Eating Ourselves Into Being: Navigating Identity Through Queer Foodways

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Abstract

Queerness, along axes of both gender and sexuality, is socially constructed and constantly negotiated through everyday social and cultural practices like foodways. Food's centrality in culture makes it a largely normalizing force that circulates moral regulations on bodies while also providing us regular opportunities to engage in moral considerations about how we relate to one another through food. This research explores how queer individuals understand food as a signifying practice for conceptualizing and negotiating their intersectional identities, and how identity formation is influenced by biopolitical regulation of bodies, health, and relationships. Based in critical feminist and food geographies, I conducted semi-structured, food-situated interviews with 12 LGBTQ+ identifying young adults. These were qualitatively analyzed using a combination of inductive and deductive thematic coding. Using these methods, I found that participants navigate a complex landscape of queer identity in response both to normative frameworks and LGBTQ+ politics that manifest through anxieties about gendered eating, cooking, and exercise practices. Participants also orient to strong moral conceptualizations of health and food provisioning, like pressures to be vegan/vegetarian, to present themselves as 'ethical eaters'. Tensions between gendered foodways, health expectations, ideas of what 'ethical eating' is, and the structural limitations on these practices lead to anxiety around foodways while also demonstrating the myriad ways that food is used as a tool in the process of identity-formation In the midst of these complex moral and ethical identity landscapes, participants ultimately turn to frameworks that are more expansive and potentially liberatory to guide their decisions, such as *queer* terminology or health frameworks rooted in moderation and balance.

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Introduction

> If the idea of a queer mode of eating is far-fetched, does this illustrate the fact that queer only contends with the sexual aspects of our bodies? Beyond sex, is there anything else that might differentiate a queer assembling of bodies, that recreates relationships to others, to selves, to the world differently?
>
> –Elspeth Probyn (1999)

Eating is a thoroughly intimate experience, from the people with whom we share our meals, to the people who have grown and cultivated our foods, to the act of consuming it. Everyday, we use food to negotiate our identities, (re)articulating the various relationships in our lives through our habitual culinary practices. Through cultural, familial, platonic, romantic, and sexual relationships, we strive to live 'the good life,' which is heavily influenced by normative understandings of what these relationships *should* look like and "how to establish meaningful forms of intimacy" (Mannur 2022, 50). Navigating the world in queer relationship to self and others, then, calls into question what constitutes 'meaningful forms of intimacy,' and food may provide a "more imaginative articulation of identity" for us to explore these negotiations of gendered and sexual normativities (Probyn 1999, 422).

Foodways–which includes the beliefs, production, provisioning, consumption, and disposal of food–connect us to a number of cultural identities. Food's centrality in cultural practices makes it a largely normalizing force that circulates moral messaging about bodies and how we present ourselves to the world. Research regarding identity-making and food have found that foodways often reinforce hegemonic ideals about body and health, particularly related to gender, sexuality and race. However, this research has primarily investigated the experiences of cisgender individuals in heterosexual contexts, so foodways as cultural tools are not well understood for LGBTQ+ people. Because LGBTQ+ people must actively transgress gender and

sexual normativities to construct their identities, understanding queer[1] experiences, decisions, and interactions with foodways may reveal how we might disrupt the normalizing nature of foodways and ultimately imagine more just culinary futures for all people. This research asks (1) how queer individuals understand food as a signifying practice for conceptualizing and negotiating their identities, (2) how queer individuals' understandings of food and identity are influenced by cisheteronormative cultural frameworks, and (3) how queer individuals might be differentially impacted by biopolitical influence in the realm of food.

To address these questions, I will first provide an overview of relevant prior literature that analyzes the relationship between food, gender, and sexuality as biopolitical regulating mechanisms through the moralization of food and health, and document the existing research that relates foodways and LGBTQ+ identities. Then, I establish critical food and feminist geographies as the guiding methodologies for this research and explain the methods of data collection and analysis. The following section analyzes the participants' interviews. I begin by establishing the complex ways in which participants identify, given that they must navigate both the rejection of cisheteronormative frameworks and a complex landscape of LGBTQ+ label politics. Next, I focus on how participants understand gender roles and dynamics through foodways, particularly domestic labor and dating. Queer gender roles and attraction are largely understood through the same foodways practices that normative gender roles are, though participants note the difficulty of managing external presentation versus internal preferences in interpreting their own foodways. There are complex interactions between cisheteronormative pressures and queer notions of masculinity and femininity; this results in the maintenance of

[1] Following Guyan (2022), I use the term 'queer' to broadly describe experiences related to gender and sexuality, for LGBTQ+ people. "LGBTQ+" and "queer" will largely be used interchangeably, though I acknowledge that many people, including my interviewees, see some difference between them. There is more discussion of the definition and use of 'queer' in "A Note on Terminology."

some traditional power differentials in LGBTQ+ spaces, like privileging masculinity, while also creating opportunities for unique forms of empowerment. Then, I focus on the body as the scale of study by looking at motivations and mechanisms used to change the body, like exercise. This section also includes discussion of participants' histories with eating disorders and the emotional distress and gender dysphoria that caused these eating disorders. Next, I discuss the role of dominant discourses of health and other moral guidelines for eating, such as environmentalism and veganism. Participants largely have shared conceptions of health that they morally oriented to, and these moral pressures underlie food decisions related to environmentalism, vegetarianism/veganism, and food waste. Lastly, I discuss the structural limitations that impact participants' foodways and often prevent them from eating and provisioning food in the ways that they want to. In summary, participants experience tension between how they 'should' move through the world and how certain practices may be inscribed on the body, marking their identities in ways that invalidate their own understanding of themselves. Participants also theorize alternative normativities to challenge dominant ones, including normativities in LGBTQ+ spaces, that are more freeing or empowering but are sometimes still rooted in dominant frameworks. Lastly, I reflect on how the gendered and ethical associations of foodways explored in this analysis demonstrate individualization of biopolitical responsibility and how this is oriented to through a moral framework.

Relevant Prior Literature

Introduction: Relating Food, Gender, & Sexuality

People use food to relate to one another on a variety of scales, which makes it apt for examining how we produce and negotiate our social identities in everyday contexts. Farm

laborers and food manufacturers often prepare our food in ways that are geographically and cognitively distant from us (Eden, Bear, and Walker 2008), though we often provision food in highly gendered (Shiva 2009) and racialized (Chen 2012) interpersonal contexts. While the literal consumption of food happens on a thoroughly individual level, our embodied experiences of foodways are embedded in particular social, historical, and political contexts that inform our relationships with ourselves, each other, and the world (Harper 2012). These socially ascribed and systematically upheld expectations can be defined as a particular cultural lens, or an interpretative framework used to ascribe meaning to the world (Hall 2008). Foodways practices act as a type of cultural framework that we use to understand and perform our social identities by ascribing particular values on these practices, like 'eating salads' as a healthy and morally sound practice. The meanings written on our bodies by our food choices depend on the specific cultural interpretations of our bodies and social identities. Because food practices are assumed to be made freely by the individual (an assumption that ignores important structural constraints), these ascriptions are entangled with moral judgements about our health, well-being, and status in society as 'upstanding citizens.'

Similar to food, sexuality and gender act as social and biological systems of regulation that communicate to others, and ourselves, the ways that we wish to relate to the broader world (Probyn 1999). Gender and sexuality, like other socially-constructed identities, are maintained through the repetition of particular discursive and material interactions; however, these the interpretation of these actions are determined by "highly rigid regulatory frames," which are inscribed upon us based on our biology and particular cultural contexts (Salih and Eaglestone 2002, 63, citing Butler 1999). The practices that we use to perform and 'do' our genders are highly entangled with our sexualities. In other words, to be a traditional woman is to desire the

attraction of a traditional man. Thus, queer sexuality–the attraction to *not* the 'opposite' sex, or one's own non-binary or trans-aligned gender identity–threatens not only the regulatory framework of heterosexuality but it also "puts one's own sex into question" (Ahmed 2006, 71). Ultimately, cultural gender works to regulate social and material interactions, and thus our bodies.

The relationality of food, as a cultural item and vehicle for familial and social interactions, enables us to examine, (re)produce, and perhaps resist our various social identities through food practices and discourses. Because of food's moral entanglements with environmentalism, health, and general well-being, food also becomes a tool we use to also position ourselves as ethical beings. In the following section, I explore how the democratization of biopolitical power to individual people places significant responsibility on individuals to maintain themselves as moral, upstanding citizens, as it relates to normative values of gender, sexuality and health. Then, I connect research relating some aspect of foodways with gender, sexuality, and other social identities to identify the current gaps in academic knowledge that motivate this research.

Neoliberal Biopolitics: The Making of Moral Individuals through Food

Food's relationality enables it to be a vehicle for neoliberal biopolitical power. The individualization of biopower through the moralization of food in the U.S. during the 20th century contributes to increased responsibility on the individual for upholding certain biological and health-based notions (Veit 2013). This individual responsibility exists in spite of the largely systematic and external structures that influence our perceived health, such as through the construct of body size.

Neoliberal Biopolitics & Morality

Food as a tool for the enactment of biopolitical power uses discourse on consumption and food provisioning to communicate and reinforce moral messaging about the health and physical maintenance of a community. Biopolitics refers to the moderation of life and death, especially through bodies, gender, and sex(uality) as central aspects of biological and cultural reproduction (Schurr 2017). While the state has historically been the principal enactor of biopolitical regulation (Foucault 1997), neoliberalism has (a) placed the moral responsibility of maintaining and improving one's own health on the individual and (b) expanded the sources of biopolitical influence to include anything profit-driven (Goodman and Jaworska 2020). U.S. culture also links food and morality, explored below, to make food a critical way that we relate to one another as ethical beings and giving all people a sense of biopolitical responsibility.

Morality and ethics ask that we "register the proximity of objects and others," orienting ourselves in both cultural and material space to direct our interactions in intentional and agreed-upon ways (Ahmed 2006, 3). A conception of ethics that exists outside of official regulation recognizes the ways in which people have the power to adapt within a situation so that they are "the willing subjects of a particular moral discourse" (Mahmood 2005, 28). Different from a more general conceptualization of ethics, Mahmood (2005) builds on the Foucauldian idea of ethics as a moral desire to conform to a particular way of living. In this process, individuals and communities become subjects of these moral codes which result in normativities that are self-sustaining (Mahmood 2005). Ahmed's (2006) exploration of queer phenomenology defines these naturalized social frameworks, such as heterosexuality or whiteness, as 'straight lines.' These lines of heteronormative moral discourses become conflated with values like

'decent' and 'conventional." We use our understandings of these conventions to *orient* ourselves in relation to others. Thus, non-normative constructs like queer desire or non-whiteness, are read as 'off-line'; however, these 'lines' that represent our identities and ways of being may try to be corrected, or 'straightened' by other constructs which we hold that are more decent or conventional. This complex interplay of ethical pressures and moral desires is the landscape upon which queer identities are navigated, reformulated, and adapted. Such ethical pressures to act in morally agreed upon ways also extends to food decisions.

The Moralization of Food

The individualization of biopolitical responsibility stems partly from the moralization of food consumption and nutrition practices that began in the early 20th century. Food conservation efforts arose in response to food shortages and high cereal crop and meat export demands during World War I in the United States; however, it was white, middle- and upper-class families that championed these campaigns, rooted in moralistic virtues of abnegation and nationalism (Veit 2013). The rise of home economics also transferred the responsibility of food maintenance for families to married women as opposed to paid household labor; this instilled the moral demands of health and family vitality into the house and particularly the role of the 'housewife' (Veit 2013). Throughout the rest of the 20th century and through the present, the responsibility of food maintenance and consequently, health, has been increasingly tied to the individual or the household beyond any institutional or structural factors.

The continued democratization of biopolitical power as a result of neoliberalism has led to the conceptualization of a neoliberal individual who can be blamed or praised for their own personal health (Goodman and Jaworska 2020). The industrialized nature of the food industry

and rise in nutrition science has created a culture of 'rational eating,' in which moral health is to be maintained through self-discipline and nutrition-focused eating, as opposed to more emotional or cultural motivations (Veit 2013). The individualized pressure of being an upstanding biological citizen results in guilt for not maintaining societal standards, which is exacerbated by media and interpersonal messaging about individuals' 'negative contributions' to the community through explicit and implicit moral messaging about body shape, (un)healthy foods, and lifestyle choices (Goodman, Johnston, and Cairns 2017). The responsibilizing nature of neoliberalism also obscures structural factors that contribute to various health outcomes by "reframing them in terms of individual accountability," especially as it relates to racial discrimination and other systemic disparities (Sanders 2019, 291). Perhaps the best example of this responsibilization is the 'obesity epidemic,' which medical and political authorities often frame as 'self-imposed' and within the realm of personal responsibility; this villainizes obese people as lacking moral- and self-discipline (Sanders 2019). However, environmental toxins, byproducts of industrialized food, subsidized crops that promote less nutritious foods, and geographic food access, among other structural barriers–which are far outside the realm of control of the individual–play a far more significant role in obesity than calorie-intake (Guthman 2011). The individual framing of health results in guilt for not upholding societal standards and 'putting a strain' on the rest of the community, while not holding systematic actors accountable for various health outcomes (Goodman, Johnston, and Cairns 2017). The idea of free choice presupposed by these moral frameworks raises the question of how resistance to some aspects of biopolitical influence may affect how we conform to ('straighten') or perhaps resist ('bend') other biopolitical spheres of influence that have been similarly moralized and individualized, like gender and sexuality.

Alternative Food Networks

The recent rise of alternative food networks (AFNs), however, shows that consumers and individuals certainly understand the role that mainstream food systems play in their diets and in their relationship to others and the environment. Alternative food systems exist outside and in defiance of "mainstream" food systems, which Tregear (2011) defines as industrialized, global, and corporatized means of food provisioning. While Tregear (2011) critiques this definition of "alternative" purely in opposition to "mainstream," alternative food system practitioners tend to root their practices in concrete objectives like ecological sustainability, ethical labor practices, and economic well-being for non-corporate actors. Examples of AFNs include organic labels, local food systems, and even dietary practices like veganism and vegetarianism, for some individuals. While these food systems seek to address different aspects of the food system, they often focus on the production of food and assume positive entanglements for consumers (Tregear 2011). However, not all AFNs are as effective as they first appear. For example, organic foods have been increasingly incorporated into 'big agriculture' and the industrialized food system, which undermines the ecological goals of the organic label while also making it difficult for small farmers to compete (Pollan 2001; Guthman 2004).

Another limitation of AFNs is their general lack of racial consciousness, which fails to address racialized food and health disparities that result from dominant food systems and limit the input and participation of people of color in AFNs. Whiteness often comes to embody racially unmarked spaces, which assumes that the majority of people hold the values and privileges of white people. Since many AFNs are not explicitly racially conscious, universalizing tendencies in organizations and social networks may exclude people of color because they do not

explicitly problematize racist histories of food or broader economic systems that differentially affect people of color (Guthman 2008). While veganism and vegetarianism may not always share the same motivations as AFNs, the culture surrounding veganism/vegetarianism can be similarly exclusive of non-white racial identities and experiences. The universal assumptions of vegan motivations, such animal rights or weight loss/thinness, are rooted in the values of middle-class white women, whereas Black vegans, for example, may practice veganism to address racialized health disparities or decolonize their bodies from the legacy of settler colonialism (Harper 2012). In her analysis of Black vegan texts, Harper also recognizes how geography and class can limit one's ability to eat a plant-based diet, showing how veganism can be culturally and structurally exclusive towards Black women. Within the context of AFNs, Black veganism shows that, while people can resist or alter their foodways to some extent, other avenues of provisioning are not available to everyone.

Current Research on Foodways, Gender & Sexuality

Current research in discourse analysis, psychology, and food studies has investigated how individuals orient to gendered aspects of biopolitical regulation through food in order to construct group and individual identities; however, these studies often utilize cisheterosexual framings of gender and sexuality. One study in consumer behavior research analyzed the consumption habits of an all-female and all-male household. They found that both households accepted and participated in gendered consumption in order "to create and uphold their idea of themselves, their image, and their identity" (Turner et al. 2013, 281). In the male household, participants regularly consumed larger portions and more meat than the female household, which aligns with masculinized consumption practices (Turner et al. 2013). The female household was

more motivated by minimizing consumption, and they conflated "low-fat" diets with "healthy" lifestyles in order to perform feminine identity roles. This gendered eating difference demonstrates that gendered food practices (e.g., eating 'low-fat') which acquire meaning (e.g., 'healthy') have largely been accepted as part of their identities "without challenge" (Turner et al. 2013, 286). Participants utilized these food consumption practices to maintain their (cis)gender identities and accepted the gendered nature of these food practices. The lack of desire to challenge the links between these arguably harmful ideals and their resultant impacts on individuals' gendered self-image, especially in relation to members of the 'opposite gender,' shows how normative assumptions have been internalized and act almost invisibly through individuals' behaviors.

Significant research identifies gender disparities in household labor, especially cooking and food provisioning, between men and women in cisheterosexual contexts. As previously mentioned, the rise of home economics as a practice for married women, as opposed to paid household laborers who were often women of color, instilled the moral demands of health and vitality into the role of womanhood while deprofessionalizing and devaluing household labor monetarily (Veit 2013). Women continue to be predominantly responsible for food provisioning in the U.S., particularly in heterosexual partnerships, and this responsibility can lead to negative physical, psychological, and social outcomes (Bird 1999; Kolpashnikova and Kan 2021). A quantitative study using the 2012 Ohio Survey of Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Issues found that women who participated in alternative food networks–such as organic, fair trade, or local food movements–spent more time provisioning food than men who participated in similarly environmentally or ethically motivated food networks (Som Castellano 2015). Participation in

broadly ‘ethical’ food practices does not necessarily problematize other social inequities in food provisioning, showing how gendered disparities permeate critiques of mainstream food systems.

Despite the cisheteronormative framings of these studies, similar household labor disparities exist in more LGBTQ+ centric-studies as well. Carrington’s (2000) interviews with partnered lesbian, bisexual, and gay couples living in San Francisco found that participants’ descriptions of their partners’ participation in food provisioning would often be skewed in order to protect the gender identities of their partners. For example, for some lesbian couples, the partners would over-emphasize the domestic work done by their partner whereas the converse was true for gay male partners in the study. This suggests that active participation in queer relationships neither diminishes the presence or awareness of traditional gender roles nor the desire to protect those identities in our partners or in ourselves.

Other research studies on LGBTQ+ populations and food have focused on food insecurity, eating disorder behaviors, and other health outcomes using large-scale, quantitative methods rooted in public health and psychological methodologies. One study of graduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that non-white, international, and LGBTQ+ students experienced increases in food insecurity more acutely than other students (Boncyk et al. 2021). Further studies have found that LGBTQ+ adults experience higher rates of food insecurity and are at a higher risk of experiencing depression and disordered eating behaviors (Arikawa et al. 2021; Linsenmeyer et al. 2021). Discrimination and perceived stigma against LGBTQ+ identities likely increase the risk of disordered eating behaviors, and body-image issues may be exacerbated by mainstream appearance ideals and the intersectional pressures faced by many LGBTQ+ people (Parker and Harriger 2020). Since body ideals are informed both by gender identity and cultural-gender ideals, transgender individuals experience greater appearance

anxiety through internalized body ideals than their cisgender counterparts (Amodeo et al. 2022). While this research certainly contributes much to understanding of health outcomes and risk factors for LGBTQ+ youth and adults, it largely focuses on rates and intensity of experience rather than more qualitative, grounded understandings of these experiences.

Ultimately, cultural studies relating food, gender, and sexuality have largely been limited by cisheteronormative framings with universalizing racial assumptions; they have also been largely conducted within public health and psychological domains. These framings do not capture the experiences of non-straight and non-cisgender individuals who experience unique relationships of food and body; furthermore, the lack of attention to intersectionality, or how different marginalized identities held by the same individuals interact with and amplify one another (Crenshaw 1989), further limits our understandings of racially-othered *and* queer bodies in relation to food. This gap demands a more politicized, critical, and queer reading of foodways for understanding how 'unruly' bodies are made culturally and materially (Mannur 2022).

Widening the View: Queering Foodways

Being an upstanding biopolitical actor requires conforming to gender and sexuality norms, meaning being both cisgender and heterosexual. Queer individuals, then, must reject at least one (and more likely, *both*) of these aspects of biopolitical regulation, which raises the question of how such rejection affects individuals' orientation to other spheres of biopolitical influence and subsequent identity negotiation. While extant research shows desire to align with, and thus reproduce, normative gendered identities in certain contexts, focusing more holistically on foodways may reveal a wider range of attitudes and experiences relating to conformity and transgression of normative identity categories. Food and food discourses circulate biopolitical

messaging, so understanding queer foodways will provide insight into how queer individuals construct and understand their genders, sexualities, and other socially constructed identities through food.

Methods and Methodology

Queer(ing) Critical Feminist & Food Geographies

Grounded analytically and methodologically in cultural geography, this research aims to use the tools and frameworks of feminist and food geographies to understand LGBTQ+ experiences and challenge cisheteronormative research practices. *Culture* can be understood as shared systems of meaning that we use to make sense of the world (Hall 2008). Acting as a type of interpretative framework for understanding and interacting with the world, culture is a way to create shared identity within cultural groups to build internal solidarity by distinguishing themselves from other cultural groups. However, academic understandings of culture have been and often continue to be rooted in masculinist epistemologies that center formal, global phenomena over embodied, local practices (Mountz and Hyndman 2006). Feminist geographies challenge these assumptions by recognizing the scale of the body as a valuable source of knowledge-creation that interacts with, but is not determined by, social norms and institutions whose power dynamics inform knowledge-making (Nast 1994).

For in-group research where the researcher shares some cultural identities with their participants, as I do in this research, it is important to recognize that the the researcher and "her research subjects exist in the same landscape of power," but that the researcher necessarily has more power given their control over the academic knowledge produced from the research (Rose 1997, 313). While power dynamics cannot be avoided, they can be reconfigured to ensure that

the embodied knowledge of the research participants guides knowledge production (Rose 1997). The application of these guiding principles is outlined below.

Methods & Study Design

Data Collection & Participant Relationships

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 LGBTQ+ identifying young adults aged 20-24 between October 2022 and February 2023, with 10 interviews conducted in-person and 2 interviews conducted over Zoom. Interview participants were recruited through university organizations, LGBTQ+ organizations, social media, my personal network, and through snowball sampling. This recruitment sample biases the sample towards university-educated students who are generally affluent and well-educated. All participants lived along the Colorado Front Range at the time of interviews. The sample sought to be racially diverse–including people of Latine, South Asian, and various multiracial backgrounds–and is broadly representative of a wide range of LGBTQ+ identities–including asexuality, trans and non-binary identities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer identifying individuals of many gender identities. This study focuses on intersectional identities and the unique experiences of individual participants. When asked how they identify, many participants pushed back against identity labels, and this research works to avoid reducing participants and their identities to such labels.

Participants were given the following options regarding pseudonyms to represent themselves in the final research: (1) for them to choose their own pseudonym, so they would know which quotes are sourced from their interview, (2) for me to select their pseudonym and tell them what it is, or (3) for me to select their pseudonym and not tell them. These options allowed participants to choose how they would be represented in the research reports and their

relationship to that representation. Lastly, all interview participants were sent an executive summary in lay-terms, designed to be digestible to non-expert and non-academic audiences (See the executive summary in Appendix 1).

Interview Design

Interviews were semi-structured, with questions that inquired about participants' background and identities, food experiences, food decision-making, and how food relates to their background and identity (See interview guide in Appendix 2). The semi-structured nature of interviews allowed participants' own knowledge to guide the interviews, revealing what aspects of food and identity are most salient to them, while also allowing myself as the interviewer to participate in the co-creation of knowledge (Brinkman 2020).

The interview participants and I agreed on a private location such as their home; a neutral, public location, like a public park; or via Zoom to complete the interviews. In-person interviews were conducted in food-oriented contexts, such as sharing or preparing a meal together, which was funded by the researcher. Zoom participants were similarly compensated, but Zoom interviews lacked the food-sharing component. I chose to interview participants in food-situated contexts to set a conversational tone, given the personal and mundane focus of the interviews, as well as to provide situational context for interviewees to draw on throughout the interview (Cavanaugh et al. 2014). Furthermore, by giving participants autonomy to choose the type of meal we shared/prepared and the location of the interview, I hoped to make the interview process more empowering for interviewees, both for their own comfort and to elucidate deeper study-relevant values and motivations regarding foodways.

Analysis

I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of thematic analysis, which includes familiarizing oneself with the data, creating initial codes, grouping codes thematically, and defining and naming themes. These themes aimed to capture a 'rich description' of the entire dataset, aiming to code as much of the interviewees' responses as possible to capture overarching themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). I developed a set of deductive codes that emerged from the literature review and generated inductive codes that emerged from interview data. Many statements from interviews were coded for their explicit relationship to a theme, such as gendered pressure they felt in relation to food. However, other codes were more interpretative, which attempted to assess the underlying frameworks and implicit assumptions made by participants, such as comments that conflated thinness with health (Braun and Clarke 2006). The service Otter.ai was used to transcribe interviews, which were verified and cleaned by the researcher, and thematic analysis and coding was done in the software Nvivo. For a table of codes used in the thematic analysis, see Appendix 3.

I used discourse analysis to understand the aspects of foodways that participants drew upon to construct their gender and sexualities. Discourses are semiotic systems of language, images, and other types of media that we draw upon that encode certain forms of knowing, quite similar to Hall's (2008) conceptualization of cultural frames. We draw on these discourses/cultural frames based on the assumption that our interactants are also privy to the discourse at hand (Cope and Kurtz 2016). Discourse analysis aims to understand what activities, cultural norms, and institutions contribute to various discourses, how linguistic characteristics maintain discourses, and how these discourses deem various judgments and values (un)sayable (Cope and Kurtz 2016). Given the anxiety around health, gender, and sexuality in contemporary

U.S. society, this study aims to understand how these discourses interact through foodways given the current lack of research at these intersections.

A Note on Terminology

For the purpose of this research, it is helpful to lay out shared terminology to refer to participants, in order to draw connections between and compare their experiences. The language used has been selected to be as rooted as possible in the participants' chosen identity labels. Here is a brief overview of identity terms that will be used throughout this research:

- *Gender* refers to a person's cultural identity based around masculinity, femininity, or descriptors between or beyond this binary. *Sexuality* refers to romantic and/or sexual attraction to those of the same gender (*lesbian* or *gay*), a different gender (sometimes *straight*), multiple genders (often *bisexual* or *queer*), or no genders (*asexual* or *aromantic*) (Guyan 2022).
- *Queer* will be used as an umbrella term to refer to all LGBTQ+ people and their diversity of experiences transgressing dominant cultural frameworks (Guyan 2022). *LGTBQ+* and *queer* will be used mostly interchangeably, except when referring to LGBTQ+ spaces, to differentiate between participants' feelings that not all LGBTQ+ spaces are *queer*.
- *Non-binary* and *trans-aligned* will be used to describe experiences which do not align with the gender binary. Participants' designations as *transgender (trans)* or *trans-aligned* will reflect their own experience and are used when being trans is relevant to the experience.
- Assigned-female-at-birth (*AFAB*) and assigned-male-at-birth (*AMAB*) are used to describe the ways that people were socialized as a result of their biological sex, as it was

interpreted at birth. This is most frequently used to provide context for non-binary and trans-aligned comments and can also refer to cisgender people, whose assigned genders at birth align with their current identities.

Ultimately, this research aims to use the most specific language possible while aligning with participants' own identities.

Limitations & Reflections on Methods

Though the sample size represents a diversity of gender identities, sexualities, and racial backgrounds,[2] all participants are immersed in Western, U.S. American culture, are receiving or have received a college education, and operate in middle to upper class social networks. There are important intersectional identities that are not represented in this research, particularly economically. The choice to interview young adults provides insightful information about young people, though their experiences and development certainly inform their experiences in ways not applicable to other age demographics.

In early iterations of the project design, I had intended for interview participants to complete an optional food journal, where they would reflect on their food experiences in writing and photography. While this type of more individualized reflection has the potential to provide rich data, it proved logistically difficult for participants to participate in given busy schedules. Furthermore, some participants who did participate in this aspect of the research mentioned that it evoked past methods of calorie-counting and surveillance related to eating disorders and brought up a lot of judgment on themselves. After two participants provided this feedback, I decided to stop soliciting food journals from all participants given the prevalence of eating disorder histories from study participants. I also did not feel equipped to deliver the food journal

[2] The study did not have any participants who identified as trans-women, Black, or intersex.

prompts in more holistic ways to properly deliver trauma-informed follow-up care for participants (See the food journal prompt in Appendix 4). In a food studies course at UC Santa Cruz, Julie Guthman similarly found that students' reflections on their own food practices reinforced negative normativities, so this type of reflection must be intentionally designed to minimize psychological harm to participants, if pursued in future research (Guthman 2007). No food journal data was used in findings of this research.

Lastly, the transcription of these interviews could have benefitted from collaborative transcription, in which interviewees are consulted about the transcriptions of their interviews in order to clarify particular meanings or intentions of what they said (Cavanaugh et al. 2014). While I tried to follow up during interviews as much as possible about statements like, "I grew up eating healthy" (Aurora)[3], I found many instances where we moved past comments like this that could have provided more opportunity to investigate those values which we take for granted or assume are shared among others. Given time and resource limitations, this was not possible for this research but is recommended for similar projects in the future.

Data and Analysis

Introduction

> I remember thinking in middle school, like, if I was perfect in every way, then I could be gay, you know? Just because, like, if you can take control of every other aspect of your life, then the one thing that's quote/unquote wrong with you…that'd be acceptable.
>
> –River

River shared this comment while reflecting on his adolescence and how he moved through his gay identity in middle school. It reflects an awareness of the fact that, by being gay,

[3] Interviewee quotes will be attributed with their name in parentheses afterwards, unless it is clear from the context who the quote is attributed to.

he was “breaking an important rule,” as another interviewee put it, and the sense that he might be accepted socially if every other part of him was ‘perfect.’ Through gender, sexuality, eating habits, and the myriad other ways we present ourselves to the world, we try to conduct ourselves as ethical beings, but what happens when what is normative does not align with our internal, lived, and embodied experiences? As LGBTQ+ individuals queer their orientations or ‘lines’ of attraction and gender experience, how do they attempt to queer other aspects of their lives, or perhaps try to straighten them (Probyn 1999; Ahmed 2006)?

The section proceeds as follows. To analyze the interviewees’ statements, the “Navigating Identity” section details the landscape of identity politics that participants have encountered and continue to navigate as they understand their gender identities, attractions, and how those relate to others. That is followed by an exploration of food as a cultural item that we use to understand gender roles and dynamics, especially related to familial and romantic relationships, in the section “Food as a Cultural Item: Gender Roles & Dynamics.” This section also includes a discussion about how masculinity and femininity are differentially constructed and oriented to in LGBTQ+ spaces that differ from traditional gender roles but often continue to draw on cisheteronormative frameworks. In “The Role of the Body in Identity Formation,” I analyze exercise, food, the body, and eating disorders as sites of identity formation as participants reflect on how they have tried to change their bodies in various ways. Then, the section “Health and Moral Motivations for Eating” shows the immense moral pressures surrounding healthy eating and ethical food provisioning, and the entanglements of health, environmentalism, and veganism/vegetarianism in food decision-making. Lastly, I consider the structural, institutional, and systemic limitations to participants’ food choices in “Other Aspects of Agency & Decision-Making.”

Navigating Identity

Coming to understand and name one's gender and sexuality relies on internal experiences that not only often go against dominant cultural understandings of gender and sexuality but also can be at odds with normativities and pressures within LGBTQ+ discourses. In particular, discussions about privilege, visibility, and toxicity associated with various identities complicate relationships with certain labels that otherwise well-represent the experiences of gender and attraction of participants. These types of tensions have led many participants to seek broader identity labels that allow them to hold a wider range of experiences while still remaining 'within' the confines of that label and reject the negative perceptions of other labels.

Naming Gender and Sexuality: Discovery and Navigation of Labels

Simply asking participants the identities that they have sparked lively discussions about the difficulties of finding, using, and embodying identity labels, especially those in the LGBTQ+ space. Queer identities were often learned from the internet–whether through social media, memes, or online quizzes about sexuality–and through various other forms of media. Despite limited LGBTQ+ representation in film and television, gay and lesbian couples featured on-screen often provided the only representation of queer experiences for participants before college. Many participants primarily learned about others' queer experiences through friends in middle and high school, since many had religious or cultural backgrounds that were dismissive of queer existence.

Through these stories, many participants experienced their one-time newness to queer experiences and identities. Vincent noted that "I had never had exposure to it [being gay]. Like

the thought never occurred to me." The fact that they could be "new to the concepts" (Anís) highlights the non-normativity of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender identities because it required an external source of information to process and identify these quite internal and embodied feelings. The default understandings of personhood rely on binary gender categories based on sex that are attracted to each other. Young experiences of attraction to people who are not the 'opposite sex' or experiences of non-binary and/or trans-aligned gender identities are framed as "new." This framing and the discovery of these experiences shows that they are not part of the base of normative, shared cultural knowledge for many of those interviewed.

Participants also described how the discomfort they felt in conforming to cisheteronormative standards also led to their awareness of their queerness, though they did not always have the language for it at the time. Especially for non-binary and trans-aligned AFAB individuals, the ideal feminine body and the ways in which their bodies do and do not align with those descriptions played a significant role in the way they thought about their genders. 'Thick thighs/hips,' 'skinny waists,' and 'boobs' were the most salient aspects of the ideal feminine body by normative standards, but were not necessarily the desired body type for these individuals. Oftentimes, they referenced clothing as a tool used to mitigate gender dysphoria. For example, Georgie uses loose shirts to broaden their chest and loose pants to help square their hips. They described the confusion that their younger self had about why more androgynous clothing that 'hid' the more feminine parts of their body felt more comfortable to them, even though this was 'less attractive' by dominant cultural norms.

Consequently, some participants articulated that finding labels provided a sense of clarity about their sense of identity because they had vocabulary to connect to others' experiences. For example, Akasha eventually chose to identify with asexuality after debating whether or not it

was ‘worth it’ to use the term. She experienced some hesitation about the lack of outward visibility of asexuality, but she said, “[It] gives me a little bit more closure about who I am.” However, identity terms are also a hindrance for many participants. Like Akasha, other participants identified a hesitancy to take certain identity labels given either their lack of visibility or the relative privilege that they have in LGBTQ+ spaces, since claiming those labels ‘takes up space’ within the queer community. Taking identity labels, especially terms like asexuality that are not often legible on the body, gave Akasha pause because “it’s not as overt and it hasn’t hurt me in the ways that society reacts to some of these other labels… I do want to iterate, obviously, this is overall positive, but I think it’s important to acknowledge that it comes with an aspect that others wouldn’t fully accept me into their community because I haven’t had some of those same experiences as them.” While asexuality reflects internal experiences that go against the dominant normativity that assumes all people to experience sexual attraction and require sex as central to romantic partnerships, it is not readable on the body the same way being non-binary or lesbian might be, for example. While this is an understanding of relative privilege, it also suggests that participants perceive a hierarchy of LGBTQ+ experiences that make it seem self-serving to take-up space with an LGBTQ+ label without having experienced externally legible forms of discrimination. Coming to labels requires not only navigating what that label means about rejecting dominant culture but also politics within LGBTQ+ discourse.

Participants who have been navigating labels for longer periods of time, such as since middle or high school, often found that terminology was ‘messy’ due to the definitions of terms themselves. Participants noted that the terms bisexual and lesbian, for example, popularly rely on binary understandings of gender that did not align with other values held by participants. They expressed tension with the desire to use these terms more inclusively despite the fact that these

terms have not evolved to capture non-binary and trans experiences. Despite the messiness and potential limitations for some participants, exploring those tensions often served as a vital component for understanding their own identities. Oliver, who now identifies as trans-masculine, used to identify as a lesbian since he was romantically interested in women as an AFAB-person, and he found that he fit into other aspects of lesbian culture; however, he did not feel comfortable with being referred to as a lesbian because of the implications of himself being a woman or 'woman-adjacent.' That discomfort, however, helped him realize that he is trans-masculine, so his discomfort with the term came less from his experiences of attraction but from his own gender identity. While Forest similarly couldn't find themselves represented in the lesbian or gay man labels, they also found an overall lack of trans-inclusivity within most LGBTQ+ spaces, except for those explicitly created for transgender and non-binary people. Until recently, they struggled with finding safe spaces within LGBTQ+ culture. Growing up, they felt it was "pretty obvious that I wasn't queer like the people around me" as a result of their non-binary identity and experiences of attraction.

Similar tensions arose for queer-identifying men with feelings of disbelonging or value-misalignment in gay male spaces. These participants identified aspects of gay male culture they found to be problematic, and some participants did not resonate with the term *gay* as a result of that. For example, Vincent states his identity this way: "I identify as male and queer. The queer is the recent addendum to it because I've decided that being gay is bad." He later expanded on this comment, asking, "How am I supposed to feel like this is a comforting label when the people I interact with that label make me feel like shit?" These comments show that his negative experiences with gay men have led to a disconnect between himself and the gay label, despite the fact that his gender identity and attraction align the normative definition of being 'gay.'

Similarly, River and Nicholas experienced toxic pressures to be traditionally masculine, especially in terms of body type and physique, in spaces for men who have sex with men. River also felt that identifying as queer was "more than gay," hinting at the limitations of how masculinity is defined in gay male spaces. However, River notes that aligning himself with more traditional masculine ideals not only gave him "more power in the gay world" but also made him more accepted by 'straight culture.'[4] Navigating identity labels requires understanding how those labels and identities will not only be understood by other LGBTQ+ people but also read through dominant cultural framings.

Queer as an Identity Term

Because of these tensions with many identity labels, many participants identified with the term *queer* as a broader identity label that encompasses experiences of both gender and sexuality. Across all interviews, participants noted that queerness, at its most basic level, is associated with actively resisting sexuality and gender-based norms. Ryder, who identifies as gay[5] and male, does not believe that he is queer because "he doesn't play as much with gender and sexuality" as other people that identify as queer. He also noted 'queer's' associations with countercultural movements give it a more political edge than other LGBTQ+ terms. Vincent found that even though "gay is the counterculture," it has been standardized and normalized in the same way that 'mainstream' culture is. So, he finds 'queer' to be a term that resists some of the boxes created by other identity labels and identifies with the term.

Aurora noted a similar lack of label confinement that aligns with her bisexual identity, where there is less pressure to *do* or *perform* her identity in a particular way: "I don't feel

[4] These ideas around masculinity will be further explored in "Queer Masculinity," below.
[5] While Ryder also takes issue with aspects of gay male identity, he is less resistant to the term itself and more critical of the cultural pressures within 'gay culture.'

confined in [the term ‘queer’], so that like, if I am more attracted one day to a male, that doesn’t mean I’m a worse bisexual, so I definitely just like the flexibility of that.” Many participants experienced this sense of freedom under the umbrella term ‘queer,’ finding that it could grow with them as they move through different experiences and understandings of their own gender and attraction. Only one participant expressed hesitation about this term for his own identity given its historical use as a slur towards LGBTQ+ people (Perlman 2019) and will only refer to people as queer if he knows this is their chosen label. This range of responses suggests broad acceptance of the term queer among participants, with many using the label as the primary term to express their identity.

In navigating the complex landscape of identity, these participants had to understand what it meant to resist dominant cultural notions of how they ‘should be’ and reconcile this resistance with terms steeped in political discourse within LGBTQ+ spaces. Many found comfort in *queer* as a term that accomplishes both aspects and gives them more freedom in their understanding of their own identities.

Finding Community and Belonging

While all participants identify as LGBTQ+ in some way, there was a wide range of perceived connectedness to ‘the LGBTQ+ community.’ Most participants broadly found more comfort around other LGBTQ+ people than ‘straight’ people, especially in social interactions. Some participants specifically sought out LGBTQ+ spaces, such as university pride spaces or LGBTQ+ sports teams, whereas some participants reported just often finding themselves in queer friend groups. Generally, the most salient identities for participants were non-normative identities or those that differ from the majority (e.g., being a person of color, being from the

South), as well as gender identity for all participants. In the same way that some white participants did not share their racial/ethnic identity without being directly prompted, which indicates that this identity is less salient for these participants, physical health and ability only emerged in interviews with individuals who have disabilities. A few participants did discuss relative privilege when asked about which identities impact their lives most. Akasha notes that more than identities, like being Indian-American or asexual, the things that she does encompass her experiences more, like being a pre-medical student. River and Luna both discussed a lack of settlement within their multiracial backgrounds, given their white-passing appearances and lighter complexions compared to their family members. Although some literature suggests that privileged identities often become backgrounded and are rendered invisible, many participants reflected explicitly on their racial and economic privilege as well as relative privilege in LGBTQ+ spaces.

Furthermore, racial backgrounds impacted understandings of queer identity for some participants. Anís discussed her Mexican-Catholic upbringing as a difficult environment for asking questions about gender roles and sexuality, despite the open-mindedness of her parents and their overall lack of conformity to traditional Mexican gender roles. It was through discussions with friends in the U.S., opposed to her family in México, where she formed her bisexual identity. Forest, who is Palestinian-American and Middle Eastern, enjoyed cultural connection with their family *and* faced discrimination and pushback from their family for their queer identity. For participants with immigrant backgrounds, they felt a sense of disbelonging not only for their racial differences in the U.S., but also for their gender identities and sexualities from their families. This simultaneous experience of multiple, interlocking oppressions shows one example of the intersectionality between racially-othered identities with queer identities (The

Combahee River Collective, 2019). Participants of color largely discussed the sense of 'betweenness' within the LGBTQ+ community. While for some, like Forest, this betweenness may stem from their identity as trans and non-binary, an identity which does not always feel included in LGBTQ+ spaces, it also seemed to be exacerbated for individuals who have mixed or hyphenated identities where that betweenness is felt along multiple axes of identity. Since many LGBTQ+ spaces are not explicitly created for queer and trans people of color, it is quite possible that these spaces become universalized towards white norms (Guthman 2008) and do not serve the unique social and cultural needs of people of color, though this research did not explore these specific ideas.

Other participants also felt that belonging to the LGBTQ+ community involved being part of the dating scene, 'gay nightlife,' or being involved in activism and social justice causes directly related to LGBTQ+ rights. Participants in long-term partnerships and those who do not participate in gay nightlife cited these reasons as some barriers to seeking out explicitly queer spaces, but that those spaces also were not necessary for their overall emotional fulfillment. Ryder also noted that there is a positive pressure of the "gay community" to be socially informed, both on LGBTQ+ rights issues and other matters of social justice, such as racism. However, this pressure felt exclusionary for Nicholas, who did not express a strong desire to be involved in social change but did want to find community in LGBTQ+ spaces.

Ultimately, participants have a wide range of participation in explicitly LGBTQ+ spaces as well as with queer individuals in their personal lives. Identity and belonging stem not only from navigating the landscape of LGBTQ+ identities but also other significant social identities, particularly race or ethnicity. The intersectionality of inhabiting a queer body of color leads to heightened senses of disbelonging and tensions between family, culture, and identity, but

participants also discuss the relative privileges that they have in their lives. In the following section, we will explore how participants understand food as a cultural item to explore their gender and sexuality.

Food as a Cultural Item: Gender Roles & Dynamics

Food plays a significant role in developing social relationships and connecting us to our cultures. This section outlines the role of foodways, particularly cooking and consumption, as ways interviewees understand their cultural and gendered identities. Cooking and domestic labor are often discussed in the context of family and upbringing, where participants find there are tensions between internally-motivated preferences versus how certain actions are inscribed onto the body in gendered ways. Consumption is most salient in dating and relationships. Reflections on queer dating show how masculinity is privileged in many queer contexts, though the ways in which masculinity holds power is contested by many participants.

Food, Family, and Relationships

Many participants shared a strong passion about food and its cultural and social centrality in their lives. Georgie, an avid baker and home cook, said, “Making food is a big part of who I am. I don’t know if it relates to the queer part of me, but like I’ve always said, if academia doesn’t work out, I’m gonna open a bakery.” Food also played a central role in familial memories for participants. Many discussed regular family gatherings over food, like family lunches after church on Sundays, as central to their identities. Other traditions included larger events like weddings and other holidays associated with non-White American cultural practices. These types of gatherings and events often served as sources of knowledge for cooking different

types of food and the value placed on sharing meals with one another. In college, food played a similarly central role, where much socialization occurred over food, coffee, or drinks.

Consequently, preparing and sharing meals together served as a primary way of maintaining platonic relationships for these participants. Georgie said that, "genuinely, my first response to someone having an emotional crisis is to make them food. Because you see that I've thought about you and want you to be happy…we just have that reciprocal nature going." They value the energy that goes into preparing food and the joy experienced while eating it–especially the baked goods they often make for friends–and view the gift of food as life-giving. Cierra also mentions that the time it takes to prepare a good meal feels like a 'love language' to her. The platonic and familial memories shared by participants show the power of food in sustaining relationships.

Beyond the interpersonal, food also serves as one way of understanding one's place in the world, whether that be racially, geographically, or otherwise. Akasha, who moved between a few different states growing up, always came back to Thai food and was thankful to have good Thai restaurants to eat at in Boulder. Ryder and Cierra, who both grew up in very culturally and culinarily different regions of the U.S., found significant comfort in the barbeque and Southern-style foods they so love, respectively. While white participants often cited family meals as their major comfort foods, Ryder and Cierra who also both identify as white were made more conscious of the geographic and regional aspects of their heritage through the differences in food culture between Boulder and the Colorado Western Slope and the American South.

Participants of color generally related to their non-White heritages through food, though the relevance of this to their understandings of self varied greatly. For example, Luna finds minimal cultural connection through cooking Mexican dishes, partly due to the difficulty of

making Mexican food vegetarian-friendly. However, Anís, who immigrated from México to Colorado as a teenager, enjoys re-imagining traditional dishes she ate as a child to fit into her lifestyle and palate as an adult. However, others have had more negative experiences relating to their foods and cultures. Forest, who is Palestinian American, had an early understanding of their racial differences from their predominantly white peers because they were bullied at school for their za'atar sandwiches. This experience created an early stigmatization of their relationship with Palestinian American culture and identity from a young age. In this way, food serves as a proxy or indicator for many other types of identities, like racial and regional identities, which can make it an intensely politicized object in people's lives.

Food objects were also a site of minor contention where cultural differences were experienced at a multitude of scales. For example, Ryder noted that food culture on the Western Slope of Colorado, west of the Rocky Mountains, is richer, heartier, and meatier than the health-conscious and often plant-based ethos of Boulder, on the Colorado Front Range east of the mountains. Broadly speaking, the Western Slope is associated with more rural American culture and the Front Range with more urban American culture, though they are geographically very close. Anís similarly has noticed that most of her friends are from north México, where they primarily eat flour tortillas, but she is from south México, where they primarily eat corn tortillas. They jokingly tease each other's preferences and recognize geographic difference through tortilla preferences, but Anís notes that similar culinary differences with a friend from Guatemala resulted in them bonding over common connections. She and her friend had fried plantains, and although her friend preferred sour cream with her plantains whereas Anís preferred condensed milk, they bonded over their shared enjoyment of this food. The marginalization of foods different from the mainstream–which differs based on the geographic, national, and racial

context–contributes to their heightened visibility. This marginalization also explains the connection over similar foods in spite of geographic/national differences, where commonality is unexpected.

A few participants also made distinctions between how cultures of color versus white American culture(s) utilize food as a community practice. Anís describes how her grandmother would give away homemade tamales at the end of events as a sign of gratitude and love, explaining that "I really like how *our* people connect through food." Her use of the term 'our people' and her intonational stress on 'our' indicate that she is referring to Mexican people in contrast to the predominantly white American culture she is surrounded by today. Similarly, Aurora noted that, "when I talk to a lot of my friends of color, there's just a different community around food. When I lived in Costa Rica, food was the center of your love. Like, you were sobre mesa and that was just what you did." While she later notes the family dinners shared on the Italian side of her family as well, the cultural community connections her friends of color have seem to be deeper to her than her familial connections. The heightened sense of community articulated through food likely stems from stronger familial values in other cultures as well as food being a site of identity formation and reclamation in the face of the dominant white U.S.-American culture.

Overall, food has salient connections to family, identity, sense of self, and relationship formation. However, when asked to make these connections explicitly, participants often struggled with articulating what the exact connections were. They found that memories and various identities were so intertwined that it was impossible to untangle them: "And I think food is very related to memory. It's very much related to gathering. And like, yeah, of course your identity is going to be impacted by that" (Cierra). But Cierra further reflected that it is practically

impossible to articulate the exact connections. For these reasons, among others, cultural food research is messy and must hold space for nuance, uncertainty, and contradiction.

Understandings of Normative Gender Roles

This section first discusses broad understandings of traditional femininity and masculinity with an emphasis on foodways, largely framed in a cisheteronormative context. This is followed by a discussion of queer conceptions of femininity and masculinity where dating, romantic, and sexual relationships are discussed. Masculinity was overall discussed less by participants than femininity was, and traditional masculinity especially was almost entirely discussed in relationship with femininity–in spite of a roughly even gender distribution of masculine- and feminine- aligned individuals.

Traditional Notions of Gender & Gender Roles

Femme-aligned non-binary participants and women frequently discussed how witnessing their family's adherence or rejection to gender roles contributed to their understandings of feminine gender roles today. Familial understandings often had a more significant impact on gender roles than broader cultural norms, when those were at odds. For example, despite the strength of the woman's role as the primary food provisioner in Mexican culture, Anís's family practiced non-traditional divisions of cooking labor. Her father played a significant role in preparing meals and may have done more food provisioning than her mother, and both her parents were avid teachers in the kitchen to both her and her brothers. She references machismo culture as the source of these gender divisions, but that "machismo culture wasn't something that was part of my family." Similarly, Cierra was raised with a "very strong feminist mom" who

taught her to resist patriarchal relationship structures. Cierra also believes her father cooked more than her mother did and that witnessing more equity in her parents' relationship gave her an example of non-heteronormative roles. However, she also notes that the American Southern culture she grew up around had far more strict understandings of gender roles. Both Anís and Cierra believe in equality in relationships rooted in witnessing their parents practicing, if not actively resisting, these gender roles. They also both framed their father's contributions to the household food provisioning as participating in 'women's work,' showing that they viewed their parents' resistance to gender roles in the context of strong Southern and Mexican gender roles.

For other participants whose parents' representation of labor division were less egalitarian, they could identify the disparities in household labor; however, this awareness similarly contributed to desire for egalitarian gender roles in domestic work. Georgie reflected that "my mom was the housewife when I grew up," recounting how they, their sister, and their mother would primarily do food provisioning tasks like grocery shopping or preparing meals. This observation reflects a similar awareness of gender roles, and Georgie expresses a similar desire for more equal divisions of gendered labor and an overall de-gendering of domestic labor. Masculine roles of domestic labor other than food preparation discussed in the previous paragraph were infrequently discussed by participants, and male and AMAB participants rarely discussed domestic labor at all. What little discussion there was about domestic labor often revolved around feminine gender roles, discussed above. This relative silence suggests that participants socialized as men are less aware or unaware of the gendered division of labor and that it is a less salient aspect of their gender identity than participants who have been socialized as women. When male participants did discuss themselves in relation to domestic labor, it lacked

a gendered framing. For example, Ryder explained that he wished he "cooked more," but not for any gender-related reasons.

Participants also identified differences in the gendered reproduction of culinary and cultural knowledge. Cierrra cheekily made note of some of these differences in recognizing the lack of a masculine term for *grandma's recipes*: "That's just [how] it's passed down in the South. Like, I doubt you can say to many Southern women, 'Hey, do you have a grandfather's recipe?'" By highlighting the common, gendered phrase to refer to familial recipes, she recognizes the lack of a term to refer to such culinary traditions passed down patrilineally. This gendered semantic gap exists in spite of the associations of masculinity with cooking practices like grilling, as Georgie notes, that is associated with masculinized foodways practices like outdoors cooking and meat. The lack of a masculine term that implies the cultural reproduction of knowledge, however, maintains the transfer of culinary knowledge as 'women's work.' Luna also notes that culturally-specific culinary knowledge gets shared differently in biracial families depending on the gendered and racial intersections of the parents. Luna's mother is white and their father is Mexican, and they imply that their parents followed more traditional gender roles in saying, "I didn't learn how to cook. That definitely did not get passed to me, so I don't personally have a whole lot of connection to [Mexican food culture]." Participants' home experiences varied though they similarly ascribed cultural reproduction onto feminine gender roles.

As participants enter adulthood, they also reflected on what it meant to establish or resist gendered dynamics in their relationships. Georgie, who is AFAB, explained that they do as much as they can to distance themselves from feminine gendered work like cooking and cleaning, despite their partner's support of their non-binary identity. However, they do enjoy some "dainty" activities, like making the bed, so they identify the tension that they do not innately

dislike all activities that are feminine-coded but resist the gendered-impetus for them to be the partner doing those tasks. However, open discussions with their partner helped minimize gendered pressure within the relationship. Similarly, Luna, who is also non-binary, AFAB, and partnered with a cis-man, reflected on the pressure that they feel when they cook for their partner though most other household labor divisions largely feel functional rather than gendered. Cierra also noted that "it's not actually the patriarchy that's making you cook. It's just your strengths and weaknesses and your relationships or your wants and dislikes or whatever," but she still felt uncomfortable in relationships in which divisions of labor emerged in ways that aligned with traditional gender identities. Participants have complex relationships to their identities and how those may or may not manifest through food labor. These tensions are informed not only by internal experiences and preferences, as Cierra mentioned, but also by the awareness of how those different practices that are inscribed normatively onto their bodies through traditional frameworks of gender.

Queer Femininity

Participants also reflected on how their own and others' femininity can be affected by holding a queer identity. They often observed that queer womanhood becomes associated with masculinity in some manner, which is affirming for some individuals and stigmatizing of femininity for others. Cierra, who is femme-presenting and queer, said, "We continue this narrative of saying that hyper-femininity is still for the male gaze and still for men's consumption. So, like, I think a lot of people when they come out, they think they have to reject that part of themselves." She further expresses that femininity, even in queer spaces, does not take up space in the same way or have the same kind of visibility as masculinity. In order to feel

empowered, she has often felt that she has needed to adopt aspects of masculinity rather than fully embracing femininity–but a version of femininity that isn't performed for the 'male gaze,' she emphasized. However, for other femme and woman-aligned participants, the freedom that queerness does provide for them to embrace their masculinity is incredibly empowering. Aurora, who identifies as queer, finds that she is attracted to muscular and masculine-presenting men and women. She likes to see those masculine physical traits on herself as well, because "the larger my muscles are, the more queer I look." She acknowledges some reservations she has with this sentiment because "it feels like, you know, muscles[6] are male," but she ultimately feels empowered by these traits. She reflects that perhaps because she can find masculinity desirable, she feels more comfortable presenting more androgynously since being masculine doesn't negate her own desirability. Cierra's critique of the lack of affirming femininity and Aurora's recent embrace of androgyny suggest that queer notions of femininity are still underlain by the traditional aspect of femininity that is articulated *for* masculinity, and by extension, *desirability* in a traditional heteronormative sense. In this interpretation, one way to reject heteronormativity is by rejecting femininity, showing that even queer ideas of femininity can be implicitly rooted in cisheteronormative assumptions.

This navigation of femininity is further articulated in the context of dating, where women who date people of many genders experienced the most self-consciousness about their general demeanor, the types of food they ate, and their eating habits while on dates with men. Anís commented that she worried about the "proper way to sit at a table" and felt pressured to eat salads while dating one male partner. As their relationship progressed, food remained a way that they would connect, but his early comments about her getting a salad stuck with her throughout

[6] Discussion of musculature, gender, and body are further expanded upon in "The Role of the Body in Identity Formation."

that relationship: “I was like, just let me eat” (Anís). Aurora experienced similar pressure to order things “like a salad or something that’s not messy,” and that there was a pressure to get the “lightest thing on the menu” when on dates with men. She was also aware of trying to take small bites. Luna, who currently identifies as non-binary but was not out at the time of this story, had a lot of anxiety around eating on dates with men, especially as a bigger person. On one date, they “hardly ate anything” but then ate the rest of the leftovers after getting home. These pressures turn food into “a fear-inducing thing rather than just a thing for joy” (Aurora), which aligns with previous research that finds femininity to be associated with the omission of food, or what they are *not* eating (Turner et al. 2013). The incredible similarity between these stories of feminine-presenting people struggling with pressures to minimize their consumption and appear ‘small’ clearly show a heightened pressure of traditional femininity on dates with men expressed through relationships with food.

While these participants all note a high degree of knowledge and pressure for normative male/female relationships, their reflections on dating show a lack of culturally salient scripts for relationships between women or that involve non-binary people. Aurora, who has primarily dated men, is “used to food being bought for me,” but hadn’t really thought about who would pay when she goes on dates with women. She has also “learned so easily how to interact with men,” but has a hard time initiating romantic or sexual interactions with women because she “doesn’t know how to.” Luna also noted that “I didn’t feel awkward at all about eating because I was hungry” on a date with a woman. Though the date did not go well, they didn’t feel anxious about eating and were less aware of their body size. When describing her dates with another woman, Anís emphasized the comfort she felt while eating with her, “just chatting, and not caring about how much you’re eating.” However, Cierra noted that that gendered pressure can

emerge in relationships between women and non-binary people, especially if one person is much more masc-aligned "because I feel that they play into that role, because they're 'more of the man' of the relationship." Because Cierra really values equality, however, she makes sure to emphasize equality particularly in relationships where she is more femme than her partner. Ultimately, these participants generally experience far less awareness of their performative femininity while dating people who aren't men.

Queer Masculinity

Understandings of queer masculinity largely stemmed from dating in gay male spaces, and the ideal gay masculinity articulated by participants more closely aligned with cisheteronormative standards than in the discussion of queer femininity, above. While Vincent does not identify as non-binary, he has a hard time aligning with traditional masculinity, especially as he has understood masculinity from interactions with gay and bisexual cisgender men. He associates masculinity with "being a piece of shit," and he wants to practice a more nurturing and emotionally sensitive form of masculinity. This desire largely stems from negative experiences and body policing in the gay dating world. Nicholas framed his dating experiences through the "homosexual" versus "heterosexual" world, with gay men applying more toxic pressures to maintain an athletic, muscular, and thin body than women he has dated. River divulged a common phrase on dating and hook-up apps for men attracted to men: "No fems, no fats." The ubiquity of this phrase, and others similar to it that often include racial groups (e.g., "no Asians"), show the strong desire for masculinity presented in particular bodies. The intense body policing that happens in the realm of gay dating made Nicholas feel immense pressure to be skinnier and more muscular than when he was primarily dating women. Nicholas also noted that

he used dating apps like Grindr to try to learn more about gay culture, making this type of body policing particularly harmful for those exploring male-to-male attraction, as it can set certain harmful norms early-on in the process of identity formation.

However, River does note that gendered dating roles do not really emerge while dating men in the same way as they do for binary heterosexual relationships. While they often understand differences in masculinity and femininity between individuals, those differences "don't dictate who's gonna pay or open the door or do any of that shit. Function, very functional, just equal." The division of who pays and initiates dates, for example, is determined more functionally, similar to relationships amongst queer women and non-binary people. However, participants pointed out that more concrete roles in gay dating exist, and they are leaned more heavily upon by those new to the 'gay scene': "I was having a conversation with some gay friends last night, and they were saying how all the newbies to being gay are kind of more obsessed with the idea of being a top and a bottom" (River). These terms are popularly used to describe one's position in anal sex, with the anal-receptive partner as the 'bottom' and the anal-insertive partner as the 'top.' While topping and bottoming has some affiliation with masculinity and femininity respectively (Johns et al. 2012), participants did not indicate that this was a salient aspect of their gender identity. River's comment suggests that those new to gay and LGBTQ+ spaces may use these terms, since they have salient analogies in binary heterosexual dating contexts, to *orient* themselves in the context of an unfamiliar landscape (Ahmed 2006). Like with the reflections of dating by femme participants, gendered dating roles play a much more minimal part in queer dating. However, there is a high pressure for masculine participants attracted to men to adhere to specific standards of physical masculinity and desirability. The strong desire for these intensified notions of masculinity in queer spaces stems from the power

that masculinity holds in both queer and 'straight' spaces, though both notions are resisted by participants, highlighting an ambivalence about masculinity.

Gendered Straightening Mechanisms

Ultimately, people who date men feel pressure to manage their body and appearance to uphold notions of masculinity and femininity aligned with or to be desirable to traditional masculinity, with additional pressure for femme people to monitor their food behavior. As Ryder put it, "men are atrocious, whatever their sexuality is. And it may make your body image horrible." While he was referring to men attracted to men, this comment applies to all participants' experiences. The way that queer sexualities interact with gender identity shows that masculinity continues to hold certain powers and privileges, though this did not go unchallenged by participants, like Cierra who demands more embracing of queer femininity for femininity's sake or Vincent's rejection of gay male identity altogether.

The impact of queer sexuality on womanhood stems from the close associations of traditional womanhood and femininity with attraction to (cis)men. For women and femme-people to reject attraction to men (or to also be attracted to women and other non-men) implies a rejection of womanhood/femininity and consequently a turn to the masculine–or at least that makes queer attraction more 'palatable' in dominant cultural spaces. This orientation to the masculine may act as a type of straightening mechanism that works to make queer, femme attraction align with dominant gender values and assumptions (Ahmed 2006). While masculinity is certainly not a negative aspect of gender identity for all femme-aligned participants, it does highlight the intertangled nature of sexuality and gender identity. Similarly, queer masculinity and especially masculine normativities within gay male spaces become intensified. If being a

normative cis-man is similarly reliant upon attraction to and objectification of femininity, attraction to men by men implies a rejection of that type of masculinity. However, rather than 'correcting' this diversion by feminizing, masculinizing male standards further maintains more traditional power and attractiveness in gay male spaces. A privileging of masculine ideals manifests for queer notions of both masculinity and femininity.

The Role of the Body in Identity Formation

Participants experience an enormous amount of pressure related to how their body should look, which is sometimes at odds with how they want to feel in their bodies. These pressures manifest through the food-body-exercise dynamic and how participants navigate pressures related to musculature, thinness, and desirability. Gendered pressure is also experienced through the gym environment, both in the space itself and in gendered forms of exercise more broadly. Lastly, many participants shared about their experiences with eating disorders and how struggles with identity and the interactions between gender dysphoria and body dysmorphia contributed to eating disorders.

Exercise, Food & the Body

Participants had different experiences with exercise as it contributed to their understandings of themselves and their bodies. Aurora reflected earlier about the fear of food she developed because of gendered consumption pressures while dating men, but her relationship with food changed when she began weight-lifting more frequently and found that her workouts improved when she ate more. She began to see food as a source of strength rather than as a source of guilt, and her relationship with her body, exercise, and food shifted as she wanted to be

stronger rather than skinnier. Other participants described more transactional experiences with food. “It was via exercise, like you have to earn your food that you eat,” said Georgie, describing their tenuous relationship with food in high school. Rather than viewing food as functional fuel, as described by Aurora, exercise became a way to ‘earn calories’ and be deserving of eating. The valorization of exercise and demonization of food and consumption emphasizes the pressures that exist to partake in ‘thinning’ mechanisms, like exercise, versus ‘fattening’ ones, like eating.

Pressure to be thin or desire thinness was experienced by many participants. Luna explained that they were especially self-conscious about eating ‘too much’ on a date with a man prior to their coming-out as non-binary: “Every media thing you see is, like, people will judge a woman for eating.” They expressed an immense pressure to minimize consumption on dates expressed by multiple femme-aligned participants, despite their hunger and the fact that they would often eat a regular meal when they got home. This suggests the strength of the moral desire to *perform* an orientation to thinness for their male counterparts–though they largely did not actually wish to alter their bodies in this way. Male participants also identified a strong desire to make changes to their bodies. River described how he was insecure about being a “plumper kid” growing up, especially compared to the thin, athletic body types of his soccer-playing friends. Even though being bigger than the other kids helped him as a soccer player, he wanted to fit in more with the ‘smaller guys.’ However, he now recognizes that one of the guys that he used to envy began asking River for weight-lifting tips later in high school, so there is a tension even within masculine athletic body types between musculature and thinness.

Many participants described an intense desire for athleticism and muscular bodies that can have potentially adverse psychological consequences, known as muscle dysphoria (Amodeo et al. 2022). Especially for men who date men, representations of gay men through film,

television, and pornography show idealized gay men as incredibly physically fit, thin, and wealthy, which contributed to body insecurities for these individuals. River noted that dating and hook-up apps force a kind of 'self-awareness' about who you are talking to, what they look like, and how you look in comparison to those people. The phrase, "No fems, no fats," also shows that not only is fatphobic body policing prevalent, but it is also acceptable behavior in online dating. There are immense pressures to be muscular in gay dating culture; however, it is interesting to note that consumption played a negligible role in understandings of the body for male-identified people.

Exercise and the Gym: Gym Bros and Cardio Girls

Numerous participants discussed the role of exercise, specifically working out at gyms, as central to their fitness and understanding of their bodies. Firstly, they note that the gym is a highly gendered space. Participants generally did not view themselves as a 'typical' gym-goer, who were described as masculine-presenting individuals who might externally look like a 'gym bro'. For Georigie, they feel uncomfortable in gym spaces because they aren't a 'gym bro' and feel that they could potentially be harassed or micro-aggressed while at the gym. Similarly, Ryder commented on the type of people he understands to be at the gym: "They were all the guys who would say 'faggot'[7] very nonchalantly…It's so many frat guys and stuff like that, and that's just not my vibe." The gym's association with the intensely masculine and cisheteronormative 'frat guy' makes the gym a space of nonchalant homophobia and transphobia, rightfully making many participants wary of gyms in general. In discussion of the 'gym bro' archetype, closely associated with fraternity culture, some interviewees noted the lack

[7] I was unsure of whether to censor the f-slur, but I ultimately decided to keep it because it is a direct quote from a participant and it provides insightful context about discrimination, masculinity, and gym-spaces. See Owens (2019) and Rinner and Hieke (2022) for further discussion about the use of slurs in scholarly and popular writing.

of a feminine equivalent. While a few jokingly threw around terms like ‘hot-girl yoga,’ ‘gym-girls,’ or the broad group of ‘runners’ as potential feminine equivalents, they agreed that there was not a feminine equivalent that was as culturally salient as a ‘gym bro.’

However, the association of yoga and running with femme-people shows the different ways that exercise types are gendered. Neither yoga nor running have significant muscle-building associations with them, whereas the typical gym bro is most closely associated with weight-lifting and developing musculature. Georgie noted that “I’ll see a lot of feminine-presenting people on the cardio machines, and then there’s the testosterone room,” referring to the weight-room. In alignment with previously discussed body ideals, feminine associations with cardio are associated with ‘losing fat’ and ultimately being smaller, whereas masculine associations with weight-lifting are closely related to musculature. There is also a perceived legitimacy to masculine exercises as indicated by Aurora’s comment: “I think the moment I started getting *super serious* with working out was through lifting, not just, like, running cardio all-day-every-day.” While this comment shows the diminution of a feminine-aligned exercise category, it also shows that exercise types not focused on weight-loss and instead focused on getting stronger had a more positive mental impact for this participant. Georgie noted a similar shift when they also switched from predominantly cardio-focused workouts to weight-training ones. This may be related to both participants’ preferred presentations as more androgynous, and it is important to recognize how the framing of workouts in relation to the body impacted their self-worth. The complexities of navigating gym spaces, experienced in a highly normative framework, and the gendered nature of workouts themselves is yet another way that queer identity must be navigated on a day-to-day basis.

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders played a significant role in the lives of many participants, with many who experienced diagnosed eating disorders or other patterns of disordered eating behavior. Some participants struggled with food related to their identities and lack of control in their lives, but not related to their LGBTQ+ gender or sexual identities. When Akasha moved to a new middle school, she lost the friend groups and extracurriculars that had come to define her sense of self. She coped by not eating, because "trying to be the skinniest was something that I could do. So that certainly limited my consumption and the things that I felt like I could eat." For Akasha, these pressures stemmed from having a definable characteristic that she could base her identity in, and this lost sense of self manifested through the skinniness, which is based in feminine body norms. During high school, Nicholas similarly struggled with feeling overweight and not athletic enough, and this manifested through self-hatred that resulted in patterns of disordered eating. Pressure to have a body that confirmed to masculine ideals made Nicholas feel 'out of control,' and since food was one thing that he did have control over, his emotional coping manifested through these eating habits.

For others, disordered eating related more directly to their sense of queer identity. Aurora struggled with her bisexuality while she was bulimic. Through personal reflection and therapy, she found that her struggles with accepting her bisexuality contributed to her bulimia: "When you're questioning your identity, you tend to cope in different ways. And food was how I coped." Forest had a similar experience in middle school as they struggled with coming to terms with their gender identity and sexuality in a Middle Eastern household, which was dismissive of their queer identities. They also received praise for their weight-loss from family members, despite the unsafe means through which they lost the weight. Like Nicholas and Akasha, they found that

consumption was one of the only aspects of their life that they could control, and they emotionally coped by limiting consumption to maintain a sense of control.

For Forest, their eating disorder stemmed from another aspect of their experience with gender identity: gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria broadly describes the distress that arises when one's sex assigned at birth does not match their gender identity (Tosh 2016). In addition to the emotional duress caused by navigating queer sexuality and a non-binary identity in a culturally stringent environment, they were also concerned with gaining weight in dysphoria-inducing places, like the hips and chest. Other non-binary participants had similar experiences in which gender dysphoria manifested through restrictive eating practices and general anxiety around food. Georgie was diagnosed with body dysmorphia, where individuals have an intense preoccupation with their body size or shape, though they now feel that it was actually gender dysphoria that was the root cause of their struggles with body-image and food. The answers they have during a therapy in-take session that led to their diagnosis weren't rooted in the dislike of their body, "but because of the gendered aspects I was feeling." Georgie describes the gender dysphoria they experienced as related to weight-gain that exacerbated femininity in their hips, chest, and thighs. Distress about body image arises from adherence to normative understandings of a desirable body, as well as desires to present as their actual genders. Feelings of rejection, lack of belonging, and attempts to alter one's body through food contributed to disordered eating behaviors among participants.

Aurora also highlighted that "the more I've connected with being queer, the better my food habits have been… So I don't know if that's maturing, or if that is just me being, like, 'Oh I don't hate myself and my body." In other words, as she has been able to more fully embrace her queer identity, her relationship with food and her body has improved, so she has 'healthier'

eating habits. For Aurora, this means that she no longer has an eating disorder or regularly engages in disordered eating practices. While recovery looks different for all people, Aurora's story suggests that understanding and articulating the connections between sense of self, food, and body can play an important role in addressing disordered eating behavior. Next I turn to another source of food pressure, normative frameworks of rational eating, which is centered in nutrition, environmentalism, and ethical eating practices.

Health & Moral Motivations for Eating

As we have seen so far, participants orient themselves to dominant normative frameworks, LGBTQ+ pressures, and their own, internal feelings to understand how their foodways practices represent themselves to the world. While this analysis has primarily focused on how gender and sexuality connect to foodways and bodies, normative frameworks about the foods that we 'should' eat–whether it be for our own health or for the health of the planet–also play a significant role in the way that we eat ourselves into being. The broad global connectivity through food systems and the increased anxiety around those food systems and how they impact our bodies certainly have had a significant impact on participants' understandings of their moral practices through food provisioning. Participants work to present themselves as morally or ethically aware of various health and environmental food discourses, regardless of whether or not they actually practice the foodways they identify as moral or desirable. Enmeshed in moral discourses about health and alternative food systems, participants work to situate themselves within these discourses and orient to the food practices and identity entanglements they find most important.

Health

The overall ubiquity of participants' commentary about 'healthy' foods indicates strong cultural frameworks at play. Many participants framed their health judgments about foods in terms of macronutrients (fats, carbohydrates, and proteins) and food groups (fruits, vegetables, proteins, grains, and dairy). Macronutrient framing has recently replaced caloric methods of measuring food intake as popular in health and nutrition discourses. The food-group framing in nutrition began as early as 1894, with the USDA's first nutritional guidance release, and continues through contemporary iterations like MyPlate.gov (Frazão 1999). Another common theme among participants' responses was that they expressed a desire to eat what they thought of as healthy at the expense of taste, even if this is not actually realized in their eating habits. While there was some pushback against the sacrifice of taste for health, it was nonetheless presented as an upstanding trait to at least demonstrate that they were self-aware of health standards that they may or may not actually adhere to. Participants are incredibly conscientious of the perceived impacts of their food decisions as related to climate/environmental impacts and economic and geographic privilege, with anxieties about health permeating these considerations.

Healthy Foods

Participants most often referenced fruit, vegetables, and protein as the healthiest[8] food groups and macronutrients. Given the overall dispositions to exercise, many participants expressed health concerns around consuming enough protein to maintain their active lifestyles. Participants who do not view their own diets or lifestyles as healthy talked about such goals in an

[8] The phrase 'healthy' and its derivatives will be used as the participants conceptualized them in this section and do not indicate actual nutritional advice or my own opinions.

aspirational way, or jokingly compensated for their unhealthy habits in other ways. When asked what foods he thought were healthy, Ryder answered, “Fruits and vegetables. Which, like, I love fruit. I eat a lot of fruit. I genuinely hate a vegetable.” He went on to discuss his least favorite vegetables–which are broccoli and eggplant for their taste and texture, respectively–and then explained how he knows he needs to eat more vegetables. The healthy nature of these food groups are taken as ‘given,’ and go unquestioned even in spite of taste preference. Exercise was also largely accepted as a healthy activity. Georgie’s mother’s job as a personal trainer contributed to the idea that movement was a solution to feeling unwell, physically or mentally. Similarly, Ryder explained that he is “not exercising as much as I should,” thinking primarily of intentional workouts at the gym as opposed to regular, daily movement, such as walking to-and-from campus, which he also does everyday. This framing of exercise shows how health can be performed and that certain physical activities are categorized differently based on the intentions of their performance, rather than the physical activities in-and-of themselves.

While what is considered healthy is largely agreed upon by participants, these ideas were not always taken for granted. A few participants referenced balance and moderation as important guiding frameworks for how they think about health in their own lifestyles. They presented this opinion as resistant to dominant framings around health. River comments that “gym bro energy” can morph into an unhealthy or obsessive practice of focusing on physical appearance. He noted that he incorporates balance with activities like “taking care of my mind, drinking Kombucha, and yoga.” These activities are still considered healthy, but not strenuous like exercise or restrictive like calorie counting. Aurora and Cierra also explicitly pushed back against what they viewed as toxic ‘health’ practices that promote imbalance. They both incorporate ‘treats,’ like Ghiradelli chocolate bars and chocolate cake, into their diets. It is not the sweet-treat itself that is

presented as healthy, but the allowance of some 'cravings' in their diets. Cierra also explained other metrics of balance/health she uses, like "is your plate colorful?," rather than a macronutrient or food-group oriented framing. However, even in the rejection of one notion of health, participants accept different moral frameworks to guide health and well-being through food and movement.

Unhealthy Foods

Carbohydrates, meats, and dairy products were generally viewed as 'unhealthy' and 'fattening'. Georgie noted that one effect of "growing up with skinny standards" is guilt around eating cheese, despite the fact that they love the taste of cheese. Meat is also viewed as unhealthy, and for some, morally objectionable. Even if participants did not adhere to veganism or vegetarianism themselves, they oriented to the fact that people around them are morally or healthfully opposed to meat-eating.[9] Ryder said that "I'll try to eat a salad or some fruit or something everyday, but I definitely still have a relatively meat-heavy diet." Ryder indicates an opposition between salad/fruit versus meat, almost as if they are incompatible with one another, and implies that a meat-heavy diet is morally undesirable. Aurora's family would physically hide sweets, which she would find and eat, but her family would call her selfish for doing so. This kind of spatial stigmatization of 'temptatious foods' further contributed to guilt about desiring and consuming sugary foods. Participants also only 'craved' meat and sugar, marking them as morally problematic. Having cravings for morally prohibited foods is one way that people could 'save face' while still admitting to consuming these foods because it recognizes that they were aware of potential negative moral implications, even if they gave in to the cravings.

[9] Meat-eating morals are explored in "Other Ethical Eating Frameworks," below.

Some participants noted the particular type of health that is advocated for in the Denver/Boulder area. Ryder, from the Western Slope, noted that such pressures to eat plant-heavy diets and reduce meat consumption did not exist 'at home,' but are much more salient in Boulder. Cierra, who is from the South, also commented on unhealthy connotations of Southern food: "Everything's fried, even fried okra or vegetables. Like, then it just takes the health benefits. I mean, I didn't grow up in one of those houses that was super health-conscious, but we tried to have a salad at every meal." Here, Cierra notes that fried, fat-heavy cuisines are unhealthy and particularly associated with Southern regional cuisines. Nicholas also expressed disdain for the general U.S.-American diet versus a European diet since U.S. diets are more processed, less nutritious, and less environmentally-sustainable. Luna also noted that easily accessible foods, in terms of easy preparation and low cost, tend to be 'unhealthy,' which is a byproduct of the U.S. mainstream food system. Participants expressed frustrations about the cultural and structural limitations for eating healthy.

Ultimately, health was defined in terms of produce and protein amongst all participants, regardless of racial identities, geographic backgrounds, and self-identified adherence to these health standards. The conflation of morally desirable foodways with health shows that the moralism of food is quite present today (Veit 2013). Foods that are high in sugars, fats, or otherwise 'lacking nutritional value' may taste good but are not perceived as healthfully good. Pressure stems from the individual having to make appropriate health judgments and procure appropriately healthy foods, that also align with moral framings of food's environmental and ethical impacts, explored below. Lastly, cultural relevance, nostalgia, and other food feelings were seldom referenced in discussion about health, which further shows the extent of how health

is approached from a rational perspective despite the centrality of food to relationship-building expressed by participants, explored above.

Other Ethical Eating Frameworks

Veganism & Vegetarianism

Aside from health-related motivations for changing one's diet, many participants also discussed the elimination of meat and/or animal products. The primary reason for practicing veganism or vegetarianism was environmental, given the higher environmental impact of eating animal products than plant-based products. Akasha feels grateful to have been raised vegetarian because it's a way she can "contribute to [environmental justice] without any additional responsibility on my end." Minimizing her meat consumption gives Aurora a similar sense of control in the daunting face of climate change, and it makes her feel like "I can do something." Others also feel health-based motivations for minimizing meat, especially red meat, in their diets. Many participants minimize their red meat consumption while consuming 'lighter' meats, like chicken and fish, for protein. Nicholas, for example, said that he only eats fish because "it's a very clean meat. And it's very light, it's not fatty at all." He also noted that he doesn't particularly care about animal rights and approaches his pescetarianism from the perspective of his own health. River, however, noted that while he mostly doesn't eat red meat for the environmental impact, he also "couldn't kill a cow, but I feel like I could kill chickens. Yeah, I could kill a turkey or a chicken, and I'd be okay. But ethically, morally, I couldn't kill a cow, or a pig really? Occasionally though, I'll have a hamburger." He jokingly notes that he feels more moral connection to charismatic and anthropological livestock, though that doesn't stop him from occasionally eating meat. Aside from direct health-related reasons for minimizing meat,

others dispreferred the taste or physical impacts it has on their body. River and Aurora both explain that they have never loved the taste of red meat and it upsets their stomachs. Ultimately, people minimize their meat consumption because of environmental, health, moral, and physical sensation reasons.

Food Anxieties: Consumption & Waste

Not all people who care strongly about the environment were vegetarian or vegan. For example, Cierra stated, "I care very deeply about the environment, but not in a way that makes me a vegetarian." Similarly, Anís noted that she understands that meat has a negative environmental impact, but that "sometimes, I'm just craving a piece of meat." Both Cierra and Anís expressed a similar admission of their 'craving' and taste-preference in a way that shows they understand why this may be seen as morally problematic, but 'give in' to the temptation anyway. While these participants did not address this connection directly, meat-based dishes often play a central role in cultural foods, especially Southern food for Cierra and Mexican food for Anís.

Luna, who is Mexican, explained a disconnection with their Mexican culinary heritage because "being vegetarian, I feel like, does not align with Mexican cooking at all." They grew up eating meat-centric meals that no longer align with their vegetarian diet. While multiple participants referenced East Asian cuisines as more 'diverse' foods that are easy to make plant-based, only two participants referenced Indian foods as another diverse, vegetarian-friendly option–one of whom is Indian. While there are many cultures that have significantly more plant-based diets than many types of East Asian cuisine, tofu-based stir-frys and other white-washed Asian dishes were salient vegetarian and vegan friendly dishes. Even those

without vegetarian inclinations expressed a desire to cook more “diverse” foods. These comments suggest that participants may be asserting an elite, moral status by being able to ‘eat their way’ through diverse and *othered* cultural contexts, especially with the healthy associations of East Asian cuisine (Mapes 2021).

Minimizing food waste was also a common anxiety amongst participants. Many wanted to minimize food waste because of the negative environmental impact of wasting food. Akasha even has her parents collect their compost, since her parents’ town does not provide industrial composting services, that she then brings to Boulder to dispose of. Aurora also reflected on food waste minimization as an attainable action with positive environmental impact that she practices, aligned with her environmental values. Anís was also motivated by the recognition of personal privileges as a deterrence for food waste. She volunteers with organizations that salvage food from restaurants and grocery stores to bring what would have been food waste to those in need of more financially accessible food options. In México, she grew up with strong Catholic values that encouraged her to think about others while also experiencing food insecurity and lack of aid herself. Part of her food-waste minimization practices also included using food resources, like mobile food pantries, and to make use of the privileges that she has living in the U.S. now. Recognition of privilege on a global and local scale and of environmental values encourage the minimization of food waste.

Other Aspects of Agency and Decision-Making

The strong internal and external pressures to eat, procure, and dispose of food in environmentally-friendly and health-aligned ways is limited by various structural and

institutional factors identified by participants. Participants identified systemic variables that prevent them acting out their foodways ethics in the ways that they desired.

The financial expense of food was the primary limitation identified by participants. Recent increases in food prices and the general expensiveness of food causes significant stress for many participants. Georgie said that “I don’t find any happiness [grocery shopping] because I’m losing my money and it’s not the part of food that I love,” but they do love finding good sales, clipping coupons, and creatively planning meals to align with their budget. River also noted that his standards for cooking food at home are ‘low’ right now, given his time and financial limitations as a student: “I don’t spend a lot of money on seasonings and extra stuff.” Despite the fact that at other points in the interviews, participants noted the importance of taste and enjoyment of food, this could not be a central decision-making factor because of high prices associated with good-tasting foods.

Participants also expressed frustration around the time-pressure of preparing and eating food, both in terms of having limited time for foodways activities. With busy schedules that keep them out of the house for most of the day, many noted that returning late at night or having different schedules from people they live with limited their abilities to share meals with other people, despite the fact that sharing and preparing meals together is central to their social lives. General busyness and the pressure to constantly be productive was a source of food-related stress, with many expressing desire to be able to cook more fresh foods and share intentional meals.

Participants also expressed frustration about the constraints of food-based institutions that limit how they eat and where they can source different foods from. River and Aurora discussed the desire to have slower meals and resist eating primarily for function. Aurora talked about

studying abroad in Costa Rica, noting that food in the U.S. is fast-paced and utilitarian. She explained that "if I could change anything, I would make more small mom-and-pop shops instead of just grab-and-go efficiency-based stuff." This comment hints at the institutional and structural limitations for participants whose environments do not facilitate the types of eating they wish to engage in. Many of the participants are students, so they have limited access for on-campus dining. Akasha, who is vegetarian, structures her on-campus travel patterns to make sure she can be at dining halls that have better vegetarian options, which is frustrating for her. For participants who mostly cook their own meals, they also struggle with finding 'ethnic' ingredients and foods due to limited availability, hours of operation of ethnic markets that overlap with school or work, or that are located far away. Participants adapt by sourcing ingredients from friends and family who might have easier access to these types of ingredients and foods, but often receive foods pre-prepared so they can't cook the foods themselves.

Similarly, there are limited options for easily accessible grocery stories and other food provisioning resources that align with environmental and ethical goals. While Akasha cares deeply about where her food comes from and how it is sourced, she recognizes limitations of farmers' markets because "it's not always clear whether or not it's necessarily environmentally friendly or ethically better…but I think it's probably better than the big chain grocery stores." While she enjoys going to farmers' markets for the social experience, these limitations as well as the fact that it's not a 'one-stop-shop' for all of her groceries prevent it from being her primary grocery store. Georgie also has a hard time balancing ethically-sourced foods from a human labor perspective with being able to afford brands that have the ethical labels they seek out. River made a connection that buying organic or regenerative foods tends to be a splurge, indicating a

well-founded association between environmentally and ethically 'good' foods with higher price tags.

While only a few participants in this research utilized food aid, they noted that limited options at food pantries constrained the ability to cook a wide range of nutritious and culturally appropriate meals. One participant's aunt is part of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children Food and Nutrition Service (WIC), but WIC utilizes vouchers that can be applied only toward specific items. While the items are determined by particular nutritional guidelines determined by the USDA,[10] her Aunt is Mexican and primarily cooks Mexican and Central American foods. So, foods like peanut butter often go unused when she would prefer to get more vouchers for similarly nutritious foods, like rice and beans, that align more with her cultural cooking preferences. Similarly, Anís expresses frustration about the lack of culturally relevant foods at the mobile food pantry she frequents. While she is grateful for the source of free, fresh produce because it allowed her to spend her food budget on other items, the lack of diversity of foods makes it difficult to explore new recipes and cook enjoyable things. Ultimately, financial, time-based, and institutional constraints restrict the ability of participants to procure food in the ways that would fully align with their moral, health, and cultural intentions.

Discussion: 'The Bottom's Diet' and other Queer Foodway Practices

I think there's some funny things about the bottom's diet, you know? Most people who are in the bottom position, they can't be like eating pizza. Every meal, you know, you have to be a bit more aware of digestive health, or whatever. So yesterday night, we [my gay friends and I] had a salad. And like, it's kind of funny because it's a bunch of gay guys eating salads.

–River

[10] See https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/frequently-asked-questions for more information about USDA WIC guidelines.

In this quote, River discusses the 'bottom's diet.' First he notes that people who bottom can't be "eating pizza," which he explains stems from being more aware of their digestive health. In this context, this awareness stems from a desire to keep the anal canal as clean as possible for anal-reception rather than particular values about 'health' more broadly. River then comments on how "it's kind of funny, because it's a bunch of gay guys eating salads." This joke activates two understandings of *salads* as a signifying practice: (1) the implication that salads are 'bottom-friendly' foods, situated as antagonistic to pizza, and (2) the feminine connotation of salad, antagonistic to masculinity. These understandings are not entirely unrelated either, with popular associations of femininity with healthy foods, also showing the feminine-connotations of bottoming. There was also a cheekiness to this joke, as River recognized that the first activation would be recognized by fellow men who have sex with men, and that the second activation would be more salient to a cisgender-heteterosexual crowd.

In just a few sentences, River addresses each of the main research objectives: (1) how queer individuals understand food as a signifying practice for conceptualizing and negotiating their identities, (2) how queer individuals' understandings of food and identity are influenced by cisheteronormative cultural frameworks, and (3) how queer individuals might be differentially impacted by biopolitical influence in the realm of food. His off-hand comment about the 'bottom's diet' shows the entanglement of our associations of identity, gender, sex(uality) and health. He also demonstrates how various gendered/health associations may rely on similar frames within broader cisheteronormative culture, but that there are particular associations within gay culture. Despite resisting gender roles throughout his interview and the normativities with gay male dating, this quippy joke indicates the strength of food as a signifying practice in discourses of gender and sexuality in LGBTQ+ spaces.

While salads are certainly a salient signifying practice for understanding health and gender, queer individuals also orient to many other foodways in situating themselves and their identities. Domestic labor, consumption, and concerns about body shape and size played a significant role in understanding one's gender identity, especially in the context of sexual orientation; these were also sites of contention for navigating normative expectations and LGBTQ+-specific frameworks simultaneously. Broadly, participants experienced tension in foodways with highly gendered connotations, like cooking, whose normative connotations do not align with their desired presentation or internally-driven preferences.

This tension also emerged in discussion around health and ethical eating. While many participants criticized 'mainstream' food systems in the context of health and environmentalism, they nonetheless expressed a sense of responsibility over their own health and environmental practices through foodways. This sense of responsibility reflects how biopolitical influence has been subsumed into the neoliberal individual. Thus, systemic limitations and institutional actors can only be held accountable in an abstract sense, with the actual responsibility and moral pressure falling on individuals. Furthermore, participants largely did not view themselves as part of broader 'alternative food' movements, even though they morally aligned with many AFNs and also had foodways practices that align with AFNs. This further demonstrates the largely individual framings of food expressed by participants. Lastly, some participants identified lack of racial and cultural inclusivity in AFNs and in food assistance programs, which aligns with this body of research, though this concept is not extensively explored.

Participants' intersectional identities and experiences also demonstrated that straightening devices applied differently in different contexts. For example, the privileging of masculinity ideals in queer understandings of masculinity and femininity works as a straightening device to

remain ‘palatable’ in dominant cultural spaces while also navigating the rejection of queerness in those same cultural spaces. In the context of food and health, participants straightened ‘unhealthy’ behaviors, such as giving into cravings of meat and sugary foods, by demonstrating their knowledge of the healthy ‘rules’ they are breaking. In the case of queer identities, participants attempt to reject the straight lines of cisheterosexuality–even though adjusting to these ‘deviances’ sometimes relies on dominant frameworks. The idealized notion of health remains intact, with participants correcting or explaining behavior rather than questioning the framework itself. While normativities regarding food might be similarly constructed, the ways they are morally oriented show they are more readily accepted than sexuality and gender-based norms.

Ultimately, food plays a significant role in embodied experiences that relate us to ourselves, each other, and the world at large, proving to be a salient cultural tool for understanding gender identity and attraction. Participants described experiencing significant tension navigating the various ways that they ‘should’ move through the world, what their own internal desires are, and how various actions may be inscribed onto their bodies based on the particular contexts or bodies that they are in. When resisting normativities related to both gender/sexuality and health, participants turned to new types of normativities that were more expansive or rooted in balance. For gender/sexuality, this orientation was the *queer* label, and for health, it was *balance* or *moderation*. While participants critiqued dominant normativities and some emergent pressures in LGBTQ+ spaces and discourses, they also recognized that they must have some moral compass with which to orient themselves as it relates to food, health, gender, and sexuality.

Conclusion: Towards More Just Culinary Futures

In order to understand who they are, participants navigated a complex landscape of queer identity in response to normative frameworks *and* LGBTQ+ politics that manifested through anxieties about gendered eating, cooking, and exercise practices. Tensions between gendered foodways, health expectations, ideas of what 'ethical eating' is, and the structural limitations on these practices led to anxiety around foodways while also demonstrating the myriad ways that food is used as a tool in the process of identity-formation. Regardless of the actual foodways practices of participants, they often centered their knowledge of what was morally permissible, demonstrating the degree to which they associated foodways with their outward presentations. Participants also often contradicted themselves, reflecting the complexity of navigating the presentation of self amidst a diverse and changing landscape of the meanings given to our foodways, both by ourselves and by those around us.

Given the prevalence and severity of eating disorders experienced by participants in this study, understanding the embodied experiences for people of different LGBTQ+ identities with eating disorders is an important route for future research. While current literature has identified increased risk factors for eating disorders in LGBTQ+ youth, more specific understandings of the particular bodily tensions that contribute to eating disorders, specifically for trans and non-binary individuals, could provide information relevant to addressing eating disorders in this population for healthcare practitioners. This research also opens up many questions about the relationship between 'ethnic foods,' health, and identity that takes a more explicitly race-critical approach. The perceived authenticity of foods of color arose in discussions about veganism/vegetarianism, which suggests more popular understandings and critiques of the white-centric conceptulizations of veganism described by Harper (2012) but requires further investigation. Further associations

between health and racialized foods–like the association between health and East Asian foods or unhealthy connotations of Southern food, largely rooted in Black cooking–would elucidate how we literally 'eat the other' or how this may represent a more holistic, racial reckoning with food (hooks 1992). As hypothesis-generating research, there are numerous avenues of potential future research.

Expanding the scope of the study of sexuality to include food asks "how we not only ingest dominant patterns but also, through reflection on eating and cooking…how we hope to produce ourselves as thoughtful and even ethical beings, connected to each other in sometimes pleasurable, often painful, and always regulated ways" (Probyn 1999, 422). Through participants' thoughtfulness, intentionality, and even anxieties around their foodways, it is clear that they have reflected on the ways in which eating, cooking, and even disposing of food connects them to broader systems, each other, and especially themselves. Even in rejecting the limiting normativities presented by dominant thinking around food, health, body, gender, and sexuality, participants found themselves turning towards alternative regulating mechanisms. However, these new normativities were more flexible, more empowering, and ultimately, more aligned with their internal experiences and desires. We must have frameworks through which to orient ourselves to one another and a shared vocabulary for how to express these ideas, and participants recognize the ever-changing landscape of these moral frameworks, especially those that attempt to be more expansive. While there can be no one best practice or framing of food, participants share an understanding that having a baseline normativity that holds space for ambiguity, change, and even conflict might provide more freeing foodways for us all.

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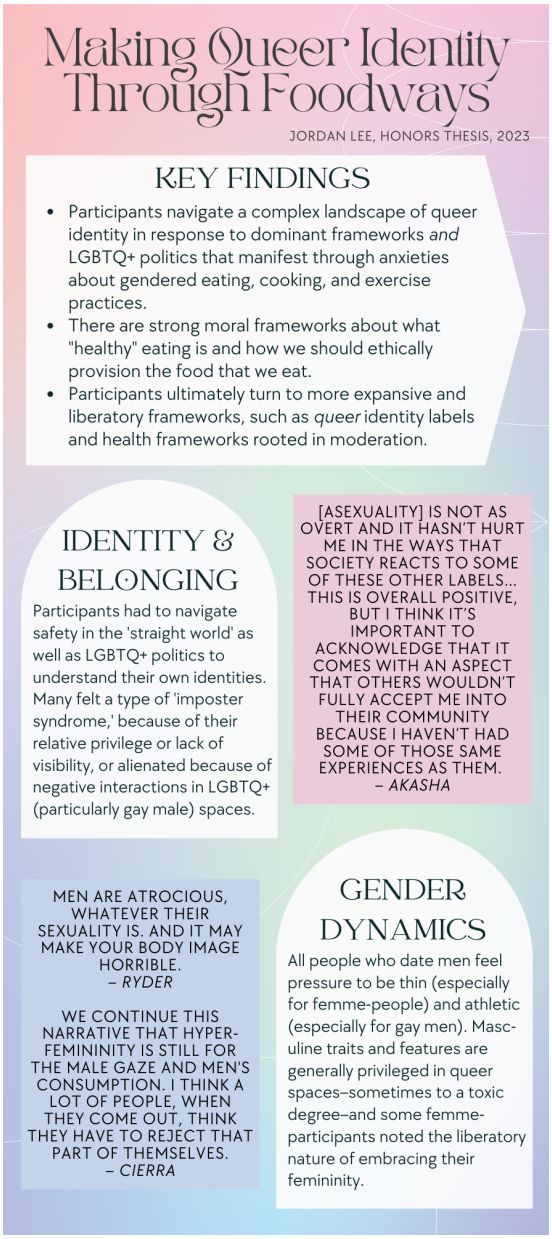
Appendix 1

Executive Summary for Participants

This infographic was emailed to participants with a brief description of the findings and information regarding their pseudonyms. It summarizes the key findings from each of the main sections of the analysis of the interview data. The infographic also uses lay terms and more popular language. The title differs from the title of the final paper because that is the working title used in recruitment materials, so using the title "Making Queer Identity Through Foodways" maintains consistency for interview participants.



Appendix 2

Interview Guide

Background Information

1. How do you currently identify?
    a. What labels are important to you?
    b. Which identities are most important to you?
    c. What aspects of who you are or what you do impact how you experience life?
2. *** Probe with this: This research focuses on queer identity. How do you define queerness, and is it a label that you associate with?

The Food Situation

3. Tell me about the meal that you chose today. How does it represent who you are?
    a. Does it represent a certain time in your life?
    b. What feelings does it bring up for you?
4. What is your go-to comfort meal?
    a. How is it normally prepared? How do you prepare it?
    b. Do you associate with any people in your life? Or any times of your life?
    c. How does it feel to eat this food? Prepare this food? See others eating this food?
5. How often do you eat this meal, or a meal similar to this one?
    a. How has that changed over time?

Queerness & Food Decisions

6. What associations do you have of food with the queer community, or any aspect of queerness?
7. Are there certain foods that you think of as being "queer"?
8. Do these associations reflect your experiences with food as a queer person?

Food Practices Today

9. Describe a typical week/day in your life, from a food perspective:
10. Where do you get the food from?
    a. Do you mostly eat-out at restaurants, do take-out, prepare your own meals, have someone else prepare your meals, etc.?
11. Who else is involved in getting and preparing food?
12. How does this compare to other times in your life?
    a. Did you eat similarly as a child?
        i. In high school?
        ii. In college? Etc.

Food Decisions

13. How do you decide what you are going to eat on a given day/week?
    a. What resources do you turn to answer questions you might have? (ex. Yelp, for restaurants; certain cooking blogs, for recipes)
14. What pressures, if any, do you experience around your food decisions?
    a. To what degree are you concerned with what others think about the foods that you eat?

   b. To what degree do you think about the foods that others eat?
15. Is there anything that you want to change about your typical food practices?
   a. Why do you want to make those changes?
   b. Is there anything preventing you from making those changes?
16. How has your background and identity impacted your experiences, thoughts, and decisions related to food?
17. What do you want to be like? What values do you hold? What practices do you (or do you want to) use to get to that place?
18. **for values-based questions (ethics, vegetarian, etc). Ask "Why is that important to you?"

Appendix 3

Working Code Hierarchy

Parent 1	Parent 2	Code	Description
identity	meta identity talk	Defining queer	how participants define queer
		discourse(?) about identity	discussion of identity in general, such as talk about labels
	individual-level identity	tension with one's own identity	expression of resistance to one's own identity
		self-identity	description of one's own identity
	community-level identity	community	general discussion of one's communities (not related to food decision-making)
		belonging	commentary on one's sense of belonging
exercise			exercise or fitness related comments
gender roles	gendered pressure	Increases	contexts/spaces/actions/etc. that heighten feelings of gendered pressure
		Decreases	contexts/spaces/actions/etc. that mitigate feelings of gendered pressure
	source of knowledge	Personal experience	personal experiences of gender roles (or lack thereof)
		Representation	reference to external experiences (e.g., tv/movies, parental expressions)
	–	masculine	explicit and implicit references to masculinity or masculine identity
		feminine	explicit and implicit reference to feminity or feminine identity
foodways		shopping	reference to shopping for food or food items
		preparation	reference to preparing or cooking food

		consumption	reference to consuming food
		dating	reference to dating food norms
		routine	Description of foodways routines (broad)
decision-making	structural	time	time as a factor in food-decision making
		money	money or finances as a factor in food decision-making
		pace	pace of foodways as a factor in decision-making
		physical environment	physical space as a factor in decision-making
		insitutional	insitutional constraints as a factor in decision-making
	affectual	general	general emotions as a factor in decision-amking
		control	control as a factor in food decision-making
		physical sensations	physical sensations before, during, or after eating that contribute to decision-making
		health judgements	Commentary about healthy and unhealthy foods, good or bad foods, etc.
	ethical/moral	vegetarian/vegan	Reference to minimization or elimination of meat in one's one diet
		seasonality	Reference to seasonality of produce as a factor in food decisions
		environmentalism	Reference to environmental or climate based motivations in food decisions
		workers' rights	References to ethical labor movements as a factor in food decisions
		connection/community	Role of eating with others or building relationships as factor in food decision making
body type		general	reference to body shape or size
		relationship between food and body	reference to value-assignments to food and body relatinoship
		eating disorders	reference to eating disorders
		clothing	reference to clothing and body type
normative identities		race	reference to racial assumptions including non-references (i.e., assumptions of Whiteness that go unnamed)
		cishet	reference to cis-heteronormativity, including non-references
		other	references to dominant identity categories, especially those that go unmarked in dialogue

Appendix 4

Food Journal Guide

Thank you for participating in this research! We are asking participants to complete a food journal reflection activity prior to interviewing. The purpose of the food journal is to better understand your food experiences, allow participants to reflect on their food experiences ahead of interviews, and provide additional information for the research process.

You may document 1-3 days worth of your experiences, explained in more detail below. We are asking for three things:

(1) Photos and/or drawings documenting your food experiences. You don't need images for every food activity, but a few pictures/drawings can be helpful context for the researchers. Images will be seen by the research team only, and will not be shared otherwise. *****Please do NOT submit photos/drawings that include identifiable individuals (i.e., do not submit pictures with people's faces)**
(2) A guided reflection for at least one meal or food experience (such as grocery shopping or cooking/preparing food), outlined below.
(3) Responses to broader reflection questions at the end of your time documenting your food experiences.

You can make a copy of this document and fill out the reflection questions or record your reflections by-hand– whichever is easier for you. Please email your reflection to [researcher's email address] or bring a physical copy of the reflection to your interview.