsored posts that promote a specific dietary agenda not previously integral to their personal brand.

Rhee has also engaged in this more elaborate type of sponsorship post. In July 2013, Rhee posts about a brand "ambassador trip" sponsored by California Avocado in which she and a number of other food bloggers participated. The trip involved a stay in the Millenium Bitmore hotel in downtown Los Angeles, dinner at a downtown restaurant, and a chef-prepared lunch. The focus of the event, however, was a recipe development contest, in which the brand ambassadors teamed up to develop a recipe for pasta salad featuring California avocados. The "Asian Pasta Salad" recipe included in this post is a variation of what Rhee developed alongside Ali Martin, author of the food blog *Gimme Some Oven*, during the contest ("Asian Pasta Salad"). Unlike with Moncel's post, readers who commented on this sponsored *Damn Delicious* post did not have anything to say or criticize about the sponsorship itself, suggesting that readers do not find sponsored posts inherently problematic; rather, it's polarizing issues that can be linked to the sponsorship that present a problem.

Describing their professionalizing journeys, interacting with readers through the comment section, and engaging in sponsorship activity all present opportunities for food bloggers to nurture their ethotic relationship with readers, but they are not risk-free. Increased popularity can also bring with it increased pressure for the blogger to maintain a stable textual persona that becomes increasingly synonymous with the brand they've established, which potentially limits their creative expression or ability to change how they present themselves online. Food bloggers like Moncel, Rhee, and Perelman who have crafted their textual persona as

a just-like-you "home cook" without professional training can, after gaining widespread readership, become "locked in" to that identity, which limits their ability to assert themselves as professionals over time. They are therefore required, to a degree, to deny their own experience and authority in order to present themselves as the relatable voice readers have come to know and trust. Such ossification of online identity can also pose problems when popular food bloggers might wish to assert their native expertise and identity as a "professional" food blogger in particular interactions with readers in the comment section—such as insisting that a specific ingredient, like rice vinegar, should not be substituted. Studying how rhetors like Moncel, Rhee, and Perelman navigate such a complex rhetorical situation complicates seemingly easy binaries like "professional" and "non-professional" that are often used in TPC, and expose the rhetorical richness to be found when we are willing to muddy the definitional waters and instead position professionalism as a spectrum.

Conclusion

The concept of ethos-as-relationship is not new; rather, it has long laid dormant within rhetorical scholarship, particularly Western rhetorical scholarship. In this dissertation, I call for bringing the relational core of ethos back to the forefront of our scholarly examination and instruction. Viewing ethos as inherently relational is not only important for the study of rhetoric itself; it also has implications for how we conceive of concepts such as expertise and professionalism within and beyond the domain of food. For example, understanding ethos as a relationship between a rhetor and their audience provides a new perspective on debates surrounding cultural appropriation of foodways such as those that rocked *Bon Appetit* in the summer of 2020. In this instance, a number of *Bon Appetit*'s employees publically called out the brand for appropriating the recipes and food traditions of their and others' non-European home cultures (among other issues).[139] In a response to these and other accusations, Research Director Joseph Hernandez owned the brand's failures and outlined steps for improvement, including combing through *Bon Appetit*'s online recipe archive and asking of each recipe: "Do we give credit where it's due?" (Hernandez). While acknowledging the cultural origins of particular recipes should certainly be common practice, we can also view this situation as illustrative of the importance of ethotic relationships.

One of the common arguments made by those concerned about culinary appropriation is a variation of "they want our food but they don't want us." Culinary appropriation, then, can be viewed at least in part as a rhetor erasing or ignoring part of their audience—not their intended audience, perhaps, but their audience nonetheless. In other words, a rhetor (whether an individual or a company) appropriates when they refuse to develop a relationship with the people and

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[139] For a detailed timeline of this controversy, see Harris, Haasch, and Greenspan (2021).

culture whose food they celebrate or profit from. We can hear an echo of this erasure in Michael Twitty's 2013 open letter to Paula Deen, where he writes, "Don't forget that the Southern food you have been crowned the queen of was made into an art largely in the hands of enslaved cooks, some like the ones who prepared food on your ancestor's Georgia plantation" ("An Open Letter"). Twitty has criticized both Deen and another white Southern chef, Sean Brock, for profiting off of Southern black foodways without acknowledging the true origins of the recipes and dishes that made them famous. When ethos as viewed as relational, questions about culinary appropriation might shift from "Does a chef have the right to this recipe through their racial, ethnic, or cultural identity?" to, "How has this chef sought to develop a relationship with the people and culture from which this recipe originated?," as well as "Have they given credit where it's due?"

This last question in particular is relevant to how expertise and professionalism have historically been more readily assigned to some people over others. In other words, we cannot ignore the power dynamics that still accompany labels such as "expert" and "professional," or the fact that those who occupy the most privileged social positions are more easily able to assert an expert or professional status. To refer back to Twitty's critique of Deen above as an example, enslaved African Americans are frequently erased from narratives of Southern foodways. Women of all racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds also struggle to be viewed as experts and professionals within the food realm in the same way as their male counterparts because of the long designation of cooking as a domestic (rather than professional) task. This is not to say that women, especially white women, never occupy positions of expertise and professionalism as food writers and chefs; however, as the food blogs I examine in this dissertation show, women must often still construct a textual persona tied to hegemonic performances of femininity and

domesticity as a precursor to developing an ethotic relationship with readers. It is on this foundation, then, that women food writers must work from if they want to be viewed as experts or professionals by their audiences.

Who receives credit for recipes and food traditions matters in a capitalist society. While recipes themselves cannot be copyrighted,[140] text surrounding them (i.e. "substantial literary expression") is subject to copyright (Levin). It is therefore in an aspiring food writer, chef, or recipe developer's financial interests to create a strong personal brand that associates themselves with the foods and recipes they are disseminating. Twitty's criticism of food celebrities like Deen and Brock, then, becomes a critique of how they built their personal brands by concealing the origins of the recipes and foodways that made them famous—exploitation of others for their personal gain. Such exploitation violates a genuine ethotic relationship between the food celebrities and the communities who have strong cultural ties to the foodways the celebrities are bringing under the umbrella of their personal brand. This exploitation is also inhospitable, as it denies the cultures who developed these foodways a seat at the table.

The transformation of Ree Drummond's food blog into a corporatized website is illustrative of the extreme end of personal branding—the individual becomes completely absorbed by the brand they have built. Readers who initially gravitated to *The Pioneer Woman* because of Drummond's textual persona within the blog have lost much of the content that created the ethotic relationship they felt they had with her. New posts in the Food and Cooking section of *The Pioneer Woman* blog-turned-brand website are no longer authored by Drummond

---

[140] According to *Copyright Alliance*, "A recipe can also be protected by copyright law if it creatively describes or explains the cooking or baking process connected to the list of ingredients. Even if the description of the recipe is sufficiently creative and copyrightable, the copyright will not cover the recipe's ingredient list, the underlying process for making the dish, or the resulting dish itself, which are all facts. It will only protect the expression of those facts. That means that someone can express the recipe in a different way — with different expression — and not infringe the recipe creator's copyright" (Levin).

herself, such as, "22 Best Egg Recipes That Go Way Beyond Breakfast" (Bahn) from February 2022. Furthermore, much of the content featuring Drummond on the site has shifted from stories told *by* Drummond to stories *about* Drummond and her family, such as a recent post titled "Ree Drummond's Cat Has a 'Really Stressful' Cold-Weather Habit" (O'Sullivan). Such pieces are clearly authored by people other than Drummond, as the in-text citation indicates. While occasional posts by Drummond herself can still be found on what is now called "Ree's Blog," this "blog" is buried within the "Ree's Life" section of the site. In other words, we see Drummond being *distanced* from her audience on the very site that allowed her to form ethotic relationships with her readers and made her a household name. As a result, I would argue that Drummond's audience is being forcibly shifted from being her *readers* to being her *consumers*.

I do not, however, think that the erasure of the rhetor from the ethotic relationship is the inevitable outcome of online food writing. Perelman in many ways provides a counter-example—she still manages her blog and posts regularly while also developing cookbooks that her readers (and others) can purchase. The transformation of Drummond's blog and the resulting distance it creates between her and her audience does raise questions about the long-term viability of the ethotic relationship she has with her former readers, questions I believe it is still too early to answer. But as other microcelebrities, such as, I would argue, food blogger Chungah Rhee, move in the same direction as Drummond, there will be more opportunities to examine whether ethotic relationships can survive rhetors distancing themselves from the relationships they once fostered. If they do survive, what rhetorical strategies does the rhetor use to maintain them? If they do not survive, how does the dissolution of the relationship come about, and what does that aftermath look like? These are questions I hope to explore in future research.

While this dissertation has focused on food writing texts, repositioning ethos as relationship is not restricted to food-related communication. In fact, reconceiving ethos-as-relationship could help rhetoricians, experts, and professional communicators better persuade their intended audiences. For instance, viewing ethos-as-relationship reframes the difficulty many scientific communicators have had convincing the American public to receive the COVID-19 vaccine from a portion of the population's rejection of "experts" and "science" to one of a damaged or non-existent relationship between these communities and the scientific community. Rather than releasing more studies showing the vaccines' efficacy and safety, public-facing scientists could work on rebuilding trust with the vaccine-hesitant. What I am proposing is not a quick-and-easy solution, to be sure, but it may well be necessary in order to make any significant headway on this and other pressing issues. As rhetors, we can then ask ourselves, "How am I building a relationship with my audience?" rather than, "How am I conveying my expertise or authority to my audience?" We might just find that we rushed into persuasion too soon or let a previously-established ethotic relationship wither.

Appendix

🔒 mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&view=btop&ver=ops2cvpehp6&q=beth%40budgetbytes.com&qs=true&qid=D61DE018-9F6F-4BBB-961F-1DAB6D416AF1&aqid=C35DB8AD-E7E3-4768-9810-... 🔍

Re: Submission from Contact ➤ [Inbox ×]

Beth Moncel beth@budgetbytes.com via helpscout.net   Sun, Jul 5, 2020, 1:39 PM ☆ ↩ ⋮

to me ▾

Hi Brita!

Baleadas sound amazing! Are they like arepas? I think that's definitely something I'd need to eat in an authentic restaurant before attempting myself, lest I totally botch and misrepresent another culture's food. But Nashville is a pretty diverse city, so maybe I can find a Honduran restaurant! I'm putting it on my list. :)

Thanks for the suggestion--I absolutely love hearing them!

Beth

Beth Moncel
Owner, Budget Bytes, Inc.
beth@budgetbytes.com | BudgetBytes.com

[f] [📷] [P] [🐦] [▶]

Get the Budget Bytes app!

[▶ Google play] [⬇ Download on the App Store]

On Thu, Jul 2, 2020 at 4:45 PM UTC, Brita Thielen <bmthielen15@gmail.com> wrote:

🔒 mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&view=btop&ver=ops2cvpehp6&q=beth%40budgetbytes.com&qs=true&qid=D61DE018-9F6F-4BBB-961F-1DAB6D416AF1&aqid=C35DB8AD-E7E3-4768-9810-... 🔍

On Thu, Jul 2, 2020 at 4:45 PM UTC, Brita Thielen <bmthielen15@gmail.com> wrote:

Name
Brita Thielen
Email
bmthielen15@gmail.com
Message
Hi Beth! I've been a big fan of your blog for many years. Have you ever considered developing a recipe for Honduran baleadas? A simple version traditionally consists of a thicker flour tortilla filled with refried beans, mantequilla (I use sour cream here in the States) and hot sauce, but other common additions include scrambled eggs and avocado. I usually make the tortillas from scratch to get the thicker texture. While Honduras isn't typically known for its cuisine, this was my favorite dish when I lived there and I wish more people in the US knew about it!

Brita Thielen <bmthielen15@gmail.com>   Sun, Jul 5, 2020, 2:53 PM ☆ ↩ ⋮

to Beth ▾

Hi Beth,

They're probably closer to a burrito than an arepa, in my experience. And I just googled and apparently Nashville has several Honduran restaurants! (Pretty cool since they're fairly uncommon in the States still). It looks like Delicias Las Catratchas has both baleadas and another dish I would recommend called Pollo Frito con Tajadas (Fried Chicken over strips of fried green plantain, often served with a sort of pickled vegetable coleslaw).

Your reply made my day! Also, I made your blueberry lemon curd shortcakes for the 4th and they were divine.
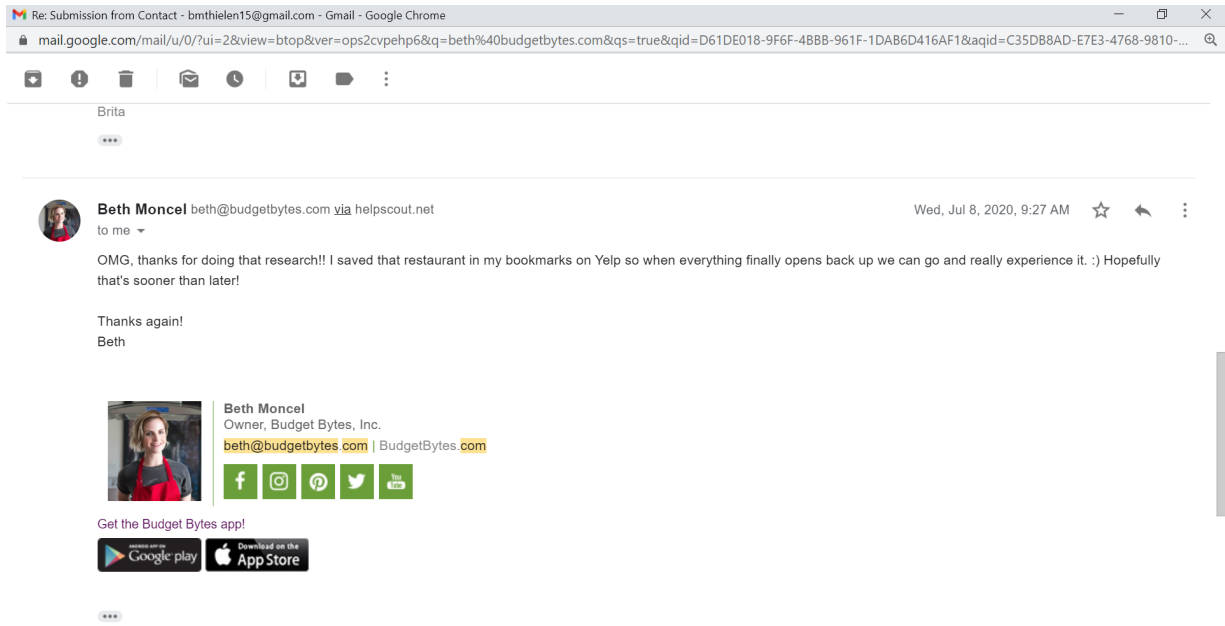
Figure 25: My July 2020 correspondence with *Budget Bytes* author, Beth Moncel ("Re: Submission from Contact")

SCOTT

My Grandmother would roll in her grave for this recipe(she lived in Sand Mountain Alabama her whole life) Happy to share hers. Sugar? Blasphemy.
You've taught me a lot, maybe I can share with you now..,
JUNE 5, 2021 AT 1:25 AM · · REPLY

DALE JOWERS

My great, greats were from Sand Mountain, too. NO SUGAR IN CORNBREAD!
JUNE 5, 2021 AT 2:10 PM · · REPLY

LISA

Sand Mountain is tiny! How are so many of us here related to people from there?

But look, make your cornbread how you like and stop telling other folks they're wrong for liking different things. Your grandma ain't eating this.
JUNE 9, 2021 AT 8:40 AM · · REPLY

SUSAN WEISS

Lisa, thank you! I had to laugh when I read your on-the-mark comment! This is a cooking blog by a very talented, self-taught cook. It is not a life and death discussion. Scott and Dale, do your thing, but, please, CHILL!
JUNE 9, 2021 AT 10:05 AM · · REPLY

SCOTT

Would you make these comments to an Italian grandmother about her sauce, or an Asian family about their dumplings? I assume you would appreciate their cultural culinary heritage and respect that they have done it this way for generations for a reason. Yeah, my Grandmother isn't eating eat as she died decades ago, but I respect what she taught me. Something I'm not seeing here.
JUNE 9, 2021 AT 2:23 PM · · REPLY

JULIA

Just as there is not one Asian dumpling, there is not one cornbread. Cornbread is made all over the United States (and likely the world, I don't claim to be a culinary expert), and in some regions it is indeed sweet. And has been for generations! Alabama doesn't own cornbread.
JUNE 9, 2021 AT 4:28 PM · · REPLY

SALLIE ALTMAN

Wouldn't mind that recipe for hers one bit though...
JUNE 11, 2021 AT 7:12 AM · · REPLY

SALLIE ALTMAN

Wouldn't mind that recipe for hers one bit though...

JUNE 11, 2021 AT 7:12 AM · · REPLY

KATE

Bravo, Lisa! Thank you for being a voice of reason. I too laughed out loud at your comment.

JUNE 9, 2021 AT 1:43 PM · · REPLY

JULIA RO

Not from Alabama over here. My grandparents never used sugar either, probably a result of the Great Depression. Deb generally uses very little sugar in her recipes, which I appreciate. I usually omit the sugar (unless someone catches me). :)

JUNE 9, 2021 AT 9:34 PM · · REPLY

PJ

Nothing, but nothing, grinds my gears more than people who gatekeep recipes here or tell Deb she's doing it "wrong".

As others have pointed out, there is no single "right" way to make cornbread. Some recipes use sugar; others don't. Some use white cornmeal, others prefer yellow. Some incorporate corn kernels while others omit or avoid them.

The important thing is to accept difference. It's as true in recipes and foodways as it is in everything else in life. For Pete's sake, save the outrage for things that matter.

JUNE 12, 2021 AT 4:00 PM · · REPLY

Figure 26: *Smitten Kitchen c*omment exchange on "perfect, forever cornbread" (Scott). Originating 5 June 2021 at 1:25 AM.

ROBERT

This is the worst advice on making cornbread EVER! There's no sugar in cornbread. That is cake. Sweetie, come on down to Memphis and we'll teach you how to make it. All you need is a fork, a bowl, and a cast iron skillet. May God have mercy on your soul.

JUNE 5, 2021 AT 1:38 AM · · REPLY

> **LORI**
>
> Calm down Robert. If you get this upset over cornbread, i think you have deeper issues. Get help.
>
> JUNE 5, 2021 AT 1:18 PM · · REPLY

> **MONICA**
>
> Deb is a New Yorker and I don't remember reading anywhere that this was a southern style cornbread. I'm from New England and live there now, but I grew up in the south and lived in the southwest for a while – this is my preferred style of cornbread, too. The fact that folks get angry for not doing things their way will forever baffle me – especially in the kitchen because food is so personal. You can just...not make it.
>
> JUNE 6, 2021 AT 10:33 AM · · REPLY

> **CINDY**
>
> Chill
> Out!
>
> JUNE 6, 2021 AT 6:01 PM · · REPLY

> > **DEB**
> >
> > I've written about how classic Southern cornbread doesn't have sugar in it several times on this site; I merely skipped the disclaimer this time because it was feeling redundant and this recipe makes no claims to being proper, authentic Southern cornbread. If it did, I would expect a lot of well-deserved consternation, as I would if I called something pad thai or falafel that wasn't. But that's not what this is. This is the perfect cornbread *for me*. It's absolutely okay to skip the sugar, or skip the recipe entirely. I do, however, love a lively comment section full of opinions, as long as they're friendly and good-natured.
> >
> > JUNE 7, 2021 AT 10:57 AM · · REPLY

> > **MONICA**
> >
> > Exactly the graceful response and overall approach I'd expect from you. For what it's worth, I made this last night and thought it was perfect. Like I mentioned, I've lived in nearly every corner of the country and we all know that cornbread is different regionally, but this Mainer is 100% on board with the minimal sweetness. It definitely makes the corn taste more like corn, like salt does to most dishes.
> >
> > JUNE 8, 2021 AT 5:31 PM · · REPLY

MONICA

Exactly the graceful response and overall approach I'd expect from you. For what it's worth, I made this last night and thought it was perfect. Like I mentioned, I've lived in nearly every corner of the country and we all know that cornbread is different regionally, but this Mainer is 100% on board with the minimal sweetness. It definitely makes the corn taste more like corn, like salt does to most dishes.

JUNE 8, 2021 AT 5:31 PM ·· REPLY

> **K**
>
> Ding ding ding, Monica! This is why I add a little sugar AND salt to the boiling pot of sweet corn if it's past its prime. And, for what it's worth, I learned this from Mom, because we grew sweet corn on the farm.
>
> JUNE 11, 2021 AT 11:58 AM ·· REPLY

PJ

Robert, sweetie – I'm sure if Deb or any of us came down/up to Memphis to peek in your kitchen we'd find something to criticize or tell you how wrong you are about how you make something.

I'm also sure that Deb and many of us would be much more graceful about sharing our opinion than you've been here. As others have so eloquently put it: chill out and lighten up.

JUNE 12, 2021 AT 4:03 PM ·· REPLY

MARTY PRIOLA

As a fellow Memphian, I feel the need to minimally defend Robert.

I think his comments were meant tongue in cheek. I don't view this as a hill Robert wants to die on.

I think it's more: "There are regional differences." And sort of laughing about them.

JUNE 13, 2021 AT 8:56 PM ·· REPLY

> **MONICA**
>
> Regardless of intent, it reads as unspeakably condescending. Defend away, though.
>
> JUNE 30, 2021 AT 3:00 PM ·· REPLY

Figure 27: *Smitten Kitchen* comment exchange on "perfect, forever cornbread" (Robert). Originating 5 June 2021, at 1:38 AM.

KIM

Ah, the sugar thing. It's very decisive in the South. Some never use sugar, some always use a little sugar. It depends on how you grew up and maybe what part of the south you are from. So pay no mind to people who are going to be all know-it-all and rude about it! My family never used sugar but sometimes I use 1-3 tablespoons depending on what I'm serving it with. I find a slightly sweet cornbread goes exceptionally well with salty things like ham and bean soup. Where I am from in Middle Tennessee there is thing called corn light bread. It is quite sweet, has flour in it, and baked in a loaf pan. It is served with our tangy vinegar bbq pork shoulder. Your recipe sounds fabulous with the ground corn and I can't wait to try this! I will add, if I have bacon grease, I put it in the skillet while it is preheating. Then I pour most of the hot fat into the batter, stirring quickly. I leave enough in the skillet to fry the crust, as others have mentioned.

JUNE 5, 2021 AT 8:50 AM · · REPLY

KIM

Divisive**

JUNE 5, 2021 AT 8:51 AM · · REPLY

JNH

Divisive is right! I grew up with a similar tradition to you (0-3 tbs depending on what you're serving it with), growing up in southern appalachia.

For those who are interested in why this is so divisive, there was a great article from the charlotte observer on this a few years ago, breaking down some of the racial history of sugar in cornbread. Highly recommend it:

https://www.charlotteobserver.com/living/food-drink/article68763427.html

JUNE 5, 2021 AT 6:16 PM · · REPLY

KIM

That was an excellent article. Thanks for sharing. I hope everyone reads it.

JUNE 6, 2021 AT 9:03 AM · · REPLY

FRAN

Agreed!

JUNE 6, 2021 AT 9:25 AM · · REPLY

LILLIAN

That is a fascinating article—thank you for sharing! As a first generation American who grew up in the north, but has lived in Virginia for 20+ years, I've heard about the sugar debate but never had any idea of its origins (although I probably should have suspected...)

Figure 28: *Smitten Kitchen* comment exchange on "perfect, forever cornbread" (Kim). Originating 5 June 2021 at 8:50 AM.

LAURA

Wow...all the hate and judgement over 3T of sugar is really unfortunate. I'm sorry you've been treated like that, Deb, especially when you work so hard to encourage readers to adapt your recipes to suit their preferences. Yet, somehow, you're not allowed to have preferences and adapt recipes to suit them?!?! Ridiculous.

JUNE 5, 2021 AT 8:21 AM ·· REPLY

LAURA

Another Laura agrees. Deb is a beacon of goodness, don't bring your negativity here. Also, for those wondering...in my gluten-free household, I easily adapt Smitten Kitchen's recipes using an all-purpose gf flour blend that contains xanthum (or add a teaspoon per cup flour). In addition, to be dairy-free (I know, we have one member who is fussy over here) a simple vegan butter and non-dairy milk mixed with lemon or vinegar to curdle works as well. Happy Saturday everyone.

JUNE 5, 2021 AT 11:23 AM ·· REPLY

Figure 29: *Smitten Kitchen* comment exchange on "perfect, forever cornbread" (Laura). Originating 5 June 2021 at 8:21 AM.

PJCAMP

No, no, no, no! That isn't cornbread. It is a giant corn flavored biscuit and it's just wrong.

The reason you had to add sugar is because you added flour. Don't add either. Corn is plenty sweet on its own. Do this:

Put a good glug of oil (or I guess you could use ghee) in a cast iron skillet, put it in the oven and preheat to 400 degrees. You want a blazing hot skillet.

You need 2 cups corn meal, 2 teaspoons baking powder, one teaspoon baking soda, one teaspoon salt. Put an egg in a 2 cup measuring cup and whisk it. Add buttermilk until you have two cups and whisk again. Pour into the corn meal mixture and mix. You may have to add more buttermilk but you won't have to add less. You're looking for something the consistency of quicksand so it is self leveling. Pour into your hot skillet.

Hear that sizzle? That's the bottom frying. Cook for 25-35 minutes until it is nicely browned and pulling away from the sides.

I swear, Yankees and their sugar bread.

JUNE 5, 2021 AT 1:47 PM · · REPLY

> **LISA**
>
> Oh yeah, us Yankees and our sugar. That's why we love sickeningly sweet things like sweet tea. Oh no wait – that's you!
>
> JUNE 5, 2021 AT 5:29 PM · · REPLY
>
> **QUIXOTE**
>
> Omigod. You mean cornbread is not cake? :shock: :horror:
>
> Yes, I grew up in Boston. Why do you ask?
>
> JUNE 5, 2021 AT 10:47 PM · · REPLY

Figure 30: *Smitten Kitchen* comment exchange on "perfect, forever cornbread" (PJCAMP). Originating on 5 June 2021 at 1:47 PM.

MARION — 01.20.19 @ 3:32 PM REPLY

I would like to try this salad can i use regular vinegar.

> **BETH M** — 01.21.19 @ 4:51 AM REPLY
>
> I think you might mean white vinegar when you say "regular", and if so, white vinegar is MUCH stronger than rice vinegar, so it will definitely change the flavor. I suggest getting rice vinegar if at all possible.
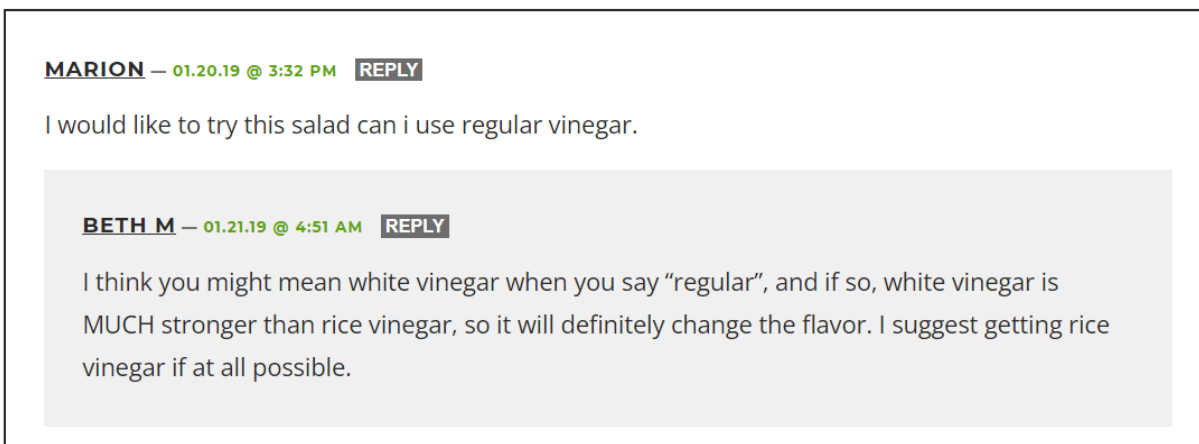
Figure 31: *Budget Bytes* comment exchange on "Sesame Cucumber Salad" (Marion). A comment exchange between Moncel and a reader who wants to know if she can substitute white vinegar for rice vinegar. Originating on 20 January 2019 at 3:52 PM.

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