2016

You Are What You Eat: Investigating Food Discourse and Digitally-Mediated Identities

Katelyn Leigh Burton
University of Rhode Island, katelynburton@gmail.com

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT:

INVESTIGATING FOOD DISCOURSE AND DIGITALLY-MEDIATED IDENTITIES

BY

KATELYN LEIGH BURTON

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

ENGLISH

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

2016

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION

OF

KATELYN BURTON

APPROVED:

Dissertation Committee:

Major Professor: Kim Hensley Owens

Jeremiah Dyehouse

Stephen Wood

Nasser H. Zawia

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

2016

Abstract

My dissertation, *You Are What You Eat: Understanding Food Discourse and Digitally Mediated Identities*, investigates the rhetorical nature of digital identity creation and management and the role of food discourse within these practices. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1984), "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar" (6)…and perhaps also between the delicious and the unappetizing, fast food and haute cuisine. Within this project, I use a rhetorical lens to explore digital identity constructions within the food blogging community.

This study is driven by a dual exigency: to better understand digital identity practices and the rhetorical power of food. First, this project is motivated by Sherry Turkle's investigation into online gaming identity in *Life on the Screen*, and the need to understand identity-shaping practices in the rapidly changing digital realm. Studies of the blogging community often focus on the identities written on the screen. While these studies make great strides toward a more comprehensive understanding of the blogging community as it exists online, my study expands upon this research to help obtain a clearer picture of the invention and composing practices that also occur off the screen, those that create the finished product published online. And, second, it is motivated by a need to better understand the rhetorics of food as they function in everyday discourse. Rhetorical scholars have studied food rhetoric as a pedagogical tool (Bloom, 2008; Cognard-Black and Goldthwaite, 2008; Waxman, 2008) or as an isolated text (Nowacek and Nowacek, 2008; Schneider, 2008). My project extends

rhetorical food studies to the places where they are most often and most richly practiced; namely, in the homes (and in the digital environments) of those who engage in the culinary arts on a daily basis. Food rhetoric is embedded with complex undertones of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomics, and moral values, which this project works to unpack.

This study is what Robert Stake (2000) refers to as a "collective case study" (437). Each case study within this project focuses on one individual food blogger and his or her daily cooking, writing, and blogging practices. Each participant took part in a number of qualitative research methods including semi-structured interviews, informal observations of blog-related activities, and weeklong reflective writing logs. I also conducted a thorough artifact analysis of each participant's blog, coding for a variety of quantitative and qualitative factors such as number of words per post, frequency of sponsorships, and themes discussed in each post. My intention in using these diverse methods was to paint a fuller picture of the cooking and blogging practices of individual bloggers by exploring their behavior both on the screen and off.

Throughout my analysis, the concept of *ethos* emerges as a unifying theme. *Ethos* is shaped by bloggers' decisions about self-disclosure, engagement in community-building practices, and, in some cases, attempts to monetize their blogs and navigate the tensions between food professionals and food hobbyists. Each of these individual decisions contributes to a much larger digital identity—and digital *ethos*—that ultimately determines how others perceive of and respond to a blogger. This project argues that *ethos*-building strategies differ markedly in online and offline spaces and advocates for greater awareness regarding the ways all writers rhetorically craft their identities—and *ethos*—online. Bloggers, composition instructors, and students can all benefit from a more intentional approach to their own digital identities and this project offers a framework for approaching this new and dynamic challenge.

Dedication

"Chocolate has given occasion to profound dissertations."

-Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

Thank you to my three blogger participants who so generously donated their time, their thoughts, and their delicious cooking to this study.

Thank you to my dissertation advisor, Kim Hensley Owens, for looking at countless drafts, responding to frantic emails, and offering constant moral support. You are a true superhero.

Thank you to my partner in crime, Patrick Prager, for supplying constant encouragement through the stress-filled lows of this process and supplying champagne to celebrate the highs.

Preface

It was 2011 when I moved from Kansas to Rhode Island to pursue my PhD. Initially it seemed like an adventure, but I quickly realized that moving cross-country with no family, no friends, and no support system was much more terrifying than I had imagined. And so, in an effort to create a community for myself I ventured into the world of food blogging. I had been a loyal food blog reader for years and decided that actively participating in this community—starting my own blog—would help me feel a sense of community I was suddenly lacking.

And I did find that community, but as I continued blogging and gaining readers, I also stumbled upon a truth I hadn't expected: that is, I began to struggle with the identity I was conveying via my blog. The blog began as an experiment during a turbulent time of my life. I was independent, living in a new state, and entering a new chapter of my life. As such, I blogged about food, yes, but I also blogged about my dating life, my work, and my experiences living in a new place. The Katy of that early blog was a little sassy, frequently tongue-in-cheek, and some days seemed like a wanna-be Carrie Bradshaw.

As the months passed, I became increasingly settled in my new life: making friends, growing accustomed to the pace of my PhD work, and entering into a long-term relationship. These changes all brought new readers to my blog. No longer was I writing to a sea of strangers and friends back home. Now I had to account for new readers…readers from my new life. Friends and colleagues from school, my partner's family and friends, even friends of friends I barely knew. As I gained more disparate groups of readers, my digital identity became increasingly fraught as I agonized over how to appeal to so many different reader needs and expectations.

Of course, my story is a classic case of overthinking and one that I hope most bloggers don't experience. However, these experiences made me curious about how other bloggers experience the act of writing a self online. And, thanks to a few encouraging professors, this dissertation research commenced. I now know that I'm far from the only blogger who has agonized over digital identity and reader response but, moreover, I uncovered some fascinating patterns in the way other bloggers approach this task. I look forward to sharing them with you here.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter One
Introduction to Food Discourse

The saying, “you are what you eat,” is an oft-repeated mantra, but while this well-known phrase is typically used as a warning against unhealthy eating habits, it is perhaps even more appropriate in considering the rhetorical nature of food. “You are what you eat” becomes a reminder that the foods we eat and the ways we discuss them send messages to others about who we are or, perhaps, how we see ourselves. A visit to the grocery store offers a great example of this rhetorical power. Whether or not we consider it, the items and packages heaped in each shopping cart convey a great deal about one’s socioeconomic level, ethnicity or heritage, health views and concerns, and, ultimately, taste. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1984), “Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar” (p. 6)…and, as this project will explore, perhaps also between the delicious and the unappetizing, fast food and haute cuisine. No matter one’s age, gender, socioeconomic status, or location, we all consume and converse about food in one way or another. Yet for the omnipresence of food, we rarely analyze the symbolic meaning of food discourse. This study is situated in that very gap.

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (2009), a lawyer and self-proclaimed epicurean of the 1700s, is today most known for his culinary reflections, such as “Tell me what kind of food you eat, and I will tell you what kind of man you are” (p. 14) or “The destiny of nations depends on the manner in which they are fed” (p. 14). Just as Brilliat-Savarin argues that a man’s character can be determined by the food he consumes, this project suggests that there are very real connections between the food we consume and converse about and the identity we portray to others. This dissertation project investigates this relationship as it exists within a relatively recent digital genre, focusing specifically on food discourse and digital identity management within the food blogging community. Rhetorical scholar Lynn Bloom (2008) has estimated that there are currently well over 150 million food blogs online. This massive and quickly growing community offers a unique opportunity to investigate digital food rhetoric in action as these bloggers interact with readers and other food bloggers within the scope of their own and others' blogs. The food blogging community is a place where bloggers regularly create, manage, and negotiate their food identities and, moreover, this rhetorical work can be tracked over long periods of time to better understand the ways these identities develop and change. The food blog as a genre offers unprecedented access to enable an examination of individual food identities as they exist in real time and over prolonged periods.

More specifically, this project aims to better understand the ways bloggers use food discourse to create and shape their online identities and, alternately, the ways bloggers' identities determine the food they create and how they talk and write about it. In short, this project uses a rhetorical lens to explore food discourse as it functions symbolically, as a means to shape one's identity. Further, this project investigates the relationship between our various identities, both in person and online. Food bloggers exist in a number of intriguing middle spaces: between public and private but also between amateur and professional. In this way, food bloggers are poised to have a heightened awareness of their own mediated identities and digital *ethos* in ways that others might not.

The following questions have guided this study:

1) How do food bloggers understand and negotiate the relationship between food discourse and identity?

2) How do bloggers convey identity online?

3) How do the lived experiences of food bloggers relate to the online identities conveyed via blogging?

As these central questions illustrate, this study stakes its ground in two separate (and not frequently overlapped) threads of scholarship: digital identity/digital *ethos* and food rhetoric. Though this project will focus primarily on contributing to the former scholarly conversation, discussions of food rhetoric are woven throughout this project. As such, this introductory chapter offers readers an introduction to the rhetoric of food, exploring topics such as the historical evolution of food discourse, ancient rhetorical studies of food dating back to Aristotle, the socioeconomic and gendered dimensions of food discourse, its role within the English classroom, and its most recent iteration within the digital realm. Ultimately, this chapter contextualizes this project within that long and rich history.

A Brief History of Food Discourse

To enter into a discussion of food discourse, one must first review the history of the genre. This is no small task. Throughout human history, food culture might be considered one of the most enduring common threads. Since humans have hunted and gathered, there has been a culture of food, however basic. The importance of food and cooking to our culture, to our development, to our continued evolution cannot be understated. Ann Gibbons (2013), in an article for *National Geographic*, quotes

Richard Wrangham, a Harvard primatologist who has argued, "the biggest revolution in the human diet came not when we started to eat meat but when we learned to cook." Wrangham estimates the introduction of cooking to have occurred sometime between 1.8 million and 400,000 years ago and correlates this advance with the rise of the "thinking man." According to Gibbons, "Pounding and heating food 'predigests' it, so our guts spend less energy breaking it down, absorb more than if the food were raw, and thus extract more fuel for our brains." In essence, the rise of cooking can be linked back to the evolutionary advancement of humankind. Gibbons evidences that cooking has clear physical and physiological implications. However (and more importantly for my purposes here), cooking also has clear cultural implications, both for groups and individuals.

Theoretical discussions of sustenance date back thousands of years to Aristotle (2013), who discusses this most basic human function in *On the Soul (De Arima)*. Here, Aristotle lists the five psychic powers of living things: "the nutritive, the appetitive, the sensory, the locomotive, and the power of thinking" (p. 45). The first psychic power, the nutritive, is embedded in every living thing from the smallest plant to the greatest animal. However, the second power, the appetitive, is seen only in animals with sensory capabilities, "appetite is the genus of which desire, passion, and wish are the species" (p. 45). For Aristotle, appetite is more than supplying nutrients to one's body, more than a simple one-to-one relationship between food and body. Rather, the act of consuming involves three components: body, food, and, most notably, soul:

> Since nothing except what is alive can be fed, what is fed is the besouled body and just because it has soul in it. Hence food is essentially related to what has soul in it. Food has a power which is other than the power to increase the bulk of what is fed by it; so far forth as what has soul in it is a quantum, food may increase its quantity, but it is only so far as what has soul in it is a 'this-somewhat' or substance that food acts as food; in that case it maintains the being of what is fed, and that continues to be what it is so long as the process of nutrition continues. (Aristotle, 2013, p. 52)

Aristotle's discussion of the besouled body is akin to what we today might dub identity. In essence, he suggests that the very act of eating allows our souls or identities to be and to continue being. Aristotle's *On the Soul* is perhaps the first written testimony of this deeper significance of food. Indeed, food keeps us alive; however, it is also the substance that nurtures our souls.

Though Aristotle may have been the first to theorize the importance of food to human culture, his reflections paved the way for many others. However, gastronomical cultural trends and innovations are unrecorded throughout much of human history. Historically, food knowledge has often been communicated through what historian Luce Giard (1998) refers to as "the sophisticated ritualization of basic gestures" (de Certeau, Giard, and Mayol, p.154). Indeed, food knowledge has traditionally been conveyed through non-verbal gestures, repeated cooking practices, and oral teachings as family members, close friends, and/or community members pass on time-tested techniques and beloved foods.

Documenting Food Culture: The Shift to the Written Word

The rise of the written culinary word marked a momentous shift for the culinary world but also for the cultures in which these gastronomic texts existed. Some historians have reported the existence of three ancient tablets, the first Mesopotamian recipe collections, which date back to the 17th century BC (Dalby, 2003, p. 217). These ancient tablets undoubtedly take the prize for first. But it wasn't until centuries later that most recipes were finally converted to text and copied on scraps of paper and notecards or bound into a collection and dubbed a cookbook, making them significantly more accessible and widely available than the tablets of Mesopotamia. There are many competing claims for the world's oldest cookbook. Food historian Massimo Montanari (2004), author of *Food is Culture*, has traced the oldest Italian recipe collection (titled the *Liber de Coquina*, translated to Book of Cookery) to the thirteenth to fourteenth century (p. 37). And researchers at Manchester University's John Rylands library have unearthed a cookbook, *The Forme of Cury*, written in Middle English by King Richard II's head cooks and dating back to 1390 (Keighren, 2009). No matter where one marks the beginning of the written culinary tradition, this shift marked a major change in the history of culinary knowledge.

Montanari reflects on the cultural implications of this important transition:

> …with the development of a written record of cuisine which made the cumulative increase of knowledge possible, man has answered the need for an authentic and unique body of information, of a kind unavailable, at least in material tangible form, to societies still clinging to oral traditions.[1] Written cuisine permits the codification, in an established and recognized medium, of the practices and techniques developed by a specific society. Theoretically

> speaking, orally transmitted cooking, is destined not to leave traces of itself over time. (2004, p. 35)

Though Montinari's language is a bit dismissive of oral cultures his larger point is worth unpacking. Throughout much of history food culture was held in the minds of the individuals and groups who were responsible for cooking. And, indeed, the lack of gastronomical writing from these periods leaves scholars with a cultural gap. Culinary scholars can make educated assumptions based on available products and cooking methods; however, the true nature of a culture's culinary arts has been largely unknowable. With the creation of a written gastronomical tradition, scholars were suddenly able to understand a piece of culture that had heretofore been largely missing. As people began to collect written recipes and, eventually, bind those recipes into cookbooks, a culture of food writing was born, one that could be documented, analyzed, and, perhaps most importantly, preserved for future generations. Cooks, chefs, and bakers could draw on wider sets of food knowledge and, likewise, pass along their knowledge to a wider audience than had been previously possible. It is these texts that have enabled scholars to understand past food culture in a more detailed and more easily traceable way than might be possible for cultures or groups with oral culinary traditions.

And, in fact, a glance through the available scholarly discourse surrounding food culture is immediately overwhelming. Historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have amassed what is now a stunning collective of research surrounding food, cooking, and culture (de Certeau, 1984; de Certeau, Giard, and Mayol, 1998; Heatherington, 2001; Heinz and Lee, 1998; Meneley, 2004; Mintz and Du Bois, 2002;

Pietrykowski, 2004; van der Veen, 2003, among others). These studies typically track the relationship between a specific culture and its culinary norms or preferences on a macro or culture-wide scale. Many of these scholars acknowledge the connection between food and identity, typically as a socially determined convention of an ethnic group or socioeconomic level. Throughout this mass of food research, culinary texts have served as an enticing bed of research. Many historians and anthropologists have traced the progression of cultural food norms through cookbooks, to greater or lesser degrees.

In fact, Montanari believed that food was such an integral part of culture that he designed a grammar of food, a literal representation of food as the language of a culture:

> The lexicon on which this language is based obviously consists of the repertory of available animal and vegetable products, very much like the kind of morphemes (the basic units of meaning) on which are built words as well as the entire dictionary. . . Morphology includes the ways in which products are developed and adapted to the different demands of consumption. This takes place through culinary practices, those actions and procedures (ways of cooking and food preparation) that transform the basic morphemes into words—that is, into dishes or foods of varying uses and functions. . . *Syntax* is the structure of the sentence, which gives meaning to the lexicon and to its morphological variants. In our sphere of gastronomy it is the meal that coordinates the dishes according to criteria determining sequence, combinations, and reciprocal relationships" (Montanari, 2004, p. 99-102)

Montanari takes pains to clearly outline the specifics of this grammar of food, even theorizing about the process through which words and foods come into a culture and, sometimes just as abruptly, disappear. Montanari leaves the reader with this comparison:

> …food acquires full expressive capacity thanks to the rhetoric that in every language is its necessary complement. Rhetoric is the adaptation of speech to the argument, to the effects one wants to arouse or create. If the discourse is food, that means the way in which it is prepared, served, and eaten. (2004, p. 102)

Though his grammar of food may seem an impractical, though delicious, analogy, Montanari here forecasted the deep and undeniable connection between food and rhetoric, a relationship that many scholars (including myself) would later explore further.

The Shape of Rhetorical Food Studies

Food "speaks" in a variety of ways and the field of rhetoric offers a valuable way to understand food discourse symbolically, as a means to create and shape one's individual identity. And, though the majority of food research comes from scholars in history, sociology, and anthropology, a small group of rhetorical scholars have begun to take a deeper look at food discourse as it exists in all its shapes and forms today.

For example, in her 2008 article, "Consuming prose: The delectable rhetoric of food writing," Lynn Bloom has dissected and discussed the broad expectations of food writing genres, even attempting this type of writing herself within the scope of the essay. (She notably includes recipes for Chicken with a Confit of Red Bell Peppers and Onions and offers detailed descriptions of a few other favorite dishes: Linda's Brisket and Best Blueberry Pie.) Bloom enacts the various features and norms of this genre as she simultaneously analyzes them, arguing that successful food writing must be pleasurable to read but must also be grounded with tight literary control. Though Bloom focuses on "belletristic nonfiction either devoted to food or containing significant food-related scenes—primarily creative nonfiction, autobiographies, travel accounts—with a passing glance at the art of writing cookbooks and, therefore, recipes" (2008, p. 348), she also gives recognition to the (then) newly emerging field of food blogging. She acknowledges that "There are (more or less) 151 million food blogs, from those reeking of monumental bad taste and narcissism to commercial sites promoting cookbooks to succulent commentary by good cooks and professional food writers" (2008, pp. 348-9) and, though she doesn't wade into the norms of the food blogging genre specifically, the importance of food writing is made clear by Bloom's luscious food descriptions, if not by her clear description of the larger food writing genre. Bloom has offered clear and easily accessible sound bites describing the elements of food writing: "*Food writing emphasizes abundance"* (2008, p. 351), "*Food writing emphasizes its human contexts*. (2008, p. 353), and "*Food writing is evocative, full of human emotion, energy, sensory details, sensuality*" (2008, p. 356, emphasis in original for all). These broad guidelines are useful in examining any number of food genres, from the cookbook to the blog.

Other rhetorical scholars have analyzed in depth the pedagogical usefulness of other food-related genres. For example, Barbara Waxman (2008) has explored the genre of the food memoir in her article, "Food memoirs: What they are, why they are popular, and why they belong in the literature classroom." And Jennifer Cognard-Black and Melissa Goldthwaite (2008) have taken turns describing their differing and shared experiences teaching a food-based English course in their article, "Books that cook: Teaching food and food literature in the English classroom." Taken together, Bloom, Waxman, and Cognard-Black and Goldthwaite, offer a variety of classroom-based approaches to food discourse and, notably, rhetorical scholars have historically tended to focus on the pedagogical uses of the genre more than perhaps any other area of food studies. Yet because much of this scholarship is grounded within the confines of the university focusing on classroom practices, this scholarship tends to isolate food discourse from the communities in and for which they were created. Though a few rhetorical scholars have shifted their gaze outside of the university, these scholars still tend to engage directly with texts rather than the communities in which they are enacted.

Rhetorical scholar Susan Leonardi (1989), for example, has addressed the rhetoric of cookbooks and the importance of the connection between author and reader in her article, "Recipes for reading: Summer pasta, lobster a la riseholme, and key lime pie," a conversational piece about the embedded discourse in and around recipes. Leonardi jumps right into the crux of her argument, asserting:

> I think I can safely claim that a cookbook that consisted of nothing but rules for various dishes would be an unpopular cookbook indeed. Even the root of *recipe*—the Latin *recipere*—implies an exchange, a giver, and a receiver. Like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be. A

> recipe is, then, an embedded discourse, and like other embedded discourses, it can have a variety of relationships within its frame, or its bed. (340)

To support this statement, Leonardi analyzed multiple editions of the American cooking staple, *Joy of Cooking*. This article traces the cookbooks' narratives as they are constructed first by original author, Irma S. Rombauer, and later by her daughter, Marion Rombauer Becker. Through these varying iterations of the classic tome, Leonardi found a move away from a more conversational cookbook narrative, one that engages with the reader as friend and partner in the kitchen, to a more sterile and professional narrative, one that treats the reader as a student or kitchen novice. She writes, "What feminine readers of this text already know, that the recipe's social context gives it far more significance than that of a mere rule for cooking" (1989, p. 344). Leonardi concludes that the rhetorical power of a recipe lies in the power of the author to connect with the reader.

Though the scholars mentioned above seem content to dwell in the familiar territory of the classroom or the cookbook, today's food culture is highly dynamic and ever-changing. This focus on food manifests variously through entire channels devoted to food, countless Internet sites that function as a digital home and community for food lovers, widespread farmers' markets and food festivals, food activism, and much more. Food, it would seem, is invading all aspects of our lives. And, furthermore, food movements and culinary trends rise and fall quicker than ever thanks to the increasing globalization of our world. Where the scholars mentioned here focus on culinary artifacts taken in isolation…and their application in the classroom, I would argue that we must make a more pronounced effort to extend rhetorical food studies outside of the academy, to the places where they are most often and most richly practiced; namely, in the homes (and on the computers) of those who engage in the culinary arts on a daily basis.

Looking Beyond the Classroom and Into the Kitchen

Within the field of rhetoric, a growing movement has urged scholars to look outside of the classroom to other spaces and situations in which people work to improve their writing (Nystrand and Duffy, 2003; Gere, 1994). Martin Nystrand and John Duffy, editors of *Towards a Rhetoric of Everyday Life,* have advocated strongly for this decentralizing of rhetorical studies: “We have argued that those involved in current research in composition increasingly look beyond classroom-based investigations of written language toward the roles and meanings of writing in diverse social, historical, and political settings outside of academia” (2003, p. xxx). Indeed, Nystrand and Duffy seem to be arguing for a more expansive and multifaceted understanding of writing and its various motivations. They note, “composition is moving ‘further afield,’ in Deborah Brandt’s phrase, away from a strict emphasis on classroom-based studies of writing and toward more expansive studies of the meanings and functions of written discourse in social life” (2003, p. xxx). And, while Nystand and Duffy have offered a convincing argument for studying the rhetorics of everyday life, it was Anne Ruggles Gere who first put a name to this movement.

It was over two decades ago when Gere first dubbed this field of study the “extracurriculum” and defined it as follows: “The extracurriculum I examine is constructed by desire, by the aspirations and imaginations of its participants. It posits writing as an action undertaken by motivated individuals who frequently see it as having social and economic consequences" (1994, p. 80). Gere advocates for the importance of recognizing this extracurriculum, the spaces and situations outside of the classroom in which people work to improve their writing. She does not suggest that we appropriate the extracurriculum into the classroom but, rather, that we recognize the important work being down outside the classroom and the ways it ties individuals to their communities. Gere's extracurriculum encompasses precisely the kinds of food writing being enacted every day by cooks, bakers, food bloggers, and people who just enjoy discussing food. Gere would suggest that there is inherent value in the writing of the home cook: "We can also learn to value the amateur. The culture of professionalism, with its emphasis on specialization, abhors amateurism, but composition's extracurriculum shows the importance of learning from amateurs" (1994, p. 88). This project follows in this line of rhetorical scholarship, looking outside of the classrooms where food discourse is, at times, enacted and past the professional kitchens where (typically male) chefs create their own food cultures, into the kitchens and online spaces where food discourse is a central component of the lived experience.

And a few rhetorical scholars have done just that. For example, David and Rebecca Nowacek (2008), a sociologist and rhetorical scholar, respectively, have offered an analysis of the organic food movement in their *College English* article, "The organic foods system: Its discursive achievements and prospects." In this article, Nowacek and Nowacek use the activity theory model to show how the various communities and publics connected to the organic food movement came together to shape a working definition of the term "organic," one that is still evolving even today.

This article tracks the rise of the term "organic" as it was initially created and employed by organic farmers as a discursive tool to describe their gardening practices and larger moral stance towards farming. As the desire for organic products grew and a market emerged, a new public of consumers required a new definition for the term "organic," one that more clearly defined the organic standards buyers expected. As outlined by Nowacek and Nowacek, the evolution of the organic food system has largely been a discursive battle involving an ever more diverse collection of publics. Ultimately, this debate—and others like it—points to the power of words within our culture of food, a promising thread for future rhetorical scholars to follow.

Nowacek and Nowacek evidence the multifaceted and ever-evolving nature of food studies, particularly when they are contextualized within their often messy and complex cultural backdrops. Though we can learn much from studying texts in isolation (as Leonardi proves above), there is a great deal more to be gathered analyzing these texts in context. Exploring the dynamic nature of these movements and trends as they evolve in real time exposes the problematic social issues and inequalities that inevitably exist in any culture of food. This project attempts to span the gap between these two different approaches to studying food rhetoric. There is indeed value in studying both primary food texts as well as the larger social contexts within which they exist. In this respect, the food blogging community is a perfect site for food research. The text and recipes that exist within each blog post offer a primary text—in many ways similar to the cookbook entries discussed by Leonardi above—from which much can be divined. However, unlike traditional print cookbooks, food blogs are active digital spaces that offer readers the opportunity to write back, engaging the author in discussion about ingredients, techniques, food values, or even non-food topics. In this way, the food blog can be "both-and," a space for primary food texts as well as community engagement. The next section will offer a more thorough exploration of food communities as well as the problematic inequalities that exist therein.

The Distinctions of Food: Distinction Between and Distinction From

In the food blogging community and beyond, food can be used to unify people. Groups can be demarcated based on the food products they choose, the cooking methods they employ, and the ways they present and serve their dishes. However, food culture is equally effective at dividing groups of people. The Bourdieu quote at the beginning of this chapter reflects this tendency, "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (p. 6). Food may bring people together, but it also illuminates divisions. This is problematic for two primary reasons. In reviewing past gastronomic writing, we are presented with a lopsided picture of what culinary norms actually looked like at a given time or in a given place. Montanari has reflected on this inevitable problem:

> This destiny would seem to oppose not only the societies with written traditions to those with oral traditions, but also various social groupings within the same societies . . . Because the lower classes did not commit their own experiences to writing but relied on oral transmission, they have seemingly left us nothing. (2004, pp. 35-36)

Historically, the culinary tradition highlights those privileged to have the means and the capability to record their own culinary tradition. Ultimately, it's vital to remember that the culinary texts that have survived to today offer a fairly singular and privileged view of what it meant to cook and eat in another time and place.

Beyond the problematic historical perspective created by these culinary divisions, it's also worth noting the current issues exacerbated by these culinary divides. Today, food culture illuminates not only socio-economic divides, but also educational divides and gender divides, to name a few. Bourdieu has argued, here in terms of art and music, "cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education" (1984, p. 1). I would argue that this theory holds true within the world of food as well. Esoteric foods such as foie gras or foods created using cutting edge techniques such as molecular gastronomy are meant to appeal to a certain demographic, one that is not widespread or all-encompassing. Michel de Certeau (1984) has similarly reflected on the relationship between socio-economics and taste:

> …what I really wish to work out is *a science of singularity*; that is to say, a science of the relationship that links everyday pursuits to particular circumstances. And only in the *local* network of labor and recreation can one grasp how, within a grid of socio-economic constraints, these pursuits unfailingly establish relational tactics (a struggle for life), artistic creations (an aesthetic), and autonomous initiatives (an ethic). (p. ix)

In essence, de Certeau's "science of singularity" encourages us to look more deeply at the differing uses of food. Is a dish consumed with the goal of experiencing new and exciting flavors? Is it consumed with the goal of filling the stomach and providing energy to last the day? Or is it consumed with ethical consumption habits in mind (perhaps using ethically-sourced, vegan, or raw ingredients)? These key differences are vital to understanding the role of food as it exists for various groups.

Marjike van der Veen (2003), archeologist and author of "When is food a luxury?," has addressed perhaps the most central question in the field of food economics: what food is considered a basic necessity for human life and what food is considered a superlative luxury item? Stated otherwise, where can we draw the line between the haves and the have nots in relation to food culture? In this article, van der Veen tackles these questions, defining and exploring the world of culinary luxuries and noting the differing forms these luxuries take in differing cultures. Though ven der Veen ultimately refrains from dubbing certain foods luxury items, a task that would be hopelessly marred by grey areas and exceptions to the rules, he does offer the following explanation:

> Here the focus is not on the inherent characteristic of what is consumed, but on the signal it gives to those who cannot consume it. This has led to a new definition of luxuries, as goods 'whose principal use is rhetorical and social, goods that are simply incarnated signs.' (2003, p. 408)

The food items and techniques included under this category, then, are necessarily fluid and ever-changing based on the surrounding cultural norms and mores.

Josee Johnston and Shyon Baumann (2010) echo many of these same themes in their book *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*. Here, Johnston and Baumann investigated how the foodie movement has redefined luxury cuisine, moving away from foods that are necessarily expensive or rare and, more recently, prioritizing foods that are "exotic" or "authentic." In this way, the foodie movement has seemingly been democratized. Foodies might now flock to a hole-in-the-wall taco joint rather than a three Michelin star restaurant. However, the necessities of time, income, and taste that still exist are nevertheless exclusionary, in many of the same ways high brow food has always been. And, moreover, this recent focus on "exoticism" underscores the overwhelmingly European and/or Western identity of the foodie movement. To dub certain foods as "exotic" is akin to labeling them as "other." In this way, food is still—and, perhaps, will always be—a signifier of status and culture, one that is unavoidably exclusionary.

Articles such as those from van der Veen, Johnston and Baumann, and Montanari are useful in that they help to define terms and better understand the landscape of a food culture. Yet these broad and, at times, abstract discussions of culinary luxuries and norms are less helpful in illustrating the way these theories play out within a specific food culture or setting. Symbols of culinary luxury abound today with indulgent products such as truffles, caviar, foie gras, and Kobe beef often considered symbols of an upper-class lifestyle. However, increasingly consumers with the resources to do so embrace a much more restrained (but perhaps equally as expensive) diet, one filled with organically-produced locally-sourced foods. The growing popularity of organic grocers such as Whole Foods is directly tied to this trend towards healthful and natural foods. In a world that is increasingly diversified and globalized, the term "luxury" has become fragmented, applicable to any number of food items and trends. Whether our selections could be defined as luxury food items, local, organic, or otherwise they communicate to others about our socio-economic identity. These distinctions are also apparent in the food blogging community. Though the food blogging community appears fairly diverse at first blush—with blogs devoted to every cuisine, diet, and, notably, price point conceivable—the very act of blogging (or blog reading) assumes access to the necessary technology and the luxury of expendable time. Though this project will not focus centrally on these issues of socioeconomic equality, it is vital to note that these communities all hinge on specific non-negotiable resources. However, as much as food indicates socioeconomic differences, it is perhaps most often discussed in relation to gender differences. I turn now to the relationship between food and gender.

The Gendered Nature of Food Studies

For all the divisions created by food discourse, perhaps one of the most well known is that of gender. This difference is readily apparent in Montanari's historical discussion of cooking techniques as he likens the boiling pot on the hearth to the arena of female competence and, conversely, the roaring fire pit used for roasting as the very symbol of man's virility (Montanari, 2004, p. 49). This binary reduction may seem simplistic and outdated; however, these same symbols have remained largely consistent throughout the years with women holding court in the kitchen and men taking over on the updated fire pit…the grill. It would appear that gender norms have not evolved much or, at the very least, our stereotypical food provider archetypes haven't.

Within the field of rhetoric and composition, Jamie White-Farnham (2012) offers an insightful exploration of gender and literacy in relation to domesticity in her article, "Rhetorical recipes: Women's literacies in and out of the kitchen." This article discusses a number of interviews White-Farnham conducted with members of the Red

Hat Society, a group composed of women who are largely middle-aged to elderly, white, and middle-class. While White-Farnham found that study participants typically took part in a wide range of literacy-related activities, she also found that these women typically discount their household literacies in favor of more traditional forms of literacy. White-Farnham ultimately attributes this to a devaluation of female gender roles, even by those women engaging in these same roles: “According to rhetorical scholar Mary M. Lay, ‘a bifurcated consciousness potentially affects a woman’s ability to appreciate her own experiences and to interpret their meaning outside the gender role assigned to her’” (White-Farnham, 2012, p. 36). White-Farnham’s findings are particularly intriguing within the scope of this study, primarily because they tell a story of female attitudes toward domesticity from the point of view of a more mature age group, one that experienced its prime many years (if not decades) ago. The Red Hat Society participants might serve as a foil against which we might draw connections or contrasts with a younger demographic. In fact, several scholars have taken a look at gender in relation to domestic (and, below, primarily culinary) literacies today.

Kate Cairns, Josee Johnston, and Shyon Baumann (2010) offer a discussion of gender as it exists within today’s “foodie” culture in their article, “Caring about food: Doing gender in the foodie kitchen.” In a series of interviews with self-proclaimed foodies, which Cairns, Johnston, and Baumann define as “people with a long-standing passion for eating and learning about food but who are not food professionals” (2010, p. 592), they found that both male and female foodies enact multifaceted and complex food identities. However, they also found that women struggle much more in negotiating their gendered foodie identity, largely because of the conflict between their traditional need to do care work and their more subversive desire to embrace food as a luxury item or pleasure source. Where men are often free to pursue their passion for food as a purely leisurely activity, the women present in Cairns, Johnston, and Baumann's study struggle with the need and desire to provide for those they care about (much like the Red Hat Society participants above); however, their self-identified role as "foodies" complicates this inner struggle even further.

Cairns, Johnston, and Baumann extend their analysis, acknowledging the complex class-based implications inherent in foodie culture:

> On one hand, foodie discourse is often at odds with historically dominant ways of doing masculinity or femininity. On the other hand, the discourse is still constrained by a broader system of conventional gender relations, a system that is also conditioned by the economic and cultural implications of class positions. (2010, p. 609)

Foodie culture is a pastime only possible for those with the requisite resources. As such, the female desire to consume is strictly limited to what Cairns, Johnston, and Baumann classify as "good food." Implicit here is a socioeconomic bias; to be a foodie, one must have the cultural capital to recognize the distinction between "good food" and the food of the masses. Ultimately, the female foodies in this study are left to negotiate their foodie identity between the conflicting forces asserted by their gender, their socioeconomic level, and their passion for "good food." Cairns, Johnston, and Baumann note that "women's efforts to perform foodie identities that balance both pleasure *and* care, knowledge *and* emotion, might be interpreted as a reflection of post-feminist discourses that claim that women can now 'have it all'" (2010, p. 610), yet negotiating gender in relation to food culture seems to have become a more complex task than ever. This project touches on some of these gendered themes in later analysis chapters, specifically in Chapter Six in relation to issues of professionalizing food blogs.

The Digitization of Food Discourse

Thus far, this chapter has discussed rhetorical studies of fairly traditional food texts such as cookbooks and memoirs. Within the last decade, however, a great deal of food writing has migrated to the digital realm, most notably in the form of the food blog. This relatively new genre has quickly gained traction in recent years and, though the scholarship surrounding food blogging is still surprisingly sparse, interest in this area has grown exponentially within the last few years. A flood of recently published books have covered the genre of the food blog. Many of these take the form of instruction manual guiding readers towards expertly crafted food writing (Dianne Jacob's *Will Write for Food: The Complete Guide to Writing Cookbooks, Blogs, Memoir, Recipes, and More*, 2015; Kelly Senyei's *Food Blogging for Dummies*, 2012) or food styling and photography (Helen Dujardin's *Plate to Pixel: Digital Food Photography & Styling*, 2011; Matt Armendariz's *Focus on Food Photography for Bloggers*, 2012; Alison Parks-Whitfield's *Food Styling and Photography for Dummies*, 2012). A few more scholarly works take an analytical approach, looking at the relationship between social media and food, as in Signe Rousseau's (2012) recent book, *Food and Social Media: You are What You Tweet*. And some have even conducted linguistic analysis of food discourse as in Dan Jurafsky's (2014) long-standing blog, The Language of Food, an outlet that shares a title with his most recent book, *The Language of Food: A Linguist Reads the Menu*. Yet, for all these books and blogs focused on food discourse within new media, very few delve into the complex relationship between food and identity. For that, I turn now to Paula Salvio (2012), an interdisciplinary scholar focusing on education, culture, and sustainability.

Salvio, author of "Dishing it out: Food blogs and post-feminist domesticity," offers a close look at gender roles and norms as they function within a number of popular food blogs. Here, Salvio has conducted a qualitative content analysis of twenty food blogs using a feminist lens. Salvio's central argument is that the gender roles espoused on these blogs are often backward looking, gesturing to outdated gender norms. In fact, Salvio finds that female blogging identities tend to fit into the archetypal categories of princess or old witch, digital identities crafted and offered with a knowing wink but problematic nevertheless:

> The women who emerge from these entries seem frantic, coquettish, and princess-like, or old and smelly with chin hair. And while these images are rendered with a wink, they work to soften, dramatize, and disguise a post-feminist sensibility that is attached to ideas about natural sexual differences. For the theorist Slavoj Zizek, the clearest evidence of ideological interpellation is the statement, 'I know it, but I do it anyway.' The behavior that winks knowingly at its own complicity assumes that the wink negates that complicity. So while readers and bloggers . . . may read and write about the pleasure of providing domestic comforts with a wink—that is, a sense of knowingness, or even irony—they remain aligned with a post-feminist ideology that reclaims

> ideas of natural sexual differences from the postwar era. If we look closer, post-feminist sensibilities persist. They exacerbate distinctions between men and women and provoke middle-class anxieties about having children, finding a husband, and securing the comforts of home. (2012, p. 35)

Salvio's characterization is astute, but also incomplete. Though many food bloggers do play into traditional gender norms, either intentionally or not, I find Salvio's binary inadequate for exploring the fascinating spectrum of gendered personae that can be found in the blogosphere. Ultimately, Salvio's analysis of gender in food blogs is a useful starting point for a more thorough investigation of digital food identity. Her assertions regarding traditional gender representations offer the beginnings of what is bound to be a much larger and broader discussion of digital identity and food discourse, a discussion this dissertation hopes to continue and expand upon.

This project is situated within and draws upon this long history of food discourse while also looking forward to the future of food discourse. As noted above, the rise of the Internet has enabled many food communities to move online, fostering virtual communities that needn't be confined to one location or time but, rather, can draw members from across the globe. The result is food communities that are increasingly specific, typically centered on a shared food ideology, cuisine, techniques, flavors, or values. This project investigates what it means to be a part of this new digitized food community, focusing in on specific bloggers and investigating the various ways they enact identity in online spaces.

A Menu of the Courses to Come…

Chapter Two, "A Review of Digital Identity Literature," situates this dissertation within a larger landscape of scholarly work. This study is driven by a need to better understand digital identity as it is created and managed in the blogging community. This line of inquiry has deep roots, tracing back to Sherry Turkle's 1995 investigation into identity within the online gaming community in *Life on the Screen*. As the digital realm evolves and changes at an increasing rate, we confront a corresponding and continually growing need to understand identity-shaping rhetorical practices in the digital realm. The world of digital food writing presents a dynamic opportunity to analyze the role of food rhetoric in creating and shaping online identity, and, moreover, to track the evolution of these identities in real time. In the absence of the real life cook/chef/blogger/writer as a reference point, these bloggers use food rhetoric to create digital identity and connect with others and they often do so artfully and effectively. Ultimately, this project aims to advocate for greater awareness regarding the ways we all symbolically shape our identities online.

Chapter Three, "Case Study Methodology: Methods and Complications," outlines the case study methodology used in this project. I conducted this study through a collection of three case studies, what Robert Stake (2000) refers to as a "collective case study" (p. 437). Each case study within this project focuses on one individual food blogger and his or her daily cooking, writing, and blogging practices. Chapter Three details the overarching case study methodology as well as the specific research methods used to conduct this investigation. My intention in using this diverse set of methods was to paint a fuller picture of the cooking and blogging practices of individual food bloggers by exploring the ways they function both on the screen and off. Studies of the food blogging community as well as the blogging community at large heretofore have often focused on the identities written on the screen and enacted via pixels and code. While these studies have made great strides toward a more comprehensive understanding of the blogging community as it exists online, my study expands upon this research to help obtain a clearer picture of the invention and composing practices that also occur off the screen, the rhetorical work that happens behind the scenes to create the finished product published online. Through this combination of research methods, these case studies unearth a complex and multifaceted portrait of a few of today's food bloggers. However, this research was not without its challenges. Chapter Three offers a discussion of the challenges of digital recruitment and research. And, finally, this chapter introduces readers to the three case study participants: Jennie Bea, Jacqueline, and Mac

Chapters Four, Five, and Six each focus in greater depth on the individual case study participants and specific strategies used to create and manage identity online. Each of these chapters highlights a different aspect of the food blogging community to help illuminate the various ways in which these bloggers negotiate identity rhetorically in digital spaces.

Chapter Four, "Self-Disclosure in the Food Blogging Community," begins with the most basic decision bloggers must make in defining their digital identity: how much and what types of information they wish to disclose about themselves online. This chapter expands upon existing research on digital self-disclosure focusing on the relationship and, at times, discord between the digital representation and the "real life" version of the blogger. Each of these participants conceives of and enacts this relationship in strikingly different ways and this chapter explores these differences and the ways they manifest within the space of the blogs. From zero personal disclosures and the attitude that identity should emerge strictly through food-based content to poignant and painful personal disclosures to the hyperbolization of identity online, each blogger conceives of this task differently and the results set the stage for all future digital identity decisions.

Chapter Five, “Community Building and Collective Identity Management,” draws upon Margaret Syverson’s (1999) work on writing ecologies to explore the ways in which each of these bloggers engage in community building via their own personal blogging ecologies. Within this chapter, I analyze how these varying communities work to shape the blogs and bloggers themselves. Whether a community of family members and close friends, others in the blogging community, or even professional chefs, each of these bloggers opts to engage with a very specific community and these decisions have far-reaching impacts in terms of the bloggers’ individual identity performances as well as the typical reader interactions. In many ways, these decisions lay the groundwork for the final analysis chapter, which focuses on digital *ethos* and professionalization in the blogging community.

Chapter Six, “Professionalization, Blog Monetization, and its Inherent Tensions,” centers on the rhetorical concept of *ethos* as a means to discuss the tensions between food professionals and food hobbyists, a divide that is unavoidably gendered. This chapter explores various forms of blog monetization and highlights the ways these revenue streams often complicate bloggers’ identities and connection to readers. Using examples of both successful and unsuccessful monetization experiences, this chapter teases out the underlying tensions that determine how bloggers attempts at professionalization will be received by readers. Ultimately, this chapter discusses whether it's possible to frame oneself as a "professional blogger" within the food blogging community and explores how these distinctions are drawn.

Finally, Chapter Seven, "Findings: The Importance of the Extracurriculum and Digital Identity as Dynamic Event," demonstrates the significance of these findings for other rhetorical scholars, particularly those focusing on digital rhetorics. Using the findings of the three analysis chapters, this chapter proposes a model for understanding digital identity as a dynamic event, one that is recursive, ongoing, and communal. Additionally, this chapter advocates for greater awareness regarding the ways all writers rhetorically craft their identities online. Bloggers, composition instructors, and students can all benefit from a more intentional approach to their own digital identities and this project offers a framework for approaching this new and dynamic challenge.

Chapter Two
A Review of Digital Identity Literature

Within the last decade, food writing has migrated to the digital realm, most notably in the form of the food blog, a genre that has quickly gained traction in recent years. As noted in Chapter One, a few scholars from the fields of sociology and education have ventured into the world of food blogging, most often focusing on the gender norms enacted within digital media (Cairns, Johnston, and Baumann, 2010; Salvio, 2012). While gender is certainly a vital part of any food-related identity, a topic that will be discussed in later chapters, this project aims to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of digital identity and, more specifically, its manifestations with the genre of the blog.

In the world of Web 2.0, the blog is a relatively low-tech medium. It doesn't depend upon various cutting edge technologies, it prioritizes text and/or images that could be created using common and widespread technology, and the genre itself has not evolved much since its debut in the late 1990s. Rebecca Blood (2000), who literally wrote the book on blogging (or web logging as it would have been dubbed in its early days), offers an early overview of the blog genre, its various forms, and its historical evolution. Though her analysis is now close to twenty years old, it remains surprisingly astute. In her blog post, "Weblogs: A history and perspective," she recounts the earliest incarnation of the blog: "The original weblogs were link-driven sites. Each was a mixture in unique proportions of links, commentary, and personal thoughts and essays. Weblogs could only be created by people who already knew how to make a website" (Blood, 2000). As Blood notes, these early days of blogging were limited to those with specialized coding knowledge. She recalls a blog compilation list from 1999 that lists a total of 23 blogs known to be in existence.[2] This was the earliest incarnation of the blog.

As blogging technology evolved, sites such as Blogger popped up[3] that streamlined the blogging interface and demystified the process for those without extensive coding knowledge. For the first time, blogging became possible for a larger and more diverse population. Blood recounts the simultaneous shift towards blogging interfaces like Blogger and also toward a more reflective journal-style format:

> While weblogs had always included a mix of links, commentary, and personal notes, in the post-Blogger explosion increasing numbers of weblogs eschewed this focus on the web-at-large in favor of a sort of short-form journal. These blogs, often updated several times a day, were instead a record of the blogger's thoughts: something noticed on the way to work, notes about the weekend, a quick reflection on some subject or another. Links took the reader to the site of another blogger with whom the first was having a public conversation or had met the previous evening, or to the site of a band he had seen the night before. Full-blown conversations were carried on between three or five blogs, each referencing the other in their agreement or rebuttal of the other's positions. Cults of personality sprung up as new blogs appeared, certain names appearing over and over in daily entries or listed in the obligatory sidebar of ‘other weblogs’ . . . It was, and is, fascinating to see new bloggers position themselves in this community, referencing and reacting to those blogs they read most, their sidebar an affirmation of the tribe to which they wish to belong. (Blood, 2000)

This newer journal-format blog, as described by Blood, is remarkably similar to the blog as it exists today. Despite the availability of technology that is continually evolving and doing so at an ever-quicker pace, the blogging community has largely held tight to its technological roots. Blogger is still a popular blogging interface (though it now competes with countless others such as Wordpress, Squarespace, Tumblr, and Ghost, among others) and the genre norms have remained relatively stable.

Four years after Blood's early analysis, Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd (2004) offered their own discussion of the genre as the blog began to gain traction with the larger Web community. In their article, "Blogging as social action: A genre analysis of the weblog," Miller and Shepherd trace the ancestry of the blog genre through its defining characteristics. They note that blogs are defined by three key elements: reverse chronology, frequent updates, and links combined with commentary, and they trace these various characteristics as they appear in earlier genres such as the marine log, diaries, and clipping services. While these ancestral ties may seem varied and long-displaced from today's blog, Susannah Stern (2008), author of "Producing sites, exploring identities: Youth online authorship," would argue that Miller and Shepherd's ancestry chart is a bit too limited. She offers a more extensive lineage:

> By most accounts, personal home pages and blogs are not altogether new genres for self-expression. Rather, their authors appear to draw from a variety of preceding genres, including diaries, autobiographies, resumes, high school yearbook entries, personal letters, refrigerator doors, business cards, displays on bedroom walls or school lockers, and advertisements, among others. Yet

> personal web pages and blogs differ notably from these predecessors, because they are not fixed or static, but rather allow for ongoing and alterable expression. Blogs, in particular, are expected to be unending and incomplete. (2008, p. 98)

And, indeed, the blog now takes the place of many of these genres, displacing traditional print genres and serving simultaneously as personal journal, public advertisement, and emergent community.

Blood notes that by September of 2000 (just one year after the "known blogs" list stretched a mere 23 entries long) there are thousands of blogs taking a variety of forms:

> …topic-oriented weblogs, alternative viewpoints, astute examinations of the human condition as reflected by mainstream media, short-form journals, links to the weird, and free-form notebooks of ideas. . . Free-style blogs are nothing less than an outbreak of self-expression. Each is evidence of a staggering shift from an age of carefully controlled information provided by sanctioned authorities (and artists), to an unprecedented opportunity for individual expression on a worldwide scale. Each kind of weblog empowers individuals on many levels. (Blood, 2000)

By the end of 2011, NM Incite would place the total blog count at a staggering 181 million (Sindoni, 2013, p. 120). Though that number has undoubtedly grown in recent years, it has become increasingly difficult and, in fact, impossible to place a count on the size of the current blogosphere. This is partly due to the growing number of abandoned, defunct, or spam blogs accumulating of the Web and partly due to the fact that there is no master list of blog domains (Rettberg, 2008, p. 29). While some blog hosting sites, such as WordPress, do offer data on their bloggers (2012 reports place their blog count at over 50 million blogs), many others, such as Blogger, do not provide public data. Despite patchy and outdated information on the current size of the blogging community, it's safe to assert that the blogging community remains a popular digital outlet for creators as well as consumers.

The Growing Blog Community

With such an astronomical (and ever-growing) number of blogs, one might wonder about the struggle to gain a readership in an ever-more-saturated market. And, indeed, for many bloggers, particularly those who recently entered the blogging community, gaining an audience is becoming an increasingly difficult feat and not everyone will succeed. Though gaining a readership may be increasingly difficult in today's competitive blog atmosphere, blog readers tend to be frequent and loyal consumers. In fact, these blogging communities are one of the primary features of the evolving genre and the recent focus of much scholarly research.

Collin Brooke (2005) emphasizes the importance of these digital communities in his article, "Weblogs as deictic systems: Centripetal, centrifugal, and small-world blogging." Here, Brooke offers a discussion of the sociability of blogs, particularly in relation to the blogroll. The blogroll has long been a standard feature of the blog, offering bloggers the opportunity (or the expectation, depending how one views the blogroll) to link to related blogs they read often and/or encourage others to visit. The blogroll has been a feature of the blog since its earliest incarnations and its continued omnipresence helps underline the importance of community within this genre. Brooke has suggested, “To maintain a blog…is to participate in a small-world network, one that involves both clustering and connecting. The combination of these forces (embodied in any number of different kinds of gestures) results in a different kind of writing altogether” (2005). Blogging, for Brooke, is not simply writing for the self and, likewise, it is not simply writing for others. Instead, it involves a complex process of negotiating both needs at once and allowing that process to push one’s thinking further.

Bronwyn Williams (2008) similarly emphasizes the importance of these blog communities in his article, “What South Park character are you?: Popular culture, literacy, and online performances of identity,” where he echoes James Paul Gee in referring to these digital communities as “affinity spaces.” According to Williams:

> These affinity spaces, which Gee argued could be virtual or physical such as web sites or fan magazines, bring people together through a shared interest or activity. Affinity spaces allow individuals ‘to any degree they wish, small or large, [to] affiliate with others to share knowledge and gain knowledge that is distributed and dispersed across many different people, places, Internet sites, and modalities.’ (2008, p. 32)

This ability to connect with others over shared interests, experiences, or other commonalities is not unique to the blog genre: it is apparent throughout social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, in chat rooms and discussion boards, and even in online video games (which will be discussed further later). However, the blog genre is unique in that it offers an autonomous space of one’s own, unlike chat rooms and discussion boards, which are shared and, typically, regulated spaces. And, unlike social network profiles, which often serve as a generalized representation of the self, blogs enable users to delve into one (or more) aspects of their identity in a deeper, perhaps more meaningful, way with others who share such interests.

Composition scholars are often quick to note the positive impacts of the blogging community in relation to the writing and critical thinking processes. However, as noted by Williams above, blogging communities are perhaps most notable for their ability to engage like-minded communities. But why do so many people seek out these digital communities? Psychologists John A. Bargh, Katelyn Y. A. McKenna, and Grainne M. Fitzsimons (2002) offer one possible answer in their article, "Can you see the real me? Activation and expression of the 'true self' on the Internet." Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons conducted a series of three empirical, quantitative studies into the relationship between what they dub the "actual" and "true" selves as perceived both face-to-face and online. Here, the "true" self is defined as "actually existing psychologically (i.e., a present, not a future version of self), but not fully expressed in social life (i.e., not the actual self)" (2002, p. 34) or, in other words, the self-perceived version of oneself that may not be conveyed to others. By contrast, the "actual" self is that self which others see, know, and interact with. These studies yielded two notable findings. First, online communication facilitates a more accurate representation of the true self than does face-to-face communication. Based on these findings, we can hypothesize that bloggers are drawn to digital communities because they feel they can most accurately express their true self in these environments. Second, Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons also found that within online relationships participants are more likely to like their partner and project idealized characteristics onto them: “Those who interacted on the Internet liked one another significantly more (M=5.55) than did those who interacted in person (M=3.05)” (2002, p. 42). In lieu of actual social cues and personality attributes, those interacting online tend to project ideal characteristics, those of a best friend or close family member, onto their digital partners. This unconscious act fosters a more positive relationship than might exist offline.

This section has delved into both the benefits and the drawbacks of the blogging community and the blogger’s role within it. Before turning to a more specific discussion of digital identity, I first want to leave off with a thought from Blood’s 2000 discussion of blogs. She suggests:

> We are being pummeled by a deluge of data and unless we create time and spaces in which to reflect, we will be left with only our reactions. I strongly believe in the power of weblogs to transform both writers and readers from "audience" to "public" and from "consumer" to "creator." Weblogs are no panacea for the crippling effects of a media-saturated culture, but I believe they are one antidote. (Blood, 2002)

In a culture that is often defined by reactivity rather than proactivity, I do believe that blogs offer an important opportunity to introspect, communicate, and, hopefully, create.

Digital Identity

The previous sub-section covered the rise of the blog as a medium as well as several of the most oft-debated features of the blog. This sub-section will now turn towards a more thorough discussion of digital identity, perhaps one of the longeststudied but least understood aspects of our increasingly digitized world. Though this sub-section will discuss a variety of digital media it will ultimately focus on digital identity within the blog genre specifically, a genre that has often been overlooked in favor of more cutting edge technology yet one that provides a long and fruitful history of identity work.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Goffman, Baudrillard, and Ethopoeia

Any discussion of identity shaping must first begin with a nod towards Irving Goffman, the father of impression management scholarship. In fact, a survey of digital identity literature reveals a fairly unanimous appreciation of Goffman's work as it applies to the digital sphere. Goffman's impression management work suggests that we can never have access to another's true identity. Rather, we are presented with personae: performative identities that are edited and censored with the intention of portraying a very specific character. Edward McQuarrie, Jessica Miller, and Barbara Phillips (2013) describe these various personae through the metaphor of actors and audiences:

> Goffman applied a dramaturgical metaphor to everyday life, arguing that participants in social encounters could be parsed into actors and audience, with actors striving to put on a front and convey a certain persona, and audiences accepting successful actors seeming as they wish to be seen. In Goffman's account, no social actor is ever authentic in his or her behaviors toward an audience; authenticity, to the extent it is possible, is reserved for the private or intimate sphere. To an audience, one shows a persona, rather than revealing one's identity. (p. 140)

According to Goffman's theory, then, attempting to access another's true identity is equivalent to attempting to see through the characters presented on stage or on screen in search of the inner actors' true identity. To do so would be an exercise in futility.

Though Goffman first suggested his theory of impression management long before the digital age, the rise of Web 2.0 provides a more tangible way to discuss his ideas. Increasingly, it is becoming standard practice to inhabit a variety of digital spaces such as social media sites, online games, and blogs. Within each of these digital spaces we have the capacity to curate our online presence in a very intentional and specific way, one that may or may not align with our identity offline. Katie Davis, Scott Seider, and Howard Gardner (2008) explain that our perception of others is typically based on a limited set of facts: "…in any given social situation we do not have access to all the facts, in part because we cannot know another person's innermost thoughts and feelings. We must therefore rely on representations of reality rather than on the reality itself" (2008, p. 1087). This is nowhere more true than online. As authors and actors of our own identities, we often feel a heightened awareness of our own identity performances in online spaces. Here, our textual and/or visual performances are emphasized, often in lieu of other performative factors such as voice inflections or facial expressions. And, to compound this awareness, we are faced with the possibility that our digital performances are often recorded and accessible for the foreseeable future. These factors come together to create a digital culture of extreme self-awareness. However, our digital identity performances do not exist within a vacuum. In addition to the performer, an audience is necessary in order to make the performance complete.

This heightening of awareness surrounding our digital identity performances is partially attributable to the presence of an audience primed to receive. Davis, Seider, and Garner (2008) discuss the role of the audience in identity communication:

> [Goffman] described the self as a product, not a cause, of the scene that a performer creates. The self is the character that the performer plays. It arises as the performance is recognized by the audience. Thus, the self does not exist within the individual. It is, rather, a 'collaborative manufacture' between performer and audience. (p. 1087)

In our daily lived experiences, our identity performances are often influenced and shaped by our previous interactions with those around us. Weeks, months, or even years of past performances and the reciprocated performances of friends and family have worked to shape and refine the identities we perform on a regular basis. This contrasts sharply with the freedom of identity performances online. Today, with the luxury of Web 2.0 technologies, we now have the option to act out a variety of identities in our digital lives. Though the identities we form in these digital spaces may be similar to or worlds away from the identities we enact offline, we tend to be far more aware of these digital performances as opposed to our face-to-face performances.

Today, Goffman is perhaps the most cited scholar of impression management; however, he certainly wasn't the first to discuss the concept. Carolyn Miller (2003) discusses the ancient origins of this concept in her article, "Writing in a culture of simulation: *Ethos* online." Here, Miller uses the classic Turing test as a means to explore the concept of "ethopoeia," an ancient Greek rhetorical term that describes the act of creating characters or personae through discourse. She explains the term as follows:

> *Ethopoeia* was one of the earliest rhetorical techniques that the Greeks named; it denoted the construction—or simulation—of character in discourse, and was particularly apparent in the art of logographers, or speechwriters, who worked usually for those who had to defend themselves in court. A successful logographer, like Lysias, could create in a prepared speech an effective character for the accused, who would actually speak the words; it was perhaps the very separation of the writer from the speaker that permitted recognition of ethopoeia as a technique. (2003, p. 74)

Miller traces discussion of ethopoeia through various ancient scholars such as Aristotle,[4] Plato, and the Sophists, before returning to the present day and the role of ethopoeia in computer-mediated communication.

Ultimately, Miller credits digital discourse for revitalizing the term and the practice of ethopoeia, arguing, "The revival of rhetoric is made possible—perhaps made necessary—by the new culture of simulation. Rhetoric, after all, is an art of simulation, an art by which we create alternate worlds, alternate selves, alternate modes of belief" (2003, p. 78). Miller, taking a decidedly rhetorical approach to digital identity, echoes many of Goffman's earlier arguments surrounding impression management. And, where Goffman emphasizes the impossibility of accessing "true identity," Miller similarly argues that "Ethopoeia is essential to character development and to human interaction, and the Turing test is one we engage in every day as we encounter each other's words" (2003, p. 78). Indeed, in this "new culture of simulation" as Miller dubs it, identity performances have unprecedented possibilities and deciphering those performances is becoming increasingly important. Through the ease of the Web, now anyone with computer access and basic computing skills can craft and disseminate a character of his or her own device, one that may be worlds away from his or her true identity.

Several scholars have recently begun to explore these digital identity performances. James Zappen (2005), for example, has suggested that the evolution of digital media has complicated traditional ideas of *ethos*, as we must now consider:

> …a complex negotiation between various versions of our online and our real selves, between our many representations of our selves and our listeners and readers, and, not least (as Manovich suggests), between our many selves and the computer structures and operations through which we represent these selves to others. (2005, p. 323)

And, more recently, Todd Frobish (2012) has proposed a model to assess digital *ethos* using categories such as community identification, moral character, intelligence, and verbal and design competence. Such a model is indeed helpful for those attempting to analyze *ethos* in digital spaces, but how do these digital performances relate to the self that exists off the screen?

Some scholars argue that we are reaching (or perhaps have already reached in some cases, as will be discussed further below) a point at which digital identities can and do take precedence over their real-life counterparts. Jean Baudrillard (1994) forecast this transition in his classic work, *The Precession of the Simulacra.* He notes:

> Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being of a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory—precession of the simulacra. (1994, p. 1)

Though Baudrillard could not have predicted the overwhelming influence of Web 2.0 and the subsequent rise of digital identity performances, his words now hold an ominous forecast for our increasingly digitized lives. Yet, before any sweeping generalizations are made as to the impact of digital media and digital identity performances, let's first turn to an overview of the current literature surrounding digital identity.

Digital Identity Formation: Exploration, Fragmentation, and Intensification

Though scholars predictably disagree about many aspects of digital identity formation, most seem to fall into one of three camps. These camps are largely divided on one key point: the function digital technologies serve in facilitating identity work. While there is certainly overlap between the various camps and plenty of grey area, for the purposes of this review I will divide this scholarship into these three main functions: exploration, fragmentation, and intensification.

1. Exploration

The first of these functions, exploration, suggests that digital identity as a continual process. This process does not necessarily lead to a better or truer digital identity but, rather, serves a purely exploratory purpose. These scholars typically assert that the act of identity exploration enables users to test out various identities without the pressure of committing to one indefinitely. Laura Gurak and Smiljana Antonijevic (2008), for example, have suggested that the blog should be viewed as an event rather than an object, a space where bloggers can develop and grow over time in conjunction with their readers. They point to the blog's unique capability to encourage change and exploration:

> Unlike personal Web presentations, structured around 'the essence of me,' blogs are structured around 'the process of me.' Unlike chatting, pointed toward 'hear me out this moment,' blogging is pointed toward 'hear me out throughout time.' Blogging, thus, is a twofold communicative event. On one hand, it is the event of 'writing oneself' through continuous recording of past and present experiences, just as in the case of traditional diaries . . . On the other hand, blogging is the event of 'rewriting oneself' through interaction with the audience. (2008, p. 65)

Though blog identities may appear strikingly stable over long periods of time, changing in small and typically unnoticeable ways, the process of exploration becomes striking when one compares early and recent samples from long-time bloggers. Where daily change is unnoticeable, long-term change is often undeniable.

While bloggers may explore and inhabit a single digital identity over a long period of time, Gurak and Antonijevic are quick to remind us that these digital explorations should not be confused with true identity: "…it is impossible to know… whether we are seeing a reasonably accurate representation of the person or, more likely, a particular identity created to be displayed as a public glimpse into someone's private life" (2008, p. 66). In many ways Gurak and Antonijevic's conception of digital identity formation recalls Baudrillard's earlier discussion of simulation and the hyperreal: it is the continual creation of simulations (here, repeated creation of a digital identity) without connection to reality (here, the lived identity). In essence, Gurak and Antonijevic suggest that we have entered the world of the hyperreal.

Those scholars who reside in this first camp often tend to focus on the utility of digital identity exploration as it functions for a particular group: adolescents. For example, Susannah Stern (2008) investigates adolescent identity exploration within the blogging community in her article, "Producing sites, exploring identities: Youth online authorship." Through a series of interviews coupled with artifact analysis, Stern has asserted that blogs and personal websites serve as a means for youths to test out and explore potential identities and, perhaps, find affirmation in their identities:

> In descriptions of their decisions about what to reveal, exaggerate, and omit in their online communication, youth authors reveal a highly conscious process of self-inquiry. Adolescents consciously and conscientiously negotiate the boundaries of public and private spheres as they deliberate about who they are and who they want to be, within their local community and the larger culture. The Internet, young authors suggest, affords space and place for such complex identity work. (2008, p. 97)

In many ways Stern echoes the findings of Gurak and Antonijevic, advocating for the positive role of digital technology (and, specifically, blogs) in facilitating continual identity exploration. In fact, she suggests an inherent similarity between blogging and identity work: "Indeed, the unfixed, malleable, and evolving nature of personal sites is not at all unlike identity itself: an enduring process, rather than a fixed one" (2008, p. 112). And, in many ways, this process of digital identity exploration can be fruitful for adolescents still in the early stages of identity formation.

Stern focuses on the positive outcomes of this process, noting that this identity exploration may enable adolescents to "test out" online personae they may not be ready to inhabit in their lived experiences. In this way, adolescents may determine whether a digital identity is successful or not before incorporating it into their offline identity. She explains:

> Because the audience is never far from their minds, young authors demonstrate considerable awareness of how they project their 'real,' internal sense of themselves into their online self-presentations. Generally, they view their public selves not as fabrications, but as 'touched-up' versions of themselves. A key task of adolescence involves bringing the actual self more in line with the ideal self, and in moving away from distinct, non-overlapping facets of identity. The online 'touching-up' that youth authors reference may thus function as an 'as-if' exercise—a way of trying out new ways of being and attempting to incorporate their ideal selves into their actual selves. (2008, p. 106)

This ability to "try on" various identities provides young people with unprecedented opportunities for identity exploration. However, what happens when these explorations are met with unsatisfactory or even negative feedback?

Davis, Seider, and Gardner (2008) explore the potential for negative outcomes in digital identity exploration, specifically for adolescents engaging on social networking sites. Like Stern, these scholars note that digital identity exploration can assist adolescents in testing out various identities on a live audience. However, Davis, Seider, and Gardner acknowledge that this process can also be fraught with peril for young people still trying to determine who they are:

> [Adolescents] design their social network profiles, blogs, and websites in a way that will capture and hold the attention of their audience. In the process, they may keep out thoughts and feelings that do not fit with the image they are trying to convey online. To the extent that self-promotion becomes the central focus of attention, the selves adolescents portray online are likely to be inauthentic fabrications. In contrast to the healthy act of using online spaces to explore previously unexamined facets of one's identity, the deliberate suppression of parts of oneself undermines the identity formation process by preventing the construction of an integrated, holistic sense of self. (2008, p. 1094)

Ultimately, Davis, Seider, and Gardner leave us in a grey area, acknowledging the promise of identity exploration as well as the peril of identity fracturing, particularly for young people still actively negotiating identity both on and offline. In this way, these scholars effectively place one foot in the camp of exploration while the other is rooted elsewhere in the camp of fragmentation. To gain a better conception of this camp, I turn there now.

2. Fragmentation

Though less discussed than theories of exploration, theories of identity fragmentation do tend to crop up within particular mediums. For instance, Best Kolko and Elizabeth Reid (1998), authors of "Dissolution and fragmentation: Problems in online communities," offer an early discussion of fragmented digital identities, as they existed within the realm of MOOs and MUDs in the late 1990s. Within this digital space, and citing their own first-hand experiences, Kolko and Reid found digital identities to be problematic largely due to their qualities of inflexibility and ephemerality. They summarize this phenomenon quite succinctly, concluding, "In consequence, the individual virtual persona is at once too committed to the particularity of the self it projects and too uncommitted to the continuity of that self" (1998, p. 220). Particularly within the scope of these MOOs and MUDs, media that allow participants to come and go as they please and to take on new identities when desired, these critiques do make sense. Within these spaces it is quite simple to adopt a particular identity and to just as easily drop that identity with no repercussions.

This type of behavior is also readily apparent in discussion boards or, notoriously, the comments section of web sites. Here, users can participate in conversation using a digital identity (one that may be fiercely protective of a particular ideology and even vitriolic in the denunciation of opposing world views) and, just as easily, the user may drop that identity by removing herself from the conversation at a whim. This type of fragmented and disposable digital identity can indeed be problematic to the self (as well as the successful flow of reasonable conversation online). However, the MOOs and MUDs discussed here represent a strikingly different medium in comparison with the blogs and social networking sites that dominate today's digital landscape, forums where users are expected to create and inhabit enduring and relatively stable digital identities.

Sherry Turkle (1995), author of *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet,* offers a deeper discussion of this digital fragmentation. Turkle's work similarly focuses on digital identity in online gaming, a medium that offers users the opportunity to play with identity in a distinctly compartmentalized way. The gamers Turkle discusses typically have a clear black and white separation between their various identities. But, in contrast to Kolko and Reid, Turkle argues that we should embrace this ability to inhabit a multitude of identities:

> When we step through the screen into virtual communities, we reconstruct our identities on the other side of the looking glass. This reconstruction is our cultural work in progress . . . The Internet is another element of the computer culture that has contributed to thinking about identity as multiplicity. On it, people are able to build a self by cycling through many selves. (1995, pp. 177-78)

While Turkle recognizes the opportunities inherent in digital media to embrace multiple identities, she is equally hesitant about the underlying implications, noting, "For every step forward in the instrumental use of technology (what the technology can do for us), there are subjective effects. The technology changes us as people, changes our relationship and sense of ourselves" (1995, p. 232). And, indeed, Turkle does find and explore many troubling examples of these technological changes, most of which fall into the category of what Turkle calls the "crocodile effect," which "makes the fake seem more compelling than the real" (1995, p. 237). The gamer who logs into his MUD almost 20 hours a day. The gamer who marries within his game (complete with huge wedding party and reception), yet is strikingly lonely offline.

These examples seem to hint back to Baudrillard's warnings of the age of simulation: all are examples of gamers who have become drawn into the "simulation" to the detriment of their offline life, though many of these gamers might argue that the game had become the real or, in Baudrillard's words, the hyperreal. Nevertheless, with a clear understanding of the benefits as well as the costs of these digitally fragmented identities, Turkle concludes:

> We don't have to reject life on the screen, but we don't have to treat it as an alternative life either. We can use it as a space for growth. Having literally written our online personae into existence, we are in a position to be more aware of what we project into everyday life. (1995, p. 263)

Though Turkle's investigation into digital identity is now just as dated as that of Kolko and Reid (both writing from the late 1990s, well before the age of social media and even before the blog had become widely embraced), her reflections on the utility of digital identity are just as useful now as ever.

3. Intensification

The digital identity scholars covered thus far all share one underlying assumption: that on some level all digital identities diverge from the "real" lived identity of the person by whom they were created. Whether digital media allow us to explore new identities in order to better understand our true selves or whether they push us towards a fragmented self, these scholars assume that the true identity is always already embodied. Our final camp diverges on this point, arguing instead that digital spaces allow users to embrace and convey their true identity, often in ways that are simply impossible in real life. Blood describes this process as it relates to the experiences of the blogger:

> As he enunciates his opinions daily, this new awareness of his inner life may develop into a trust in his own perspective. His own reactions--to a poem, to other people, and, yes, to the media--will carry more weight with him. Accustomed to expressing his thoughts on his website, he will be able to more fully articulate his opinions to himself and others. He will become impatient with waiting to see what others think before he decides, and will begin to act in accordance with his inner voice instead. Ideally, he will become less reflexive and more reflective, and find his own opinions and ideas worthy of serious consideration. (2000)

For Blood, then, rather than using the blog to test out new identities, the blogger uses this digital space to become more confident in his or her existing identity and all the opinions and insights that are already included therein.

While Blood argues that digital media enable the blogger to embrace his or her identity, Miller and Shepherd go one step further, arguing that the blog enables the blogger to not just embrace but to intensify his or her existing identity:

> The blogging subject engages in self-disclosure, and as we noted earlier the blog works to bind together in a recognizable rhetorical form the four functions of self-disclosure: self-clarification, social validation, relationship development, and social control. Combined with its focused and repeated effort, the blog's public disclosure—its exhibitionism—yields an intensification of the self, a reflexive elaboration of identity. (2004, p. 14)

Miller and Shepherd suggest that the nature of the blog as a medium encourages bloggers to recognize the very essence of their own identity, to boil down the self until it becomes a thicker, more concentrated version (just mix with water!) of the offline self. This process, they argue, is the discursive accomplishment of the blog: "The subject selects, displays, and comments upon the mediated reality of the internet, becoming thereby a validated part of that reality and defining for itself and for others its own nature—or rather a rhetorical version of 'its own nature'" (2004, p. 15). A harsher reading might view this is a tendency to create a caricature of the self, to reduce a complex, dynamic identity into something that fits onto a screen for easy consumption. However, what is worth noting is Miller and Shepherd's central argument: that the blogger doesn't wish to role-play but, rather, to create a digital identity that feels "real."

These initial investigations into digital identity evidence the complex nature of digitally-mediated identities (both food-centric and otherwise) and speak to one of the most long-standing issues in the field: that is, the relationship between these digital identities and their real life counterparts. As the scholars above have illustrated, there will always exist a schism (whether great or inconsequential) between the blogger on the screen and off the screen. One impetus behind this project is to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between the lived and mediated identities of those within the food blogging community, to avoid the bad habit of assuming these identities are necessarily synonymous and to demonstrate the fluidity that exists within and between these identities. Because the nature of the blog often requires a considerable amount of disclosure on the part of the blogger, it is tempting to assume that the blogger behind the scenes must match the one on the screen. In fact, this tendency to collapse the blogger into his or her digital persona is a dangerous assumption. Within the digital realm, access to the "real" is simply not an option. Rather, we must settle for a simulation of the real, offered through text deliberately composed to elicit a particular response, carefully selected insights into the blogger's "real life," and luscious food photography. These rhetorical choices allow the blogger to shape and craft the final blog product to convey a very specific and intentional online food persona or, in Baudrillard's words, a simulacrum of the real blogger, an identity that feels more real to us as readers though it is merely a silhouette of the real blogger. The previous section has discussed digital identity management online, primarily within textual environments such as MUDs, MOOs, blogs, and social networking sites. The next section will turn now to another form of identity work that takes place in many of these digital environments: visual impression management.

Visual Rhetoric and Digital Identity

As evidenced above, a great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the complex issue of digital identity. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, a fair amount of that scholarship has been dedicated to the study of visual impression management online. Digital media enable the dissemination of images in ways never before possible. Freed from the costs and limitations of print media, images can be uploaded to the Internet cheaply, quickly, and easily with the aid of technology that is now fairly ubiquitous. While text still holds a dominant role in many digital media, some scholars argue that images may ultimately be more important to users. Brandon Van Der Heide, Jonathan D. D'Angelo, & Erin M. Schumaker (2012) make just such an argument in their article, “The effects of verbal versus photographic self-presentation on impression formation in Facebook.” These communication scholars conducted two related studies into the impact of textual versus photographic communication as it influences impression formation within Facebook profiles. The study looks specifically at user interpretation of extraversion versus introversion as communicated through text and photographic self-disclosure and their findings yield a few surprising insights:

> First, Study 1 found that textual self-disclosures in isolation can more strongly influence social orientation judgments than photographs. However, Study 2 found that when the same cues [text and photographs] are presented simultaneously in the context of Facebook, with all other profile information remaining constant, photographs have more impact on judgments of extraversion than do textual self-disclosures. (2012, p. 109)

It is worth noting that most digital mediums today are comprised of a combination of both textual and photographic elements. Whether these cues work in tandem with one another or provide conflicting information to readers, the findings of Van Der Heide, D’Angelo, and Schumaker indicate that photographic representations of digital identity do indeed carry meaning, perhaps more than we might initially recognize.

While photographic representations of the self have been shown to have a strong amount of influence on audience, it is also important to acknowledge the motivations of digital authors as they select and curate their own visual identities online. While there is not a large body of scholarship exploring image selection within the blog genre, various scholars have assessed the motivations of social media users as they go about selecting their profile image. Michele Strano (2008), for example, assesses user profile images on Facebook in her article, "User descriptions and interpretations of self-presentation through Facebook profile images." Here, Strano surveys a large pool of Facebook users, ranging in age, gender, and race, to investigate the motivations behind their profile picture selection, impression management intentions, and frequency of change. She finds that younger participants tend to change their profile picture more frequently than older participants and women tend to change their profile picture more frequently than men. These findings suggest that these groups of users may be more aware of their visual digital identity within this particular medium. However, Strano notes that the findings of her study are limited to one social networking site, Facebook, and may vary drastically from one medium to the next depending on the context and purpose. She suggests, "…it might be interesting to compare the intentionality of self-presentation on dating sites, where very specific relationship goals may be at stake, to that of online social networking sites like Facebook, where broader goals of maintaining friendships are at work" (2008, p. 10). Indeed, the level of impression management work may vary from one digital genre to the next; however, at least within the realm of social networking sites, it would seem that Strano's findings are not unique to Facebook.

Andra Siibak (2009) conducts a similar survey within her article, "Constructing the self through the photo selection: Visual impression management on social networking websites," focusing instead on a popular Estonian social networking site. Siibak conducts a survey of users ranging from 11 to 18, assessing the motivations and choices behind their image selections on social networking sites. She finds that women tend to consider a wide variety of variables when choosing a profile image, a far greater number of variables than men, and hypothesizes that this is largely due to women's need to fit an ideal self or what she calls an "ought self," an idea of self "built upon the self-beliefs, norms and values that are associated with the traditional gender role" (2009, p. 5). Women, within the realm of social networking sites, take part in a continual and extensive process of visual impression management, a process that doesn't necessarily carry over to other groups.

Scholarship on visual identity management online largely seems to begin and end with the self-portrait, and with good reason. The self-portrait provide a direct and clear representation of identity, an image-based version of the About Me statement common to many social networking sites and blogs. Things become a bit murkier when we begin to venture into the larger world of image-based representations online. Nevertheless, Julia Davies (2007) attempts to speak to this larger question in her article, "Display, identity and the everyday: Self-presentation through online image sharing." Here, Davies conducts an analysis of image-sharing site Flickr and the multimodal communication that takes place there. Though the site is primarily devoted to image sharing, Davies finds that the comments that emerge in response to each image work to create individual narratives (and sometimes multiple opposing narratives) that function to create communities that span the globe. She offers an example:

> … the 5,000 people who have uploaded images depicting the contents of their bags, to the group 'What's in your bag?' (Flicker, 2006), have participated in a collaborative, social literacy act. In presenting such images, individuals not only enact an online identity, but also contribute to a text whose authorship is

> globally distributed. The text reflects aspects of the local Flickr group as well as aspects of the globally dispersed community. (2007, p. 553)

Davies' conception of identity as it functions on Flickr has an inherent duality, slipping back and forth between the individual identity shaped by the images and/or captions each user uploads to the site as well as a community identity that is shaped as users interact with one another and take part in larger conversations.

Davies' analysis is particularly interesting for our purposes due to her focus on "images of domesticity." Within Davies' conception, this term describes the predictable food imagery that dominates social image sharing sites today: she cites images of a lemon cake fresh out of the oven or a man in a chef's coat cooking in a shiny new kitchen. But the term also extends to more unexpected iterations of domesticity. An image of cleaning products lined up in a neat row, each bottle topped with a matching cloth for cleaning. Or this description of the user, Ms. Moll:

> …who uploaded a series of photographed shopping lists she had found over a period of years. She gave each list a title which highlights an aspect of each one, such as 'Organic,' 'Pick up Salmon,' 'not sure about the cream.' Viewed collectively, Ms. Moll's shopping lists allow viewers to focus on what they might ordinarily disregard; from being discarded scraps, the lists acquire status, albeit somewhat absurd. Seen collectively, they give a view of the commonalities and differences in the way people live. (2007, p. 556)

Davies notes that throughout the images of domesticity apparent on Flickr she finds that users fairly consistently tend to "dramatize the domestic" (2007, p. 556), stylizing the trappings of the home and offering them up as art.

And the same can certainly be said of the food photography that is a central part of the food blog genre. Nathan Myhrvold (2011) has dissected the art of food in his article, "The art in gastronomy: A modernist perspective." Myhrvold summarizes his central question here as follows:

> Food serves an obvious utilitarian purpose: to refuel our bodies for the task of life. We need to eat, and toward that end we devote large amounts of both professional and amateur effort towards food preparation. Much of that effort goes beyond what is needed for nutrition, because food is also a source of great pleasure. It can engage our emotions and our minds just as much as images or words can, which begs the question: Can food be art? (2011, p. 13)

To answer this question, Myhrvold creates a qualifying criterion: that art must be "a dialogue between artist and audience" (2011, p. 17). With this qualifier in mind, he ultimately answers "yes," food can absolutely be "a dialogue between chef and diner" (2011, p. 17). But where Myhrvold dwells in the space of tangible, consumable foods created by chef and served directly to diner, we must continue to dwell in the world of simulation where food imagery is created by blogger and served directly to reader…via pixels and screen rather than plate and fork. While the jury may be out on the artistic merits of food imagery, its presence (or lack thereof) on a food blog undoubtedly influences the reader's interpretation of both blog and blogger. More research is needed to determine precisely how and to what extent that influence functions.

Ultimately, I argue that a broader investigation into the food blogging community will reveal a much richer and more complete picture of food rhetoric as well as digital identity. The world of digital food writing presents a rich and dynamic opportunity to analyze the role of food rhetoric (in the form of both text and images) in creating and shaping online identity. Ultimately, this project advocates for greater awareness regarding the ways we symbolically shape our own identities—both in real life and via digital media—and investigates the various effects of that shaping. I argue that the food bloggers who take part in this study are already actively shaping their online identities. In the absence of the real life cook/chef/blogger/writer as a reference point, these bloggers use food rhetoric to create digital identity and connect with others and many of them do so artfully and effectively. What I will explore throughout this project is the degree of continuity (or disparity) between the lived experiences of the blogger and his or her online food identity. How do these bloggers use food discourse symbolically to shape the disembodied body?

Chapter Three
Case Study Methodology: Methods and Complications

Just as a recipe is guided by step-by-step directions, this study has also been guided by an overarching set of research methods. The comparison here strikes me as particularly apt in that both recipe directions and research methods provide a clear set of guidelines while also leaving room for individual interpretation or adaptation, as the case may be. Just as the savvy chef, upon realizing she is out of spinach or basil or vegetable oil substitutes with bok choy or oregano or applesauce, respectively, the savvy researcher is also able to move quickly on her feet, adapting to the unexpected changes that inevitably pop up when working with human subjects. Though these in situ changes may not always result in the perfect dish, they are useful experiments for the continually learning and evolving chef or researcher. With that said, let's discuss the methods used in this particular study.

Digital Qualitative Research: Challenges and Opportunities

Much of the research into digital media thus far has been conducted exclusively within the realm of the digital, taking an in-depth look at a particular digital space and the way individuals function within it (Davies, 2007; Denveater, 2009; McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips, 2013; Rousseau, 2012; Salvio, 2012). Susannah Stern (2008) problematizes this approach in her article, "Producing sites, exploring identities: Youth online authorship." She points out, "Conversations with youth producers reveal that in order to understand their experiences, we must look beyond the artifacts they manufacture…and focus as well on the practices of creating and maintaining these online works" (2008, p. 99). Here, Stern suggests that we must look at the activities both on and off the screen to attain a deeper understanding of these digital composition practices and the identity-making actions therein. And Stern herself offers a great example of the type of research methods she advocates. She engages in both a qualitative artifact analysis of adolescent blog spaces as well as interviews with the adolescent authors themselves.

Web 2.0 has created a space for writers to compose text and project it to an unfathomable audience, offering average individuals the opportunity to define and project their identities online in ways heretofore only experienced by technology gurus and public figures. While it is vital that we engage with these texts to better understand the types of compositions being posted online, I agree with Stern that we also have an obligation to strive for a better understanding of the authors behind these digital texts and their various motivations and goals. Without this context, at best we can only hope to achieve a partial picture and a patchy understanding of the identity work these writers do. And many scholars are, indeed, conducting research that investigates both on-screen *and* off-screen identity (Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons, 2002; Davis, Seider, and Gardner, 2008; Gurak and Antonijevic, 2008; Siibak, 2009; Strano, 2008; Turtle, 1995; van der Heide, D'Angelo, and Schumaker, 2012; Walther, Slovak, and Tidwell, 2001, among others). Though the mixed methods approach advocated by Stern, myself, and the many other researchers mentioned above boasts many benefits, it is not without its own downfalls.

Stern dwells on this point briefly, considering that the participants in her study "no doubt deliberated about what to tell me based on how they wished for me to represent their authorship practices in my own research" (2008, p. 99) and urging other researchers "to bear [this] in mind as we endeavor to understand the experiences of others" (2008, p. 99). And, indeed, any qualitative researcher must keep in mind the gap between the "real self" and the self that is conveyed both to the researcher and to the world. In my own research I was cognizant of the fact that my participants all craft a very intentional public personae via their blogs and social media. Though participants did reveal information about their actions and identity "behind the curtain," they also entered into these interviews, observations, and blogging logs with the knowledge that their words could be published and undoubtedly engaged in some degree of self-censorship or framing in light of this knowledge. When I interviewed participants for the first time, they chose what they felt comfortable sharing with me. When I visited their home kitchens for an observation, they may have cleaned or organized or otherwise used their kitchens differently than they normally do. Further, because I am dealing with two parts of one identity—the online and offline personae—I made efforts to not value one over the other or view one persona as more "real." Rather, in this study I attempted to explore these various personae as equally real, valuable, and worthy or study.

Some scholars suggest that much of the disconnect between the participant's reality and what the participant chooses to share with the researcher can be nullified though the relationship between researcher and participant. Julia Davies (2007) has theorized the impact of the researcher/participant connection in her article, "Display, identity and the everyday: Self-presentation through online image sharing." She discusses her take (as well as others' theories) on the subject:

> I have found, like Mortenson and Walker, that 'an accepted online presence which proves that the researcher is real to the digital space and not just a visitor

> with no knowledge' can be a real asset. Furthermore, Lankshear and Knobel have drawn attention to the need for 'insider research'—research focusing on those involved in new media *by* those who are also immersed in them. Digital texts are ubiquitous, increasingly embedded in the lives of those who have adopted them, and insider knowledge is required in order to move beyond a fascination with the exotic, or the alienation sometimes experienced by 'outsiders' to digital cultures. That is, the practices need to be researched by those who see beyond the charisma or alienating potential of technologies. (2007, p. 552)

In light of Davies' discussion of "insider researcher"—as well as Patrician Sullivan and James Porter's (1997) cautions to reflect critically on one's own positionality—I find it necessary to reflect on my own role within the blogosphere at large and the food blogging community in particular. As a digital writing instructor, I am knowledgeable of the history and evolution of the blogging community at large. I have taught modules that involve blogging for multiple semesters within a digital writing course and have gained experience with a variety of platforms from Google Blogger to Tumblr to Wordpress as well as more advanced platforms like Wix and Weebly. Additionally, I have created and managed my own small food blog since 2012. Despite these various experiences, I still refrain from considering myself an "insider researcher" within the food blogging community. Some of the participants who will be introduced later in this chapter have been blogging for many years; have generated a great deal of revenue from their blogs; have fostered partnerships, sponsorships, and even book deals from their blogs; and some have pursued blogging as a full-time career.

However, my positioning as an avid consumer and sometimes member of this community does have benefits within this research; namely, an added *ethos* as food blogger, food blog reader, and overall foodie. My experience in and knowledge of the food blogging community provides me with a deeper knowledge of the inner workings of this community and an ability to understand those subtle nuances that others might not recognize, such as the important difference between canola oil and olive oil within the health food community. More on that later. I believe my experience with and within the food blogging community may provide me the opportunity to gain a fuller picture of the bloggers behind the blogs and, in that way, pass a deeper knowledge of these spaces and the identity work therein along to my readers. However, my intimate knowledge of this community also necessitates that I unpack many of the unspoken assumptions and beliefs I hold so as to lay bare this subject matter to my readers.

Case Study Research

At noted above, this study is grounded firmly in the world of qualitative research. As described by John Cresswell (2009), qualitative research is characterized by the following traits. Qualitative research:

- …takes place in a natural setting;
- …relies upon researcher as the key instrument;
- …employs multiple sources of data;
- …uses inductive data analysis;
- …relies upon participants' meanings;
- …has an emergent design;
- …is grounded in a theoretical lens;
- …is interpretive;
- …and offers a holistic account. (pp. 175-76)

While all qualitative research certainly is not representative of these characteristics, these traits do provide a strong jumping off point from which to discuss the research methods used in this particular research project: case studies. Though qualitative research methods tend to be fairly prominent within the field of rhetoric and composition, certain qualitative methods are certainly more widely used than others. Surveys, interviews, and qualitative artifact analysis are all ubiquitous throughout rhetoric and composition research; however, methods that require a bit more immersion, such as ethnographies and, most relevantly here, case studies, tend to be less widespread throughout the research. For this reason, I'll begin with a brief discussion of case study literature before moving on to a more specific discussion of the methods used within this research project.

Robert Yin (2009) provides the most comprehensive discussion of case study research I've yet found. I quote his two-fold technical definition below:

> The first part begins with the scope of a case study: (1) A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident . . . Second, because phenomenon and context are not always distinguishable in real-life situations, other technical characteristics, including data collection and data analysis strategies, now become the second part of our technical definition of case studies: (2) The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data

> needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (2009, p. 18)

Case study research, then, is notable for four primary characteristics: it offers an in-depth investigation into a specific phenomenon; it largely takes place in the context of real-life situations; it relies on data triangulation between multiples data sources; and it benefits from theoretical underpinnings to guide inquiry. Though others' definitions may vary, most will be based upon these key defining traits. I will discuss each of these in further detail below.

1. In-Depth Investigation

Though qualitative research methods are often criticized for their lack of generalizability, generalizability is generally not the goal of case study research. Rather, case study research strives for particularity and specificity in describing individual experiences and phenomena. Because of this close focus on individuals, participant selection is paramount. Robert Stake (2000) discusses the importance of and motivation behind participant selection for case study research:

> The researcher examines various interests in the phenomenon, selecting a case of some typicality, but leaning toward those cases that seem to offer *opportunity to learn*. My choice would be to examine that case from which we feel we can learn the most. That may mean taking the one most accessible, the one we can spend the most time with. (p. 446, emphasis in original)

Unlike other research methods that may draw from a large participant pool, case study research necessitates that the researcher carefully and intentionally selects research participants with an eye towards potential contribution to the study at hand.

As noted above, a common criticism of case study methods lies in the specificity of these methods, with many arguing that scholars should strive for more broadly generalizable results. However, as Thomas Newkirk has pointed out, "The strength of this mode of research is not in producing generalizable conclusions, guaranteed by rigorous and objective observation procedures; the strength…comes from the 'ideographic' nature of case studies, their capacity for detailed and individuated accounts of writers writing" (1992, p. 132). Case study research is an ideal research approach for this study of digital identity-shaping practices because it offers an opportunity to capture the complexity of and distinctions among the writing (and cooking) practices of individual members of the food blogging community both on the screen and off.

2. Analysis in Context of Real-Life Situations

These highly-focused, qualitative methods offer an unparalleled opportunity to understand an individual's experience within the context of his or her own environment, both in person and online. Though several studies have investigated the digital representations of bloggers in general (as well as food bloggers, in particular) through qualitative artifact analysis of the blogger's online presence, these methods seem to get at only one facet of the blogging experience—that which occurs online. Case study research, by contrast, "allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2009, p. 4). This means that researchers are able to observe and interact with the participant in *situ*, whether that means on the screen or in the kitchen. Because researchers work so closely with participants, Stake has noted, "Case content evolves even in the last phases of writing" (2000, p. 441). Indeed, because of the constant interaction between researcher and participant as well as the active meaning making process that occurs during these interactions, case study researchers often find that their analysis is ever-changing. This is nowhere truer than in the realm of digital research. As I followed along with my participants' daily and weekly blog updates, I constantly discovered additional content to both expand and complicate my findings. But more on this point later.

3. Converging Lines of Inquiry

Though data triangulation is not specific to case study research, it is undoubtedly enhanced by the wealth of methods employed during the typical case study research project. Yin has elaborated on this point:

> The use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues. However, the most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of *converging lines of inquiry*, a process of triangulation and corroboration . . . Thus, any case study finding or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode. (2009, pp. 115-16, emphasis in original)

The very nature of case study research necessitates that researchers employ various research methods that can ultimately be used to check one another and increase overall validity.

Similarly, case study research also presents numerous opportunities to give voice to research participants. Participants' own words and discourse are typically integrated into the very fabric of the final project through the use of quotes from interviews, writing logs, and artifacts. Ensuring that participants' unique voices are heard reduces the chance that their voices are appropriated or unwittingly misinterpreted. The presence of participant voices helps to further ensure the validity of research findings and, furthermore, enables readers to connect with participants more easily and fully.

4. Theoretical Propositions Guide Inquiry

The review of literature conducted in the previous chapter provides a strong grounding upon which to build this current study. As outlined there, the bulk of this research suggests that online identity practices do indeed differ from offline identity practices. This case study will extend upon this research, exploring precisely how identity practices differ in online versus offline spaces. As such, this study has been guided broadly by digital identity research but it has also been guided by specific sub-sections of this research. Each analysis chapter will discuss an individual identity-shaping practice (including decisions surrounding self-disclosure, community building strategies, and professionalization within the food blogging community), outline the corresponding literature on that topic, and explore the experiences of the research participants.

Research Design

As described above, this study was conducted through a collection of three case studies, what Robert Stake (2000) refers to as a "collective case study" (p. 437). Each case study within this project focuses on one individual food blogger and his or her daily cooking, writing, and blogging practices. This project employs a combination of interviews, informal observations, reflective writing logs, and qualitative artifact analysis, which will be discussed in greater detail below. The intention behind using this diverse set of methods was to paint a robust picture of the cooking and blogging practices of individual food bloggers by exploring the way they function in both their on-screen and off-screen lives and experiences. As mentioned earlier, previous studies of the food blogger community as well as the blogging community at large have tended to focus rather myopically on the identities written on the screen and enacted via pixels and code (Denveater, 2009; McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips, 2013; Rousseau, 2012; Salvio, 2012). While this is a worthwhile pursuit in itself, my study expands upon this research to obtain a better understanding of the invention and composing practices that occur off the screen and how they contribute to the on-screen identity. Thus, this study employs various methods, including interviews and observations, in order to observe the embodied blogger as he or she goes about his or her daily blog-related activities. Through this combination of research methods, these case studies unearth a complex and multifaceted portrait of a few of today's food bloggers.

1. Interviews

Yin (2009) has argued that interviews, the first of these methods, are an essential source of evidence to case study research as they can be targeted to focus directly on the desired subject matter and often yield unparalleled insights. The initial stage of the research process required a thorough interview with each research participant. These interviews ranged between 45 minutes and two hours, depending on the participant. Interviews were semi-structured, consisting of open-ended questions designed to allow participants to shape, expand, and guide the interview as they saw fit. And the content of these interviews did indeed vary from one participant to the next. On a broad level, each participant discussed memorable food-related experiences, their growing passion for food, evolution as a blogger, and current cooking, writing, and blogging practices. However, beyond this basic script participant interviews varied drastically with some participants focusing more heavily on food memories and heritage and others choosing to focus on the business of blogging and the challenges of transforming a blog into a full-time career. These variations give wonderful insight into the varying motivations of each food blogger and have greatly shaped the final analyses that follow. A full interview script can be located in Appendix A.

2. Reflective blogging log

After each participant completed the initial interview, they were asked to complete a reflective blogging log. Participants were asked to reflect in their writing log daily for one week about their interactions with food, cooking, and blogging. These reflective writing logs serve several purposes: most notably, they paint a more complete picture of the day-to-day lived experiences of bloggers engaging in food and food rhetorics, offering a glimpse into the entirety of the lived experience of these participants as they interact with food, technology, and their own writing process. Jennie Nelson (1990) points out the benefits of writing logs "as a research tool for examining the concerns and processes of writers working in natural settings over extended periods of time" (p. 368). And, indeed, this research mode offers a valuable opportunity to glimpse the broader scope of messy, chaotic, and uncensored activities that go into every perfect photograph and polished blog entry.

However, this portion of the research also presented some of the greatest challenges for participants. Though the log was designed to span the course of a week, each of the three participants in this study struggled to complete the log within the given time frame, as they found it difficult to remember to complete their reflections each day. For one participant, this log ended up taking two weeks and, for the other two, even longer. The logs nevertheless produced fascinating results for both myself as well as my bloggers. For me, these logs provide a useful picture of the time invested into blogging on a daily basis and the way these numbers vary from task to task and blogger to blogger. Some of the participants expressed frustration in remembering to complete the log on a daily basis, but each of the participants commented on the usefulness of this activity for helping them better understand their own work patterns and trends. Though these logs were anything but perfect in their execution, they hold value nevertheless. Future research may require rethinking the implementation of these logs, perhaps by sending daily reminders to complete the log or sending a daily log via email to be completed a portion at a time, thus taking the burden of responsibility off of the participants.

3. Observations

After each participant completed the initial interview and reflective blogging log, I conducted an informal observation of each participant going about his or her normal blogging activities. These informal observations were designed to offer a glimpse into the lived experiences of each blogger in his or her natural environment. The information gathered from these observations serves to contextualize each bloggers' thoughts, opinions, and reflections on food and blogging, creating the opportunity for a more complete and multidimensional case study. Each participant determined the location and activity for their own observation. Although I offered a range of suggestions to each participant, including the option to conduct the observation as they cooked, photographed food, composed blog posts, or completed other blog-related tasks such as shopping or recipe planning, these observations all took much the same format. Each observation occurred within the participants' home kitchen as they prepared and photographed a dish (or two) to be ultimately posted on the blog. Observing this particular activity also carried an obvious perk. When the participants were finished cooking and blogging, without fail they invited me to join them in tasting the dish and in some cases even asked for feedback and suggestions for possible improvements. These experiences sitting around kitchen tables with my participants sharing and enjoying food together served as wonderful opportunities to see each blogger in his or her element. And, furthermore, the act of consuming home-cooked dishes made by my participants allowed me to better understand each one's individual food *ethos*.

As they went about their normal activities, I took notes on their verbal and non-verbal communication as well as their movements and uses of the space within their own kitchens and homes. These observations also served a secondary purpose in that they offered an opportunity to discuss any follow-up questions carried over from the initial interview. The observations illuminated quite a bit about not only the bloggers but also the space in which they worked and their natural cooking environment. In two of the three cases, the participant's significant other was present in the home. Observing the interactions between the participants and their significant others provided additional insight into the normal lived experiences of cooking, photographing, and blogging.

4. Artifact analysis

As the final data collection strategy, I conducted a thorough artifact analysis, gathering and examining existing blog content posted by each of my participants through December 2015. For each participant, I archived and then analyzed blog posts for a number of elements. A few of these elements were quantitative, measuring posts per year as well as the average number of words and images present in each blog post. I used this numerical data to compare trends over time throughout each blogger's career as well as differences between bloggers. This quantitative data illustrates trends in the way each blogger prioritizes textual versus visual communication at any given time and also shows how much content bloggers are creating at any one point in their blogging career.

I also analyzed blog posts for qualitative elements such as style, norms, and recurrent themes. I mined each blog post for recipes, sponsorship information, links to "recipe round-ups" or posts on other sites, as well as any other relevant content. Yin has (2009) argued that the most important function of artifact analysis is to "corroborate and augment evidence form other sources" (p. 103). As such, this data provides a counterpoint to the "behind the scenes" data gathered through interviews, observations, and writing logs, serving as a more polished "finished product" with which to compare the other process-based data. Blog artifact analysis offers the opportunity to draw contrasts or illustrate continuity between bloggers' in-person and mediated identities.

Participant Selection: Initial Recruitment Strategy

The participants of these case studies are all active members of the food blogging community as was initially intended. However, the initial participant recruitment plan changed drastically throughout the early months of research. Initially, to recruit case study participants, I planned to reach out to bloggers through a combination of the following resources:

- Direct email to regional food bloggers
- Posting to food blogging community sites via message boards (Foodista, Food Blog Alliance, Foodie Blog Roll, Serious Eats, Tech Munch NYC)
- Posting to food blogging groups on social networking sites (G+ Food Bloggers Community, Facebook Food Blogger Friends)
- Attending food blogging conferences to make face-to-face contact with food bloggers

Through these resources, I hoped to recruit between three and five participants for case study research.

As participants volunteered, I would ask them to self-report additional information to ensure that they met all necessary criteria to serve as research participants. I would choose each case study participant based on the following criteria:

- Resides in the New England or New York area
- Sufficient blogging duration (approximately two years minimum)
- Sufficient blogging frequency (must blog weekly)
- Sufficient reach (approximately 20,000 minimum; based on blog's unique monthly visitors as calculated by compete.com)

My intention with the first of these criteria was to ensure that participants resided within a reasonable distance for travel to conduct face-to-face interviews and observations. My intention behind the remaining criteria (blogging duration, frequency, and reach) was to guarantee that case study participants had ample experience and growth as bloggers on which to reflect. I hoped the duration and frequency criteria would ensure that bloggers had the time to create and shape their online identities and the reach criterion would ensure that the bloggers involved in the case study had achieved a relatively successful online identity. Through these criteria, I hoped to unearth richer data and a deeper understanding of food rhetoric as it is used to shape identity.

Beyond these basic requirements, I planned to select participants based on demographic factors including age and gender so as to achieve a diverse sample. I could gather this demographic information by accessing blog material or during initial email communication with potential participants. Ideally, the sample would be selected to mirror the larger demographic trends amongst food bloggers, as reported in 2012 by Foodista and Zephyr Adventures, organizers of the International Food Blogger Conference.

However, as noted above, the recruitment plan for this research project has shifted significantly from this initial conception. Though I was ultimately successful in gathering three food bloggers to participate in this study, the recruitment process was marked by constant struggles and frustrations. I'll expand more on this point below.

Recruitment Challenges: Adapting and Improvising

Initial attempts at recruitment were marked by varied levels of success. Least successful among these attempts were those communicated through food-focused message boards and social media groups. I posted messages to G+ Food Bloggers, Facebook Food Blogger Friends, Serious Eats, and TECHmunch, among others. Despite multiple varied messages sent out through a variety of social media these group messages seemed to be rejected or ignored entirely, not even garnering a single response from group participants. This lack of response may be due to the increasing presence of advertisements and spam within various websites and social media platforms, causing this study's recruitment messages to get lost in this mass of content or, perhaps, disregarded as an advertisement and/or spam itself.

It is worth noting that the groups to which these messages were sent and shared were typically quite large in size, ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 members. At first glance, this size may seem a major advantage, allowing my messages to reach greater numbers; however, based on experiences throughout this research process, it might also serve as a disadvantage for two key reasons. First, in a group this large content is constantly being added, making it impossible to ensure that any one message stands out and receives attention. Most group members may have been completely unaware of my posts due to the continuous feed of new content. Second, groups of this size are prime targets for advertising and spam, as noted above. While a small digital group may know and trust all fellow members to contribute worthwhile content and, thus, take all messages and contributions at face value, large digital groups cannot rely on such assumptions. Within these groups, most participants do not know one another and participants may evidence a wariness of content posted by others. Future studies may find more luck in sending targeted messages to smaller, more intimate social media groups.

In light of these struggles with group recruitment messages, more emphasis was placed on individual direct email recruitment. Individual messages were sent out to food bloggers in the New England and New York areas as explained in the methods section above. These messages, though more successful than group messages, received a great deal of mixed feedback. Over two-thirds of the messages sent (67.7%) were met with no response at all, despite multiple follow-up messages. Additionally, a considerable portion of the messages (19.3%) were met with negative responses. These responses, which typically expressed interest in the project and encouragement as I progressed forward with my research, typically echoed the same refrain: I'm just too busy right now. These bloggers cited various blog-related projects such as website redesigns or impending book proposal deadlines or, in a few cases, major life events that would absorb their available time; however, this refrain was all-encompassing. Each and every blogger who responded in the negative cited this same reason. Though it is indeed possible that these excuses were just that—excuses—I would suggest that this trend also speaks to a larger issue within the food blogging community: that is, the fact that most bloggers work at least one job in addition to blogging. This is a discussion I'll take up again in greater detail in Chapter Six.

These initial struggles to locate participants who were willing to devote the time and energy necessitated by these case study methods caused me to think a bit outside the box of my initial participant criteria, as outlined above. These changes have been alternately positive and frustrating at various points throughout this research. I will address these changes as well as the implications they have had on my research below in greater detail.

The first criterion necessitated that participants reside in the New England or New York area. This stipulation was created primarily for practical purposes; that is, to enable me to be physically present for all interviews and observations. And two of the three participants discussed in this study do indeed live in these areas, one in a large New England metropolitan area and one in a large New York metropolitan area. However, while there are many bloggers in each of these regions, locating these bloggers proved to be surprisingly difficult as there is not a master list of bloggers by area. Attempts were made to contact large food blogger organizations in the hope of obtaining a directory of sorts; however, these attempts were met with no response. Additional attempts were made to post to localized food blogging communities via social media; yet, as mentioned above, these mass messages were consistently unsuccessful. Ultimately, the strategy that worked best here was Google and a series of ever more specific web searches for food bloggers by area.

Nevertheless, it became quickly apparent that I may need to expand my search radius to other parts of the country. During this time I contacted bloggers from the Southern states, the West Coast, and across the Midwest. Expanding my scope allowed me to find Jennie Bea, a blogger from middle America, whom I will introduce shortly. Though I was able to make a trip to visit her in person for the observation, her initial interview was conducted via FaceTime. In hindsight, having participants from various parts of the country has been a decidedly positive change, helping to add diversity to the types of blogs and bloggers represented in this study.

The next criterion required that all participants have sufficient blogging duration, which was defined as a minimum of approximately two years experience. Two of the bloggers in this study meet this requirement easily. The other boasts a bit less experience with just shy of two years of food blogging under her belt. Though I expected this lack of experience to be a negative attribute in terms of growth and self-awareness in the blogosphere, I found it to be quite the opposite. Though this blogger lacked long-term experience she created a great deal more diversity within the participant pool, offering her perspective on the initial stages of food blogging, a stage the other participants were too far removed from to discuss with any kind of depth. This novice participant provided a point of contrast to the more established bloggers who had already experienced much growth and evolution within the food blogging community and was able to describe these struggles and tensions as she experienced them in real time rather than from a four-year remove. The diverse viewpoint this participant has brought to this research has been invaluable, as you will see in later chapters.

The third criterion required a sufficient blogging frequency, which was defined as weekly for the purposes of this study. Though each of the food bloggers in this study do meet this criterion at times, they are also human and have lapses. The novice blogger of the group may post new content multiple times a week and, at other times, may post every few weeks. These variations in blogging frequency are typically due to the fluctuations we all feel in our lives as work or family or love takes precedence and other aspects must fall to the background for a period. However, these fluctuations are just that, constantly in flux, and so the blogger always returns to the blog when other aspects of life normalize. Similarly, the other two participants in this study also evidenced their own rhythms and fluctuations. Though their patterns tend to be more consistent and less erratic, both blogs evidence periods of unrest within the blogger's lives and corresponding periods of less frequent posts. These variations, which had not been taken into consideration prior to this study, are a normal and unavoidable facet of any hobby *or* profession and one that must be allowed for here as well. Each of the three bloggers presented here are and have been actively blogging throughout the entirety of the research progress, which has been more than sufficient for the purposes of this research process.

The final and, in hindsight, most cumbersome of the original criteria necessitated that bloggers have a sufficient reach, defined as a minimum of approximately 20,000 monthly readers as calculated by the website, Compete. As discussed above under the blogging frequency criterion, the blog is never a static object but rather a continual process or event that is constantly changing. Similarly, the blogs discussed in this study are ever changing in terms of readership. For example, the final blogger discussed under "Meet the Bloggers" below, Mac, has had upwards of 47,000 unique visitors to his blog in any one month. However, during the month in which we conducted our initial interview he received only 13,000 unique visitors to his blog. And, even now, he has months that top out in the 30,000-40,000 range but he has just as many months that may bring in 8,000, 10,000, or 15,000 visitors. The second blogger discussed below, Jacqueline, is perhaps the only blogger to consistently pull in more than 20,000 unique visitors per month, typically averaging somewhere between 30,000 and 52,000 monthly visitors. However, this success is also quite recent for Jacqueline. During the month in which we conducted her initial interview Jacqueline had 32,000 virtual visitors. But look only two months prior and her monthly visitor numbers are in the 13,000-18,000 range, well below the original expectations of this study.

All of these numbers are further complicated by the other markers of blogging success that were not taken into account during the planning and participant selection stages of this study. For example, Jacqueline receives sponsorships on an extremely frequent basis, with at least three of her five weekly posts boasting some kind of sponsorship. She has also served as a guest blogger for well-known chefs/restaurateurs and is frequently asked to speak at food events in her area. Mac, on the other hand, has published a book, had multiple TV appearances, and also boasts several high-revenue sponsorships. These facts, when combined with monthly blog traffic, as calculated by Compete, all paint a more complete picture of the blogger and his or her success. You may notice that I have omitted my first blogger, Jennie Bea, from this discussion. As the fallibility of my original criterion became increasingly problematic, I came to rely on the data provided from Compete less and less. For Jennie Bea, a novice blogger with only a year of experience under her belt, I found the monthly reader criterion to be entirely unnecessary. Jennie Bea, in many ways, serves as a foil to the other bloggers discussed in this study and, as such, her readership at this early point in her blogging career is less vital to her role in this research.

Though the four criteria, as originally outlined by the dissertation research proposal, proved to be less useful than originally intended, the changes that happened in situ have been perhaps more useful to my growth as a researcher and digital scholar. These changes necessitated that I remain quick on my feet as I assessed the situation and made necessary adjustments to ensure that I was able to obtain the most useful and relevant participants. But, perhaps more importantly, these changes have fostered a deeper understanding of the blogging community and what it means to be a successful blogger in this world. Quantitative metrics of success such as duration, frequency, and readership are undoubtedly useful in gaining a fuller picture of the blogger; yet there are also countless qualitative elements that must also be taken into consideration and judged carefully by the informed digital researcher. Each of these participants have been unquestionably useful to the overall pursuits of this research project, whether they meet each criterion or not. Now, let's meet them.

Meet the Bloggers

The following section will introduce you to the three participants who make up this collective case study. The information conveyed here was gathered from multiple sources including the interview and observation with the blogger as well as the content of his or her blog. Whenever possible, I've used direct quotes from the bloggers to offer a bit of insight into their unique voices. These introductions only provide a brief sketch of each blogger, a sketch that will be further shaded, detailed, and defined in the analysis chapters to come.

1. Jennie Bea

Jennie Bea has been blogging for almost two years and is a self-proclaimed food blogging novice. Her blog is primarily dedicated to hearty, Midwestern cuisine and evidences a strong connection to her family heritage and local roots. She describes her culinary focus:

> I think that [the food is] representative of where we are too. If we lived in a place where there was an abundance of all kinds of outrageous fresh produce or outrageous seafood, I think those would influence it. But here, you know, that this region doesn't have an abundance of those things. Like the staples are very much a balanced meat, potatoes, that sort of thing. So I think that I am in that norm. (personal communication, October 13, 2014)

Additionally, most posts include a story or anecdote about her family or husband and the way they influenced or, perhaps, inspired the dish at hand. In fact, the very title (a play on her new married name) and focus of Jennie Bea's blog revolve around her status as a newlywed attempting to cook for her new husband. This focus paints Jennie Bea as a blogger who values her role as wife.

However, outside of her blog, Jennie Bea works full-time as a marketing and special events manager for a large company in a mid-size Midwestern city. Additionally, Jennie Bea holds an advanced degree in hospitality, has taken a number of food classes, and has worked for a catering business. Though this specialized knowledge and food-related experience places Jennie Bea far beyond the average food blogger she tends to be a bit more reserved about her abilities, rating her own food knowledge around an eight out of ten.

Despite all this, Jennie Bea's tendency to target her posts towards family and friends is worth discussing for a few reasons. When asked about her blog's audience, Jennie Bea explains:

> I think that it's people that know me for sure, right now…When I'm writing [the recipes] I'm trying to figure out who would eat this and sometimes I think, if we got [my husband's] mom to sit down and actually read it and want to cook something, would she enjoy it? (personal communication, October 13, 2014)

From an objective standpoint, this tendency to target immediate acquaintances is typical of entry-level bloggers and serves to solidify Jennie Bea's role as the novice blogger. However, her tendency to target her friends and family may also be representative of her awareness of audience, as many of Jennie Bea's blog commenters do seem to be her family and close friends.

2. Jacqueline

By contrast, Jacqueline has been blogging for more than seven years (since January 2009) and could be considered an authority within the food blogging community. She blogs consistently five days a week and has for several years, though it is also worth noting that since its inception her blog has been consistently updated at least three times a week. Jacqueline explains:

> So at first it was definitely a hobby. I would take pictures on my dorm desk with a terrible camera. Now I look at it like this is my second job and I have to have posts Monday through Friday. It's much more of a commitment. And it's also a way to make money. It's still fun and it's still a hobby but I'm like I'm going to post these days and on the weekends I have to develop this many recipes so it's much more structured. (personal communication, September 1, 2014)

As her blog has developed from hobby to part-time job, the focus of her blog has also evolved considerably.

What began as an initial foray into home cooking, spurred by boredom, has now evolved into a fully vegetarian blog, heavy on technique and multi-step, multi-component recipes. Jacqueline describes the culinary focus of her blog:

> If you ask my fiancé he'll say I gravitate towards anything that produces the most dishes in the kitchen. I don't really do that many easy, 30-minutes meals. I just tend to do more complicated—I just like to make life harder for myself, I guess. So I like to really make everything from scratch so I like doing something crazy like making my own pasta or things that maybe most people would say 'oh this is going to take too long.' I like to make my own bread and it's always so fun to really get in the kitchen and challenge yourself. (personal communication, September 1, 2014)

These recipes, as Jacqueline indicates, are not for the inexperienced home cook or, for that matter, anyone needing to have dinner on the table quickly.

Though Jacqueline frequently mentions her family—primarily her immediate family and newlywed husband—her blog tends to focus primarily on her friends and acquaintances within the food blogging community. Jacqueline regularly participates in food blogging community activities, workshops, and conferences and evidences a strong connection to the friends she's made within this community. Her blog also boasts frequent sponsorships and partnerships with companies and other prominent members of the food industry and she generates a considerable amount of income through these deals.

Beyond the blog, Jacqueline is now a full-time student enrolled in an MD/PhD program in a large city on the East Coast. She has maintained this blog throughout her undergraduate education and medical school and plans to continue it once she becomes a doctor, though she also expresses concern about her future ability to juggle two full-time careers and maintain a personal life.

3. Mac

Mac has been blogging for more than eight years (since January 2008) and would be considered a top figure in the food blogging community. He blogs consistently three times a week, though he sometimes posts more frequently when posting sponsored blog posts in conjunction with a company. Mac's blog offers a range of foods, though he is most known for his tendency towards exotic or ethnic cuisines and his self-proclaimed love for mashing two concepts/recipes together into one. Mac explains how his interest in ethnic cuisine has helped to expand his culinary knowledge:

> I force myself to be adventurous. And I cook four times a week or three times a week for the website. I can make curry powder. I can make a vindaloo curry without a recipe. Or a pad thai or a green curry, from scratch without buying the paste. I have forced myself to go from scratch with ethnic food with unique, crazy recipes for many, many years. So I've gained the knowledge and I'm there. It's just from doing it all the time and forcing myself to get crazy. (personal communication, March 30, 2015)

His recipes range in their level of difficulty, though Mac's experience with various techniques and willingness to experiment has increased significantly over the years.

Whereas the other two bloggers mentioned in this study tend to discuss their personal lives within the space of their food blogs, Mac tends to abstain from this practice. His posts focus almost solely on the food. He may mention the inspiration for a dish or the background of the dish itself, but personal anecdotes, memories, or opinions are largely absent here. Like Jacqueline, Mac does engage with sponsors and collaborations with others in the food industry and those connections are apparent on his blog; however, his approach differs from Jacqueline's in many ways. I'll discuss this further in Chapter Six.

Mac is also unique in that he recently quit his restaurant job to pursue food blogging as a full-time career. He has published one cookbook, has another on the way, and he is also pursuing a variety of other food-related ventures and side businesses ranging from products to TV appearances to additional book deals, though the blog remains his primary focus. Mac explains his career goals: "I'm not trying to be the next Bobby Flay by any means or Guy Fieri, that's not my goal in this. But my goal is to write about food, write recipes for the rest of my life” (personal communication, March 30, 2015). And, indeed, he is on the right track to do so.

The following three analysis chapters will expand upon the initial participant profiles offered here, diving deeper into the various choices and strategies that help to make up each participant’s larger blogging identity. I begin with perhaps the most basic decision bloggers must make in crafting digital identity; namely, whether and how much to disclose about themselves.

Chapter Four
Self-Disclosure in the Food Blogging Community

I begin here with a discussion of digital self-disclosure; that is, the information the blogger chooses to share with others in online spaces. There are those like Jacqueline who tend towards hyperbole online ("it's more amusing to be a slightly more ridiculous version of yourself"). There are those like Mac who consciously avoid this intensification of the mediated self, omitting personality entirely from their blog entries ("on the website my personality is the food"). And there are those like Jennie Bea who fall somewhere in the middle, picking and choosing what to share and what to keep private.

But how does the mediated life relate (or not) to its unmediated counterpart, the lived experience of the user? The primary impetus in this chapter is to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between the mediated and unmediated identity, to explode the common narrative that posits these identities as synonymous. Within the food blogging community, access to the "real" blogger is simply not an option. Rather, we must settle for a simulation of the real, offered through luscious food photography, accompanying text deliberately composed to elicit a particular response, and carefully selected insights into the blogger's "real life." These rhetorical choices allow the blogger to shape and craft the final blog product to convey a very specific and intentional online food persona or, in Jean Baudrillard's (1994) words, a *simulacrum* of the real blogger, an identity that feels more real to us as readers though it is merely a silhouette of the real blogger.

These initial investigations into food blogger identity evidence the complex nature of digitally created food-centric identities and lead to an additional complication: the relationship between these digital identities and their real life counterparts. Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd argued in 2004, "Validation increasingly comes through mediation, that is, from the access and attention and intensification that media provide" (p. 6). As digital media assume an increasingly central role in our lives and, in some cases, a take precedence over the real, we are seeing "a fulfillment of Baudrillard's 1981 perception that the relations between the real and the simulated have reversed: that rather than representing the real, the simulation constitutes the real" (Miller and Shepherd, 2004, p. 6). That is, Miller and Shepherd suggest that the mediated has gained primacy over the real…*is* the real. This tendency to collapse the blogger into his or her digital persona is a dangerous assumption. It is vital to remember that there is still a blogger behind the scenes, one who may or may not have anything in common with the blogger crafted on screen. There will always exist a schism (whether great or small) between the blogger on the screen and off the screen. This chapter works to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between the lived and mediated identities of those within the blogging community, to avoid the bad habit of assuming these identities are necessarily synonymous.

This chapter will explore the differing ways food bloggers negotiate and shape this *digital simulacrum*. Does the digital self take on a life all its own, in some cases intensifying one's identity to be a caricature of the self? Are all personal details laid bare? Does it highlight only a certain facet of one's personality? Is the digital self a mere shell of its real-life counterpart or is it more fully fleshed out than its real-life counterpart? These decisions about whether and how much to reveal about oneself are central components of identity creation and management in online spaces and, ultimately, determine whether and how other's perceive and respond. And while there is no right or wrong way to approach digital self-disclosure, I argue below that different strategies result in wildly different results. Before delving into that argument, I'll review the recent scholarship on self-disclosure.

Strategic Sharing Online: Theory of Digital Self-Disclosure

Digital spaces allow unprecedented capabilities for choosing and curating our own digital projections. The digital is redefining the line between the public and private, what is shared and what is withheld. Laura Gurak and Smiljana Antonijevic (2008), authors of "The psychology of blogging: You, me, and everyone in between," discuss the nature of the blog and its existence in the grey area between public and private, arguing that blogs enable individuals to create both individual and group identities online. They suggest that text and images conveyed on a blog work to shape the individual identity while the community-based features such as the comments section, the blogroll, and links all functions to shape the group identity, situating the blogger within a group of like-minded individuals. For Gurak and Antonijevic, then, the self-disclosure involved in blogging simultaneously creates group affinity and works to shape the very individuals who take part in it. And, while many scholars agree that blogs (as well as a range of other social networking media) necessitate a certain amount of self-disclosure, they disagree as to the consequences of such sharing.

Collin Brooke (2000), in his article "Forgetting to be (post)human: Media and memory in a kairotic age," argues, "If at one time it was the unexamined life that was not worth living, today it seems that it is the unmediated life that is meaningless" (p. 790). For Brooke, digital self-disclosure goes beyond group affinity in the blogosphere. It has become a necessary piece of our increasingly digitalized world. Long gone are the days when self-introspection was thought to be the key to happiness and deeper meaning in life. It has been replaced by constant status updates and long friend lists. If it wasn't Instagrammed, did it actually happen? And, while Brooke's tongue-in-cheek statement goes a bit to the extreme, the underlying message is telling. For better or worse, our digital lives now function as an important source of validation and many scholars are beginning to worry about the implications.

Even in 2004 as they worked to define the genre of blogging, Miller and Shepherd speculated on the "confessional nature of blogs." Ultimately, they argue that blogs function to redefine the public and private realms, offering a place where users can establish and negotiate a mediated identity. However, this tendency to share raises some problematic questions about over-disclosure:

> Both voyeurism and exhibitionism have been morally neutralized and are on their ways to becoming ordinary modes of being, subject positions that are inscribed in our mediated discourse. The cultural moment in which the blog appeared is a *kairos* that has shifted the boundary between the public and the private and the relationship between mediated and unmediated experience (2004, p. 6)

Miller and Shepherd saw this movement not as necessitated by the blog genre, but symptomatic of a deeper personal need for validation: "we must characterize the generic exigence of the blog as some widely shared, recurrent need for cultivation and validation of the self" (2004, p. 14). And, indeed, looking back on the predictions of Miller and Shepherd, which were published over a decade ago, it is easy to see the subtle (and not so subtle) cultural changes that have increasingly made both exhibitionism and voyeurism standard practice in our day-to-day digital activities, both in the blogging community as well as in our increasing reliance on social networking sites.

But for all these cautions about the negative implications of digital self-disclosure, the picture is not quite so bleak. In fact, many scholars argue for the necessity of these disclosures. The food blogging community, for example, offers an interesting example of the simultaneously public and private roles of the blogger. Blogger/scholar Denveater (2009) argues that the food blogger must necessarily fill the gap between the public chef and the private home cook:

> Far more than a professional chef or cookbook author to whom we turn for experience, a blogger—to whom we turn for *an* experience, for *experiences* plural—has the leeway to tell the story of the recipe not as it should be but as it is, as it lives and breathes in home kitchens. (p. 45)

One goes to a restaurant to consume the food in its final form as a beautifully designed dish with a perfect balance of flavors. One visits a food blog, on the other hand, to consume the full story behind the food. This requires that the blogger offer not only luscious images of the final "public" product, but also the messy process that happened behind the scenes. This might come in the form of process photographs, anecdotes about failed attempts in the kitchen, or even messy, emotional memories embedded in the dish and all its previous iterations. In Denveater's understanding of the food blogger, self-disclosure is necessary to sate the cravings of the audience/community.

While Denveater articulates an interesting point about the ability for bloggers to offer the "whole story" rather than a polished and perfected image, it is important to remember that blogs convey the content that the blogger has chosen to convey and carefully shaped into a presentable message. Miller and Shepherd (2004) recognize this capability of the blog:

> Content is important to bloggers because it represents their freedom of selection and presentation. What many bloggers find most compelling about blogs is the ability to combine the immediately real and the genuinely personal, a combination that represents a refreshing contrast with the 'bland commercial' point of view of so much internet content. (p. 8)

In a digital realm that is becoming increasingly commercialized, blogs do indeed offer a point of human contact. However, that point of humanity is largely edited and adapted to fit the needs of the blogger.

A food blogger might publish a "kitchen fails" post, assuring readers that the blogger is indeed human and not always a domestic goddess (or domestic god, as the case may be). Yet even such a post is often carefully crafted, offering anecdotes about how the soufflé finally came out right on the eighth try and was a huge hit or offering images in which these "kitchen fails" are posed on a marble countertop and looking just as delectable as anything that has ever emerged from the reader's home kitchen. Such posts serve two purposes. The surface purpose is to reinforce the "realness" of the blogger in sharing these behind-the-scenes moments. However, posts such as these often serve to also create a hierarchy between blogger and readers. Blogger Jessica from How Sweet It Is posts annual "kitchen fail" posts in which she rounds up the year's worst recipes. These posts typically contain 8-10 "fails" over the course of an entire year and many of these are declared "fails" simply because they don't photograph as well as hoped or just weren't flavorful enough. Ultimately, such posts, offered as self-disclosures into the messy process behind the blog posts, serve to illustrate the difference between blogger and reader.

Edward McQuarrie, Jessica Miller, and Barbara J. Phillips (2013) discuss a similar trend as it occurs within the fashion blogging community in their article, "The megaphone effect: Taste and audience in fashion blogging." McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips found that successful fashion bloggers use taste not to create like-minded communities but, rather, to distinguish themselves from others as arbiters of taste. The path these bloggers follow to become successful in the fashion industry is surprisingly consistent throughout all participants:

> Initially, the blog proceeds as if a virtual community was going to be constructed, with the blogger acting simply as one participant among others. But this complex of behaviors soon disappears as the bloggers begin to build an audience. As her audience grows larger, the blogger's behavior changes. She stops interacting with her followers. She avoids answering specific questions, ignores suggestions for posts, and refuses to address issues raised in comments . . . Interestingly, this does not bring the growth in audience numbers to a halt. In fact, we observe follower comments to become more uniformly positive as the blogger ignores her followers more and more. As

> bloggers gain autonomy from their followers' desires and wishes, they appear to be perceived as more worthy of an audience. (2013, p. 146)

Essentially, a blogger may begin with the intent of being totally transparent; however, blogger identity becomes increasingly mediated and obscured as the blogger gains popularity. Though this study and career trajectory is specific to the fashion blog community, it's possible that this pattern may carry over to other sub-sections of the blogging community.

Interdisciplinary scholar Paula Salvio (2012) has discussed self-disclosure within the food blogging community as a decidedly positive trend. She views these disclosures to be a positive force for change in how we view domestic labor. She writes hopefully that by generating income for their domestic labors, "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" (2012, p. 38). Salvio returns us to the discussion surrounding the shifting boundaries of the public and private, effectively arguing that these changes signal a positive step for female bloggers (and, to a lesser extent, male bloggers) who may be able to make an income by sharing publicly what was previously considered private. Melinda Turnley (2011) argues in her article, "Towards a mediological method: A framework for critically engaging dimensions of a medium," that, ultimately, the media at our disposal are dependent upon our use of them. She explains, "Like other social spaces, networking sites, games, and wikis have the potential to both disrupt and reinforce dominant social hierarchies. Our analysis of media must also account for how value and authority are constructed within particular scenes of practice" (2011, p. 134). Blogs may offer a space for community-building and connection through self-disclosure; however, it is the actions and attitudes of individual bloggers that will shape the future of the blogosphere. Self-disclosures within the food blogging community may function to distinguish bloggers as domestic authorities but these self-disclosures may also function to reframe our attitudes toward domesticity, showing that domestic labor has value. Whether, how, and what information food bloggers choose to disclose about themselves and their domestic pursuits determines which of these goals is accomplished.

Mac and the Food-Based Identity

I want to turn now to some of those individual bloggers to examine more closely their decisions about self-disclosure, specifically within the space of their own food blogs. I begin this chapter with a discussion of Mac because his attitudes toward digital self-disclosure are the most conservative of the three bloggers featured in this study. In this way, this chapter will investigate self-disclosure strategies as they exist on a spectrum, beginning with those most conservative and progressing towards more liberal policies. In the case of each of these bloggers, I will argue that individual decisions about whether to disclose personal information directly affect the culture of the blog and how readers respond to the blogger.

I begin with Mac, the constant professional, who takes a very utilitarian stance towards the personal information revealed on the blog. When asked how he determines what to share on the blog his response is absolutely straight-forward and literal:

> I just write…the title is what the food is, very specifically because as you know that's important. A paragraph that usually says how I came up with it if it's weird or talk about the show or the band if it's come up from that or the restaurant that I figured it out at. Maybe what were some challenges at figuring out the actual recipe and it was really good and here it is. I try to put a joke in here and there. I also…I sometimes edit my pictures with funny things. Or I put a GIF in…like today there's one of whisking liquid nitrogen ice cream. (personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Mac literally describes the layout of each blog post but, notably, avoids any discussion of himself here. This description —title of dish, details about developing the recipe and challenges of making that particular dish, and the recipe itself—is a format that Mac has used since the early days of his blog and also one that would carry over just as well to a print genre such as the cookbook. Though many cookbooks, particularly those published recently, do include personal asides such as pictures of the author's family or home, stories of recipe development, and personal anecdotes, what separates the blog from the cookbook is the ability to achieve a more personal connection with readers. The blog is a space that enables cooks and consumers to interact with one another in real time on an unprecedented level. Readers can ask the blogger directly about the inspiration for the dish, a story related on the blog, a detail of the recipe, or an ingredient substitution. These personal interactions are simply not a function of a cookbook or other print genre.

Mac, however, not only omits a discussion of personal disclosures from his description above, he is openly critical of this strategy in other bloggers: "You'll hear me say a lot [about] all these other bloggers. I like them. I read them. But I don't have time for your four paragraph story about your dog did something stupid today and here's a recipe for madeleines" (personal communication, March 30, 2015). To Mac, then, these personal disclosures are more than unnecessary, they are a nuisance within the genre of the food blog. Though this attitude towards self-disclosures is not common amongst most food bloggers, it's a strategy worth discussing. Mac chooses to omit identity-shaping details in his blog entirely; however, his blog still carries a strong identity…an identity crafted and shaped by other, more subtle, details.

For example, Mac is quick to note the rhetorical power of food, specifically on his own blog. One of Mac's primary reasons for omitting personal details on the blog is because he believes that the food should do much of the identity-shaping work on his blog. He explains:

> I think like I said I'm very straight forward on the website itself…I think there's humor in the recipe itself like mac and cheese stuffed burgers is funny and that's my personality but on the website my personality is the food…I think it's like the recipe itself shows my personality. (personal communication, March 30, 2015)

And, indeed, the food featured on Mac's blog is full of personality. He is known for creating mash-ups of seemingly incompatible dishes and experimenting with exotic cuisines. His recipe archives features dishes such as Chicken Korma Lasagna, BLT Ice Cream, Chicken Tikka Masala Shepherds Pie, Stroganoff Burger, Cheesesteak Gougeres, and Squid Ink Teriyaki Wings. And there are entire categories such as

Fatty, Spicy, Stacked, and Stuffed. This is absolutely food that conveys personality…self-disclosures not needed.

And within these blog posts themselves, Mac is consistent in his focus on the food as opposed to himself. His posts almost invariably begin with a discussion of the creative process that led to the dish, as in this post for Chicken Korma Lasagna:

> Last Sunday I was craving a vodka sauce, mainly because I wanted something creamy but also tomato based. I was exploring this craving in my head trying to think of different roads to go down and I came to an Indian korma style sauce that uses tomatoes, yogurt, and cashews to create that lovely pink color we are all used to in vodka sauce. I wanted to still use this in a pasta dish, and I settled on a nice baked lasagna as the vehicle for the sauce. I added broccoli and tender chicken thighs to make this a really hearty lasagna. I was alone that day but I made a whole huge pan of lasagna so I could pig out on it and have lots of leftovers for the week. (blog post, December 4, 2015)

This post, like most others, continues on to include step-by-step instructions for the dish and ends with the recipe itself. The only details readers might be able to gather about Mac must be deduced from his culinary interests and preferences.

Occasionally, Mac will include a detail or story about his personal life but even in these cases these details are typically only included to discuss some sort of recipe inspiration, cooking experience, or in relation to blogging activities. For example, in his post for Cheesesteak Gougeres Mac offers a few details about his holiday but only as a means to apologize for an extended absence from his blog:

> Whew, sorry I disappeared for a little there guys! I had a bit of a broken computer issue that I was hoping to take care of quickly myself, but instead I ended up with a totally dead machine on the night before having to work long hours for 4 days followed by being on the road for the holidays. I decided just to give up and get a new computer upon my return, so here we are! Luckily I have everything backed up so there was nothing to worry about, and I probably needed a new computer anyways. Enough non-food talk though. It's New Years Eve tomorrow and you guys came here because you want to know what to bring. As always, I am here to the rescue with these amazing gougeres. (blog post, December 29, 2013)

Note the way Mac quickly transitions from any personal disclosures or anecdotes with an abrupt declaration of “enough non-food talk” as though he has reached the end of his comfort zone. And, just as Mac expressed irritation in his interview about bloggers who tell long stories about their personal lives, he seems to expect that his readers share this attitude. In reverting back to food talk, Mac notes that New Year’s Eve is right around the corner and “you guys came here because you want to know what to bring.” The underlying assumption here is that his readers do not want to hear about his personal life, an assumption that may or may not have any basis in reality.

Though readers may be able to deduce certain attributes about Mac’s personality—a sense of humor, a tongue-in-cheek approach to food, an appreciation for other cultures and cuisines—these personality traits are baked as subtle flavors within his dishes rather than served up on a platter for readers to easily consume. The passage above, for example, conveys a great deal about Mac and his attitude toward blogging. He states, “As always, I am here to the rescue,” a move that paints him as culinary superhero in the vein of Robert Irvine or Gordon Ramsey arriving to save the day. Similarly, rhetorical moves like “Whew, sorry I disappeared,” “Luckily I have everything backed up so there was nothing to worry about,” and “you guys came here because you want to know what to bring” suggest that Mac considers his readers needs and friendship more than he admits. This snippets all reinforce a mutual dependence and relationship, one where he worries about extended absences and believes his readers need him.

Despite these hints at a blogger-reader connection, Mac’s decision to intentionally avoid any personal topics affects the tone of his blog. The ultimate effect is that Mac’s blog reads more like a cookbook than an interactive blog and, as such, readers tend not to comment on posts and those who do comment talk specifically about the food on the site. Mac’s self-disclosure strategy effectively works to paint him as expert but misses an important opportunity to paint him as community member or friend. To illustrate the uniqueness of Mac’s attitude toward self-disclosure, I want to transition now to discuss the two other bloggers in this project: Jennie Bea and Jacqueline.

Jennie Bea: The Expert Novice

Mac’s complete refusal to disclose personal information is atypical in the world of food blogging; however, it’s not uncommon for bloggers to select the pieces of their identities and their lives they feel comfortable sharing. Certainly, not every blogger is expected to offer up the intimate details of his or her life for the reader’s pleasure. Jennie Bea is a wonderful example of this middle ground. She is a blogger who seems to share about many (if not most) facets of her life including her marriage, her family, fitness goals, career, and so on. At first glance, Jennie Bea appears to be an open book. In fact, when asked how her online self compares to her offline self, Jennie Bea suggests that the two have negligible differences:

> I would hope that [my online self is] pretty close to real life. I think that it might be a little more candid on the blog than in real life sometimes, depending on the audience. I think my word choice is a little more measured on the blog than probably in everyday conversation. I hope that it is still as genuine as I try to be in real life so hopefully that would come through to them. And I would hope that it comes through that I am just like a lot of people like just cooking in their house, like it's not something that I do every day and I make money off of. It's a hobby and a passion and an interest and so I would hope that that comes through. (personal communication, October 13, 2014)

Jennie Bea hopes that "realness" comes through so that readers can identify with her as a home cook, as an amateur, as a person with a passion for food. This desire is a clear departure from Mac, who does not mention a desire to connect with readers. For Mac, the food is paramount. For Jennie Bea, the connection to readers reigns supreme.

In fact this desire to connect through food is one that appears to carry over from her off-screen identity and lived relationships. Jennie Bea notes that food is her way of connecting, primarily in this case with her husband. And by sharing food on the blog, Jennie Bea is able to foster connections with a wider group of people through food. She elaborates:

> But hopefully people would get that I would probably be pretty relatable and constantly thinking about food and a newlywed and still trying to figure out being a wife and what that means and I'm by no means advocating that someone has to cook for their husband but I think it's a good way to like connect and I think food is my way to connect whereas it's very weird, for [my husband] food is sustenance. There's no love there at all but he's learning to enjoy it a little more. I think eventually that will be a little bit more present but hopefully people would be able to walk away knowing that I put an insane amount of heart into food. (personal communication, October 13, 2014)

It quickly becomes clear that Jennie Bea uses food—either literally or rhetorically, on the blog—to foster and manage relationships. For this reason, the food she cooks, consumes, and blogs about fulfills a vital function in her life beyond that of sustenance or nutrition. In her own words, "I pretty much think it's the way I create value" (personal communication, October 13, 2014). When food is this central to one's identity, it's hard to imagine creating a blog that omits self-disclosures, as Mac has done.

Though Jennie Bea attempts to put her full self into the blog, she does so carefully and consciously. That is, the identities Jennie Bea portrays online versus offline are not a perfect match. Like most, Jennie Bea has self-perceived flaws and weaknesses that she chooses to omit or minimize within her blog. For example, she expresses a hope that her tendency to worry is minimized on the blog:

> I think the blog might, I don't know that my kind of worry or kind of craziness, it might not come through on the blog so much as in real life in terms of

> wanting everything to be fine. I am a worrier and I don't know that that comes through as much there. (personal communication, October 13, 2014)

For Jennie, then, the blog becomes an idealized depiction of the self, a place where she can be her best self without succumbing to tendencies like worry or self-doubt that many of us struggle with on a daily basis. In many ways, the blog appears to function as a safe space for Jennie Bea.

However, for Jennie Bea, blogging also comes with a certain level of risk. Because cooking is a central part of her identity, the idea of starting a blog and failing was a major fear for Jennie Bea. She explains:

> I think when I started it I was kind of worried that no one would read it and what was I going to do if no one read this blog? I know there are some people that read it so I can't say that no one reads it now but I was just worried…normally I don't have a lot of cooking failures. I mean there are things I wouldn't make again but by and large it's not my S- in PE where I was not good at physical education, you know. I did not want this to be like an S- experience and I think I was kind of worried about that. (personal communication, October 13, 2014)

Failing at physical education was acceptable for Jennie Bea because athletic ability is not central to her identity. Cooking, on the other hand, is. To fail at something so central to one's concept of self would be to sacrifice that version of the self and begin again from scratch. This high level of risk explains Jennie Bea's need to represent an ideal version of the self, a digital identity that readers will like, connect with, and come back to read more.

I want to turn now to a few of Jennie Bea's blog posts. Though Jennie Bea has only been blogging for roughly two years, in that time she has developed a strong connection to her readers, discussing topics ranging from light-hearted and frivolous to deep reflections on her self, her marriage, and her future. Regular topics on the blog include mentions to and photos of her family and, specifically, her two-year-old niece, as in this post for Glazed Grapefruit Donuts:

> Our dear niece and her parents came to visit us this past weekend. Though she's little, like her auntie, she has a sweet tooth. I took advantage of the opportunity to bake for her. (And to make up for my lack of posts this week, I'm going to include a bonus recipe from our visit at the end of this post!) While she was here we got loads of love and chatter and managed a visit to the zoo. (blog post, July 21, 2014)

Mentions of family are frequent on the blog and allow Jennie Bea to easily connect with readers who are in her own lived community (a topic which will be discussed further in Chapter Five) but also to connect with readers who also place high value on family relationships.

Similarly, Jennie Bea frequently talks about her husband and their relationship on the blog, as in this post for Mini Lemon Cheesecakes:

> People always talk about the life "phases" one experiences with age. You know the milestones: college, first jobs, first home, marriage, babies, etc... As I near the end of the twenties spectrum (two years and holding!), I feel fortunate to have seen and been a part of many of the phases…And honestly, I couldn't

love that more. These occasions are filled with joy. Plus, they always warrant sweet treats.

> [My husband] and I officially "met" at a mutual friend's wedding so we love a good matrimonial ceremony and celebration! And [my husband] is a total baby lover. Now me, eh, not so much. Mostly little ones make me anxious. Despite how "responsible" or nurturing I might be, I generally tend to prefer babes at arm's length. But as of late, many of my nearest and dearest have had or are having children and we were blessed with our much adored niece last March, so I am working on my complex. (blog post, May 22, 2014)

Again, in light of Jennie Bea's reader community, mention to her husband—whom many readers might actually know—make sense as an easy way to stay in touch with relatives, friends, and acquaintances. And, for readers who don't know Jennie Bea outside of the blog, discussing the highs and lows of married life is a smart and easy way to connect with readers who are married, were married, or hope to be married one day. In posts such as this one and the one mentioned in the previous paragraph, note how the food is mentioned as an afterthought to the more central topic. Food, here, functions as a piece of these relationships but not as the central topic. This varies markedly from Mac's approach, which highlights food to the exclusion of all other topics.

In fact, even when Jennie Bea discusses food centrally within her blog, it takes the form of personal reflections on her relationship with food rather than a detailed discussion of the recipe at hand. For example, in this post for Homemade Cosmic

Brownies, Jennie Bea reflects on her lifelong struggle to have a healthy relationship with food:

> I have a confession: I am pretty *obsessed* with food. I am always looking forward to the next meal. I pin recipes constantly. I can spend hours at the grocery store looking at the offerings. My favorite books are culinary murder mysteries (yes, that genre exists!). The downside, I don't have the metabolism of a hummingbird. (thanks genetics...) so I have to keep my obsession in check.
>
> I kind of wish I could say that I was a naturally healthy cook, that I loved eating clean, and I only bought all-natural, local food. But really I don't and probably won't. Clean eating would be [my husband’s] department. I kid you not. He's a naturally healthy eater. At any special occasion, he'll bypass the desserts and dips as he beelines for the vegetable tray. (Word to the wise, If you want any broccoli or cauliflower, get there before he does.)
>
> As a former fat kid (FFK), I *should* eat like [him]. But if you see me by the vegetable tray, know it took a lot of intentional thought, willpower, and probably guilt. Admittedly, I like all things that are bad for me. Thus, I believe in moderation and not denying yourself indulgences. Trust me, the world does not want me to give up sweets or carbs...it wouldn't be pretty. (blog post, June 8, 2014)

Though the subject matter here is food, the focus is a struggle that many readers would be able to relate to. In effect, this post functions as yet another means of fostering connection with blog readers. Jennie Bea's self-disclosures are, in this way, fairly strategic in that they all work toward the same central goal of connection.

Based on the selected passages above, it's apparent that Jennie Bea is willing to discuss a wide range of topics on her blog, even very personal subjects like her struggles with weight and her insecurities. Yet what I find most interesting about Jennie Bea's blog persona is not what she discusses there but, rather, what is omitted; namely, her expertise. As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, Jennie Bea arguably has the most professional experience of the three bloggers featured in this study. Though she currently works in public relations, Jennie Bea holds an advanced degree in hotel and restaurant management as well as experience in professional kitchens and catering companies. However, you won't find any discussion of that on her blog. Here is Jennie Bea discussing her professional knowledge and experience:

> Aside from, you know, my learning in the kitchen beside someone who's been cooking forever, at K-State the hospitality degree is kind of, I would say, -like hotels…And so you take food preparation classes, you take a large-scale food service class, you do shadowing, I worked on the catering line at K-State for the Athletics Department. We had to do internships so I did an internship with Housing and Dining and then I did an internship at Papa Murphy's, which was fast-service food, which was probably the most fun food-service job I ever had. So I can do the cuts, but I'm not fast at those things. And recipe conversion doesn't come to me quite as naturally as I would like…I think food safety-wise I'm there, which is funny because most people do not care about it but I'm the paranoid person that's like leftovers, three days, gone, like first in, first out,

> like total management of that…But now I'm not doing anything with that [degree] so I think there might be another reason that I want to have some kind of connection there [to food]. (personal communication, October 13, 2014)

Jennie Bea is uniquely qualified to have a food blog, arguably more so than most current food bloggers. Yet she chooses not to disclose this information on the blog.

Though Jennie Bea did not address this omission in our interview, I would argue that it is intentional. Jennie Bea is forthcoming about every other major subject in her life: friends, family, love, work, her relationship with food, and her struggle to determine what she wants to do with her life. To omit the many years she spent training to be a food professional seems more than an oversight. I would suggest that her food expertise is omitted from the blog because it is not conducive to Jennie Bea's primary blogging mission stated above; that is, to connect. Revealing her professional training and expertise with food does nothing to foster connection with a readership that largely consists of home cooks, those who learned to cook from moms, dads, grandparents, or simple trial and error. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Jennie Bea does discuss some of her training in the kitchen, a story of a five-year-old learning to bake bread in a coffee can alongside her grandmother. This story is a way to foster identification with readers. A degree in hotel and restaurant management is not.

There is a question of gender underlying this decision. Jennie Bea is attempting to foster a connection with an audience that is predominantly female, an audience who presumably also learned to cook by the side of a mother or grandmother. For this audience, learning to cook alongside a grandmother can be a point of connection. Conversely, advanced degrees and professional experience are experiences that most women can't identity with. Jennie Bea is effectively choosing to highlight identification, perhaps, at the expense of authority. This is a move that Mac undoubtedly would not make.

I believe Jennie Bea is a fairly representative example of blogger attitudes toward self-disclosure. She appears an open book to her readers, sharing personal anecdotes, poignant memories, and funny stories. Readers will most likely never know that there is a notable omission, a gap in the disclosures. Jennie Bea is able to keep pieces of herself private and readers are able to feel a solid connection to the blogger. Let's turn now to a blogger who exists at the far end of the spectrum opposite Mac: Jacqueline.

Jacqueline, Hyperbole, and the Real

Where Mac relies on food alone to create personality online and Jennie Bea discloses personal information selectively, Jacqueline stands at the far end of the spectrum, with her liberal attitude toward self-disclosure. Later in this chapter I'll touch on *what* Jacqueline discloses on her blog but, first, I want to focus on *how* she discloses information. Within Mac and Jennie Bea's blogs, it's fairly easy to see the connection between the online and offline identities. Quotes from my interviews and observations with these bloggers tend to match fairly well with quotes from the blog in terms of tone and personality. Though these bloggers might be very cautious about what information they share with readers, they are more or less sharing their personality as it exists in offline spaces. Jacqueline is unique on this point.

Within her blog, Jacqueline conceives of her digital identity as different from her offline self. And, furthermore, she conceives of those differences in very specific ways:

> I feel like in my posts I'm pretty sarcastic, a little sassy, and a little hyperbolic. And I'm a little bit like that in real life but whenever I meet other bloggers or readers who I've never met before I'm like 'oh, am I really going to live up to the expectations of this person who I've presented myself as.' (personal communication, September 1, 2014)

The concern Jacqueline expresses here, regarding whether readers will be disappointed by her offline identity, is one that bloggers frequently discuss, particularly bloggers who have built up a large following over a long period of time. Bloggers are faced with the task of pulling in readers and making them want to return. Yet this is no easy task. Jacqueline's strategy is to become larger than life on the pages of her blog. She discusses her motivation behind this strategy:

> I think it's a little bit funnier, people are more amused by it. No one really cares [if] I'm a moderately messy person but it's much more funny if I am ridiculously messy and my fiancé is the only person in my apartment who vacuums, which is actually true. It's more amusing to be a slightly more ridiculous version of yourself, I guess. And it's easier to write about. You write in extremes a little bit more than moderation. (personal communication, September 1, 2014)

And, indeed, Jacqueline's tendency to extremes does come through in her blog.

During a long and protracted battle with student housing, for example, Jacqueline vents on her blog about her recent housing downgrade. While this could have easily developed into a "woe-is-me" blog post, Jacqueline uses her standard technique—hyperbole—to craft a post that is not only interesting, but also shocking and wildly funny. I quote from her post for Devil's Food Cake with Angel Frosting below:

> My latest scheme to beat-the-student-housing system involves a night of dark chocolate, wine, oysters, and fertility shots.
>
> I really can't understand why the.boy 'just isn't that into it.' Apparently those who are with child get preference over those who are not, yet couples and singles are ranked equally. All of a sudden single motherhood is sounding *quite* appealing…Well, my darling fiancé can protest the morality of bringing a child into this world for the sole purpose of qualifying for humane living conditions all he wants. But the proof is in the pudding. (Err, devil's food cake.) And I don't remember hearing any objections from across our apartment as I was piling rich chocolate cake layers on top of each other or sandwiching the fluffiest of fluffy frostings in between them. Or as he was shoving forkful after forkful into his mouth before leaving for work. I have a feeling there is some compromise in our future. Especially if I'm going to continue to use slices of this cake as bartering tools. Can you just see me waving around a pregnancy test in the housing office (urine flying everywhere) whilst demanding an apartment upgrade? Hey, I never promised I'd fight fair. On that note. CAKE! (blog post, August 22, 2014)

Offline, Jacqueline's battle with student housing involved extensive paperwork, numerous frustrating phone calls with Student Housing, and several less-than-glamorous apartments. It's nothing more than a typical frustration of student life. Online, however, Jacqueline's battle involves overwrought schemes to seduce her then-fiancé with chocolate cake and rush wild-eyed to Student Housing, pregnancy test in hand. And, in the process, she is able to seamlessly connect this story to the Devil's Food Cake recipe offered in this post. This is Jacqueline in all her hyperbolic glory.

Her tendency towards hyperbole carries over to much of the food presented on her blog as well. Though the food presented on her site tends to take the form of healthy vegetarian dishes, Jacqueline insists on taking even this practical cuisine to the extreme. Here, she describes her food identity:

> Like when I'm doing the Twelve Weeks of Winter Squash I'm putting myself out there as this person who is so addicted to pumpkin that my skin is practically turning orange from eating so much of it. And then I do this one winter squash post or more every week for twelve weeks so it sort of goes along with that. Or…occasionally I'll joke that I'd put kale in a cake if I could and then I do post a lot of super veggie-driven recipes and so I think to some degree the hyperbole and food do go together. (personal communication, September 1, 2014)

Jacqueline revels in the heightened identity she has created online.

In fact, throughout my interview with Jacqueline she indicated that she often intentionally plans her blog recipes to reinforce this hyperbolic identity. She offers an example:

> I'm willing to spend literally a day in the kitchen sweating over laminated dough. It also makes for a good picture, like when I'm writing the post about the experience describing myself like covering my whole kitchen in flour and still discovering it there weeks later. It allows me to add to the hyperbole in some way. (personal communication, September 1, 2014)

And this strategy seems to be working for Jacqueline. Though Jacqueline has arguably achieved less prominence in her field than Mac, her posts tend to receive far more feedback from readers, with some posts receiving upwards of 250 comments.

Jacqueline's blog, though hyperbolic and outrageous much of the time, is more than that. It is also a place where Jacqueline shares some of the most important moments of her life, in very real ways. She shares all of the good: running her first marathon, becoming engaged, getting married the day after Thanksgiving, entering medical school, becoming pregnant. Through all of these moments, Jacqueline shares her joys and triumphs with readers, sometimes in humorous and ridiculous fashion, other times with sincerity. But more than these moments, I found that Jacqueline's identity emerged in the sad and, sometimes, heartbreaking times, which she, notably, also shares with readers.

From day one, Jacqueline blogged consistently. First, every other day and then, later, Monday through Friday. This regularity made her first real absence from the blog—in her fourth year blogging—notable. It was an absence of just under two weeks and, upon her return, she published a post for Curried Carrot Soup with Roasted Pepitas, which I quote at length below:

> You either live or you die. That's what my father would shrug and say to the friends and family members who came to visit him during his final days in the hospital. And in a way. He was right. In truth, we are all gambling with borrowed time whether we know it or not – even simply crossing the street is fraught with what ifs and maybes, no matter how many times we look both ways. But in a way that so few of us are given the opportunity to be, he was fully conscious of the chances he was taking. Of just how fully he was putting his life in fate's hands.
>
> You see, unbeknownst to us, my father was told two years ago that he had a mass on his liver, maybe cancer but maybe not. And while some people might have done everything they could to skew destiny in one direction or another, he threw his hands up at the heavens and said, "Eh. It's up to you." He never followed up on it. And the rest of us are left to wonder. Why. I will never really understand his motivations (or lack thereof), but from what I can gather he wanted to be fully present, to really live, during whatever time he had. And he didn't want that time to be adulterated by hospital stays, chemotherapy- and radiation-induced sickness, and whatever other measures we might have forced him to take that may or may not have saved his life. Pretty much until the very end, when he was hopped up on so much morphine that he was no longer fully conscious, he kept saying that he "felt good". And so part of me believes that two years ago he made a decision to

forge ahead as long as he didn't feel sick and then seek treatment when he did, not realizing that there might not be options left for him when that time came. My heart hurts to think about the burden that he bore for these two years. For everything that might have been. For how utterly devastated he must have felt when he realized that there was nothing anyone could do to save him. And it breaks for every moment in my life that he is supposed to be there. But isn't.

> I was acutely aware of time while my dad was in the hospital, namely how there was not enough of it, and so I didn't leave his side for the larger part of two weeks. Not to run, not to do experiments, and not to cook. Until I went home the morning of the 25th to shower (bonus of being a medical student is that you live right across the street from the hospital) and felt a strong compulsion to make soup. I had been eying this recipe for curried carrot soup in Vegetarian Times since the issue arrived and had bought the ingredients for it before this all happened, so I set to it, allowing myself to get lost in the chopping, stirring, blending. All totally ordinary, everyday things. Relics of normalcy in a time of absurdity. That day my family and I sat around his bed eating soup out of old plastic takeout containers. It wasn't fancy or extravagant in any way, but in a sense, it was our last dinner party together. He died later that day and it was almost as if he was waiting to be sure that we would be able to carry on without him. That we wouldn't lose each other in our grief. (blog post, October 1, 2012)

This post is beautiful and sad and poignant and real. Note that Jacqueline not only chooses to share with her readers that she has lost her father but she also chooses to disclose the painful details of this tragedy, final moments shared only with the family. This is not necessarily the hyperbolic Jacqueline that readers so often see, but it is perhaps these rare moments of raw emotion that pull readers most strongly to this digital space, to this virtual community.

Baudrillard and Blogging: The Digestion of the Simulacra

Just as Baudrillard points to Disneyland as a "perfect model of all the entangled order of simulation" (1994, p. 12), I point to the food blogging community as a multi-layered digital simulacra. In so many ways, the food blog genre preempts the production of the real. In this case, a simulation of food is presented to readers: food more beautiful, exotic, creative, and delicious than could ever be crafted in our own homes. Digital descriptions of meals and images of "food porn" that become more real to readers than the food sitting in their own cabinets and refrigerators. The daunting images of food portrayed on food blogs have the power to overwhelm the home cook, to even deter the process of cooking with a sighed "I could never make that." I believe this is the effect Miller and Shepherd were pointing to in their 2004 article, "Blogging as social action: A genre analysis."

And, yet, just as Baudrillard unearths another deeper layer of simulation in Disneyland, I believe there is another layer of simulation happening within the food blogging community. Baudrillard explains this second layer simulation:

> To begin with it is a play of illusions and phantasms: Pirates, the Frontier, Future World, etc. This imaginary world is supposed to be what makes the operation successful. But what draws the crowds is undoubtedly much more the social microcosm, the miniaturized and *religious* reveling in real America,

in its delights and drawbacks…In his imaginary world the only phantasmagoria is in the inherent warmth and affection of the crowd" (1994, p. 12)

Yes, bloggers provide readers with beautiful, delicious, and, often, unattainable food. But they also provide something a bit deeper: a sense of connection, community, and friendship. The decision to disclose personal information is also a decision to allow readers in a bit closer, to allow them the opportunity to foster connection beyond that which can be achieved through food. The candid disclosures seen on Jennie Bea and Jacqueline's blogs draw readers into their own small "social microcosm," offering a warm and familiar place of belonging, one that exists separately from the reader's "real life."

These examples from the food blogging community suggest that personal self-disclosure is an important part of creating and managing digital identity. Jennie Bea and Jacqueline are evidence of the intense connections that can form online when users are willing to share themselves with others. And Mac, even for his hardline stance against needless self-disclosures, offers subtle and scattered insights into his personality. Though more research is needed to make broad statements about digital self-disclosure across other media, these findings suggest that the same patterns may hold true, particularly within social media outlets such as Facebook and Instagram where personal connections are one of the primary goals.

The next chapter will broaden our view from the solitary blogger to the larger blogging community that is fostered within each and every blog. There we will investigate how the blogger situates himself and herself within that community and the impact this has on the overall blogger identity.

Chapter Five
Community Building and Collective Identity Management

The previous chapter explored digital identity as it was created and managed by personal self-disclosures, all of the decisions bloggers make about what, when and how much to share of their lives outside the blog. These decisions about personal revelations go a long way in determining the identity that emerges through the blog and, ultimately, how readers respond to the blogger, as illustrated in the previous chapter. The present chapter will expand the focus slightly, investigating the virtual communities bloggers create through their text, images, and interactions within the blog. This chapter will examine these individual blogging communities to argue for the recursive and community-determined nature of digital identity using scholars such as Margaret Syverson and Jenny Edbauer, those who are actively working with rhetorical ecologies.

Jeffrey Grabill and Stacey Pigg (2012), in their article "Messy rhetoric: Identity performance as rhetorical agency in online public forums," have dissected the complex business of identity shaping in online spaces, suggesting: "…identity is performed and leveraged in small, momentary, and fleeting acts" (p. 101). Grabill and Pigg's work is focused specifically on the identity work that takes place within online discussion boards (referred to in their study as online forums); however, these "small, momentary, and fleeting acts" also carry over to the food blogging community. Though online forums and blogs do share many features, blogs sacrifice much of the democratic nature of online forums. The blog is created by an author who is responsible for content generation, overall message, and, in some cases, even whether readers have the ability to comment at all. In this way, the blog is a wonderful venue to study the digital identity shaping practices of the blogger, though, in some cases, a less useful place to study the identity practices of the reader/commenter.

This chapter will expand upon the work of Grabill and Pigg, taking it into the realm of the blogging community where identity comes through in the text of a blog post, a decision to share a personal story, the image that has been carefully chosen to visually represent a certain dish, or even in the blogger's response to a reader comment. These seemingly insignificant moments are the building blocks that work to create the larger digital identity. Grabill and Pigg have noted the evolving conception of digital identity throughout composition research as it has "moved from utopic to dystopic accounts to more nuanced accounts of identity" (2012, p. 103), an evolution that has been discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. Below, I will focus on some of the nuanced ways in which the bloggers in this study enact digital identities through the medium of the blog and the surrounding blog communities. This chapter will situate these individuals within a larger system, a digital ecology that simultaneously limits and facilitates these bloggers' digital identity decisions.

Writing Ecologies, Rhetorical Ecologies, Blogging Ecologies

Before I get to the bloggers, though, I want to first discuss some of the theory that has guided this research; specifically, Margaret Syverson's (1999) concept of the ecology of composition, which is outlined in her book, *The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition*. In a nutshell, Syverson suggests: "In considering an ecology of composing, we would try to take into account the complex interrelationships in which the writing is embedded" (1999, p. 6). For Syverson, this includes relationships as concrete as the people and ideas the author interacts with and the author's tangible environment. It also includes abstract relationships such as the larger social structures within which the author and text are embedded and the historical precedents, influences, and norms. And, not to be forgotten, the relationship between author, text, and potential reader. Here, Syverson extends the basic rhetorical situation, looping in a wealth of interrelationships that work to complicate the rhetorical situation but also to make it a much more dynamic and active process.

This complex mass of interrelationships has been echoed more recently by Jenny Edbauer (2005), author of "Unframing models of public distribution: From rhetorical situation to rhetorical ecologies." Here, Edbauer points to the traditional elements of the rhetorical situation and notes the way these elements, particularly when they reside within public interactions, resist order or categorization: "The rhetorical situation is part of what we might call, borrowing from [Louise] Phelps, an ongoing social flux. Situation bleeds into the concatenation of public interaction. Public interactions bleed into wider social processes. *The elements of rhetorical situation simply bleed*" (2005, pp. 8-9, emphasis in original). Within the space of the blog, a medium that fosters and enables public interactions, this "bleeding" is readily apparent. Rather than despair in this "bleeding," Edbauer chooses to view this tendency as an opportunity. She cites Steven Shaviro in explaining that "place should be characterized less in terms of this sense of community (discrete elements taken together), and more in the interactions *between* those elements—their encounters in the crease and folds" (2005, p. 10). According to Edbauer and Shaviro, then, the blog as an artifact may be less useful than the interactions that occur therein.

Like Edbauer, I also choose to see this relentless "bleeding" as an opportunity. Within the space of the blog, interactions are paramount as the blogger produces content that automatically receives feedback from readers who become authors in the comment section. The blogger transitions to audience as he or she consumes reader feedback, which becomes a part of the larger heteroglossia of the digital space. All of these diversely authored texts contribute to the future of the digital space, providing an unending dialogic feedback loop spurring invention. It is these interactions I use as evidence in this chapter to better understand the positioning of the bloggers in this study. The communities they choose to engage with and the form these interactions take can reveal much about the blogger.

Syverson outlines four key attributes that are inherent to the composition ecologies I investigate in this chapter. First, they are **distributed** across agents and structures, space and time. The individual writer (or blogger in this case) is never truly composing in isolation. They are always already influenced by the genre in which they are composing, the technologies they use, and those who have come before them. Second, composition ecologies are **emergent**. They self-organize into ordered networks that may extend locally or even globally. These networks are particularly apparent within the food blogosphere, a digital space that is largely defined by its sense of community. Third, composition ecologies are **embodied**. The processes of reading and writing are always experienced physically. Though it may be easy to feel disembodied or disconnected from other bodies in our increasingly digital world, it still takes physical acts to create blog posts and to read others' blogs whether that means typing, scrolling, clicking, or reading. And, finally, composition ecologies are **enacted**. According to Syverson:

> In text composing we do not report on a pregiven world 'out there' or 'inside ourselves'; rather, we *bring forth* a textual world as we are writing it. And we dwell in that world and are defined by its creation as certainly as we dwell in the 'real' world. (1999, p. 16)

This definition suggests that bloggers actively write the blogosphere and, in so doing, simultaneously define their community and their own space within it.

This interconnectedness can prove overwhelming for the composition researcher, as it exponentially increases the opportunities for further research. As such, Syverson identifies five potential analytical dimensions through which one can focus in to better understand composition ecologies: physical-material dimension, social dimension, psychological dimension, spatial dimension, and temporal dimension. For the purposes of this analysis, this chapter will focus specifically on the social (or the inter-individual) dimension in order to better understand the relationships and communities that are fostered, maintained, or discontinued within the space of the blog. I began this project with the intention of looking deeper into individual food identities and, while I still believe that these food bloggers do bring their own unique culinary viewpoints to the food blogosphere, Syverson, Edbauer, and Shaviro's work has pushed me to reevaluate this digital community with fresh eyes. As I abandoned the simplistic view of the writer (or blogger) as isolated composer, I realized just how interconnected and embedded these blogs could truly be.

Though the bloggers in this study share much in common, the unique blogging communities they engage with and the interactions they prioritize within their blogs drastically impact the digital identity that is conveyed to readers. And, though the time allocated for this study kept me from pursuing this point further, the other digital communities bloggers engage with and within (including a variety of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram as well as other food blogs where roles are reversed and the blogger becomes the reader/audience) work to shape the larger blogging community and foodie community online. Each interaction taken in isolation may seem insignificant but each one works to shape and norm the digital community in increasingly larger circles, just as a rock dropped in a lake forms ever-larger ripples. Within this study, however, I have limited myself to exploring the blogs of three participant bloggers and the interactions that take place therein.

Blogging Ecologies: Identity Shaping through Community Building

Within the remainder of this chapter I explore the groups and communities that my participants engage with on a regular basis. While it might seem obvious that bloggers engage with the larger blogging community, this is not always the case. Bloggers indeed might keep a blog that speaks to other food bloggers; however, they might also count family and friends as readers or even food professionals such as chefs and caterers. These various communities have the potential to react to and engage with the blog and blogger in strikingly different way and, subsequently, also shape the blogger identity that is developed over time. This chapter will explore this process and how it manifests differently for each of the bloggers in this study.

During initial interviews, I asked each blogger which of his or her blog recipes was most representative of his or her culinary identity. I intentionally left this question fairly open-ended so that bloggers could interpret it however they saw fit. And I received a range of responses: homemade white bread, butternut squash ravioli with an amaretto cookie crumble, a mac and cheese-stuffed burger. And, while these responses and their justifications were fascinating, the accompanying blog posts provided much more fodder for analysis and gave a great deal of insight into the ways each blogger interacts with his or her digital food community. Here, I will use these posts as representative examples of each blogger's culinary style but also of each blogger's typical interactions and connections online as I investigate the communities that shape (and also limit) each blogger's digital identity.

Jennie Bea, Lard, and Coffee Can Bread Pans

I begin with Jennie Bea, whose identity-representative recipe of choice is homemade white bread. White bread, a staple item in many homes and, often, a backdrop to other more exciting flavors, tastes, and textures, strikes one as having a notable lack of identity-shaping facets. However, Jennie Bea elaborates:

> I mean, really, I do identify with that white loaf of bread, which is weird. But I think because, first, I love what it represents just for my memory. But I'm also, as terrible as it sounds, I love white bread. I just do. It's always been something that I liked. As unrefined as it is, it's the profile that I like the best. I do like hearty bread, but I like white best if I were to pick. And I think it's just multi-purpose. And I like to think that I'm not stuck in one lane and that I can gravitate towards different things and I think that bread can do that. It can

> make a really good sandwich, an excellent French toast, it could be some really good stuffing or dressing, whatever we want to call it. And so I think in itself it has really good structure and it's really good, but I think when you add things to it it's even better. And so I think for me, I feel like at my core I am pretty confident and comfortable with myself but when I have other things and other people around I feel like that's better. And so I feel like that's kind of where that comes from. I feel like the bread is most representative of me. Plus I do like carbs a lot so that works out, too. (personal communication, October 13, 2014)

Here, Jennie Bea touches on a number of key points. First, she repeatedly highlights the importance of relationships and community to her identity as a blogger and as a human. This is evident when she discusses the memorial aspects of homemade white bread, relating a story about baking bread in coffee cans with her grandmother as a child, an important early food memory for Jennie Bea. The emphasis on relationships also surfaces as she explores the analogy of herself as white bread, a food item notable for its versatility and its ability to work well in any number of dishes with a wide range of accompanying flavors. The insights evidence the high level of importance Jennie Bea places on community. This excerpt from Jennie Bea's interview is also noteworthy for its consistently self-deprecating tone. Even as she compares herself to white bread, Jennie Bea repeatedly acknowledges the lowliness of white bread when compared to other heartier breads, using words like "unrefined" to describe this food item she holds so dear. Similarly, though she refers to herself as "confident" and "comfortable" with herself, Jennie Bea acknowledges that she believes herself to be better when grouped with others.

Jennie Bea posted a recipe for homemade white bread early on in her blogging career. Within this post, she also highlights various connections and relationships of importance to her. One primary focus is her relationship with her husband. Hers is, ultimately, a blog about cooking as a newlywed and husband references make frequent appearances within posts, as in the following excerpt from this post for homemade white bread:

> My hubby tells me I have a knack for 'creating work outta nothin.' He even goes as far as to harp at me about my inability to 'relax'… Apparently, he's still learning I'm not too good at being idle. And, as I am not the most gracious recipient of criticism either I typically get irritated and over zealously do more. That'll show him, right? :)[5] (blog post, May 29, 2014)

Two things happen in this excerpt. First, Jennie Bea highlights a relationship of great importance to her, a pattern that continues throughout many of her blog posts. Second, and perhaps more interestingly, in comparing Jennie Bea's interview transcript with the text of this blog post, it is apparent that her persona changes as she discusses these relationships. Despite Jennie Bea's advanced degrees in hotel and restaurant management and high level of culinary knowledge, she tends to adopt colloquial speech patterns, and refer to her spouse as "hubby."

This persona also emerges as she discusses her relationship with her grandmother, the woman she considers to be her initial culinary inspiration, the one who taught her to bake homemade bread:

> My dear, now departed, Grandma Jennie first taught me to bake bread when I was probably about age 5. My early memories include standing on a chair, sifting flour in my mom's old metal sifter with the apples painted on the sides and greasing Folgers coffee cans with a lard covered paper towel. (Yes, lard--we were that traditional.) I am confident this is when and where my carb addition [sic] began. One snowy weekend this past winter, on a day I am sure I could have just relaxed, I decided to brush up on my bread making skills. I was set on baking my Grandma's bread. The trouble was we <u>never</u> wrote the recipe down...ever. We baked by memory and instinct. But I guess recipe recall is a little like language fluency, you either use it or lose it. (blog post, May 29, 2014)

Here, again, note the way Jennie Bea highlights her rustic or traditionally Middle American roots, recalling the use of an old metal sifter, a Folgers coffee can in place of a bread pan, and even the choice to use lard instead of butter. Jennie even takes the time to point to this choice of fat specifically, evidencing her awareness of the meaning of this ingredient over olive oil or butter or even shortening. Each of these culinary moves mark Jennie Bea and her cooking background as decidedly old-fashioned, an attribute she highlights throughout this blog post and others. Also noteworthy here is Jennie Bea's analogy of recipe recall to language fluency. She notes that her grandmother never wrote down a recipe but, rather, baked "by memory and instinct." This appeal highlights the authenticity of the grandmother's cooking abilities and, by proxy, Jennie Bea's early cooking memories as well. The memory she recalls here of cooking by memory stands in contrast to Jennie Bea's more recent cooking experiences; namely, the many food courses she took in graduate school and her experiences working for a catering company. Throughout Jennie Bea's blog, she never highlights or even mentions her expert knowledge in the field. Rather, she is careful to portray herself as she has done in this post: as the typical Midwestern home cook, cooking primarily for her husband and family.

These references to people in her life make sense because Jennie Bea conceives of her audience as largely composed of family members and friends, people who probably know her husband or knew her grandmother. As such, references to these shared connections serve to further forge her bond with her audience. These interactions are representative of Jennie Bea's personal blogging community, one that could be described as a digital version of her lived community as it is comprised primarily of people she knows offline. Beyond this local community, Jennie Bea also makes efforts to engage with the larger food blogging community. Though Jennie Bea dedicates much of this post to memories of baking bread with her grandmother, she also laments that she has lost the recipe recall her grandmother had and, thus, must source a similar recipe from the food blogging community. She mentions and thanks the source of this recipe, the blogger behind the Curvy Carrot blog, and links to the post she references, though it's worth noting that this is Jennie Bea's sole mention of the food blogging community. And, even when she does interact with others from the food blogging community (in this case, the Curvy Carrot), she does so in a deferential way, using the recipe as written rather than making her own tweaks or improvements. These interactions portray Jennie Bea as yet on the fringes of the food blogging community: not yet fully embedded in it, but making efforts to forge connections.

As Jennie Bea's blogging community responds through the comments section, her assumptions about her readership are proven correct. This early post from her blog boasts three comments, including one each from her mom and aunt, and Jennie Bea is careful to respond thoughtfully to each of these commenters. These brief interactions between author and reader serve to reinforce the digital identity Jennie Bea has created, reflecting the accuracy of her belief that her readership is composed primarily of family and friends. Through these fleeting interactions, Jennie Bea receives positive reinforcement that her digital identity is audience appropriate and well received. In Jennie Bea's case, perhaps more so than for many other food bloggers, her audience is tangible, known, and vocal about how well she has targeted their needs. This is a digital blogging community perhaps in its simplest iteration: the digitization of an existing community or, in this case, family.

Jacqueline and Mac evidence a much more complex and difficult to define blogging ecology. Their audiences are multiple, varied, and, in some cases, have very diverse expectations. I turn now to Jacqueline's blogging ecology.

Jacqueline, Foodie Crushes, and Recipe Round-Ups

Many of the ways Jennie Bea engages with her community stand in sharp contrast to the community engagement practices of Jacqueline, a food blogger with over seven years of blogging experience. Because of her vast experience in the food blogging community, Jacqueline's blog tends to focus on different kinds of connections; however, these connections are still absolutely central to her blogging identity. In a post for butternut squash ravioli with an amaretto cookie crumble (the recipe Jacqueline cites as most representative of her culinary identity), Jacqueline engages with a number of groups. Within the text of this blog post, Jacqueline chooses not to engage with friends or family but, rather, to craft a humorous reflection on her celebrity chef crushes:

> In case you haven't noticed by now, I have a *thing* for mildly attractive, slightly insane, totally in-your-face chefs. First, there was Anthony Bourdain who is exactly the kind of guy you would never want to take home to your parents but who you're totally going to sleep with anyway. Just look at the man. You know he's going to give you the best night of your life, followed by steak and pommes frites for breakfast the next morning. Man of my dreams.
>
> Then, there was, is and ever will be Michael Symon. Bald, adorable, unapologetic about his disdain for vegetarian food and absolutely self righteous in his adoration of pork belly and beef cheeks. Gotta love a man with principles. Even if you don't necessarily agree with them. It makes him that much hotter.
>
> …There is Mario Batali. Who, with his red hair and larger than life persona (and stomach) is the quintessential Italian stallion.
>
> Sure, he may have a *slight* temper. His behavior may be *erratic* at best. He may *throw things* in the kitchen. But none of this really matters once you realize the genius behind the madness and the passion behind that crazed look he gets just before he throws you out of his kitchen (but doesn't really mean it). (blog post, November 30, 2010)

Though these comments are meant in jest, it's worth noting that Jacqueline frequently discusses professional chefs within her blog and often speaks of them as though she knows them despite the fact that her knowledge of them is limited to mainstream media, such as cookbooks and food-related television programs. Here, she talks about these chefs as though they were recent characters in her love life. And her fascination with these figures extends beyond carnal fantasies. Rather than seeking out recipe inspiration in the blogosphere, Jacqueline is typically inspired by the work of professional chefs. This blog post, in particular, includes dishes inspired by Giada de Laurentis and Mario Batali. And, unlike Jennie Bea who uses her source material as written, Jacqueline typically adapts recipes to make them uniquely her own rather than taking them at face value. These moves show a desire to engage with chefs on their level, whether that happens through food or romantic trysts.

However, throughout this blog post—and Jacqueline's blog, at large—the most striking connections are those with others in the food blogging community. This individual post takes part in several larger recipe round-ups. These round-ups ask bloggers to create a recipe around a central concept, cuisine, or other source of inspiration. The results are then collected and linked through the various blogs that take part. Within this post, Jacqueline participates in "Cook the Books," an activity in which bloggers read a pre-determined food-related book and then create a dish inspired by the book. However, she also submits this dish to six additional recipe round-ups,[6] typically noted and linked as follows:

> I am submitting this to Presto Pasta Nights, which is being hosted by Ruth of Once Upon A Feast, the Hearth N Soul Bloghop, Cook the Books, I Heart Cooking Clubs, and Chaya's Meatless Mondays. This has been linked to A

Moderate Life's 12 Days of Bloggie-Mas! This has been linked to Marla's Happy Post over at Family Fresh Cooking! (blog post, November 30, 2010)

Each of these recipe round-ups has its own set of guidelines and blogging participants and, further, each of Jacqueline's submissions effectively acts as self-promotion, linking her to a different group of food bloggers to create a larger culinary impact. And, while six may be an extreme number, Jacqueline's blog posts typically link to at least one recipe round-up, showing the importance she places on connections within the food blogging community.

Though Jacqueline does discuss her personal life and, most notably, her family and husband, these connections typically take a back seat to those with her various online food communities, as in this post where they almost seem to function as an afterthought: "I made these for some of my friends from college who came to visit over this long weekend and they were a HUGE hit" (blog post, November 30, 2010). This offhand reference to her lived community and the actual experience of eating the food presented in this blog post suggests that Jacqueline's primary blog community is the one that exists in the digital realm. Bloggers are generally expected to divulge information about their private lives and relationships, and Jacqueline is fulfilling that expectation, though in a way that indicates it is not her primary focus. The blogging community, disembodied on the screen, seems to offer Jacqueline a more rewarding and tangible food community in comparison to her own lived community of family and friends, individuals who may feel less passionate about food.

And this focus on the blogging community is indeed echoed within the comments of this blog post. This particular post received 122 individual comments, many from fellow bloggers who sign their comments not with their name but with their blog title (titles such as A Year on the Grill, Sweet and Savory, Sweet Artichoke, etc.). Unlike the comments on Jennie Bea's blog, which tend to focus on the personal relationships outside of the blog, these comments almost exclusively focus on the dish that Jacqueline has shared here, the images of the dish, or, in some cases, laughingly acknowledge her bizarre celebrity chef crushes. Notably, Jacqueline does not respond to any of these comments.

When asked how this particular dish is representative of her, Jacqueline's response shows the dual focus of her food community:

> I hope it would say I'm someone who is not afraid to tackle harder recipes. Making pasta is not the easiest thing to do. But also that ravioli and pasta are definitely comfort foods so I also hope it would say that I'm someone who likes to share meals with others and provide some sort of comfort or visceral pleasure through eating and cooking. (personal communication, September 1, 2014)

Here, Jacqueline evidences a need for recognition as a professional blogger with a strong set of kitchen skills and knowledge but she also evidences a need for comfort and shared meals with others. Ultimately, these rhetorical moves create a very different personal ecology than than of Jennie Bea, one less focused on family and friends and more focused on success within the larger food blogging community. Jacqueline's focus on this community works to solidify her role within it and also works to strengthen the friendships she has forged with many other food bloggers.

Mac, the Professional Chef, and Battles for Authority

In contrast to both of these bloggers is the third participant, Mac. Mac has arguably achieved the most success within the food blogging community. In his post for mac and cheese-stuffed burgers (his own most representative recipe), Mac focuses not necessarily on personal or food blogging connections but, rather, on one specific interaction between himself and one individual reader who follows Mac's blog. This particular interaction is interesting for a variety of reasons. First, Mac generally does not reply to reader comments, at least not within the space of his blog. More on this point below. Here, however, Mac has chosen to respond to a *private* letter sent via email (in full) in a very public way. And, perhaps more importantly, the reader he has opted to respond to is a professional chef, a person generally considered to have greater food knowledge and authority than a food blogger.

I begin with the letter Mac received. This letter, submitted by a chef and reader, responds to a recent recipe Mac posted to his blog, Ancho-Coffee Braised Short Ribs, and effectively chastises Mac for his culinary viewpoint. Rather than respond privately via email or not at all Mac decides to post this letter in its entirety to his blog, ironically or perhaps cruelly, within a post for Mac and Cheese Stuffed Burgers. As the original letter is quite lengthy, I include only selected portions of the letter below:

> I read your recipe for Ancho-coffee braised ribs with interest . . . In the process I came to see that you put 1/4 cup of sugar into the mix. Serving three people this comes to over a tablespoon of sugar per person. From a culinary standpoint doing that sort of thing puts you somewhere in the eighteenth century.

I persevered and found that for the same three people you dished up some potatoes with 2 cups of fat (sorry, I meant heavy cream) and 2/3 stick of butter. That's 2 tablespoons of butter per person, plus 2/3 of a cup of cream per person, plus one-plus tablespoon of sugar per person, plus the olive oil used to cook the veggies plus all the rich fat that comes from the beef ribs! Wow! Your beard must be shiny.

I can see that you like to cook, but urge you to consider the implications of your methodology. One can achieve as much flavor and intensity without any sugar at all, and with way less fat.

Flavor comes from the art of knowing how to induce it from the ingredients, i.e., the art of cooking. . . Fat and sweet are the tricks that cooks who fancy themselves chefs use to deceive the palates of the naive and the foolish and the cheap.

Discipline, it's all about discipline. (blog post, July 2, 2010)

Note the way this chef attacks Mac's culinary knowledge, using sarcasm to show his disdain, and ultimately speaking to Mac in the tone of a professor educating a student. These characteristics all speak to the larger tension between those in the culinary profession and those who claim the title of "home cook." The tension between these groups is well-documented, as outlined in Chapter One.

Now, I turn to Mac's brief response:

…I could refute this email in 100 different ways (braising liquid isn't consumed, the potatoes were for 6 not 3, I don't eat stuff like this everyday), in fact, almost every sentence is non-sence(tance).[7] What?...But instead of

> refuting, I decided to make a new recipe and dedicate it to Joe B—-. Hopefully you can put this one on your menu in Connecticut. Its full of chemicals, fats, and other delicious stuff your patrons could only wish to enjoy! (blog post, July 2, 2010)

Here, in an important moment of *ethos*, Mac affirms his authority and knowledge of food. Within this blog post he notes the multiple ways he could refute the chef's original letter, countering food knowledge with additional food knowledge. Further, Mac's choice to post this letter within this particular blog post for mac and cheese stuffed burgers (not to mention his decision to dedicate it to this disapproving reader) is a clear defining moment, allowing Mac to challenge the typical stereotype of food blogger as amateur. Here, he asserts his authority, his food knowledge, and his expert role within the food blogging community. His choice to post this letter also has a secondary effect, moving his own personal blog community (i.e. his loyal readers) to action.

In the comments section below this post, a few readers diplomatically suggest that both Mac and the chef have valid points, while most defend Mac's food choices, and a few even declare that they will boycott this chef's restaurant. The expert position Mac has negotiated within the food blogging community has created an environment in which many readers trust his judgment over that of an industry professional. Within this particular post, Mac receives 36 individual comments, though, true to form, he does not respond to any of them. Though this pattern of non-response is apparent in many bloggers—including Jacqueline—the nature of these comments are quite different in this particular blog post. Where Jacqueline's readers offer comments of praise for her recipes, the images, and her humorous stories, Mac's readers here respond directly to the power struggle Mac is engaged in. Mac's choice to remain silent within this particular comments section is telling. Though readers here debate Mac's culinary approach versus that of the chef he has quoted, Mac decides to stay out of this debate, letting it play out among the readers—who ultimately side with Mac.

When asked how the recipe from this post—mac and cheese stuffed burgers—was representative of him, Mac's response echoes many of the same themes as Jacqueline's response such as a focus on cooking identity and the importance of community. However, Mac's response is unique in that it also evidences the primacy of his food blogging identity and the strategic way he thinks about food appearance and styling within his blog:

> So I do think that the mac and cheese burgers is like a really good example of [me] because not only does it show the mashing up aspect of things, the comfort food aspect of things that I'm known for, it's also…the food that I make has to be pretty because no one will click or like it if it's not pretty. And so like stuffed things come out extra pretty and mash ups…like mac and cheese looks really good in a picture. But also I think it shows, it shows the deeper nature of the way I eat and the way that I cook. So obviously I don't eat a mac and cheese burger every day of the week. I eat healthy most of the time. And I cook these recipes for occasions and hanging out with your friends and impressing people and having fun and having something to talk about around food. And I think that when I make these special recipes they're food conversation starters and they're event meals. Everyone's coming over because

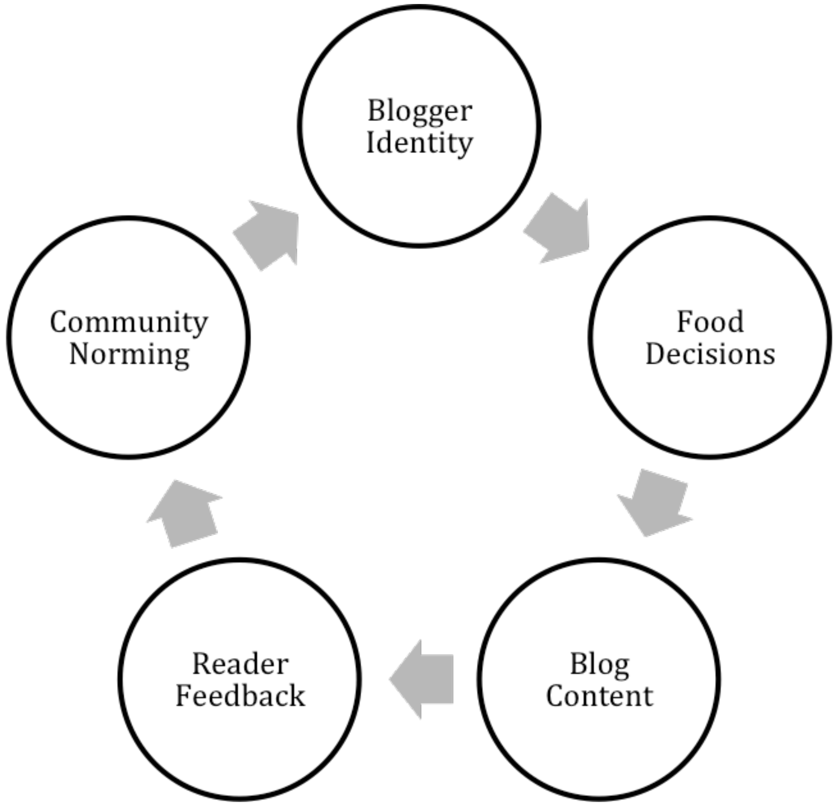
> they want to eat that thing because I told them about it all week and I got really excited about it and I dreamt about it and I'm cooking it for you guys because it's going to be awesome. (personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Though Jacqueline and Jennie Bea both think about the way food is representative of them, Mac's reflections above suggest that he tends to think of food less as an identity-shaping element and more as a strategic marketing tool for his blog, even in situations where he's cooking for close friends or family. This shift in mindset may be indicative of Mac's more advanced position within the food blogging community, a position that is further reinforced by his work with publishers and marketers in producing his own cookbook and the knowledge that this "hobby" is also his full-time career. For him, the stakes are higher for each post, each recipe, each blog photo.

Fleeting Moments: Identity Shaping in the Blogosphere

As noted above, Grabill and Pigg have suggested that "…identity is performed and leveraged in small, momentary, and fleeting acts" (2012, p. 101). Above I've argued that these fleeting acts typically occur in the interactions that are so central to the blog genre: namely, those between blogger and reader. These three bloggers provide interesting and diverse examples of the ways bloggers work to connect with various groups. However, I would argue that the interactive and recursive process of determining and managing identity in the food blogging community typically reverts to one standard model, as depicted in Figure 1 below. It is a model in which digital identity depends upon the small and often fleeting interactions between blogger and readers. Over time, these interactions have the power to either reinforce or fundamentally change the digital identity that is conveyed on the blog.

Figure 1:



And this feedback model, embodied by Jennie Bea, Jacqueline, and Mac, may not be unique to the food blogging community. Edward McQuarrie, Jessica Miller, and Barbara Phillips conducted a study of the fashion blogging community and found that fashion bloggers engage with their readers in much the same way…at least at first. They explain, "Just as bloggers begin by sharing moments in their personal life, early in the blog they also adopt a community orientation toward those who browse the blog. Initially the blogger is thrilled to receive comments and answers questions and suggestions" (2013, p. 146). This description of the amateur fashion blogger reflects Jennie Bea's tendency to respond to all reader comments and frequently mention her personal life.

However, McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips also argue that this attitude evolves as bloggers gain power and authority within their online community. They note, “As her audience grows larger, the blogger’s behavior changes. She stops interacting with her followers. She avoids answering specific questions, ignores suggestions for posts, and refuses to address issues raised in comments” (2013, p. 146). Though on the surface this analysis fits with more established bloggers, Jacqueline and Mac, who tend not to respond to reader comments and typically portray themselves as figures of authority and/or extensive culinary knowledge, I would argue that this analysis is only a partial picture. The study conducted by McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips considers only content that is published online (blog posts, readers comments, etc.). Their study did not involve any human research in the form of interviews or observations, methods that would allow the researchers to understand the motivations behind the bloggers’ approaches. Though bloggers may stop responding to reader comments, the interaction between blogger and reader does not necessarily end. The comments themselves still serve an important identity shaping function and have the power to significantly influence the future identity work of the blogger. Jacqueline and Mac may not respond frequently to reader comments but the content of their respective blogs evidences that they are nevertheless still actively shaping their digital blogging identity so as to appeal to blog readers.

This line of inquiry will be taken up in the following chapter, which dives into blogger-reader interactions further. There, I will explore the reader response to blog monetization and professionalization as an example of community norming in action.

Chapter Six
Professionalization, Blog Monetization, and its Inherent Tensions

This chapter began with a single blog comment, one I stumbled across before I began my dissertation research and long before I realized this same issue also pervaded much of my data, and initially got my mind churning on the issue of food blog monetization. The comment in question was posted on Decor8, a lifestyle blog that covers a range of topics, notably including cooking and food and I should note that I didn't stumble across this random comment by chance. The blogger and her husband had in fact composed a blog post responding to this comment and others like it. I begin with that comment:

> dear holly, please allow me to be very frank. it's all too much for me. all your books and now an online shop – you are marketing yourself too much for my taste. it has become all about earning money and i can feel the spirit fading away. so sorry to say so and i really grant you every success possible but i fear you are loosing your magic touch by selling, selling and more selling. still, all the best, uschi. (Becker, 2014)

Note the wording of the charges Uschi levels at the blogger: "I can feel the spirit fading away" and "I fear you are loosing [sic] your magic touch." The commenter struggles to clearly define the problem at hand but laments the loss of something indefinable.

For days and weeks after reading that blog post I mulled over why food bloggers do so often receive criticism for their attempts to profit from their blog work. I had seen similar issues arise on other blogs and I had even felt myself grow irritable at the presence of sponsored content or advertisements on some of the blogs I read. But why? What lack was this commenter feeling that couldn't clearly be described?

The Struggles of Professionalizing Domesticity

There is a long history of women laboring in the kitchen to produce sustenance for their family and friends. This work, both historically and even in this current day, is typically conceived of differently than the more "serious" labor that occurs outside of the home in offices, in shops, on the land. In 1963, Betty Friedan criticized female domestic authors, arguing, "There is something about Housewife Writers that isn't funny" (p. 108). And Friedan is not alone. Women's studies scholar Arlene Avakian laments in a 2014 article, "Two decades ago, other than addressing food disorders, feminists were reluctant to explore cooking and eating, linking these activities only with women's oppression" (p. 277). Indeed, for many years, domestic labors were viewed solely as a mechanism for female oppression and, as such, unworthy of study.

Within the last decade, domestic writing has migrated to the digital realm, and gained traction in the form of the food blog. And, in many ways, food blogging appears to be an antidote to this historical and hopelessly gendered devaluing. Within the food blogging community, bloggers are able to cook, bake, and digitally publish the products of their domestic toils because they *choose* to. L.M. Zoller, the blogger behind "I'll Make it Myself" writes the following:

> Perhaps once jam-making and bread-baking were once considered women's chores (with the acknowledgment of class divides), but now those tasks (hobbies?) should be a choice I have as a person who loves cooking. My love of cooking has nothing to do with the sex I was assigned or my gender

> expression. Rather, it is a testament to my love of bread and jam. And the inverse is true, too: maybe my women relatives and friends don't care about Ball jars and pectin as much as I do, but that doesn't make them automatically feminist any more than the act itself of making jam oppresses me. (2012)

And, furthermore, bloggers now have the potential to profit from this domestic labor. Some of the most successful bloggers have even been able to live off the income of this blog work, supporting their families through the sustenance created in the kitchen. Ree Drummond of *The Pioneer Woman* and Deb Perelman of *Smitten Kitchen* are great examples of this potential. With bloggers such as this in mind, some scholars are hopeful about the potential of food blogs to enable women to profit from their domestic knowledge, upending the traditional binary of women cooking in the kitchen as domestic necessity versus men cooking in professional kitchens as career. Paula Salvio (2012) has written hopefully about the gendered nature of the food blogging community:

> If we examine the blogs more closely, however, 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. (p. 38)

As noted earlier, a handful of bloggers have created successful careers through marketing their own domesticity. And, yet, these few who are able to sustain themselves through blog work are the exception rather than the rule. The larger landscape of the food blogging community evidences a very different picture. This chapter will work to explore this contradictory landscape and the way bloggers' individual identity work online plays into and, at times, exacerbates these issues. And, further, this chapter asks whether it is possible for bloggers to mitigate this devaluation of domestic labor.

A discussion of domestic labor and profit must first begin with a broad understanding of the blogging community and the norms of blog monetization.[8] A 2012 survey conducted by and published through Foodista,[9] outlines the demographics of the food blogging community. This survey, which reports on the findings of 694 respondents, suggests that profitable domestic labor may be an oxymoron. Bloggers, for the most part, are not profiting off of their blogs—or "selling, selling, selling" in the words of the commenter above. Of those food bloggers surveyed, 75 percent do not make any money from their food blogs. An additional 19.5 percent earn less than $200 per month. In fact, only the top two percent report earnings that might be considered a livable wage with blog income of more than $1000 per month.[10] According to these statistics the vast majority of bloggers are unable to support themselves or their families solely through blog income; food blogging is not a lucrative or even a viable career option for most who attempt it. Ultimately, these numbers indicate that the problem is not with readers upset at bloggers making exorbitant sums of money.

This inability to transform food labor from a hobby to a career is, for many, a frustrating realization. The problem of food blogging as hobby (read: not career) highlights a troubling tendency to devalue food-related labor, a tendency that has persisted throughout time. This issue of hobbyist versus professional also speaks to a larger tension that exists between the food blogging community and those who work as professionals within the food industry as chefs, caterers, cooks, and bakers; namely, this is a tension between differing ways of knowing. I've alluded to this tension variously throughout this project and readers will recall Chapter Five's tension in the case of Mac and the professional chef who commented on his blog. But Mac's example is just one iteration of a larger issue, a tension that is felt by professionals and bloggers alike.

In the food business professional experience is key. I spoke with Janet McCracken, the Test Kitchen Director at *Every Day with Rachael Ray*, to elicit the opinion of a food professional on this subject. McCracken has worked in the food industry for almost two decades, during which time she has worked variously as a recipe developer, food writer, and served as longtime food editor at *Bon Appétit* before landing at *Every Day with Rachael Ray*. Though McCracken acknowledged many of the upsides of being a home cook, such as the freedom to cook at one's leisure, have control of every food decision, and make spur of the moment changes, she was also critical of home cooks who choose to pursue food blogging. McCracken cited issues of lack of food knowledge, the inability to layer flavors, or get the most flavor out of each ingredient in the way that a professional chef would be trained to do through his or her time in culinary school or cooking in a restaurant (J. McCracken, personal communication, July 18, 2014). And her sentiments are certainly not unique. Lifestyle queen Martha Stewart has been quoted as saying, "…there are bloggers writing recipes that aren't tested, that aren't necessarily very good, or are copies of everything that really good editors have created and done. So bloggers create kind of a popularity, but they are not the experts" (Brion, 2013). Indeed, many food industry professionals have been openly critical of the growing food blogging community in recent years.

Within the food blogging community, participants evidence a wide range of knowledge and skills. According to the Foodista survey mentioned above, 45 percent of food bloggers have no professional background relevant to the work done within the blog. This group represents the common charge leveled at members of the food blogging community; namely, that they are amateurs and not legitimate sources of food knowledge. Though the remaining 55 percent of food bloggers claim to have professional experience in at least one relevant field,[11] it must be noted that a lack of professional experience does not necessarily indicate inexperience. Professional work is only one way of gaining experience, knowledge, and, ultimately, *ethos*. Nevertheless, American culture tends to prioritize professional experience over other ways of knowing. Many food bloggers have been cooking in a home kitchen daily for years, or even decades. Though these experiences are drastically different from those of a professional chef who attended culinary school and/or has spent years working in professional kitchens, the two experiences are valuable in their own unique ways.

This tension appears to be a rift between industry professionals and amateur hobbyists—and in many ways it is—and yet it is also unavoidably gendered. For better or worse, food professionals tend to be male, specifically those at the top of the industry, whereas food hobbyists tend to be female. Foodista reports that 84.5% of survey respondents identified as female with the remaining 15.5% identified as male. This disparity adds an additional layer of complexity to this rift, suggesting that the issue of professional versus amateur may be shaded by preexisting gender norms and expectations. Put simply, the domestic labors done by women in their own kitchens do not foster what the public perceives as authority, experience, or knowledge. Authority is created in professional settings, those places inhabited largely by men.

Our commenter, Uschi, mentioned above elicited a fairly scathing response from the blogger's husband, Thorsten, in which he identifies precisely what he believes to be the issue at hand. And, indeed, it comes quite close to the preceding discussion of gender and professionalization. I quote the crux of his argument here:

> Yet somehow bloggers…are expected to publish content for free. They are expected to do it out of the goodness of their hearts. They are expected to be magical creatures apparently living off of rainbows and hugs. Dare I say this holds true mostly for female bloggers. The moment a female blogger tries to find forms of compensation for her hard work she is chastised by a good percentage of her gender. She's selling out. On the other hand if I, as a man, were to start a tech blog, had ads from major sponsors, wrote tech books, went on paid speaking assignments, did consultations etc. I'd be considered a successful man…It speaks for the still pitiful state of female empowerment in our day and age, the biggest opponents being other females. (Becker, 2014)

Essentially, Thorsten argues, this boils down to an issue of gender expectations. And, indeed, his argument does ring true in many ways. As female food bloggers achieve success they do, indeed, often experience criticism from readers upset at attempts to turn a "hobby" into a career. The introduction of advertisement, sponsorship, or product lines all too often incite reproach and censure. However, I don't think this issue is as simple as Thorsten believes it to be. Women disparaging other women for profiting from their domesticity is certainly one possible explanation. As I embarked upon my dissertation research, however, the issue of blog monetization surfaced time and again through interviews and observations with both male and female bloggers. Bloggers who choose to engage in sponsorships or other forms of monetization *all* dealt with concerns about reader response, no matter their gender.

I do think Thorsten is on to something, though. He notes that he would most likely not face the same types of criticism if he were a tech blogger. And that's probably true. But maybe the issue is not necessarily the gender of individual bloggers but, rather, the feminized nature of the food blogging genre as a whole. Researchers Edward McQuarrie, Jessica Miller, and Barbara Phillips (2013), have found that within the fashion blogging community—a community that is similarly female-dominated—readers entered with the expectation of being consumers and expressed few qualms with sponsored posts, product lines, or other forms of monetization, viewing these forms of monetization instead as proof of a blogger's good taste. They explain their theory about why readers accept blog monetization within the fashion blog genre:

> One reason why the commercialization rampant on these fashion blogs does not produce the jarring effect found by Kozinets et al. is that authenticity, in Holt's sense of rejection of marketplace meanings, may well be more important when a blog presents itself as a personal blog, an online journal where identity work will be performed. Intrusion of marketing efforts then becomes a transgression. Successful fashion blogs instead represent a public

> display of taste, and fashion products and their brands are intrinsic rather than extrinsic to the taste asserted. The appearance of free gifts on the blogs becomes a ratification of the blogger's taste leadership, not a violation of trust. (McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips, 2013, p. 153)

Though the food blog genre does not neatly fit into the category of personal blog as online journal, it does differ markedly from the fashion genre in that its groundwork is not by necessity rooted in consumerism. The food blog seems to inhabit an uncomfortable middle ground between personal journal and commercial product. For many bloggers, the food blog is a product meant to generate income but it is simultaneously a community. And, as such, the food blog and the food blogger are particularly susceptible to the type of negative reader response Thorsten and Uschi both struggle with and against.

Though issues of gender are clearly at work here, I would suggest that they are one piece of a larger issue of community building that is more apparent in the food blogging community because it is a uniquely domestic space, one where relationships are paramount. Food blogs are typically framed in the vein of a community or friendship. Bloggers write to readers as though they are long time friends (and, in many cases, they are), sharing intimate details about their lives and their families. And readers respond in kind within the comments section. The blog in essence becomes a virtual kitchen table, crowded around with digital friends. Because blogs are not static objects but living documents that develop over a long period of time, this digital community develops and grows together, determining a shared food *ethos* amongst group members as it evolves. They are a community because they appreciate the same types of cuisine, the same cooking techniques, the same food identity. The introduction of revenue streams into this environment can be surprising or even upsetting to long-time readers, particularly when bloggers transgress the group norms that have been negotiated.

Jacqueline, *Ethos*, and the Subtleties of Cooking Oils

Allow me to illustrate this theory in relation to one of my dissertation participants: Jacqueline. Jacqueline is a savvy blogger and utilizes a number of strategies to monetize her blog including advertising, writing for other food-related websites and blogs, and, most prevalently, product and brand sponsorships. The latter of these strategies is where I will focus here today for a few reasons. First, sponsorships are Jacqueline's primary form of blog monetization. Out of the four recipe posts Jacqueline typically publishes per week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday), generally one to two of these posts feature a brand or product sponsorship. We know this because Jacqueline is careful to disclose these sponsorships at the start of each post. This is in line with the Food Blogger Code of Ethics, which stipulates that bloggers comply by a set of rules, specifically necessitating disclosure of any and all gifts, revenue, and/or other perks: *"IV. We will be transparent. We will disclose gifts, comps, samples, and financial relationships with specific businesses if we write about them*" (Burton and Greenstein, 2011, emphasis in original). Jacqueline is consistent in always disclosing any gifts received from companies, including everything from monetary sponsorships to a free box of Pom pomegranate juice. Second, this form of brand monetization is the one that causes

Jacqueline the greatest conflict, both internally and externally, and evidences the vital importance of *ethos* management within the food blogging community.

During the observation I conducted with Jacqueline we discussed the conflicts she faced in monetizing her blog, particularly through the use of sponsorships. As a full-time medical student, Jacqueline views her blog as a second full-time job. It is currently her sole source of income, though she does intend to continue blogging after graduation in addition to her work in the medical field. As such, her husband, a personal injury lawyer, is currently the primary provider at this period of time in their relationship. This background is important to keep in mind during a discussion of blog monetization. When asked about her choice to engage in sponsored posts, Jacqueline was quick to note the boundaries she has set for this practice in terms of quantity and quality. In terms of quantity, she suggested that she tries to post just one sponsored post per week, though she ruefully added that her husband would prefer that she only do sponsored posts. And, in terms of quality, Jacqueline is strategic about her sponsorships; she notes that she is “picky” about the sponsors she chooses to engage with, that she would only accept a sponsorship from a company or product she actively uses or would use in her own kitchen.

Jacqueline’s strict standards are evident in posts sponsored by such products as Quaker Oats or Pompeian Grapeseed Oil Spray, those that espouse an ideology of whole foods and clean eating that is the basis of Jacqueline’s blog. Within these posts, Jacqueline’s food identity is clear and her *ethos* is unquestioned. Take, for example, this post for Yogurt Crème Brulee, sponsored by Chobani:

> Greek yogurt is my breakfast go-to on a regular basis. It's easy, it's quick, it's high in protein, and you can pretty much adapt it to whatever flavors you're craving. But sometimes it tastes a little bit…*too* good. *Too* wholesome. *Too* playing-by-the-rules. Those days you have to dare to be different. Throw a thin even layer of sugar on top of your yogurt bowl and torch it to melty caramelized sugar bliss. And if that doesn't sound like heaven to you, we might have to reassess our best friend-ship. Really. (blog post, September 11, 2015)

Chobani is a brand that neatly fits in line with Jacqueline's food identity. Chobani's yogurt is a healthy whole food and one that she clearly eats on a regular basis, as she mentions multiple times within this single post, reaffirming its role within her food identity. And she expects this product to also be part of her readers' shared food identity. Note how she leverages yogurt as a point of group norming, as she jokes that if this food doesn't also align with readers' food identity they "might have to reassess [their] best friend-ship." Though much of this food-based community building is conveyed in a humorous way, the underlying message is one of solidarity based upon shared food ideologies. Because of this time and effort devoted towards group norming, when Jacqueline does get to her "pitch" for Chobani Greek yogurt, it is deemed acceptable despite being rather heavy-handed:

> Lately the Greek yogurt I've been reaching for to fill my breakfast needs is one from the Chobani Oats line. With 10 grams of protein and 10 grams of whole grains in every container, they are such an easy and convenient way to make

> sure I'm starting off my morning with the right kind of fuel…It's America's #1 Greek yogurt brand for a reason! (blog post, September 11, 2015)

Note the way Jacqueline's tone has shifted from her typical sarcastic and humorous tone to one that is one note, "cloyingly sweet" and reminiscent of an advertisement.

Yet her readers seem to accept these terms. Comments for this post are uniformly positive: "My fridge is full of these yogurts. I love them for breakfast," "I love crème brulee," and "I think I need a blowtorch" (blog post, September 11, 2015). It's clear that these ingredients and these techniques mesh with those of her readers. This is a sponsored post that works; one that fits neatly within the pre-established blogger *ethos* as well as the readers' shared food community. In this case, as in others like it, readers notably have no qualms with sponsorships infiltrating their food community as long as the ingredients and recipes remain in line with group norms.

Jacqueline, however, is the first to admit that she is no stranger to controversial sponsorships. During her observation, Jacqueline recalled a post sponsored by Mazola Corn Oil as an example of this struggle. The post itself offers a recipe for Swiss Chard and Artichoke Grilled Cheese on Millet Bread, a recipe that seems to be in line with Jacqueline's general culinary viewpoint. However, it is Jacqueline's forced connection between the recipe itself and the post sponsor, Mazola, that sparked the ire of her readers. Within the post, Jacqueline writes:

> Speaking of healthy eating, did you all know that February is American Heart Month? Typically I tend to try to keep my meals as heart healthy as possible by steering clear of high cholesterol/high saturated fat foods. And to that end, I almost always use olive oil in my cooking since it's full of healthy omegas as

> well as monounsaturated fat. However, olive oil isn't necessarily the best oil for all applications. It has a fairly low smoke point so for frying or cooking at a high heat/for a long period of time, it's really not the best. Recently, I was contacted by Mazola who alerted me to the awesomeness of corn oil. Corn oil is super high in polyunsaturated fat (higher actually than both olive oil and vegetable oil), which helps to lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease. In addition, it has a high smoke point so it's perfect for frying of all sorts, grilling, and, as I've used it here – bread baking! (blog post, February 20, 2013)

While this passage is fairly representative of Jacqueline's typical references to sponsored projects or brands—connecting the item or company to a clear value or benefit it offers—as the above passage shows, these transitions are not always smooth and, in fact, can often seem fairly forced. Note, for example, how Jacqueline admits that she "almost always" uses olive oil and that this item has only recently come to her attention primarily because the company contacted her for the sole purpose of offering a sponsorship. Jacqueline is advocating for a product she doesn't normally use, is not part of her normal food blogging *ethos*, and that could be perceived as nutritionally questionable. Unsurprisingly, several readers take issue with this post.

Some of these readers offer comments expressing sincere concern, like the following post: "Please be careful with the corn oil. Corn oil is very high in Omega 6. More Omega 6 than Omega 3 can be very hazardous to one's health. Thanks. Glen" (blog post, February 20, 2013). Glen's comment makes an attempt at group norming, using a kind tone and reminding Jacqueline of their shared value of healthy eating. Others more directly question Jacqueline's intentions in fully endorsing the product:

> The bread looks fabulous. I confess, though, that I'm a bit disturbed to read such a whole-hearted endorsement of corn oil on a blog which is so devoted to healthful eating. Here's a discussion of scientific studies showing the problems with corn oil…This is to say nothing about the environmental and economic implications of the corn industry…Anyway, the last thing I want is to come across as a scold or anything like that. Corn oil is *great* for frying, as you noted, but to claim it's healthy, though Mazola would love to say so, is pushing the point a bit. (blog post, February 20, 2013)

Note how this second, more strongly worded comment, again reminds Jacqueline of the norms of her own blogging community and blogger *ethos*. However, this comment also carries an underlying charge of "shill." This reader is directly questioning Jacqueline's authenticity in supporting a product with questionable health value and, moreover, describing it as a heart healthy product. Though this commenter stops short of criticizing Jacqueline's choice to engage in sponsorships altogether, this differs from the Uschi's comment only in degree, not necessarily in kind.

Jacqueline does attempt to negotiate this tension rhetorically within the space of her blog by responding to each of these commenters, offering knowledge and facts as well as engaging in community norming. For example, to the anonymous commenter mentioned above, Jacqueline writes:

> Thanks so much for your comment and the link to that article! The only thing I have to comment on is that the science article that it was based on did not use

> the proper control for their study. They claim that corn oil specifically causes this increased body mass and bone depletion but they compare it to a regular diet and not to a high fat diet rich in another type of oil, such as vegetable oil or even olive oil. I think it is pretty indisputable that eating a high fat diet causes obesity, so I'm not sure the study can really draw any conclusions about corn oil's effect specifically, at least not the way the experiments were done. I'm not saying they're wrong, just that from a science standpoint their results do not substantiate the claims that they made. I tend to not use much oil in my cooking to begin with and fully intend to stick to olive oil as my main oil of choice. (blog post, February 20, 2013)

Note that Jacqueline's response reinforces her *ethos* as a knowledgeable food professional *and* medical professional. However, in the end she ultimately reverts to broad claims that others in her community will obviously rally behind, such as avoiding oil when possible and using olive oil as her primary option. In this way, Jacqueline is able to negotiate reader criticism rhetorically within her blog. Whether consciously or not, Jacqueline recognizes the importance of appealing to readers' shared food identity, a move that serves to re-norm the community and reinforce the *ethos* she has built over time. Though Jacqueline's readers are not happy to see her tout corn oil, it's worth noting how Jacqueline is able to defuse the situation.

Jacqueline actively engages in other modes of monetization such as advertisements and writing for other websites; however, readers only respond negatively to the sponsorships, particularly those they deem a poor fit within the larger culinary *ethos* of the blog. Most of Jacqueline's sponsored posts are received by her readers without question. It is only when a community norm has been breached that readers voice dissatisfaction with Jacqueline's efforts at monetizing her blog. However, the bloggers discussed thus far in this chapter have admittedly all been female. I turn now to Mac, a male food blogger, for another perspective.

Mac, Sponsor Negotiations, and the Spice Dilemma

Mac offers an interesting foil to Jacqueline. Where Jacqueline blogs in addition to being a full-time graduate student, Mac's blog is his primary source of income. Additionally, where Jacqueline posts multiple sponsored posts per week despite her own hesitations, Mac is clearly more cautious and quite analytical about his sponsorship/revenue choices. Mac explains, haltingly, his strategy for posting to his blog:

> If I'm blogging I have to do three posts a week. . . So I do Monday and Friday and then I repost a freelance article and if I have something sponsored I like to add that. Because I feel like I don't want to rip people off by like…I think the sponsored content is just as good and unique but I don't want people to think I'm ripping them off or something by just replacing an original…even though the sponsored post is still original recipes with whole ingredients because I don't take a sponsorship from like a sauce or something. It's always going to be a whole ingredient still. But I don't know, I feel like I need to add it in addition. (personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Where Jacqueline posts recipes four times a week, intermixing sponsored and unsponsored content, Mac has a clear and intentional schedule for his blog content: original posts twice per week and sponsored content just once. Mac's internal struggle with sponsored versus non-sponsored content is clear here as he alternately reaffirms the high quality of any sponsored content on his blog while simultaneously expressing concerns of “ripping [people] off.”

This struggle might reflect Mac’s larger fear of relying on his blog as his sole source of income for the first time in his life. During the time of our interview, Mac had recently made the decision to pursue his blog as his primary career, giving up a full-time salaried job. As a new full-time blogger he acknowledges the necessary changes that come with this decision, such as increased sponsorships, while also pushing against those same changes and they power they have to change his blogging identity. Mac explains this fear, “I’m…walking a line because I get nervous about doing too much. I don’t want people to think I’m denying what I’m about. I cook from scratch but I tell people shortcuts to do, whether it’s sponsored or not” (personal communication, March 30, 2015). Note Mac’s phrasing here in explaining that he doesn’t want readers thinking he’s “denying what [he’s] about.” Essentially, Mac is expressing fears of inadvertently conveying a new and artificial identity to his readers, rather than the identity that attracted readers in the first place. Indeed, Mac is walking a thin line in this case between maintaining his blogging identity and doing what’s necessary to sustain his blog as a full-time job.

And this intentional sponsorship strategy seems to be working for Mac. Where Jacqueline’s blog evidences occasional backlash from readers, Mac has not experienced these same issues. When asked whether readers ever respond to the fact that he engages in sponsored posts, Mac responded with a simple “No. I have apologized sometimes and people have replied saying don’t” (personal communication, March 30, 2015). Despite all his concerns with sponsorships, authenticity, and blog identity, Mac, it would appear, has done something right in his cautious approach to sponsorships and his carefully curated *ethos*. Mac clearly understands the norms of this community and, by engaging only with companies that represent his established food *ethos*, Mac avoids any fall out from loyal readers. He has effectively navigated this feminized space, one that requires bloggers to prioritize community over professionalization and, ultimately, revenue.

Despite the care with which Mac engages in sponsored content, this form of monetization nevertheless remains a central issue for the blogger. The problem that emerges throughout his interview is not the expectations of Mac's blog readers but, rather, those of the companies offering sponsorships, which vary to a high degree. Mac happily details out the collaborations he's engaged in with companies such as hummus or sausage companies, products he uses on a regular basis in his own kitchen. He recalls making gnocchi and ravioli with Sabra hummus, noting:

> They're a great company. They make an excellent product. They treat me really well. And I gladly put their hummus into recipes…It's made me creative. Again, restriction is what feeds my creativity…So I was working with a sausage company and that's great because I'll write sausage recipes all day. So I don't feel like, to readers, that's betraying them in any way because I was going to post the sausage recipe already. Now I just have to say 'this sausage is good.' I make the same exact posts and then I just write at the top 'sponsored by Jones Dairy Farm.' Done. And that's it. Same post I would've posted anyways. (personal communication, March 30, 2015)

In cases such as this, sponsorship appears as an ideal arrangement, offering bloggers compensation for the blog labor they would have done anyway and simultaneously generating buzz around the products in question at a minimal price for the companies in question. However, this is sponsorship in its ideal state: blogger and company with similar food ideology mutually benefiting one another. Not all sponsorships look like this.

In fact, during our initial interview Mac described an ethical dilemma he was currently facing with one of his other sponsors. The company in question requested that Mac create a recipe and blog post using the company's spices. Mac typically makes his own spice blends at home using a mortar and pestle and, in the past, has published posts specifically instructing readers how to create spice blends at home using bulk spices purchased from ethnic food stores at a more affordable cost. Despite these differences, Mac agreed to work with the company, rationalizing that spices are a basic ingredient that his readers could easily purchase from the store of their choice. However, this sponsorship agreement quickly became problematic when the company requested that Mac delete an old post that detailed the methods to create your own spice blends for Garam Masala, All-Purpose Curry Powder, and Taco Seasoning using bulk spices.

Mac was clearly conflicted about this sponsorship. From a business standpoint, this single partnership could keep his blog afloat for months, netting $6,000 for a total of five blog posts. But from a more personal standpoint, the changes this company is requesting would require Mac to change a central component of his food identity: that is, the belief that whole ingredients—even spices—ensure the best quality food. This company has effectively made an effort to control and modify Mac's larger food *ethos*, the basis of his blog's food community. That this company asked Mac to take down a page of his blog to align himself with their mission is evidence of the more worrisome side of corporate sponsorships, the side that has moved many bloggers to speak out publicly against this form of blog monetization. Though Mac's case ended happily enough—he was able to keep his blog content and still engage in a deal with the company in question—that win could be attributed to the fact that Mac has an agent who negotiates his sponsorship deals, a rare luxury in an increasingly difficult industry.

The central problem with sponsorships, then, arises when they require bloggers to bend their identity and standards to meet the needs of the company. Unfortunately, as blogging has become a larger and more mainstream industry, sponsorships have only become more prevalent as ad revenues have dropped off, meaning this tension is one that we can only expect to increase in the future. Well-known food blogger Adam Roberts of The Amateur Gourmet has spoken out publicly on this issue, to much controversy. In fact, Mac mentioned this very post during our initial interview as evidence of the larger conversation currently happening in the blogging community surrounding blog monetization. Roberts was a popular and well-respected food blogger; however, he chose to back away from his blog, largely due to the increasing pressure to engage in sponsored blog work. Roberts reflects on his choice in a blog post:

> To make it brief, food blogging as a career (at least for me, but others too) became impossible. How so? Ad companies are no longer interested in the ads

> that you see above you right now and to the side. They're interested in the ads that get integrated into posts; the ones that so many of you have complained about me doing in the past. Sponsored content. And I reached a point, in October, where it was no longer a choice; my contract, with a guaranteed CPM (that's how much I got paid per thousand clicks) expired and, going forward, the only way I could make money was to do more sponsored posts. I told my ad company that I didn't see how this was sustainable; after a certain point, you start to lose your readers' trust. In December, I said that I didn't want to do any more sponsored posts. Last week, we parted ways…I realized I could no longer rely on food blogging to be my sole source of income…to do this full-time, you've either got to be wildly successful or you've got to be a shill. I'm not the former, for a while I was (uncomfortably) the latter, but now I have to stake out a new path as a food blogger and that's what I'm trying to figure out. (Roberts, 2015)

The struggle to stay afloat in an ever-changing digital environment is clear here, even for well-known and successful bloggers like Roberts. Blogging is a career that is hard won and, even then, requires supplementary income through side ventures such as cookbooks or deals through other media.

Both Jacqueline and Mac's experiences illustrate the constant tug-of-war bloggers must negotiate in order to carefully and deliberately manage their digital *ethos*. On one side, bloggers must appeal to the negotiated social norms of their blogging community. And on the other side, bloggers must meet the demands of sponsors in order to ensure the blog remains a viable pursuit. Negotiating these multiple audiences is a difficult task in itself; more so, when one also has to maintain a consistent message, purpose and overall food *ethos*. Though both Jacqueline and Mac have thus far been careful in their choices of sponsored content so as to remain true to their food *ethos* and virtual food community, they nevertheless encounter frequent issues as they walk the line between creating a sustainable career of their food blogs and also remaining true to their food *ethos*.

Jennie Bea and the Freedom of Blogging as Hobby

Notably absent from this chapter thus far has been any discussion of Jennie Bea and her experiences with blog monetization. This is primarily due to the fact that Jennie Bea currently makes no attempts to monetize her food blog, neither through partnerships, sponsorships, ad revenue, nor any other means. As someone still relatively new to the food blogging community it's unclear whether Jennie Bea will continue to conceive of her blog as a hobby in the future or whether she too will begin to make strides towards monetizing the food labors she carefully documents and presents within that digital space. One thing is clear, though: Jennie Bea's blogging experiences are fundamentally different from those of Jacqueline or Mac primarily because of this key difference. When asked about her least favorite part of food blogging Jennie Bea notes her photography skills, which she considers rather amateur, and the guilt that comes when she doesn't post frequently enough (at least weekly). However, these are complaints that might be made by any hobbyist, regardless of the hobby.

Jacqueline and Mac's responses to this same question are notably longer and more detailed, noting issues with feelings of jealousy towards bloggers who receive cookbook deals, lucrative partnerships, greater ad revenue, more page views, or even perks such as sponsored trips. It would seem that the problem of monetizing a blog does not end with charges of shill. Bloggers must not only contend with resistance from readers as they attempt to profit from these domestic labors, but they must also do so in a harshly competitive environment. The food blogging community is notably overpopulated with new bloggers jumping into the ring every day. As such, it becomes increasingly difficult for bloggers, particularly those new to the scene, to stake their ground in this industry. There will always be a blogger with better photography, more eloquent writing, more inventive recipes. The new challenge for those in the food blogging community is to negotiate the tension between monetizing their work and remaining "authentic."

These investigations into blogger monetization reveal the gaps in the literature surrounding professional identity management online. Though many of the scholars mentioned in the review of literature in Chapter Two have paved the way for a better understanding of digital *ethos*, these issues have become increasingly complex as more professionals strike out to create a professional life online. Food bloggers, perhaps more so than most other professions, are particularly sensitive to these struggles as they also navigate digital *ethos* management as well as the complex issues of professionalizing domestic labor.

For blog readers the frustration is clear. Understanding a blogger's identity as dynamic and evolving can prove difficult enough without the added complication of deciphering where an individual's identity ends and his or her sponsors begin. Yes, bloggers abiding by the Food Blogger Code of Ethics must reveal their sponsorships and partnerships. However, if this is the only glimpse readers catch of the complex inner workings of monetizing a food blog, it is unsurprising that they may react negatively towards these "advertisements" that suddenly infiltrate what otherwise feels like a digital friendship or community. Rhetorical scholar Ceren Sozeri (2013) has addressed a similar issue in relation to user-generated content featured within mainstream media sources such as CNN, NBC, The New York Times, and The Guardian. When the clear line between publisher and reader or, in this case sponsor and blogger, is breached, credibility and digital *ethos* are immediately called into question, resulting in wary readers and compromised trust.

As more bloggers gain fame both within and outside of their blogging communities, we must recognize the many interesting and, at times, problematic ways in which they are increasingly bridging the gap between citizen and journalist. Denveater argues:

> Refreshing as the offhand, wants-and-all approach can be compared to the more explicitly informational orientation of traditional media, the temptation in the absence of editors and fact-checkers to equate one's own stream of consciousness with honesty—and to assume in turn that what's honest is fair—is as strong as it is treacherous" (2009, p. 46)

This liability hanging over the head of the blogger—that anything said can have serious consequences—coupled with the common use of ads to generate revenue can compromise the integrity of the blog and the blogger herself. Essentially, Denveater worries that food blogs (and blogs in general) carry all the liability of traditional journalism outlets, which might be influenced and/or corrupted by sponsors, as well as the liability of new media…those that exist independently, without others to check the veracity of the message or the blogger.

Bloggers who hope to overcome these issues will have to work to be more transparent, not only in terms of the sponsorships and partnerships they engage in but also why they engage in these types of revenue-generating activities and why domestic labor must be valued. Food bloggers have the enormous task of overcoming the long-term gendered devaluing that surrounds domestic labor; however, both Jacqueline and Mac are evidence that progress is possible and, in fact, food bloggers have seen some success in navigating this complex digital space. The following chapter, Chapter Seven, will extend upon the ideas discussed in this chapter as well as the previous two analysis chapters, drawing a few overarching conclusions about digital identity management within the food blogging community.

Chapter Seven
The Importance of the Extracurriculum and Digital Identity as Dynamic Event

As I close, I return to an earlier discussion of case study methodology, introduced in the Research Methods chapter. There I quoted Robert Stake (2000) who suggested that "case content evolves even in the last phases of writing" (441) due to the constant interaction between researcher and participant as well as the active meaning making process that occurs during these interactions. I have found this to be true, painfully so at times, as my project comes to a close. Though my face-to-face interactions with my participants were limited to only two or three meetings, I found that their digital presences (which were updated weekly or, in some cases, daily) continued to expand and complicate my findings and interpretations.

As I followed along with my participants' blog updates, I have continually discovered additional content to pique my scholarly interest. Jennie Bea recently became a realtor and has built an addition to her food blog that now houses her professional information, effectively making her blog a dual-purpose space. Jacqueline is rapidly approaching her due date and will welcome her first child—a baby girl—into the family soon. How this major life change will impact the digital identity she has created and so carefully honed over time will be a fascinating development. And Mac recently signed a contract for his second book, which will be all about tater tots. It will be an exciting time for Mac as he dives into that upcoming project.

These frequent digital updates have had two different impacts on me. As a food lover and blog geek, I've been thrilled that these people I've had the pleasure to work with are in the midst of such wonderful life changes and I'm excited to watch these changes unfold. As a researcher, however, I wish I had more time. I regret that my project is coming to a close as so many life-changing (and identity-shaping) moments are just beginning. These changes—and others like them—have functioned to keep my analysis in a constant state of flux. And, though this process has been exciting, it's time to step away from the data and stop forestalling my conclusions. So, because I must, I offer a few conclusions.

The case studies in this project have touched upon a number of strategies used by bloggers as they create, manage, and hone identity within the digital environment of the food blogging community. In terms of self-disclosure, community building, and monetization, each of the three bloggers in this study has evidenced his or her own unique approach to digital identity management. These case studies offer up some specific insights into the complex inner workings of this digital community and suggest numerous paths for future research. I want to focus here on two key conclusions gathered from this research. First, these case studies suggest that we must reframe our current understanding of digital identity work and, in that vein, I propose a model for conceiving of digital identity as a dynamic event, one that is unavoidably dynamic, recursive, and communal. And, second, I suggest that the blogging community might be viewed as what Anne Ruggles Gere (1994) terms an "extracurriculum." This term might help us better understand the role of professionalism and *ethos* in this digital genre and offer an ideal of what the blogging community could be.

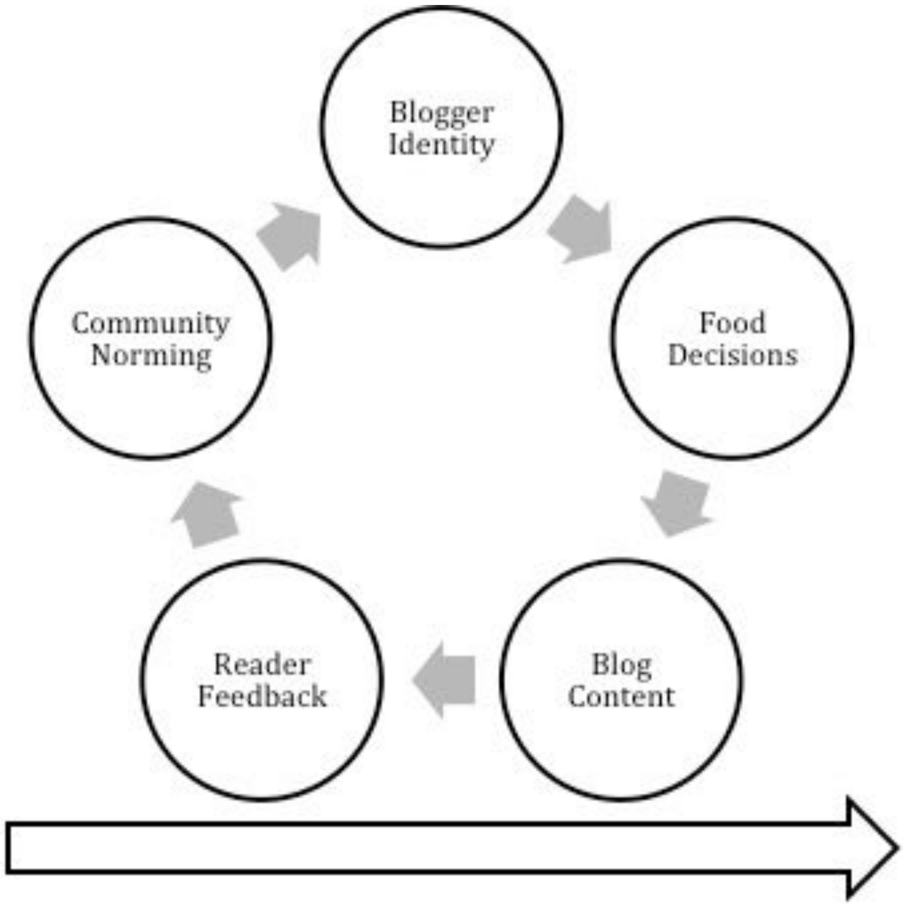
Digital Identity as Dynamic Event

As noted above, this research suggests that digital identity might be more accurately conceived of as a dynamic event. Each word in that description—dynamic and event—holds great meaning for rhetorical scholars attempting to better understand identity work in digital spaces. First, I refer to digital identity as an "event." This conclusion, taken alone, is not revelatory. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd (2004) first referred to digital identity work as an "ongoing event" in their article, "Blogging as social action: A genre analysis of the weblog." Indeed, in the blog and, as I will argue later in this chapter, perhaps also in a number of other digital genres, identity work is a long-term activity. For the bloggers in this study, digital identity has been actively created and recreated over the span of years and, in some cases, the better part of a decade. As such, digital identity cannot be expected to remain static or stationary. The identity performed on the blog evolves just as the blogger evolves, sometimes slowly and sometimes in leaps and bounds but always a moving target. Pointing to digital identity in one individual post is much like pointing to identity on one individual day: it is a useful snapshot but must not be assumed reflective of the larger entity. As such, the blog taken as a whole must be considered as an event, one that is still actively taking place.

This brings us to the second term: "dynamic." Just as digital identity cannot be fully understood based upon a small slice of the whole, it can also not be understood in isolation. Rather, digital identity must continually be referenced against the surrounding digital community, which, in the case of the food blog, includes readers, other bloggers, and corporate partners. Perhaps one of the most vital features of the blog as a genre is the ability for others to "comment" back. The blog *community* is such because readers are offered the chance to comment on blogs, engaging both the author and other readers in conversation, debate, and, sometimes, arguments. This communal aspect of the blog allows readers, bloggers, and casual visitors to bring their own set of expectations to the blog, expectations that are reinforced through the comments and that function to reinforce or destabilize the blogger's current identity performance. In this way, the interactive nature of the blog offers a continuous feedback loop, rendering the reader a vital component of bloggers' identity negotiations.

In analyzing digital identity as a dynamic event, then, issues of community and time must be considered in relation to one another (as shows in Figure 2 on the following page). The circular model represented in Figure 2 illustrates the community-based nature of digital identity formation and management, specifically as it applies to the food blogging community. The blogger identity determines the food that is created and the subsequent blog content. Then, readers offer their feedback through views, comments, and shares. This feedback functions as a moment of community norming which serves to either reinforce the digital food identity that has been conveyed or, in some circumstances, censor or correct perceived transgressions. This community norming feeds back into the existing blogger identity, reinforcing that identity or offering corrective feedback. As depicted by the arrow at the bottom of Figure 2, this process is recursive and perpetually repeating over time. Identity negotiation occurs with each blog post, as identity is continually refined, revised, and negotiated. And, moreover, as this process continues with a group of devoted long-term readers, identity becomes increasingly determined with less room for experimentation and exploration.

Figure 2:



Allow me to apply this model back to the case study participants discussed throughout this project. For long-time blogger Jacqueline, digital identity has been developed and refined over the span of several years, allowing readers to have a voice in determining expectations. Longtime readers, then, become an active part of *ethos* management, serving to reinforce norms and, when necessary, draw attention to transgressions as they did in the case of Jacqueline's corn oil post (mentioned in the Chapter Six). As blogger and readers together settle upon a mutually satisfactory food *ethos*, that *ethos* becomes increasingly determined, with less room for food experimentation. At the outset of Jacqueline's blog, for example, she would often explore various culinary styles, even featuring a recurring Red Meat Mondays post.

Eight years later, within the context of what is now a vegetarian (and, increasingly, vegan) blog, such a post would transgress the norms of her food *ethos* and would undoubtedly draw negative feedback from longtime readers. In fact, even the choice to use corn oil as opposed to olive oil or grapeseed oil incited readers to take issue and re-norm community expectations and, ultimately, Jacqueline's digital food *ethos*.

The model proposed above suggests that bloggers must contend with decreased autonomy over long periods of time, as readers come to expect certain ingredients, techniques, and cuisines from the blogs they consume. Rhetorical scholars, then, must consider not only the primary author of any one digital text but also the surrounding digital community, as identity is the product of months or even years of community negotiations. These findings have the possibility to complicate future investigations into digital identity creation in a variety of genres and also to add depth to future research in exciting and complex ways.

The Blog as Extracurriculum and the Case for the Amateur Professional

In 1994, Anne Ruggles Gere made the case for amateurs writing in the "extracurriculum"—the spaces and situations beyond the classroom in which people work to improve their writing. Her work was an important moment in the field of composition, reinforcing the value of the cognitive work done in the extracurriculum and suggesting it be awarded a more prominent place in our discourse. Gere explains, "We can also learn to value the amateur. The culture of professionalism, with its emphasis on specialization, abhors amateurism, but composition's extracurriculum shows the importance of learning from amateurs" (1994, p. 88). In many ways, Gere's quote—offered well before the creation of the blog and long before its explosion of popularity—seems to forecast the same issues this group would later encounter. Though Gere was advocating for the value of extracurricular writing communities, her words function on two levels for those in the food blogging community, referencing both the extracurricular writing community as well as the extracurricular food community.

In the case of both writing and food, one can identify a clear tendency to devalue and disregard the labors of the amateur and, in the case of food specifically, that amateur/professional divide is also clearly gendered in worrisome ways. Massimo Montanari (2004) discusses this problematic divide:

> …in the industrialized countries, culinary activity tends to forsake the domestic domain to become a profession practiced in the public arena of restaurants. In this new dimension, cooking tends to change genders, becoming no longer a female domestic activity but a profession exercised principally by men. (p. 33)

Montanari's work is now dated, first published in 1949. Troublingly, his words hold true today just as they did in 1949. A quick review of some of the world's top chefs (names such as Rene Redzepi, Thomas Keller, Alain Ducasse, Daniel Boulud, David Chang) always succeeds in producing long lists of male names. Though some female chefs have also risen to great acclaim (Michelle Bernstein, April Bloomfield, and Anita Lo, to name a few), the group is notably smaller and that disparity is indicative of the larger demographic of professional chefs.[12]

However, the work (whether domestic, culinary, intellectual, or otherwise) that is happening in the personal kitchen *and* in the food blogging community is just that…work. Legitimate labor happening outside of the traditional venues, in an extracurricular space. For that labor to succeed over time and, indeed, succeed to the point of being a viable career is a win not only for the blogger but also for the food blogging community at large. To value the work being done in the food blog is to value domestic labors that occur outside of the professional kitchen and, ultimately, to make strides toward dismantling the gendered hierarchy that has developed within the world of food.

As noted in previous chapters, Paula Salvio (2012) has written optimistically about the power of food blogs to enact this type of gendered revolution. She notes that many female bloggers do make progress by bridging the gap between the private home sphere and the social sphere, even earning a living through their domestic capabilities. Though I'm dubious about the reality of the grand claims Salvio makes here, I do agree that the food blogging community functions as an important venue for domestic empowerment through writing.

The food blogging community has made great strides in recent years and the bloggers in this study are evidence of that progress. Jacqueline, for example, has carefully negotiated a position from which she is able to generate modest income for her domestic labors while still maintaining an active and supportive food community. She is careful and thoughtful in her monetization strategies, keeping in mind the expectations of her food community so as to balance the needs of all. However, her success is a continual balancing act. Bloggers such as Jacqueline must continually negotiate the difficult balance of this digital space that is neither purely professional nor purely community. Rather, the food blogging community exists in many ways as an extracurricular space: one built upon community and a mutual love of food but with the potential to upend traditional conceptions of amateur and professional, an environment with the power to transform domestic labor into a legitimate and viable career path *outside* of the professional kitchen. In Gere's words, it is a place where we can "learn to value the amateur." As such, the food blogging community is an environment with great potential. As women continue making in the food blogging community—making cakes, making blog posts, making revenue—they're also making the case for the amateur professional.

A Brief Aside Regarding the Rhetorical Power of Food

Though less central to this particular study of digital identity management practices within the food blogging community, the rhetorical power of individual food choices cannot be overstated. In the case of the food blogging community, digital identity is heavily influenced by bloggers' food decisions. Within each of these case studies, food choices were deeply embedded with values and meaning that held great significance to those within the immediate food community. As such, every food choice carried with it a host of hidden meanings, which might be invisible to casual blog visitors but served to reinforce of dismantle the values of the immediate food community. As mentioned above, this research reinforces the rhetorical power of individual food decisions.

While food identity is typically studied on the macro level, looking at broad food cultures, rhetorical scholars can gain insight into specific values and morals by looking at food identity on an individual level. In the case of Jacqueline, for example, food *ethos* was determined down to the level of cooking oil used by participants, a decision that reinforced values of healthfulness. Likewise, in the case of Mac, food *ethos* included decisions about where to source spices, decisions that reinforce values of affordability and the importance of using whole ingredients, even grinding one's own cumin. And for Jennie Bea, whose food community largely consists of family and close friends, simple ingredients such as potatoes are embedded with deep family history tracing back several generations. Within the food blogging community, these rhetorical cues carry immense weight in assessing digital *ethos*.

This study discusses the rhetoric of food at various points throughout several different chapters; however, there is a need for further analysis of food rhetoric and food discourse. As noted elsewhere in this project, research in the field of rhetoric and composition has only touched the surface of this area. This project offers numerous points of entry for future research.

Research Limitations

The bloggers in this study are representative of the larger blogging community in many ways. They represent a wide range of education and work experience, live in diverse locations, have drastically different levels of experience within the food blogging community, and go about blogging with different goals (as a hobby versus a profession). Though it's tempting to generalize these findings to the larger food blogging community, it's important to remember that generalizability is not the goal of case study methodology. As noted in Chapter Three, the value of a case study methodology lies not in its ability for broadly generalizable conclusions but, rather, in its ability for detailed and descriptive accounts of individual experiences (Newkirk, 1992, p. 132). These case studies are not meant to be representative of the larger food blogging community; rather, the goal is to offer detailed insight into the ways these specific food bloggers enact and negotiate their own personal digital identities. And, in many ways, I believe that goal has been accomplished. However, the limitations of this project must be acknowledged.

First, this study is limited by participants who, in some ways, represent only a narrow segment of the larger blogging community. All three of the participants in this study are white. All three have at least a college degree and, in the cases of Jennie Bea and Jacqueline, several advanced degrees. All three are fairly young, in the 25-34 age group. And, though these similarities in some ways line up with the demographics of the larger food blogging community,[13] they also limit this research to specific ways of knowing and being in online communities. Future research will need to be done to determine whether the identity management strategies and patterns evidenced here are indicative of the larger food blogging community or, perhaps, a particular demographic of bloggers.

Second, though this study strived for specificity and detail, there is certainly value in generalizability. With this initial study serving as a starting point, a much broader study would need to be conducted to determine whether these findings are consistent throughout the larger food blogging community. These findings suggest a starting point for future studies, a model to assess individual identity creation in the food blogging community and to better understand the functions of community and time in that process. Additionally, more work must be done to determine whether these trends are consistent across the larger blogging community (well beyond the niche of the food blog).

Potential Applications

Further, these findings also lead to larger questions about identity formation and management within the larger blogging community, within other blogging platforms such as Tumblr, or even within other digital spaces such as social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest. The digital identity model developed and explained in this chapter could be equally useful in assessing digital identity as it exists in these various other digital media as well. Better understanding digital identity as it manifests in other digital communities would be useful for rhetorical scholars, yes, but it also has the potential for a broader appeal.

For example, a thorough understanding of digital identity management practices would be useful for today's college students, many of whom will be entering the workforce and taking jobs where digital content management is one of the central responsibilities. These students may struggle to fulfill this task without a solid understanding of the various audiences, purposes, and expectations at play here. Reinforcing these skills could be an incredibly useful piece of any digital writing or business communication course. And, similarly, these skills also encourage students to reflect on their own digital identity work, assessing the persona they have created and working to manage that persona with more attention and intention in the future. Ultimately, this project advocates for greater awareness regarding the ways all writers rhetorically craft their identities—and *ethos*—online. Bloggers, composition instructors, and students can all benefit from a more intentional approach to their own digital identities and this project offers a framework for approaching this new and dynamic challenge.

"Food Is Not Small Talk"

As I conclude this project, I return to a quote from Jennie Bea about why writing—and, specifically, writing about food—matters to her:

> I think I've learned over the past few years that food is…my language and, as crazy as that sounds, I think that's why I wanted to do this [blog] as well. It's a way for me to communicate in another way and I feel pretty confident in my writing skills and my written communication…I'm not a small talker communicator. I don't like small talk. And I think food is not small talk. I think it's impactful and meaningful and…I think that that's why I gravitate towards it. (personal communication, October 13, 2014)

Indeed, food is not small talk and, equally, neither is the rhetorical work of the blog. Both contain the potential to convey much about us as writers, as consumers, and as individuals in the digital age.

Appendix: Interview Script

Demographic Information:

- Preferred blogger pseudonym:
- Date/Place of interview:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Race/Ethnicity:
- Currently resides in:
- Family status:
- Other responsibilities (including paid employment, schoolwork, or other organizations/affiliations):

Cooking/Food:

- Tell me about your earliest memories of cooking.
- What path brought you to food blogging?
- How would you rate your level of knowledge in the kitchen on a scale of 1-10?
- How did you gain most of your culinary knowledge?
- What is your inspiration for recipes? How do you come up with new recipes?
- Do you tend to gravitate towards specific foods or techniques? Explain.
- Are there any foods or techniques you avoid? Explain.
- Which of your recipes is your favorite? Which is the most “you”?
    - Follow-up: What does this recipe say about you?

Blogging/Writing:

- Tell me a little about how your food blog has developed over time.
- What do you enjoy about food blogging? What do you dislike about blogging?
- What are your cooking and blogging routines/schedule?
- How has your readership changed/evolved over time?
- How would you characterize the food photography on your site?

Identity:

- Tell me about the readers on your blog.
- How does “you” on your blog relate to “you” in real life?
- How would you describe the food you post on your blog?
    - What do you think your food says about you?

Are there any other questions you expected me to ask?
Any other topics you’d like to discuss further?
Is there something you’ve never told anyone about this process?

Footnotes

[1] Montanari here, whether unwittingly or not, sets up a hierarchy between the oral and written tradition. Though Montanari makes this distinction to underline the importance of a written culinary tradition in tracing the history of food culture, it must be noted that this in no way suggests that oral food traditions are any less rich or complex.

[2] Though it's difficult to quantify how many blogs are currently in existence, various reports estimate that the number is currently between 150-200 million, a far cry from Blood's 1999 list.

[3] Blogger was started in August 1999.

[4] Miller credits Aristotle's work on ethopoeia for doing three things. First, he argued that all rhetors are engaged in ethopoeia, not just those composing for another. Second, he recognized that *ethos* is an continual and ongoing event. And, third, he suggested that ethopoeia must be covert to be effective. (Miller, 75)

[5] Note: Here and through the remainder of this project, quotes from participant blogs will be copied verbatim. As such, I've left colloquial spellings and other "errors" as is. I believe these decisions are reflective of the blogger and his or her digital identity choices and, therefore, I've left them to preserve the integrity of that identity.

[6] Though each recipe round-up has its own unique guidelines and expectations the general format is as follows: the recipe round-up coordinator (typically a blogger who is attempting to foster a bit of community) offers a prompt asking bloggers to develop a recipe around a central theme, cuisine, ingredient, etc. Bloggers who wish to participate compose a dish in response to the prompt and then alert the coordinator, who links all participants via a blog post. Recipe round-ups may have a few participants or several dozen and can serve as an effective means for bloggers to increase readership.

[7] This passage may require a bit of transcribing. Here, Mac has coined his own term, "non-sence(tance)." The word, aside from the misspellings, is a mashup of two words, nonsense and sentence, to describe the content of the chef's letter. It's fitting that Mac has chosen to respond in this way as his culinary style is most notable for his tendency to combine two seemingly disparate foods, as exemplified by this post for mac and cheese stuffed burgers. However, in this case the word mashup might be more confusing than helpful for readers.

[8] When I use the term "blog monetization," I am referring to any number of strategies that bloggers typically use to generate income, such as advertisements, product or brand sponsorships, creating and selling products and/or cookbooks, and writing for other food media. Not all bloggers attempt to monetize their blogs and not all bloggers use all of these methods; however, certain strategies are more prevalent than others and more contentious than others. Product and brand sponsorships emerged as a

repeated theme throughout several interviews as a point on continual tension for both Mac and Jacqueline, which is why I focus primarily on that form of blog monetization within this chapter. However, there is an opportunity for future research to also explore other forms of blog monetization and the impact they have on blogger *ethos.*

[9] Foodista is a popular food-focused website and digital community. They host the annual International Food Blogging Conference and, in 2012, surveyed their broad network of food bloggers to draw a fuller picture of the community. Their results, titled The State of Food Blogging Survey Results, were published online and are available at http://www.foodista.com/static/foodblogging-report.

[10] It is worth noting here that not every food blogger desires or needs to earn a profit through blogging. Many bloggers may see blogging as nothing more than a hobby and, as such, do not work to generate income through it. However, it is not clear from these statistics how many bloggers try unsuccessfully to generate a profit through food blogging and how many simply do not attempt to generate income through this outlet.

[11] According to Foodista, these 55 perfect of food bloggers reflect experience in a wide variety of industries, including professional work in the food or drink industries, food service, writing, editing, or marketing.

[12] According to a 2010 study by the US Department of Labor, food professionals tend to be male, specifically those at the top of the industry, where 81% of top chefs are male and 19% are female. In their recent book, *Taking the Heat: Women Chefs and Gender Inequality in the Professional Kitchen*, Deborah Harris and Patti Giuffre (2015) detail out some of the effects of this imbalance: "Over the past six years, the prestigious James Beard Foundation has presented 84 awards for excellence as a chef, but only 19 were given to women. Likewise, *Food and Wine* magazine has recognized the talent of 110 chefs on its annual "Best New Chef" list since 2000, and to date, only 16 women have been included." Moreover, the gender pay gap in this field is considerable, with female executive chefs earning $18,000 less than their male counterparts on average, according to a 2011 American Culinary Federation Salary Study.

[13] According to Foodista's State of Food Blogging Survey, 40% of food bloggers are between the ages of 25 and 34. Though the survey, unfortunately, doesn't track statistics relating to race or ethnicity, anecdotal evidence suggests that it is a white-dominated field.

Bibliography

2011 ACF Salary Study. *American Culinary Federation*. Retrieved from http://www.acfchefs.org/ACF/Resources/Salary/Survey/ACF/Resources/Salary/Survey/. Accessed 11 March 2016.

Aristotle (2013). *On the Soul* [Waxkeep Publishing version]. Retrieved from Apple iBooks.

Armendariz, Matt (2012). *Focus on Food Photography for Bloggers.* Burlington, MA: Focal Press.

Avakian, Arlene (2014). Cooking up lives: Feminist food memoirs. *Feminist Studies*, 40(2), 277-303.

Bargh, John A., Katelyn Y. A. McKenna, and Grainne M. Fitzsimons (2002). Can you see the real me? Activation and expression of the 'true self' on the internet. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58(1), 33-48.

Baudrillard, Jean (1994). *Simulacra and Simulations*. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P. (Original work published 1981)

Becker, Holly (18 July 2014). Can full-time bloggers live off of rainbows + hugs? *Decor8*. Retrieved from http://decor8blog.com/2014/07/18/can-full-time-bloggers-live-off-of-rainbows-hugs/. Accessed 11 March 2016.

Blood, Rebecca (2000, September 7). Weblogs: A history and perspective [Blog post]. Retrieved from http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html. Accessed 11 March 2016.

Bloom, Lynn (2008). Consuming prose: The delectable rhetoric of food writing. *College English*, 70(4), 346-362.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1984). *A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

Brillat-Savarin, Jean Anthelme (2009). *The Physiology of Taste*. (Fayette Robinson, Trans.). Merchant Books. (Original work published 1825)

Brion, Raphael (15 October 2013). Martha Stewart on Gwyneth Paltrow: I started this whole category of lifestyle. *Eater.* Retrieved from http://www.eater.com/2013/10/15/6351805/martha-stewart-on-gwyneth-paltrow-i-started-this-whole-category-of. Accessed 11 March 2016.

Brooke, Collin (2000). Forgetting to be (post)human: Media and memory in a kairotic age. *JAC*, 20(4), 775-795.

Brooke, Collin (2005). Weblogs as deictic systems: Centripetal, centrifugal, and small-world blogging. *Computers & Composition Online*, Fall.

Burton, Brooke and Leah Greenstein (28 August 2011). Food blogger code of ethics 2.0. *Food Blog Code of Ethics*. Retrieved from https://foodethics.wordpress.com. Accessed 11 March 2016.

Cairns, Kate, Josee Johnston, and Shyon Baumann (2010). Caring about food: Doing gender in the foodie kitchen. *Gender & Society,* 24(5), 591-615.

Cognard-Black, Jennifer and Melissa Goldthwaite (2008). Books that cook: Teaching food and food literature in the English classroom. *College English*, 70(4), 421-436.

Cresswell, John (2009). *Research Design.* Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Dalby, Andrew (2003). *Food in the Ancient World From A-Z.* London: Routledge.

Davies, Julia (2007). Display, identity and the everyday: Self-presentation through online image sharing. *Discourse*, 28(4), 549-564.

Davis, Katie, Scott Seider, and Howard Gardner (2008). When false representations ring true (and when they don't). *Social Research*, 75(4), 1085-1108).

de Certeau, Michel (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, CA: U of California P.

de Certeau, Michel, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol (1998). *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Vol. 2: Living and Cooking). Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.

Denveater (2009). The virtual roundtable: Food blogging as citizen journalism. *World Literature Today*, 83(1), 42-46.

Dujardin, Helen (2011). *Plate to Pixel: Digital Food Photography & Styling.* Indianapolis, IN: Wiley Publishing.

Edbauer, Jenny (2005). Unframing models of public distribution: From rhetorical situation to rhetorical ecologies. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 35(4), 5-24.

Friedan, Betty (1997). *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Norton.

Frobish, Todd (2012). On pixels, perceptions, and personae: Towards a model of online ethos. In Moe Folk and Shawn Apostel (Eds.), *Online Credibility and Digital Ethos: Evaluating Computer-Mediated Communication* (1-23). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Gere, Anne Ruggles (1994). Kitchen tables and rented rooms: The extracurriculum of composition. *College Composition and Communication*, 45(1), 75-92.

Gibbons, Ann (2013). The evolution of diet. *National Geographic*. Retrieved from http://www.nationalgeographic.com/foodfeatures/evolution-of-diet/. Accessed 11 March 2016.

Grabill, Jeffrey T. and Stacey Pigg (2012). Messy rhetoric: Identity performance as rhetorical agency in online public forums. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly,* 42(2), 99-119.

Gurak, Laura and Smiljana Antonijevic (2008). The psychology of blogging: You, me, and everyone in between. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 52(1), 60-68.

Harris, Deborah A. And Patti Giuffre (2015). *Taking the Heat: Women Chefs and Gender Inequality win the Professional Kitchen*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP.

Heatherington, Tracy (2001). In the rustic kitchen: Real talk and reciprocity. *Ethnology*, 40(4), 329-345.

Heinz, Bettina, and Ronald Lee (1998). Getting down to the meat: The symbolic construction of meat consumption. *Communication Studies*, 49(1), 86-99.

Jacob, Dianne (2015). *Will Write for Food: The Complete Guide to Writing Cookbooks, Blogs, Memoir, Recipes, and More.* Boston, MA: Da Capo Press.

Jurafsky, Dan (2014). *The Language of Food: A Linguist Reads the Menu.* New York: Norton.

Johnston, Josee and Shyon Baumann (2010). *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape.* New York: Routledge.

Keighren, Jon (2009). Oldest English recipes cooked up at John Rylands. *The University of Manchester.* Retrieved from http://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/oldest-english-recipes-cooked-up-at-john-rylands. Accessed 11 March 2016.

Kolko, Beth, and Elizabeth Reid (1998). Dissolution and fragmentation: Problems in on-line communities. In Steven G. Jones (Ed.), *Cybersociety 2.0* (212-229). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Leonardi, Susan (1989). Recipes for reading: Summer pasta, lobster a la riseholme, and key lime pie. *PMLA*, 104(3), 340-347.

Meneley, Anne (2004). Virgin olive oil and slow food. *Anthropologica*, 46(2), 165-176.

McQuarrie, Edward F., Jessica Miller, and Barbara J. Phillips (2013). The megaphone effect: Taste and audience in fashion blogging. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(1), 136-158.

Miller, Carolyn (2003). Writing in a culture of simulation: Ethos online. In Martin Nystrand and John Duffy (Eds.), *Towards a Rhetoric of Everyday Life* (58-83). Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P.

Miller, Carolyn and Dawn Shepherd (2004). Blogging as social action: A genre analysis of the weblog. *University of Minnesota*, 1-21. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, http://hdl.handle.net/11299/172818. Accessed 11 March 2016.

Mintz, Sidney and Christine Du Bois (2002). The anthropology of food and eating. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31, 99-119.

Montanari, Massimo (2004). *Food is Culture*. (Albert Sonnenfeld, Trans.). New York: Columbia UP.

Myrhold, Nathan (2011). The art in gastronomy: A modernist perspective. *Gastronomica*, 11(1), 13-23.

Nelson, Jennie (1990). That was an easy assignment: Examining how students interpret academic writing tasks. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 24(4), 362-396.

Newkirk, Thomas (1992). The narrative roots of case study. In Gesa Kirsch and Patricia Sullivan (Eds.), *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research* (130-152). Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP.

Nontraditional Occupations of Employed Women in 2010 (August 2010). *U.S. Department of Labor*. Retrieved from http://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/NontraJobs_2010.htm. Accessed 11 March 2016.

Nowacek, David, and Rebecca Nowacek (2008). The organic foods system: Its discursive achievements and prospects. *College English*, 70(4), 403-420.

Nystrand, Martin and John Duffy (2003). *Towards a Rhetoric of Everyday Life.* Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P.

Parks-Whitfield, Alison (2012). *Food Styling and Photography for Dummies.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Press.

Pietrykowski, Bruce (2004). You are what you eat: The social economy of the slow food movement. *Review of Social Economy*, 62(3), 307-321.

Rettberg, Jill W. (2008). *Blogging*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.

Roberts, Adam (4 March 2015). What's going on with food blogging? *The Amateur Gourmet.* Retrieved from http://www.amateurgourmet.com/2015/03/whats-going-on-with-food-blogging.html#more-16062. Accessed 11 March 2016.

Rousseau, Signe (2012). *Food and Social Media: You are What You Tweet.* Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Salvio, Paula M. (2012). Dishing it out: Food blogs and post-feminist domesticity. *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, 12(3), 31-39.

Senyei, Kelly (2012). *Food Blogging for Dummies.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Press.

Siibak, Andra (2009). Constructing the self through the photo selection: Visual impression management on social networking websites. *Cyberpsychology*, 3(1), article 1.

Sindoni, Maria Grazia (2013). *Spoken and Written Discourse in Online Interactions: A Multimodal Approach.* New York: Routledge.

Sozeri, Ceran (2013). Ethical challenges for user-generated content publishing: Comparing public service media and commercial media. In Moe Folk and Shawn Apostle (Eds.), *Online Credibility and Digital Ethos: Evaluating Computer-Mediated Communication* (302-315). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Stake, Robert (2000). Case studies. In Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (435-454). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Stern, Susannah (2008). Producing sites, exploring identities: Youth online authorship. In David Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media* (95-118). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Strano, Michele M. (2008). User descriptions and interpretations of self-presentation through Facebook profile images. *Cyberpsychology*, 2(2), article 5.

Sullivan, Patricia and James E. Porter (1997). *Opening Spaces: Writing Technologies and Critical Research Practices*. Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.

Syverson, Margaret (1999). *The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP.

"The State of Food Blogging Survey Results." *Foodista*, n.d. Web. 8 February 2016.

Turkle, Sherry (1995). *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Turnley, Melinda (2011). Towards a mediological method: A framework for critically engaging dimensions of a medium. *Computers and Composition*, 28(2), 126-144.

Van Der Heide, Brandon, Jonathan D. D'Angelo, and Erin M. Schumaker (2012). The effects of verbal versus photographic self-presentation on impression formation in Facebook. *Journal of Communication*, 62(1), 98-116.

van der Veen, Marijke (2003). When is food a luxury? *World Archaeology*, 34(3), 405-427.

Walther, Joseph B., Celeste L. Slovacek, and Lisa C. Tidwell (2001). Is a picture worth a thousand words? Photographic images in long-term and short-term computer-mediated communication. *Communication Research*, 28(1), 105-134.

Waxman, Barbara (2008). Food memoirs: What they are, why they are popular, and why they belong in the literature classroom. *College English*, 70(4), 363-383.

White-Farnham, Jamie (2012). Rhetorical recipes: Women's literacies in and out of the kitchen. *Community Literacy Journal*, 6(2), 23-41.

Williams, Bronwyn (2008). 'What *South Park* character are you?': Popular culture, literacy, and online performances of identity. *Computers and Composition*, 25(1), 24-39.

Yin, Robert (2009). *Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Zappen, James (2005). Digital rhetoric: Toward an integrated theory. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 14(3), 319-325.

Zoller, L.M. "The Jam of Oppression? Feminism, 'New Domesticity,' and Gender-Neutral Home Cooking." *I'll Make It Myself*, 22 August 2012. Web. 8 February 2016.